Shared Professional Agency in Early Childhood Education: An In-depth Study of Three Teams

Abstract

Through participatory action research this study examines shared agency in three teams of Finnish early childhood educators. To cultivate a strong professional learning culture, it is important to understand features affecting the collective nature of agency. The data consist of videoed discussions of the educators' responses to their actions. Results show shared agency as specific negotiated space, in which the educators' agency was interpreted as high or low according to their relational dispositions and temporal engagements. High agency supported educators to examine and improve their daily practices. Implications for education of early childhood educators and for professional development are discussed.

Key words: teacher agency, shared agency, teamwork, professional development, teacher education

1. Introduction

Early childhood educators (ECEs) may find it difficult to analyse their professional practices and explicate how they support children's learning (Stephen, 2010). Rather than noticing their own professional behaviour, educators tend to focus more on children, leaving their own actions intact (McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011). When engaged in pedagogical work, it is important for educators to maintain and develop their professional agency as collegial experts in their communities (e.g., Charteris & Smardon, 2015; Fleer, 2006; Schussler & Knarr, 2013). Peer support is an important factor that contributes to educators' ability to carry out their visions in order to develop their practices (Hammerness, 2003). While shared practices have great influence on what teachers do, they are also resistant to change (Tate, 2016).

ECEs are responsible for transforming policy demands into professional practices in their communities (MacNaughton, Campbell, & Page, 2003). Recently, early childhood educators' role and responsibility in 'teacher leadership' has been highlighted in Finland as well as other countries (e.g., Bøe & Hognestad, 2014; National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2018). The stance emphasises professional support and guidance, thus highlighting the meaning and value of organisational culture as pedagogical. This places all educators at the centre of the curriculum and renders them collectively responsible for the complexities of professional judgement and insight (Hatch & Grieshaber,

2002). While the ECEs' workforce's increasing professional demands are recognised, it is simultaneously observed in terms of measurable outcomes stipulated by policy makers (Campbell-Barr, 2017). This narrows research to 'what counts' as worthwhile in the policy discourse (Oancea & Pring, 2008), emphasising accountability and effectiveness instead of shared qualities in professional practices (Sachs, 2016) and leaving agency largely unexamined (Vongalis-Macrow, 2007).

In order to understand ECEs' professional work more thoroughly, recent research has focused on staff characteristics and the work environment (e.g., Grieshaber, 2008; see also Kagan, Gomez, & Roth, 2017). Building on this, a new line of research has emerged that examines the relationships between educators and their workplaces, aiming to clarify 'how individuals enact early education and care work to improve the fit between the job and their own understanding of the work' (Ryan & Whitebook, 2012, pp. 93–94). Because such research is still limited (e.g., Grieshaber, 2008), it is important to gain more knowledge of how structure and process interact with the agency of educators (Ryan & Whitebook, 2012).

Accordingly, this study examines ECEs' shared agency in teamwork by uncovering educators' joint actions in their specific contexts. The two-fold research task may be posed as follows:

(i) In what ways do the experienced shared agentic features enable early childhood educators to make educational decisions in their team contexts?

(ii) How does the experienced shared agency cause variations between the teams' educational practices?

2. Sociocultural view of shared agency

This study employs sociocultural theory, viewing agency as a relational phenomenon that is temporally and locally situated with the enhancement of learning enabled through dialogue (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004; Wenger, Trayner, & De Laat, 2011). Agency, in a broader sense, encompasses individuals' capacity to exercise control over their lives (Bandura, 2001). The majority of empirical studies have more often been related to subjective agency (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). In this study, agency is conceived as a temporal and relational phenomenon, occurring temporally and between agents in the environment within which they act (e.g., Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). We draw also on Wenger's (1998) sociocultural learning theory within its view of meaningful learning as it occurs in 'situated practices in communities of practice' (CoPs), where meaning is negotiated through a process of participation and in relation to those of others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within this study, negotiations are understood as interpersonal communication in which educators engage in discussion. Thus, we emphasise authentic context and the situational needs which offer effective opportunities for networking and learning from colleagues (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Generally, agency has been evaluated by the following three criteria: intentionality, reasonableness, and capability (Moya, 1990). Kögler (2012), grounding agency with inter-subjectivity, presents three aspects of the agency concept: (i) an agent must have the capacity to effect real change; (ii) an agent must have the capacity to understand his/her own effects; and (iii) an agent is capable of differentiating its own causal powers and those conditions and contexts that affect change independently from the self (p. 48). Teacher agency, for example, is defined as a core aspect intertwined with identity (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Buchanan, 2015). Teacher agency is constructed by each educator's ideals of learning for and

through work (Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006), and it is both maintained and acted upon through intentional engagement, professional choices, decisions and taking stances which affect one's professional practices and satisfaction (Maclellan, 2017). A sense of professional agency is not a stable state but, rather, a capacity constructed situationally in the context of the individual's past and present experiences (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Within this constructive and active process, 'the focus and direction of individuals' agency (i.e., intentional actions) play key roles in the processes of learning and remaking cultural practices' (Billett, 2008, pp. 39-40). Thus, professional agency is not only an applied attribute of an individual, but is also constructed within complex relationships involving predicting, interpreting, and assessing others' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Overall, here, agency is understood and referred to as educators' active and shared engagement, negotiation, and construction of authority and ownership over their teaching and professional learning in their teams and communities (Kögler, 2012; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Due to professional agency's situational and relational nature produced through transactions, we provide below our understanding of the three interrelated aspects that construct shared agency and the theoretical basis of this study: dispositions, relationality, and temporality.

Dispositions

Besides knowledge and skills relative to teaching, 'teachers' dispositions' are important (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007) and guide their actions both inside and outside the classroom (Shoffner, Sedberry, Alsup, & Johnson, 2014), affecting children's learning, motivation, and development as well as educators' own professional growth (Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009). Due to a lack of consensus in defining these dispositions (e.g., Nelsen, 2015), we draw upon three sources: dispositions as (i) a 'system of long-lasting schemes of perception, conception and action' (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 43); (ii) 'a teaching stance, a way of orienting oneself to the work and responsibilities of teachers' (Diez & Murrell, 2010, p. 9); and

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(iii) 'attitudes and beliefs expressed via relationships used to negotiate the context of schooling' (Edwards & Edick, 2006, p. 11).

Dispositions are also formed collectively (Nelsen, 2015), as they are mainly acquired and supported or weakened by interactive experiences with others (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Thus, agency as a 'capacity to engage with the dispositions of others in order to interpret and act' is important (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004, p. 147). Reflection can reveal teachers' dispositions and provide a tool for exploring the habits of mind that underpin specific dispositions (Shoffner et al., 2014). Awareness of oneself helps teachers more accurately know who they are (Schussler & Knarr, 2013) and guide how they do their work (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994); the renegotiation of these components demonstrates the exercise of agency (Ketelaar, Beijaard, Boshuizen, & Den Brok, 2012).

Relationality

Our view is influenced by Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) understanding of human agency as 'engagement by actors' who reproduce or transform structures (p. 970), and by Biesta and Tedder's (2007) view of agency as something constructed and achieved, rather than possessed, through engagement with a context where meanings are created in the interplay of people's responsive relationships (Shotter & Cunliffe, 2003). Environments supporting participation in and belonging to one's community support active agency, which is revealed in the actions and positions that educators take in their work (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) state that human agency develops through the art of improvisation, meaning that actors have a 'space of authoring' to 'craft a response in time and space defined by others' standpoints in activity' (p. 272). Human agency, aside from being compliant with or resistant to discourses, is capable of improvising from within one's positionality and filling personal authorship with social efficacy (Holland et al., 1998). In other

words, successful agentic work requires individuals to interact effectively, pinpoint goals directly, and sustain their sense of shared commitment and engagement (e.g., Bratman, 2014; Gilbert, 2014; Seemann, 2009).

We refer to *engagement* as a behavioural intensity and an active involvement (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004) that consists of four components: behavioural (e.g., participation and involvement), emotional (e.g., reactions towards colleagues, children and community), cognitive (e.g., efforts to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills) (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, p. 60), and agentic (e.g., self-efficacy) (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Work engagement is defined as an investment of personal resources directed at tasks (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011) that thrives in settings and demonstrates strong connections between organisational and individual values (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). The capacity for working with others—*relational agency*—involves recognising the motives and resources of others, and aligning personal responses with those made by other professionals, in order to act on the expanded object (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004; Edwards, Lunt, & Stamou, 2010). Hence, adopting new approaches requires changes and transformation in both pedagogical thinking and engagement (Ludvigsen, Lund, Rasmussen, & Säljö, 2010).

Temporality

Human beings are planning agents who frequently make plans which guide later conduct (Bratman, 1999, 2010). These prior intentions and plans provide standards of relevance and admissibility (Bratman, 1999). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) view agency as temporally embedded in the process of social engagement in which past experiences inform the individual, but where the individual may also orient himself or herself toward the alternative possibilities of the future or the present (p. 963). Individuals construct their lives, beliefs, and knowledge through their choices and actions within constraints and along opportunities of both historical

and social circumstances (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Teams that consider changing aspects of themselves must understand what they value and want to keep (Boyatzis, 2009). In alignment with former authors including Holland and Lave (2001, 2009), we emphasise 'the historical production of persons in practice' (2009, p. 5).

3. Method

3.1. Participants and the Finnish context

This study examined three ECE teams working with children under 6 years of age in day care centres in suburban areas of Finland. The educators were volunteers who had permission to participate. Informed consent was obtained as part of the ethical conduct of the study; participants were informed about the study's aim, design, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw (e.g., Brinkmann & Kvale, 2011). To ensure anonymity, participants' identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms.

In Finland, educator teams are constructed jointly with the leaders of the day care centres and under Finnish regulations (Early Childhood Education Act, 2018), which stipulate that one-third of the staff members in a day care centres have a post-secondary level degree (Bachelor or Master of Education or Bachelor of Social Sciences) and two-thirds of the staff members must have a secondary-level qualification in the field of social welfare and health care. However, at the start of the year 2030, the level of degrees will change, so that two-thirds of staff must have a post-secondary degree and half of them must have a bachelor's or master of education degree level (Early Childhood Education Act, 540/2018, 37§). The child-to-staff ratio regulated by law (Early Childhood Education Act, 540/2018) specifies one staff member must be present for every four children under age three. In addition, one staff member is required for a maximum of eight children over age three.

Finnish day care centres are based on the model of multiprofessional team work, in which kindergarten teachers are expected to take a pedagogical leadership role (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2018) within a team generally consisting of two nursery nurses and one teacher. In this study, each team had three participants. The total of nine consisted of four nursery nurses, four kindergarten teachers, and one early childhood special education teacher (see Table 1).

Table 1

Professional backgrounds and working experiences of the participants.

Teams		Educational background	Work experience	Work experience on the same team
Team 1	Jaana	Nursery nurse	7 years	2 years
	Leena	Kindergarten teacher	3 years	3 months
	Elina	Kindergarten teacher	5 years	2 years
Team 2	Sari	Nursery nurse	20 years	6 years
	Anni	Kindergarten teacher	8 years	3 months
	Saara	Nursery nurse	9 years	1 year (occasionally 6 years)
Team 3	Nelli	Nursery nurse	18years	1 year
	Sanna	Early childhood special education teacher	14 years	1 year
	Marjo	Kindergarten teacher	22 years	1 year

The research method was participatory action research (PAR), integrating research and action in a series of cycles (French & Bell, 1999; see Fig. 1) that emphasised the process of systematically collected data in an ongoing system relative to particular objectives. The data were gathered from the three teams' discussions during one semester (fall to spring), using a stimulated recall video technique (STR). These STR processes (Vesterinen, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2010) are described as follows: (i) the educator's preselected daily practices were videorecorded by team members; (ii) the educator reflected on her practices by watching the video; (iii) during the team meeting, the educators watched the video together and, through dialogue, facilitated shared understandings of their dispositions and shared work (e.g., Bleach,

2014; see Fig. 1). The study's cyclical process and data collection (Fig. 1) emphasise the negotiated action and reflection whereby participants' acts are partly shaped by the acts of the others around them. They orient and respond, both to their circumstances and to each other (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013). As PAR has been characterised as a form of empowering insider research (Kemmis & Taggart, 2000), the role of external researcher in this study was to facilitate the shared discussions with a few clarifying questions using a probe such as: 'Could you be more specific'? (e.g., Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The data included a total of 16 hours of videotaped team discussions.
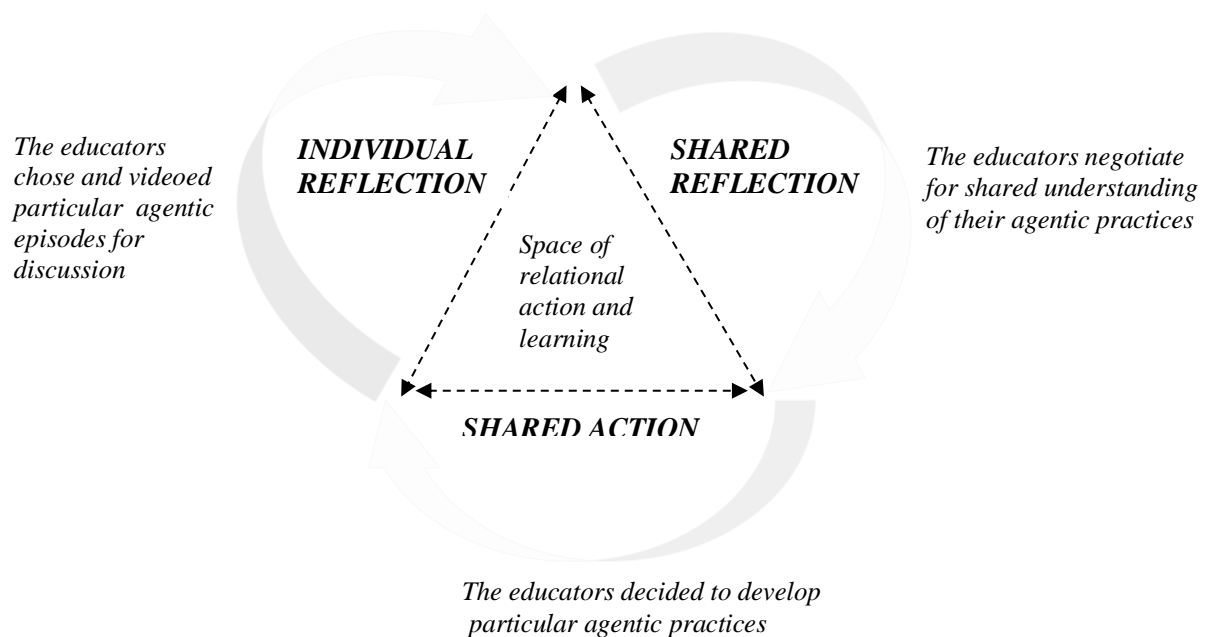

The educators chose and videoed particular agentic episodes for discussion

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

SHARED REFLECTION

The educators negotiate for shared understanding of their agentic practices

Space of relational action and learning

SHARED ACTION

The educators decided to develop particular agentic practices

Fig. 1. The process of negotiating the shared agencies in educator teams.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

As Figure 1 shows, the data were the videotaped team discussions where educators shared their experiences. All team discussions were transcribed verbatim and consisted of 194 pages. Thematic data analysis proceeded through two stages. At the inductive stage, the first author

generated meaningful themes (Braun & Clark, 2013) and tried to remain as close to the data as possible. The transcription protocols were divided into text fragments and coded in two cycles, first by descriptive terms and then by pattern coding. The text fragments were also coded within cases and then through cross-case analyses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). At the case level, both researchers carefully read each thought unit in order to have a shared understanding of it within the context of the case and to ensure they agreed about the description. In the cross-case examination, the analysis moved to a higher level of abstraction, as both researchers negotiated their agreement on the agentic *dispositions* (i.e., personal, professional, and structural), *responsiveness* (withdrawal, compliance, and engagement), and *temporality* (past, present, and future). In the cross-case analysis, both researchers compared the teams by generating findings for the three major themes.

Throughout the process, the authors addressed reliability through regular consensus-building sessions where methodological rigour was addressed by multiple perspectives, systematic re-readings of data seeking disconfirming evidence, and prolonged engagement with the process (Hill et al., 2005). For example, we dropped the idea of emotions as a dispositional theme because we realised that emotional expressions were included all over the themes. The analysis was an evolving process of arriving a greater understanding of teams' characteristics and underwent several revisions before settling on a final version.

3.3. Trustworthiness

The goals of qualitative research methods and findings are to represent studied phenomena with rigor using trustworthy terms, such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *conformability* (Shenton, 2004). One way to increase credibility is through *prolonged engagement* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We examined an exhaustive data collection for one semester. Providing contextual information, we attempted to facilitate the transferability of our

interpretations. To establish visibility, comprehensibility, and acceptability, we conducted an audit procedure for quality assessment with an external auditor (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008). Based on the data (videos, transcriptions and summaries, memos about procedures and decisions), the auditor became convinced that the decisions regarding data analysis were understandable and reliably in line with the displayed evidence and reasoning. The researcher met each participating team and discussed the empirical procedures and the emerged results. In the discussions, the educators largely reflected their collaborative and agentic processes and recognized the teams' results. These confirmatory meetings lasted approximately three and half hours and they were also videotaped. Besides participating in the discussions, each participant also answered to the survey containing questions related to their learning from the project. These additional measures of reliability were also confirmed by an external auditor. However, as a small-scale study, caution must be exercised in interpretating and generalising results.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in two parts according to the research questions. First, the features of shared agency – a*gentic dispositions*, *responsiveness in collaboration*, and *time frames* – are examined. Second, it was shown how the agentic features caused variations between the teams' educational practices, and how the teams navigated through their unique 'spaces of authoring' (Holland et al., 1998).

 4.1. Shared agentic features

Agentic dispositions

Shared agentic dispositions emerged within early childhood educators' personal, professional, and structural issues. Personal issues related to the educators' knowledge of themselves, whereas professional issues mainly centred on pedagogy, interaction, and care. Structural viewpoints included organisational norms, habits, and resources. Table 2 presents the main features of shared agency dispositions among the teams:

Table 2

The shared agency dispositions of the teams.

Agentic dispositions	Personal dispositions	Professional dispositions	Structural dispositions	
Team 1 (n=3)	27% (24f)	52% (46f)	21% (18f)	100% (88f)
	• Showing vulnerability through one's actions. • Reflecting authority. • Fostering collegiality and collaboration.	• Supporting children's learning opportunities. • Seeking better caregiving and teaching strategies. • Negotiating between child-centred and teacher-centred methods.	• Willingness to negotiate and change norms, values, and routines. • Gaining more autonomy through shared responsibilities.	
Team 2 (n=3)	31% (31f)	21% (21f)	48% (47f)	100% (99f)
	• Growing critical awareness of beliefs and attitudes. • Tendency to focus on oneself, not on action with children.	• Underlining complexities that prevent the pursuit of pedagogical developments. • Favouring teacher-centred and age-division pedagogy. Tendency for appraising children negatively.	• Prevailing tensions hinder trust. • Unwillingly, without negotiation, accepting new ways of doing. • Experiencing new ways of working as degrading autonomy.	
Team 3 (n=3)	30% (23f)	67% (50f)	3% (2f)	100% (75f)
	• Critically reflecting emotions and motives for action. • Enhancing support, trust, and well-being among colleagues.	• Focusing on children's needs and perspectives. • Developing sensitive and supportive classroom practices.	• Taking benefit from available recourses.	

As the table shows, Team 1 focused mostly on professional (52%) and personal (27%) issues, emphasising awareness of educators' emotions and values. The team members relied on colleagues and showed openness and dedication toward their professional judgements. One team member reported: *'I shouldn't have criticised her. She probably won't participate next time. … She'll think that I have already made up my mind about her. … I should have been*

giving her the thumbs up … like to the participating children'. The team actively negotiated educational practices, their values of teaching and caring, and the jointly held learning outcomes. While the team members raised their concern for teacher-centred practices, they also reflected the need for change: '*Besides those lengthy instructions, what ways are there to do this without losing my authority'?* The next example shows how the educators were empowered by their shared practices: '*As I watched my video episode, I noticed how strangely I did things, and I started to think, have I always been like that'?*

Regarding structural issues (21%), Team 1 critically reflected on its working routines and wanted to change them. The educators built up shared autonomy through reflecting on their professional knowledge and responsibilities regarding how their actions were carried out. The following example shows the team's agentic grip of structural issues: '*I agree that it took ages to think through this idea and how to do it. But from now on, we should come back to this, because the way we are doing it does not work anymore'.* Her colleague responded, suggesting: '*Besides doing our own experiments, we should ask how the other teams are doing this. It is worth trying different ways to reorganize it during the springtime'.*

Team 2 largely exposed structural dispositions (48%) that were uniquely characterised by their firm ties to past events and experiences. The dispositions revealed many structural constraints, such as fixed habits and tight norms that decreased the felt autonomy. All team members equally raised these notions. One team member described the team pressures: '*We would like to go along our old routines and do things like we have done them before. Sometimes, when we discuss with other teams, we may wonder if it's smart what they do, but we have not said anything'.* Another team member added: '*Maybe our professional roles are the thing, as we all have been working without much professional guidance and support, and no one really knows how to do things differently'.*

Team 2's personal dispositions (31%) strongly reflected the educators' workplace emotions and stressed relationships. One participant stated: '*I get frustrated when somebody works slowly, because I like to do things fast, ... so I get angry in many situations, but it does not change the situation'*. In line with this notion, the team's professional dispositions (21%) largely consisted of the complex relationships between children and educators. Therefore, the talk among the team often mirrored the busyness of daily practices and was primarily negative. Typically, the educators were not questioning their practices. One team member added: '*It is mostly negative information that I pass to colleagues. I know we could also tell the positive sides, ... but the days are really hectic and the time we share together is so short'*.

As Table 2 illustrates, the agentic dispositions of Team 3 addressed mostly professional issues (67%) and focused on the team's pedagogical practices (e.g., exploring, scaffolding, giving instructions) and ethical deliberations (e.g., child's agency vs. teacher's authority, pedagogical decision making). In particular, the educators reflected on their classroom organisation from the perspective of the children, in an attempt to enhance and expand children's involvement. In addition, the educators belonging to this team critically reflected on their teaching instruction methods, particularly by questioning their sensitivity regarding children's perspectives and peer relationships. An educator from this team explained: '*Despite our feelings of being rushed, we should be able to give more time to children to think before answering ... without the feeling of hastiness, giving clues or guessing'*. Her colleague continued: '*We should think of ways to support children's peer conversation skills. Raising a hand isn't so natural, and we should instead develop ways to respond to and respect other children, learning to listen to them more carefully and sensitively'*. In line with this child-centered approach, the team had very few structural dispositions (3%) and was more focused on relations between educators.

The team's personal dispositions (30%) concentrated on educators' motives and emotions while considering the interplay with children. The educators searched for their emotional tuning based on the needs of children and the effectiveness of their actions. Thus personal dispositions revealed questioning and a strong reflective stance. One team member explained her views of a demanding child, stating: '*The boy is smart, but uses it for finding weaknesses in children and adults, … and yet, he has his own problems where he needs help and support from others. He takes all my energy'*.

Responsiveness in collaboration

When examining the ways the team members responded to their colleagues, the responses emerged as withdrawal, compliance or active engagement. Overall, withdrawal refers to silence, compliance refers to smoothly adapting one's views and opinions of others, and engagement refers to team members' active contribution to developing practices (cf. Reeve & Tseng, 2011). The three interpretative categories reflect the stance (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004) where merely stating one's preference, without constructive or active dialogue, lacks the power to engage others in joint practices and does not affect the transformation of shared understandings. Table 3 presents the results according to the three teams:

Table 3

The levels of the teams' responsiveness in collaboration.

Responsiveness	Withdrawal	Compliance	Engagement	
Team 1 (n=3)	26% (23f)	35% (31f)	39% (34f)	100% (88f)
	• *Showing no active remarks, passively accepting colleagues' notions.*	• *Accommodating colleague's views into one's perspective:'Me too, I see'.* • *Giving individualised support.*	• *Requesting and receiving feedback.* • *Contemplating present, looking forward for experiments, innovations, and changes.*	
Team 2 (n=3)	31% (31f)	52% (51f)	17% (17f)	100% (99f)
	• *Showing no interest or activity, keeping silent.*	• *Maintaining cohesion by conforming to others' suggestions, observing.*	• *Going back and forth, uncertain about future goals.*	

Team 3 (n=3)	25% (19f)	31% (23f)	44% (33f)	100% (75f)
	• *Showing no active remarks, passively accepting colleagues' notions.*	• *Adding an aligning perspective or experiment to colleague's notions while showing understanding and support.*	• *Reasoning and reconstructing professional behaviour.* • *Commitment to adult-child interactions.*	

As Table 3 illustrates, Team 1 largely expressed engagement (39%) and compliance (35%) in its discourse, while withdrawal (26%) appeared in situations where the team members awaited their colleague's intentions and wondered whether the statement ended a question or was centred on one's emotions. Without encouragement to reflect, comment on or question a colleague's notions, the team members remained silent. One team member stated: '*I wondered if it wasn´t wise to do that, because it took so long, and the situation was messy. ... I had plans to do something else, ... so I got frustrated'.* Regarding compliance, the team members mainly aimed for dialogue and wanted to support one another's views and suggestions. As one team member was unsure of herself, others tried to balance her feelings: '*I feel like I am now raising my voice too much and too often, and I am not speaking nicely anymore. But as I looked at myself from the video, I noticed that it isn't so. And I am glad that you feel the same way with me*'. The members of Team 1 succeeded in engaging with others by developing pedagogical processes and creating opportunities for reflection, all of which were exemplified in the teams' innovative teaching practices. One team member reported: '*I think that the way I am doing this still lacks certain pedagogical aspects, or the goals are not strong enough to me. ...But as we discuss, I can see it much clearer now*'.

Team 2's educators manifested mostly compliance (52%) and withdrawal (31%) as ways they engaged in shared discourse. Silence characterised the team. Colleagues did not address, question or deny their team members' notions; thus, their shared reflection was largely missing. One team member noted of her withdrawal: '*I have noticed that it is very important to*

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consider what you say to this child, because he gets easily frustrated and angry ... but I see others treating him without caution'. The team members showed compliance mostly by confirming each other's suggestions. One team member noted that: '*I wouldn't even think to question or propose something else to them*', and her colleagues agreed: '*Yes ... I give them free hands to do as they are used to*'. Team members' engagement was a back and forth going in nature. For example, deliberation regarding the change of working practices raised hesitant counterproposals: '*We could easily change these lunch practices because there will be no increased costs*'. The suggestion called for a quick counterproposal: '*I think the way we are doing it now works well, and I do not see any reason to change it*'.

Regarding Team 3, the instances of withdrawal (25%) were mainly related to professional issues through which the team members mostly reflected on their motivation and goals for actions. Speaking aloud was a way to develop understanding and to reach more adaptive pedagogical practices. One colleague noted: '*I want my behaviour to be concise so the child can understand the reasons for it. It is not just because an adult wants to have the power to command*'. Commenting on a colleague's view to show alignment as compliance (31%) was typical for Team 3. In these instances, team members supported each other, as the following quatations clarifies: '*The reason I gave this task was that the boy was alone, and I thought that both children could make use of it. And I think they enjoyed it, too*'. Another team member agreed with this, stating: '*It was beautiful to see how the two* [children] *concentrated on their tasks*'.

Team 3 built up its engagement (44%) through suggesting changes and negotiating disagreements. Team 3 could also make effective decisions and was capable of extending their future practices and goals. The following dialogue exemplifies this: '*In case we are going into a situation with our heads full of emotion, we may lose track to our professional knowledge and argumentation and thus become disconnected*'. A colleague of hers responded with

enthusiasm: '*We should always verbalise the emotions of the child. I also tend to go ahead with my emotions, … and it doesn't give me time to think and reason with the child*'. The following example shows the team's responsiveness: '*I realised that the way we are organising our lunch does not allow much activity for the children. Why can't they do their own sandwiches, like they do in the mornings or afternoons*'? A colleague supported her: '*Let's change that tomorrow, and let's give children more active space to do things by themselves*'.

Shared time frames

While negotiating their agency, educators were focusing on different time frames, from past to future. Agentic dispositions emphasising the present and the future were essential for planning and involvement, whereas the past featured more structural issues related to agentic identities and ways of being and behaving. Table 4 presents teams' time features.

Table 4

The shared time frames among the teams.

Time frame	*Past*	*Present*	*Future*	
Team 1 (n=3)	11% (10f)	50% (44f)	39% (34f)	100% (88f)
	• *Growing awareness of previous experiences as professional codes.*	• *Asking for collegial feedback affecting shared practices.*	• *Reflecting on the goals of practices affecting the professional actions of the future.*	
Team 2 (n=3)	58% (57f)	30% (30f)	12% (12f)	100% (99f)
	• *Hard to let go, missing the old practices and structures.* • *Emotional waiting atmosphere.*	• *'Here we are' – making conclusions between past and present.*	• *Postponing the decisions for further actions.*	
Team 3 (n=3)	27% (20f)	49% (37f)	24% (18f)	100% (75f)
	• *Reporting past experiences, characterizing the affects towards individual and shared practices.*	• *Critical, context situated questioning stance enhanced new perspectives.*	• *Reflective stance enhancing reconstructive questions.*	

Team 1's discussion addressed members' behaviour mainly through present and future frames. The past temporal dimension (11%) consisted of the memories and experiences from

the educators' preceding careers. The following notion shows an example of this past dimension, as a team member revealed her professional code: '*Passing the information to colleagues regarding children is a demanding situation ... to be able to do that without other children listening ... this manner of proceeding is the way I have been told to perform throughout my career'*. Some examples of the present dimension (50%) typically include sharing one's reflections and questioning professional feedback, which was exemplified as follows: '*I wonder, is this pedagogically right?...I am bouncing back and forth to help the children as well as I can*'. The future temporal dimension (39%) consisted of educators' critical stances towards their shared teaching practices. The issues they raised were dialogically negotiated with elements of co-construction and transformation. The following notion and question are typical example of a future-seeking dimension – that is, a discussion which eventually transformed their teaching practices for the future: '*The time children presented their toys took too long. ... I guided too much ... The children didn't have an opportunity to tell the things they may have wanted. ... Did you find it very bad'?* The dialogue was ended by a colleague's response which summarised their back-and-forth exchanges and powered them to transform the practice of teaching: '*This practice has been done by all of us, ... and now we saw that this three-year-old long tradition doesn´t work. ... We should all agree never again to conduct it this way.'*

Team 2 shared their behaviour and issues mostly through the past time frame (58%). Past influences and experiences had a significant impact on, and tone relative to, the dispositions addressed within the team. In particular, the past was a prevailing time frame with structural and personal dispositions. An example of the past time frame with a comparative perspective includes the following statement: '*It was so clear to us in our old place the knowing of whose turn it was to go. ...We had certain rules. ... Here it is so different*.' It is also possible to sense a lack of power and take the view of a bystander: '*... and you have been*

decades, … and some have been there twelve years and have managed without a teacher. … You did not need anyone'. The team's present frame (30%) consisted of statements with questions, but due to the concealed or hesitant nature of the questions, the answers were not sought. Instead, the educators ended up with a kind of conclusion regarding the addressed issue. Structural dispositions also prevailed in the present time frame, where the following notion serves as an example of addressing a concealed question: '*The collaboration with another team … we have clear plans, but after six more people, … and nobody has an understanding of what is going on*'. The team's few (12%) future-reaching issues were answered with some vague enthusiasm, which postponed the decision to take further steps. The following quotations from team members exemplify their future-reaching tendencies: '*We have a team agreement which must be renewed, … so we could go through it and evaluate whether these things came through*'. '*It is not only the matter of our team. … We also need to consider the three other teams … because every team is acting differently*'.

Team 3's discourses included the present (49%), past (27%) and future (24%) time frames. The form the educators addressed in the past time frame was mostly a report of their self-centred notions, such as how events have influenced them. Although they shared past experiences, team members managed to focus mostly on both their sense of self and professional pedagogy. The following quotation showcases an explanation of changed instructional practices: '*After working with toddlers – these children are able already. I don't have to intervene – sometimes I feel like I should tie my hands behind my back. … Maybe I'll learn to see more clearly the situations when I should meddle'*. The ways the educators reflected present issues mainly focused on specific teaching tasks (e.g., management) or combined their focus on children. One team member's thoughts highlight the reporting of one's questioning stance: '*A lot of talk … how we should do things, the best way for the children. In our team, everyone can open up …without being afraid of losing face … that others might view*

me as incompetent'. Most dispositions embracing the future time frame were professional . In both present and future temporal frames, the educators reflected on their teaching and caring tasks and, in particular, management styles. Typically, their reflections were dialogical and invited the sharing of new perspectives due to the quality of shared issues, such as context-situated questions related to professional action. The following quote demonstrates a reflection on the need to clarify and reconstruct practices for the future: '*It is child-specific how one approaches or interferes with a child, … but some children take contact all the time. … How should we set the guidelines in this case, … for the child who always wants to be with an adult*'?

4.2. Different teams – different shared agencies

Regarding research question 2, results indicate educators' teaching dispositions are formed within teamwork relationships through shared practices and discourses revealing teams' ways of interacting, valuing, and thinking. Figure 2 shows the features of shared agency at the vertices and mid-points on the sides of a triangle. Small triangles form the approximate spaces of shared agency according to the percentages of the teams (see tables 2, 3, and 4). When comparing the relational spaces of the teams (Fig. 2), one can observe the differences between them. That is, teams 1 and 3 have an extended space of authoring (cf. Holland et al., 1998), while Team 2 has restricted space. The extended spaces of authoring enhanced their capacity to expand their object of activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010), as teams to shape the factors that informed their shared practices (e.g., Hermansen, 2017) and allowed them freedom to make professional choices (see Vangrieken, Grosemans, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2017). Next, we summarise the teams' shared agency as high or low, containing their collegial and social memberships, perspectives, understandings, and agentic activities within their relational-spatial spaces (e.g., Horn & Little, 2010; for relational space, see Bourdieu, 1989).
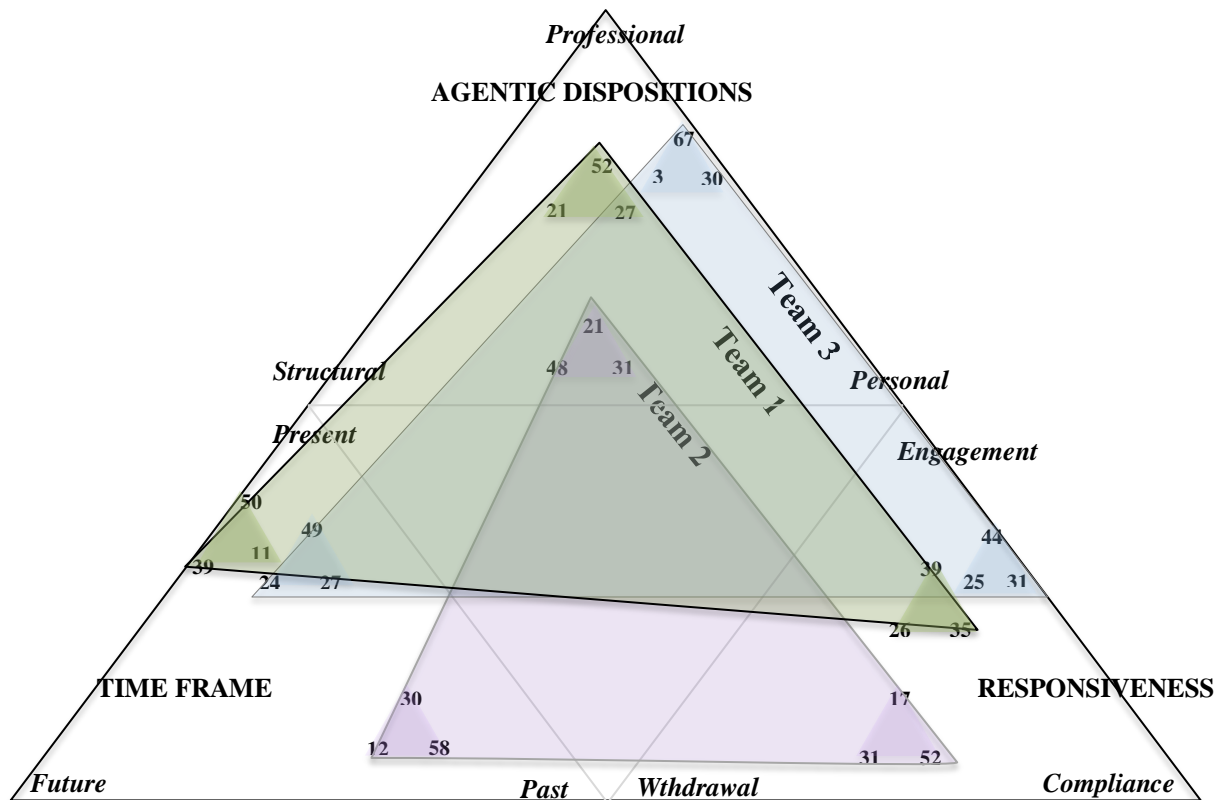
Fig. 2. Differences between the teams' spaces of authoring.

'Looking forward to changing practices': The high shared agency of Team 1

Team 1's engagement comprised compliance and withdrawal, but the difference from Team 2 is obvious due to the inclusion of present and future time frames as well as the high level of engagement in relational terms. In particular, the educators' reawakening of their shared dispositions allowed them to access a sense of who they are and how they teach both personally and collectively (Schussler & Knarr, 2013). It has also been acknowledged that teachers' actions, aside from cognitive thinking, are influenced by personal needs and emotions (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Regarding educators' professional and personal dimensions, the educators enhanced their engagements and further envisioned their images of collaborative educational spaces. The educators' ability to question their work enhanced their critical dialogue and their willingness

to change pedagogies both individually and collectively. The multiple perspectives expanded their views and engaged educators to try practices in novel ways (cf. Holland et al., 1998). Moreover, de-privatising their ways of working made it easier to share understandings and expectations between the educators, which in turn promoted better coherence in their practices (McLaughlin & Talbert 2006, p. 7), and supported collaborative learning (Hargreaves, 2003). While agency releases capacities to actively make choices, intentionally take actions and initiate changes (e.g., Goller & Paloniemi, 2017), Team 1's achievements are (well) in line with those characteristics and, thus, show the team's high shared agency.

'Struggling with an embedded past': The low shared agency of Team 2

Team 2's dispositions mostly focused on structural issues and were tied to past events with high amounts of withdrawal or compliance, and this largely described the team's professional and personal dispositions. As the results show, compliance characterised the team's social atmosphere and limited the educators' capabilities to recognise and respond to the demands of practices. The team viewed efforts towards anything new with ambivalence, often challenged by past incidents. As experienced newcomers have brought their prior modes of practice and perspectives (Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006) and professional identities (Brown, 2015) developed in prior settings, their attributes affect or oppose structures, understandings, and the development of shared meanings in new settings . As Webel and Platt (2015) noted, this development can be fostered by the often-prevailing stance that many educators do not feel the urge to justify their ingrained cultural norms and teaching.

However, experiencing a different community of practice can help educators identify and question their often-unconscious beliefs about teaching and learning to deal with the experienced dissonance (Montgomery, 2014). In the case of Team 2, it seemed that members

were beginning to question this experienced dissonance with a 'bounded autonomy' – constrained both by community and their own pre-existing frameworks for teaching (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Their collaboration seemed to be both a space with possibilities for 'productive friction' (Ward, Nolen, & Horn, 2011) and ambivalence due to the contradictions in the social structures they faced (e.g., Merton, 1976). Hence, through structural dispositions with inclinations towards past intentions and withdrawal, their shared ability to exercise control and direct their practices was low.

Putting children first in all things: The high shared agency of Team 3

Team 3's shared agency dispositions addressed structural questions least of all, and they mostly related to pedagogical practices, highlighting close interactions with children. The educators reflected on their ethical choices, focusing on children and privileging their best interests. In particular, they concentrated on bidirectional regulation (adult-child relationships), questioning both the emotional and pedagogical nature of their communication, focusing on adverse and positive aspects of their interactions, and striving to be proactive. As research shows, teachers' ability to manage their own behaviour and attention proactively relates to children's capacity to regulate their behaviour and cognitive attention (Rimm-Kaufman, Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009).

An examination of the team's relations shows members' active involvement that varied between engagement and compliance. Engagement was linked with personal and professional dispositions and became evident in members' capacity to question their practices and their awareness of children's diverse needs to care for. Like Team 1, the characteristic feature of Team 3's engagement was the present time frame, revealing each educator's responsibility for the relationships and environment they mutually construct. These instances were notable for

educators' ability to reflect on and tailor their own teaching into relationships with both children and colleagues.

To make agentic decisions about how to act and respond, Team 3 members mainly shifted their expertise from themselves to children and towards better understanding and actively experimenting with teaching and learning (Anthony, Hunter, & Hunter, 2015).The educators' willingness and interest in negotiating personal and professional issues gave them a shared vision of ideal practices, which in turn promoted their understanding of children and children's agency (see Fairbanks et al., 2010). According to this notion, the results from Team 3 show the kind of inclination to critically question one's practices in collaboration with their peers. Considering the team's professional views and engagement, its shared agency was high.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Given both the limited number and size of the teams and specific contexts, the findings are strongly related to the particular day care centers and their culture. Despite these limitations, the results offer valuable insight into the development of professional agency that is worthy of consideration across contexts, including early childhood teacher education. In order to promote a culture for ongoing professional growth, we present five implications for in-service ECE teachers' professional learning and also highlight the need to develop co-teaching in their pre-service teacher education.

5.1. A need to develop in-service learning in early childhood education

First, in order to highlight relationality in everyday actions and (re)produced space, shared agency refers to the 'amount of say' educators have over their own practices. Our findings confirmed that teams with a high level of shared agency detected more attributes related to themselves rather than issues related to them (see Hadar & Brody, 2016; Marshall &

Drummond, 2006). Educators' abilities to navigate their professional spaces entail an awareness of the set of (in the course of time) materialized, taken-for-granted practices (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007), which support educators' personal, social, and emotional growth (Desimone, 2009). Being able to shape one's socially shared understandings and respond to problematic situations is essential for shared agency (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012; see also Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2017).

Second, imparting responsibility for educators' enhancing their quality and ongoing learning involves efforts to support staff and develop the skills and dispositions necessary for their shared professional growth (Riley & Roach, 2006). As educators' agency is part of a complex process, interwoven with the structural and cultural features of the community (Datnow, 2012), the role and awareness of leaders in enhancing the history and engagement relative to the person or team is vital (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). According to our results, high agency teams employed an extended time frame to support their collaborative learning and engagement by encouraging questions and the adaption of a critical stance toward their learning. It is acknowledged that agents can either be proactive and engaged or passive and withdrawn, mostly because of the functioning of the social conditions in which they develop and work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The leader's role is essential to ensuring full engagement and avoiding educators working merely in sub-groups (Hargreaves, 1994).

Third, strong social ties encourage cohesion (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003) and ensure local norms. This notion was supported by team 2's struggling with its embedded past and norms as reified through consensus. By-standing decreases shared agency as well as individual and collective professional development and the limited agentic space also constrains teacher leadership. In line with the results, the educators' limited capacity to initiate purposeful action decreased their instructional leadership to collaborate on curriculum development (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2009; see also Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Fourth, shared agency highlights the educators' capacity for contextually sensitive deliberation (Carr, 2011). As the two high level teams showed, the educators' capacity for providing good judgment in their professional context is related to their active engagement and ability to adapt and integrate new practices into their daily teaching (van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). A critical stance that is 'more than simply sharing ideas or supporting one's colleagues' (Lord, 1994, p. 192) is necessary for the transformation of practice. However, as McLaughlin & Talbert (2006) have noted, being more critical and less polite has proven to be difficult for teachers. Thus, shared agency should not be confused with a demand to favour homogenisation but, rather, should view differences and debates as a basis for improvement (Hargreaves, 2003). As our results indicated, a critical stance between educators was related to perceived participation (e.g., questioning, negotiation) within the high-level teams.

Fifth, enhancing various individual and collective capacities (e.g., motivation, skill, learning, conditions and culture) and professional autonomy is vital for embracing 'the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time' (Stoll, Bolam, Mahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 221). As our results indicated, teams with high levels of shared agency placed the child's experience on center stage while mirroring the children's agency, emotions, and understandings (i.e., focus on their learning rather than structural features of their work), and thus, shifted their intention from teaching to learning (Hadar & Brody, 2016). We argue that enhancing shared agency supports the growth of a community as a professional learning body, and the key to improved learning for children is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. Supporting ways to strengthen the educators' practical inquiries and focusing on the problematic issues educators face in their work empowers them to improve their shared learning and agentic actions (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Volk, 2009; see also van der Heijden et al., 2015).

5.2. Importance for co-teaching in pre-service early childhood teacher education

Our findings highlight the need to develop ways of *relational, agentic engagement* also in pre-service teacher (PT) education. As novice teachers may find their position of a change agent difficult (Price & Valli, 2005), we suggest *co-teaching* as a way to facilitate PTs' agentic engagement. In co-teaching, PTs and cooperating teachers share planning, instruction, and assessment in order to create partnerships through reflective dialogue (e.g., Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010; Badiali & Titus, 2010; Murphy & Martin, 2015).

Especially teaching practicums necessitate the move from supervision of performance towards mentoring, and Boyer (2003) notes that mentors should interact in such way that "enhances engagement through increased relationships and guiding experience" (p. 26). The mentoring of PTs within co-teaching requires a mindset to collaborate and be willing to learn from mistakes. Collaborative inquiry in less hierarchical partnerships between PTs and in-service teachers also advances PTs' agentic learning and engagement (Willegems, Consuegra, Struyven, & Engels, 2017) and develops PTs' abilities to make pedagogical judgements and to identify solutions to teaching dilemmas (Toom et al., 2010).

As Torrez & Krebs (2012) note, PTs conceive a supportive mentor as a teacher who purposefully models good teaching and creates a positive relationship with mentee, provides opportunities and support, and is honest, trusting, and responsible. The relationship between PT and a mentor may also transform the involved teachers, that is, mentors may facilitate the development of professional identity by deliberately implanting in PTs a sense and experience of confidence and agency (e.g., Johnson, 2003; Swenson Ticknor, 2014). Experiences of not being able to solve pedagogically and socially challenging situations have a critical effect on beginning teachers' capacity for adaptive reflection and changing instruction (Heikonen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Toom, & Soini, 2017).

However, the mentor may also preclude mutual agentic learning (Patrick, 2013), in particular, tendency to use directive, advisory approach instead of a negotiated approach may lead to PTs forging identities far from their views of teachers as active learners (Mena, Hennissen, & Loughran, 2017). As Hoffman et al., (2015) suggested, there is both a need for stronger theoretical framing of the work of co-operating teachers in their support of teacher development and need of teacher education to be more proactive and take responsibility regarding the preparation of cooperating teachers.

Funding

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