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Could I become a leader? Finnish schoolchildren's descriptions of themselves as future leaders

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to analyze Finnish schoolchildren's descriptions of themselves as future leaders and how they describe leaders and leadership development. They were asked to describe which leadership features they considered themselves possessing and which features would be important for leaders in general. They were also asked to write about leadership development and how one could become a leader. This was a qualitative research employing a narrative approach. The data comprised 38 narratives written by 6th-graders from one Finnish school. According to findings, the schoolchildren were optimistic about their chances of becoming a leader. The children were also aware of the leadership features they did not yet have or that they would like to develop in themselves. These features also illustrated leadership qualities the children considered ideal for a leader. The most important features were experience, self-control, and courage. However, when discussing leadership development, the children emphasized also the importance of education and goal-orientation. They realized that becoming a leader was a long-term process in which various factors influence. They also pointed out that everyone cannot or did not even want to become leaders. The research contributes to the field new, less studied viewpoints about children's understanding about leadership development. It also showed how the seeds for good leadership development are planted already in important childhood environments of homes and schools.

Keywords: leadership; future leader; leader development; youth leadership; life span; narrative research

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1. Introduction

The way people perceive themselves and their relationship with others develops within the social environment they grow and develop (Lehtinen, Kuusinen, & Vauras, 2007; Berscheid, 2002). Therefore, the phases of childhood and youth are crucial even though individual change occurs through the whole life span (Lehtinen, Kuusinen, & Vauras, 2007; Berscheid, 2002). Positive development depends on a variety of factors. For example, Snyder and Lopez (2002) refer to the process in which the family, school, youth environment, and workplaces have their own roles. Likewise, our conceptions of leaders and leadership are partly molded already in our childhood, through examples, values, attitudes, models, and future expectations set at our homes (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Berscheid, 2002; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Hartman & Harris, 1992; Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014; Madsen, 2007; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013c) along with other early learning experiences (Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014; Li et al., 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). In addition, we are influenced by the media and the image of leadership presented by it (see e.g., Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Hoffner, 1996).

Nowadays, entrepreneurship and leadership are perceived as factors enhancing productivity and well-being in various organizations, and therefore, leadership research has expanded to various scientific fields (Ladkin, 2010; Northouse, 2013; Peele, 2005; Yukl, 2010). Definitions and theories of leadership have changed during the past century, due to which a comprehensive picture of leadership research is difficult to create. In this research, we lean on developmental theories and take a look at leadership from the human lifespan perspective.

From this perspective, human development is perceived as an entity (Baltes, 1987; Erikson, 1998; Levinson, 1986). Latest studies have shown increasing interest in leadership as a development process that covers the whole lifespan (Day, 2000, 2011; see also Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Madsen, 2006, 2007; Riggio & Mumford, 2011; Westman, 2000). In this research, the lifespan perspective starts from children's perceptions of leadership development. This is interesting although there is a lack of theoretical models that would explain how leadership development begins in (early) childhood (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Here, we define leadership development as a manifestation of positive development occurring as a sum of many factors (Hyvärinen, 2016; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a; Uusiautti et al., 2012). According to Murphy and Johnson (2011), development as a leader is a self-affirming process in which small steps in early development can have a significant influence in later development as a leader.

By analyzing children's leadership conceptions (see also Bigler, Arthur, Hughes, & Patterson, 2008), it is possible to reach a unique viewpoint to leadership development and essence of leadership. Children's descriptions reveal information about potential leadership characteristics and emerging journey toward a leadership position. This is a less studied viewpoint in the field of leadership research. Even if children's conceptions were unrealistic, their descriptions could show what kinds of expectations they have—or have learned—regarding their chances of becoming a leader or preferred leadership characteristics.

2. Theoretical Background

The lifespan viewpoint to leadership development (see Murphy & Johnson, 2011) has emphasized childhood experiences as the basis of leadership development later in life (see also Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008, Madsen, 2007; Riggio & Mumford, 2011; White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992). These early developmental factors can be divided into three categories that are early influences, parenting styles, and early learning experiences (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Our research focused mainly on the latter, because of their importance to the

emerging leader identity (see Lord & Hall, 2005).

Early learning experiences cover comprehensively various areas of life from education to sport and other practical elements (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Naturally, schooling and education have their own role in leadership development in school age (Madsen, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Schools influence on leadership development through general educational experiences and leadership-specific education (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). The latter means the special leadership training or practices that schools may offer already during elementary education. These experiences can be crucial to the eventual leadership development (see e.g., Matthews, 2004; Myers, Slavin, & Southern, 1990). On the other hand, from the perspective of Finnish basic education and this research, the school provides schoolchildren with numerous opportunities to practice leadership skills (e.g., presentation, interaction, and teamwork skills) during the school days (e.g., in student organizations) and leisure (e.g., in clubs), and thus supports children's potential development as leaders (Ansala, Uusiautti, & Määttä 2015; Murphy & Johnson, 2011) and career development (see e.g., Maree, 2018; Peila-Shuster, 2018).

Many leadership characteristics are molded by school-related experiences. These are, for example, the way people behave in challenging situations, tolerate disappointments, maintain social relationships, or feel happy about their achievements (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2018). Naturally, childhood homes have the main role, but schools can either strengthen or crush children's perceptions of themselves, their abilities, and future opportunities.

3. Method

The purpose of this research is to analyzed Finnish schoolchildren's descriptions of themselves as future leaders. The following research question was set for this study:

How do schoolchildren describe themselves as future leaders and how do they perceive the paths into a leadership position?

These main questions were specified with the following questions:

- What kinds of leadership characteristics did the children recognize in themselves?
- What kinds of leadership characteristic did the children consider important for future leaders?
- How did the children describe the process of becoming a leader?

The narrative research approach was chosen in this study (see e.g., Heikkinen, 2010; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Salmela & Uusiautti, 2017). Narrative research represents an approach that focuses on narratives as ways of transmitting and constructing information. The relationship between research and narrative can be viewed from two main perspectives: the research data can be narratives but research also produces a narrative about the world (Heikkinen, 2010). Narrative research can refer to the information process as such, way of knowing, and the nature of information when it represents constructivism (Bruner, 1991; Heikkinen, 2010; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). In this research, the narrative approach covered not only the methodological choices concerning data collection but also data analyses thus forming a framework for the study as a whole (Heikkinen, 2010) as the purpose was to reach children's perceptions and experiences (Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a).

The data collection happened in a Finnish school among 38 sixth-graders (19 girls and 19 boys) born in 2003. They were asked to write an essay titled "Could I become a leader?" They were prompted with the following questions: What kind of leader would you be? What kinds of strengths or good qualities do you have as a leader? How would you become a leader? What kind of school or leisure time activities would be beneficial

to you? Who would be your idol or what kind of a leader would you like to be? Would you become a leader?

The students' narratives were analyzed with the analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995; see also Heikkinen, 2010; Riessman, 2001) also following Murphy and Johnson's theory of leadership development. The narratives were categorized into themes according to the research questions. When introducing the results, excerpts from the data are introduced to show how children described themselves as possible future leaders. Students were given random codes and are referred with numbers 1-38 without revealing their identity or gender to protect their anonymity.

Child research has many special dimensions that researchers must bear in mind (Clark, Flewitt, Hammersley, & Robb, 2014; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013b). This research considers children as active and able subjects (Bucknall, 2014; Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2012; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a). The importance of ethical action and reflection cannot be emphasized too much when researching children. In this research, the main purpose was to positively reach children's voices (see Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Lagström, Pösö, Rutanen, & Vehkalahti, 2010; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a). Permissions for the research were asked from children's parents, and children also were informed about the research and their right to participate in it or withdraw from it at any time.

4. Results

4.1 Leadership characteristics schoolchildren recognized in themselves

Majority of the students (N=24, 16 girls and 8 boys) stated that they could be leaders in the future because of their *"wish to become a leader"* and because *"a leader's work is meaningful"*. They could recognize certain characteristics in themselves based on which these conclusions could be made. According to House and Mitchell (1975), good leaders typify a balanced combination of supportive and achievement-oriented elements (see also Hyvärinen, 2016; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015). These could be found in students' descriptions, too.

When it came to achievement-orientation, decision-making skills and perseverance were emphasized. Seven students wrote how they could become leaders because they simply liked leading and decision-making. This was seen a natural part of leadership.

> *"I think I could be a leader because I like to make decisions."* (Student 19)

> *"I am good at organizing thing and giving orders."* (Student 5)

> *"I like to be the one in group who makes decisions and I like to oversee other's working."* (Student 10)

Some students also considered themselves as potential leaders because they specifically did not like to be led by others. Instead, they genuinely expressed these characteristics in themselves and showed good self-knowledge.

> *"I could be a leader because I do not like to do things if others tell me, and it would be nice to give orders and advice to followers."* (Student 16)

> *"I like it when someone or some people listen to me and obey. I am not good at being under other's leadership because some characteristics in me make me express my opinions strongly. I can listen others' opinions and make compromises but I do not change mine easily."* (Student 11)

Indeed, students often referred to "making of a leader" stating that they had what is needed in leaders. Some descriptions were general and did not provide information about what the actual leader characteristics are.

> *"Absolutely I could be a leader because, in my opinion, I am very much a leader type person."* (Student 5)

In addition to various social skills, students (N=7) mentioned that to become a good leader and to be a leader, one has to persevere and be determined. An optimistic attitude toward work was seen important, especially when facing adversities.

> *"I am a brave try harder, and I try again things that I cannot do well. If I fail in a task, I do it again."* (Student 11)

> *"My strength as a leader would be that - - I finish the task that was given to me. I finish it."* (Student 14)

> *"My strength is that I am goal-oriented, determined. I also require that if something is wrong people would tell it straight without sugar-coating it. I want to achieve something great."* (Student 10)

In addition, determination and perseverance included that a leader has to be sometimes strict, too. Good leaders were helpful and demanded that tasks were done properly, but they also set example to their followers. Five students described how they possessed these leader characteristics.

> *"If I would be a leader, I would be strict. And I would work too and not just delegate all tasks to my employees."* (Student 21)

However, students were able to see the social side of leadership, too, and evaluate their supportive leadership (see House & Mitchell, 1975; Hyvärinen, 2016; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015) features. It became clear that certain social traits were considered leader characteristics. Such traits were good social skills, including honesty and trustworthiness. Seven students wrote that they possessed so good social skills that they could be leaders. They described that they were good at listening to others and got along with various people, which were regarded as good leadership characteristics and much needed in a leader's work.

> *"I think I could be a leader because - - I also can listen to what others want to say."* (Student 19)

> *"I could [be one] because in this job you have to get along with different kinds of people."* (Student 7)

Related to social skills, students stated honesty and trustworthiness as leadership characteristics they also possessed. Leaders have to express their opinions honestly and be genuine. In addition, the followers have to be able to trust them.

> *"I am honest."* (Student 35)

Trustworthiness was described as ability to act in a considerate manner. Also fairness and honesty increased leaders' trustworthiness in students' narratives.

> *"I could be a leader because many people trust me. I am responsible and take care of my duties as fast as I can. - - I am good at listening."* (Student 2)

> *"I am trustworthy and do my job as well as I can."* (Student 7)

Consideration and thoughtfulness was described in several students' (N=6) narratives. Paying attention to other people and their feelings, and self-regulation when interacting with others were recognized as important leader characteristics.

> *"I consider others' opinions."* (Student 2)

> *"I stay calm and do not get mad very easily."* (Student 36)

> *"I would be a good leader. I would respect my employees, negotiate with them, if something was bothering them."* (Student 6)

Optimism also was connected with a positive personality who expect good things to happen and consider others in a positive manner, too. Seven students thought that this would be one of their strengths as future leaders.

> *"I am a very positive person with a good mood. I get along with others well and I have never done anything suspicious."* (Student 5)

> *"My strength is that I always look at the best."* (Student 10)

4.2 Leadership characteristics schoolchildren considered important to obtain or develop

While students recognized that they already possessed some features that would be important for a future leader, they were also aware of other characteristics that they did not yet have or that they would like to develop in themselves. These characteristics were considered here as children's descriptions of an ideal leader in the future and reveal how they perceived the necessary development as a leader.

The main features to obtain if wanting to become a good leader included experience, self-control, and courage. Lack of experience was mentioned by 13 students. They described their experiences not knowing enough, not possessing necessary skills (e.g., language skills or decision-making skills), or unfamiliarity with a leadership position.

> *"My deficiency would be that I do not know how to be a leader."* (Student 1)

> *"I would not always come up with a solution."* (Student 38)

Lack of self-control and determination would also hinder one's career as a leader. Students understood that they need to control their behavior and moods in order to be good leaders.

> *"I can sometimes be so lazy, and that would not probably be a good trait for a leader."* (Student 20)

> *"My worst side is that I lose my nerves quite easily and get mad about too pointless things."* (Student 11)

The third feature was courage which also appeared as shyness. Seven students considered themselves unable to express their thoughts or control others as a leader. They understood that leaders have to enjoy being as the center of others' attention. However, these leadership skills are also learnable and can be developed by practicing.

> *"Sometimes I am quite shy and quiet, so it would be difficult to control 'the followers'".* (Student 28)

> *"My flaw would be that I would not dare to intervene in some things."* (Student 24)

> *"I do not dare to speak aloud to many people."* (Student 12)

Altogether 13 students wrote that they would like to be good leaders in the future. Although in this research, the features of a good leader per se were not studied (cf. Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2017) but students' perceptions of leadership characteristics in themselves, the features mentioned represented elements of positive leadership. Students hoped that they could develop in social skills and determination to become good leaders. They wanted to be fair and considerate.

"I would like to be a nice leader and I would like that the employees would thrive at work and I would like to be honest." (Student 35)

"I would like to be fair and friendly to everyone." (Student 26)

Determination was seen a feature that can be developed. Students seemed to regard diligence as a part of this trait, too, in addition to goal-orientation.

"I would like to be a good leader; patient, understanding, and most of all, determined." (Student 18)

"I would also like to be the leader who works a lot for the leadership position." (Student 14)

4.3 Education and goal-orientation as paths to a leadership position

Students' narratives also included descriptions of how they thought they could become leaders in the future revealing that they understood it as a long-term process in which numerous factors have their own roles.

Education and significant learning experiences - Students wrote about their relationship with education and how the substance knowledge in leadership would be acquired through education. When they described meaningful learning experiences in basic education, the importance of certain school subjects was highlighted. First of all, seven students wrote how math skills would be beneficial for leaders.

"Usually, math is the most beneficial." (Student 33)

"Some school subjects, such as math, would be very beneficial for a leader." (Student 21)

Students (N=3) also recognized that school subjects that enhance presentation skills are beneficial for future leaders. Leaders need smooth presentation and communication skills, and students also mentioned that teamwork skills can be learned and practiced at school

"School experiences like giving presentations and having a speech in front of the class would be beneficial to me then." (Student 28)

"Having a speech in front of the class and group work tasks could be good for you." (Student 7)

In general, students realized that to become a leader, one has to educate oneself into that profession. Their narratives in this sense were very interesting because the students seemed to understand that leaders have to master leadership substance and study it, but were not able to express it very clearly in words.

"By studying hard. Acquiring information about what a leader has to do." (Student 7)

"I would become a leader so, probably, that I would want to become a leader and I would read and study and apply for a leader's position. I think I could proceed quite well." (Student 13)

"I would become a leader so that I would perform all necessary education." (Student 16)

Ten students wrote that they would become leader through training their skill or strength, or by focusing on a specific field where to proceed into a leadership position.

"I could become a leader through something; if I was, for example, good at something at the university, I could become a leader because of it. I could proceed through various work experience." (Student 35)

"I could become a leader through sports." (Student 24)

Indeed, 11 students mentioned that meaningful learning experiences that took place in their hobbies, especially in sports, could enhance their future careers toward a leadership position. The students recognized that they had learned such skills and abilities in sports that would benefit them as leaders, too. They had learned to tolerate setbacks and persevere, and gained better self-esteem.

> *"My basketball hobby is very beneficial because I learn to be an individual and mind my own business, and others, too."* (Student 15)

> *"In my hobby, swimming, I have learned to be a survivor. I mean that I do my best and it is enough. I have gotten strong self-confidence. I know that when I do my best, I set my own records, and can perform better."* (Student 2)

The significance of one's own choices and action - One of the main steps toward a leadership position in students' narratives was to proceed step-by-step by working hard. They did not perceive the position as given but resulting from one's own work.

> *"I would become a leader so that I would work a lot for it."* (Student 37)

> *"I would become a good leader so that - - I would proceed one step at a time so that I would start from less impressing roles and would move slowly upwards."* (Student 16)

The first step in this path was to study hard at school. Nine students mentioned that to become a leader, one has to do well at school, study diligently, and be successful.

> *"I could become a leader if I did well at school…"* (Student 21)

> *"I could become a leader in some company due to good school grades and other studies."* (Student 17)

What was significant was the realization that their own thoughts and acts mattered the most. If they wanted to become leaders, they should act accordingly and find ways to fulfill their dream. The importance of one's own decisive and goal-oriented action was described by ten students whereas only two students wrote that they could also become leaders by accident.

Students seemed to understand how comprehensively even their early decisions (e.g., at basic school) could influence their careers as possible future leaders positively and negatively. Studying hard and working hard were examples of choices they could already make. Another types of action was also described, such as impressing others with one's skills and talents, or investing in social relationships.

> *"I would become a leader by action and practicing."* (Student 22)

> *"I could proceed by helping others and being friendly."* (Student 24)

> *"If I have decided something, I will do it. I will give a good impression to people, which is an impression that they really want me to work there."* (Student 5)

Belief in trying and learning was apparent in students' narratives:

> *"I do not know if I would be the best leader but I would try to be one as well as I could."* (Student 33)

Everyone will not be—and does not have to become—a leader - However, students' narratives were informative and realistic—also when it came to the fact that not everyone even can be or want to be a leader. While only four students reported that they will definitely be some sorts of leaders in the future, fourteen students wrote how and why they would not become a leader. Nine students wrote frankly why they do not wish

to become leaders and five students did not know yet if they would become leaders. Of these 14 students, three were girls and 11 were boys.

Students mentioned that they would not be leaders because they did not have the necessary skills or characteristics.

> *"I could not be a leader because I am bad at making decisions and bad at leading."* (Student 21)

> *"I do not think that I could be a leader. I am already too shy anyways…"* (Student 29)

One reason might be the lack of leader models. For seven students, their mothers and fathers were leader models or idols, but some students also mentioned that they did not know anyone who worked as a leader.

> *"Actually, I do not know any leaders and therefore, I cannot say who would be my leader idol."* (Student 18)

Those who knew they would not pursue a leader's career explained that they did not have the making of a leader or did not even want to become a leader. It is difficult to say based on these essays whether the reason for this was lack of self-esteem or self-appreciation or good self-knowledge and self-perception. In school, you see students who believe they do not have the chance or that becoming something is out their reach. On the other hand, there are students who already are aware of their strengths and interests, and therefore know that becoming a leader is not a part of their future dream.

> *"I am almost certain that I will not become a leader because I do not even want to become a leader."* (Student 21)

And then there were students who just considered it as one option in the future.

> *"I will not become other people's leader necessarily, that is still open. But I will be the leader of myself, and always will be."* (Student 2)

5. Discussion

What did the schoolchildren's descriptions of leadership in general and their own possibilities to become leaders in the future reveal? First of all, they were able to identify some good leadership characteristics in themselves, such as decision-making skills and social skills. The students' descriptions could be viewed from the perspective of House and Mitchell's (1975) two elements of leadership: supportive and achievement-oriented. Achievement-oriented leaders expect top performances from themselves and their followers (see also Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015), and pursue improved performances all the time (House & Mitchell, 1975). On the other hand, these kinds of leaders show trust in their own and their employees' expertise and development (House & Mitchell, 1975; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015). Supportive leaders also have trust in their employees' abilities but prioritize their well-being and needs. They are kind, caring, and easily approachable (House & Mitchell, 1975; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015). These leadership elements were visible in students' descriptions, too.

Students also could name other leadership characteristics that could merely be understood as skills and abilities (e.g., experience) that people acquire along their lifespan and are not inborn (see e.g., Hyvärinen, 2016; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Indeed, several current leadership theories emphasize the idea of leadership as a set of learnable, tailored, and developing skills or strengths (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Syväjärvi & Vakkala, 2012; Uusiautti et al., 2012). Students stated that the main features to obtain, if wanting to become a good leader, included experience, self-control, and courage. On the other hand, these opinions proved that students had understanding about the complexity of leadership role. They also were about their own abilities and strengths when contrasted to leadership development. Students realized that leadership development is a process influenced by various factors (see also Peila-Shuster, 2018). Furthermore, they knew that not everyone could or even wanted to become leaders.

Regarding the latter notion, it would be interesting to know in detail what is the role of education at home and school in students' perceptions of whether they would or could become leaders (see Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014). It is a totally different thing if someone is told that he or she could not become leaders, than if the child knew his or her interests so well that he or she knew that would be happier in other type of job. The role of parents' and teachers' support and encouragement is therefore invaluable (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014; Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014; Maree, 2018; Peila-Shuster, 2018). Instead of determining children's opportunities based on their gender, background, or other insignificant features, they could look for the special strengths in children. For some of them, leadership might be the signature strength that can—were becoming fulfilled—help them lead a happy life (see Seligman, 2011). Therefore, it is especially interesting to see how students' narratives included the viewpoint of enjoying one's work. Good leaders seemed to find their work meaningful and enjoy it. This is closely connected with the idea of employing one's core strengths at work (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015).

6. Conclusion

By analyzing students' narratives about themselves as leaders and leadership characteristics, it was possible to obtain information about how they perceived leadership in general and what an ideal leader would be like. Their perceptions are genuine, and however, influenced by the surrounding society, media, school, family, and friends. It is not indifferent how leadership is manifested: this is what the future leaders will learn about leadership. It is up to educators at home and school and in the community to decide whether they want to maintain or renew traditional leadership conceptions in children.

It is also worth understanding that leadership development is "a self-reinforcing process" (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 460). It means that helping to recognize and supporting the use of certain leadership traits and abilities in children, their leadership development will start positively already in childhood (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014). By gaining confidence in their ability to lead a group, children is more likely to engage in leadership experiences that will boost their development as leaders. In this research, schoolchildren who already recognized potential future leaders in themselves probably had gained these positive leadership experiences.

Zaleznik (2001) felicitously pointed out that the development of each and every individual starts from the family—including leaders (see also Day, 2011). This means that the core of leadership development can be found in the understanding about one's chances, which is provided during childhood (see e.g., Green et al., 2012; Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Peila-Shuster, 2018). Murphy and Johnson (2011) have presented that the childhood and youth experiences form the basis of leadership development later in life (see also Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Madsen, 2007; Riggio & Mumford, 2011; White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992). This study shook the stereotypical viewpoints by showing that in this data, altogether 16 girls of 19 perceived themselves as future leaders, while the number of boys doing so was eight (of 19 boys).

It is encouraging to realize that many leadership elements, features and skills that support leadership development are being molded or ignited through early school- and education-related experiences (see Murphy & Johnson, 2011). The school and its elements such as social relationships and teaching with all different work methods provide future leaders with a good arena of practicing leadership skills (Hyvärinen, 2016). It is important to discuss what kinds of models and opportunities school provides for leadership. In the school environment, these might be just small daily things that support positive development toward leadership. How do we encourage students to work diligently, show empathy, practice teamwork, and bear responsibility? Through these conscious practices it is possible to arouse the early sense of professional identity too, by providing children with experiences of noticing what they are good at and what they enjoy doing, and what they could enjoy doing in the future, too (see also Maree, 2018; Peila-Shuster, 2018). The new National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (2014) in Finland has put emphasis on the practicing of important leadership and employment skills. Likewise, school management is based on the emphasis of shared leadership and providing good conditions for learning. It is reasonable to ask how leadership appears in the way of creating positive

atmosphere at school and in classrooms, how different types of skills and creativity are being noticed at school, and how students' personal strengths are supported and recognized (see also Määttä & Uusiautti, 2018; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2018)? This is a challenge for every school in their endeavor of supporting the development of future leaders—and their followers!

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