Having Many Irons in the Fire

— *Finnish Female Leaders' School Memories*

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Abstract

Education and school years impact leadership development, but this development has still been little studied. This study contributes Finnish female leaders' narratives to the discussion. The purpose was to analyze how female leaders describe their school years and themselves as learners and how these elements have shaped their careers. The following questions were set for this research: (1) How do female leaders describe the significance of school in the light of their career development? and (2) How did female leaders experience school going and their school years? This was a qualitative study employing a narrative approach and in which ten female leaders were interviewed. Women's activity and social relationships appeared the most important factors in their study paths when considered from the perspective of leadership development. Based on the findings, the role and meaning of school experiences in becoming a leader were discussed.

Keywords: leadership, female leaders, narrative research, education, school

1. Introduction

1.1 Viewpoints to Leadership Development in Childhood and Adolescence

Education is expected to impact leadership development at a young age (Murphy & Johnson, 2011; Mitra, 2006). However, the impact of early years and adolescence to leadership development has still been less studied or scattered (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) as studies vary greatly according to the researchers' methodological and discipline preferences (see e.g., Charbonneau & Nicol, 2002; Dhuey & Lipscomb, 2008; Mozhgan et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 1999; Zacharatos et al., 2000; Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006). Quite often, studies highlight gifted students' perspective (see e.g., Matthews, 2004; Schneider et al., 1999) but this viewpoint does not draw a comprehensive picture of leadership development: quite a big potential is left outside if only the gifted students were studied. In this study, we have a look at Finnish female leaders' school years starting from elementary education to all the way to their graduation in a profession.

Murphy and Johnson (2011) distinguish two ways of influence: leadership-specific education and general educational experiences. In terms of leadership-specific education, schools can provide leader training at an early age which has been proven to be related to leadership outcomes (e.g., Matthews, 2004; Myers, Slavin, & Southern, 1990). On the other hand, and which we consider more relevant for the perspective of this study, school provides students with opportunities to practice leadership (Murphy & Johnson, 2011) thus contributing their development as leaders.

The ways school can influence on leadership development by providing opportunities to practice leadership skills are, for example, student organizations and other activities develop leadership features — such as presentation skills, interaction skills, teamwork skills, and affirmativeness — in children. Murphy and Johnson (2011) emphasize the importance of practicing, which encompass any other leadership roles through which young leaders might practice their leadership skills. Even if one had some innate leadership features, expertise in leadership necessitates constant practicing, and childhood and adolescence experiences can lay a great foundation for leadership development in the later phases of life. A life span approach to leader development pays attention to all these experiences dividing the elements of learning experiences into three categories: sport, education, and practicing (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). For example, many efficient leadership skills are learned or adopted from organized sport activities: visioning, intellectualizing, cultivating self-efficacy, focus on

winning, being self-interested, being competitive, being task- and ego-oriented (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Likewise, initiative is a feature that becomes naturally cultivated in sports and education (see also Ropers-Huilman, Carwile, & Barnett, 2005).

Indeed, education and school practices can enhance leadership development in children and youth in various ways. Already getting oneself heard at school can ignite leadership development (Mitra, 2006). Moreover, we would expect that mentoring relationships with teachers and faculty advisors should enhance future leadership development (Ensher & Murphy, 2005).

The school offers an intellectual, physical, and social learning and practicing environment for life (Kim & Baylor, 2006; Wilson, 1995). When it comes to leadership, school molds and tests the growing human being in good and in bad. School experiences, successes and failures, show whether one seizes opportunities or withdraws oneself. Many elements of leadership that strengthen leadership and even personality traits are molded by school experiences: the way one acts in challenging situations, tolerates failures and frustration, rejoices about successes, does self-evaluation, problem-solving, and goal-setting, and how one learns to build and maintain social relationships — all these are results of learning. School, teaching, teachers, and peers at school provide an arena to practice these skills.

In all, we consider the process of becoming a leader as one kind of manifestation of positive development, which usually is a sum on many factors (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a). The study focused on ten Finnish female leaders aiming finding out whether there any features in these women's education that could explain the development. Snyder and Lopez (2002) have introduced the process viewpoint that emphasizes the contribution of family, school, adolescence development, and good work places. In addition, there are recent studies that have shown more interest in leadership development as a development process covering the whole life span (see Day, 2000, 2011), although there still are no theoretical models of leader development that incorporate these younger years (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). This study wants to contribute to the discussion by focusing on ten Finnish female leaders' narratives: Are there common features in these women's school year experiences that could explain the development?

2. The Definition of a Leader in This Research

Despite its over-hundred-year-long history, leadership research still struggles with finding a universal definition of leadership (Juuti, 2010; Northouse, 2013; Solheim, 2000; Yukl, 2010) — but still the field of leadership research is constantly expanding (Peele, 2005; Syväjärvi & Vakkala, 2012; Uusiautti et al., 2012). The core components of leadership are common to the aforementioned viewpoints: leadership is a process that involves influencing and it occurs in groups and includes general goals (Northouse, 2013).

Scientific research on female leaders started to emerge in the United States in the 1970s (Alvesson & Billing, 1997), in Finland, it took root in the 1980s (see e.g., Aaltio-Marjosola, 2001; Lämsä, 2003). In early research, the concepts of "female leadership" and "female leaders" could refer to any managerial or leadership position (Vanhala, 2007; see also Ekonen, 2007; Huy, 2001; Kuusela, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Vanhala, 2011). The variety of concepts has partly become clarified when International Standard of Occupations (ISCO) was introduced in the European Union. However, despite for a past few years, the numbers of female leaders per country have not been very reliable or comparable (Vanhala, 2007). This is challenge also when studying female leaders because it is difficult to know who have been defined as leaders: who are the persons studied (see e.g., Davidson & Burke, 2004; Martelius-Louniala, 2003; Northouse, 2013; Peele, 2005; Vanhala, 2007; Vinnicombe, 2000; Yukl, 2010).

ISCO was created by the International Labour Organization (ILO) offering a means of classifying people based on their professional information. The current version of ISCO is ISCO-08 (International Standard Classification of Occupations 2012). Finland uses an ISCO-based classification called "Ammattiluokitus 2010 (AML 2010) [Classification of Occupations 2010]". Leadership positions are defined merely based on their functional features than field of operation. According to AML 2010, leaders are responsible and make decisions about the business strategy or organization's operational guidelines, budget, or recruitment of personnel as a whole. Leaders' main task is leading (Statistics Finland, 2011). In this research, leaders are defined according to AML 2010.

This study focused on ten Finnish female leaders through a qualitative research design. They were recruited in the research based on AML 2010 definition of leadership. But how does one become a leader? What makes women pursue such position? Are there any features in women's school years that could explain the development? This study is a part of wider research analyzing female leaders' paths of becoming and

experiences of being leaders. This article reports their school memories and experiences aiming at analyzing how they have possibly influenced these women's courses of life.

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions

This was a qualitative study employing a narrative approach. The purpose was to analyze how female leaders describe their school years and themselves as learners and how these elements have shaped their careers. The following questions were set for this research:

1) How do female leaders describe the significance of school in the light of their career development?

2) How did female leaders experience school going and their school years?

Based on the findings, the purpose is to discuss the role and meaning of school experiences when considered from the perspective of becoming a leader.

3.2 Narrative Method

The methodological approach applied in this research was the narrative research approach. Narrative research has become an important research methodology in qualitative research paradigm during the past three decades (see e.g., Elliot, 2005; Heikkinen, 2010; Hänninen, 2003; Keskitalo-Foley, 2004; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). The narrative method was chosen to reach and bring about the research participants' authentic voices.

The core idea of the narrative research is the conception of man as a linguistic, social, and cultural creature, who constructs his or her understanding about the world through social interaction with other people. Through narratives, people analyze, construct, and describe their own lives to others. A narrative also functions as the means to evaluate, to make meanings, and to construct one's identity. The narrative approach views a human being as an active actor and focuses on the time- and place-bound, linguistically interpreted phenomena and events of the real life. The research can focus on both critical and ordinary life events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). According to MacIntyre (1981), the narrative nature forms the basic ontological and epistemological dimensions of a human life; people live narratives and in narratives.

In narrative research, narratives are considered forms of thinking and construction of life (Polkinghorne, 1995). Past events are given meanings (Chase, 2008). Events are often special or extraordinary in nature (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative research is also connected with memory; a researcher has to trust in the narrative of what the narrator remembers about the past and what the narrator reveals about the past. Consequently, narrative research does not aim at objective or generalizable information, but emphasizes local, personal, and subjective information (Bruner, 1991). In this research, female leaders' ways of analyzing their experiences and their interpretations of their life events were considered crucial.

Narrative research represents an approach that focuses on narratives as ways of transmitting and constructing information. The relationship between research and narratives 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 (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).

3.3 Research Participants and Data Collection

The research participants were selected based on the aforementioned AML 2010 classification in order to have results comparable to international studies on the theme. Leadership positions were divided between four sectors: municipality, state, organization, and private sector. The operation level was defined with the so-called dartboard analogy: the closer the position is the bull's-eye, the higher level leader one is. When the dart board is combined with the four sectors, it was possible to locate suitable participants and reach as comprehensive target group as possible. In this study, all participants are called "female leaders" without making distinctions with the level they operate (cf., Ekonen, 2007; Huy, 2001; Kuusela, 2010; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Vanhala, 2011).

The data collection started by recruiting participants. A recruitment letter was sent to 12 female leaders representing municipality, state, and private sectors in 2006. In 2006, the organization sector was excluded from the research. The women were contacted by phone after sending the recruitment letters. Unexpectedly, the female leaders seemed very interested in the research. Of the first six leaders contacted by phone, everyone was willing to

participate. Five of them were finally interviewed as the sixth interview was cancelled due to difficulties in finding suitable time for interview. The data collection was continued in 2011 by sending recruitment letters to five more female leaders: two of them were ones reached in the first phase but whose interviews were cancelled and three of them were new participants. Two of the groups contacted in the first phase were interviewed because they represented such levels of leadership that would provide new perspectives to the data. Three other interviewees represented the organization sector which was considered important to include to the research in order to have comprehensive data. Altogether, ten female leaders were interviewed: two of them represented municipality, two represented the state, three represented organizations, and three represented the private sector. Therefore, they covered all sectors quite evenly. In addition, the study included women of different ages. The participants were born in 1945-1968, and thus, their school memories hark back to the 1950s-1990s.

3.4 Analysis of Narratives

A combination of narrative interview (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005) and themed interview (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2001) was applied in this research (see e.g., Saastamoinen, 1999). The interview data were altogether 16.5 hours long and followed partly biographical structure as the interviewees were, for example, asked to describe their childhood school years and education (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005; Saastamoinen, 1999). Narrative interview is biographical by nature but the emphases of the narrative can be directed in a certain direction (Saastamoinen, 1999). In addition, the biographical structure helps forming a comprehensive picture of the interviewee and perceive leadership as a part of life history that is constructed narratively in the interview situation. The combination of these interview methods was therefore useful: the interest was focused on particular themes in female leaders' biographies.

This study focused on female leaders' narratives about their school years. The analysis employed certain features of qualitative content and narrative analysis (Heikkinen, 2010; Riessman, 2001). In practice this means that the data were analyzed with Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narratives and Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber's (1998) approaches of holistic vs. categorical and content vs. form. The analysis of narratives focuses on the data as a whole: the narratives are classified into various categories based on types, themes, or metaphors similar to qualitative content analysis (e.g., Mayring, 2000). This method requires data that are in the form of narratives: analysis focuses on descriptions of the themes, personal features, or events in the narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis in this research started by dividing the data into three main sets: upbringing, education, and professional life. This article describes findings from the second category. Education was further categorized according to important features and transitions in school memories, however paying attention to each narrative as an entity, too

After this preliminary analysis of narratives, the data were studied with approaches introduced by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) that can further specify the way narrative data are read. The holistic approach focuses on the person and his or her life as a whole. Parts of biographies can be analyzed in the light of the unity. This study applied the holistic-content approach because the content of the whole narrative was taken into consideration although the actual analysis could focus on a certain theme, such as the significance of school years. This viewpoint tries to find a general impression from the story and patterns that appear repeatedly after which it is possible to recognize holistic developmental processes and transitions in the narrative.

In the categorical approach, the original narrative is split into parts in order to separate and gather sections of data that represent the same theme. This method complemented data analysis as it made possible to focus on linguistic or stylistic features within each theme. In this case, the interest was especially in metaphors (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; see also Keskitalo-Foley, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this analysis, categorical-form approach was used for constructing a metaphoric description of female leaders' school memories as a whole. A metaphor of "Having many irons in the fire" was chosen to describe the female leaders' school paths all the way from the first years until their graduation. It also describes the leaders as persons. The fundamental idea is that metaphors can reach something that is difficult to express verbally otherwise (Keskitalo-Foley, 2004).

In the analysis, the female leaders' relationship with schoolgoing and learning was viewed from school-age to youth in order to construct a coherent picture of their school paths. As the interviewees had such a big age gap, their school memories could not be divided based on school system (as the school system of Finland changed considerably during the decades after the Second World War; see e.g., Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013b). In this study, school-age refers to approximate years of 7-15. Mostly, the female leaders' memories focused on early school years. Youth as a term means in this analysis all school years after compulsory education (e.g., upper secondary education, vocational education, or university education). Nine of the interviewees had attended general upper secondary education (equivalent with secondary education, especially senior high school education; see U.S.

Network for Education Information, 2007). One of the leaders started vocational education after compulsory education.

In order to secure the participants' anonymity, any specific information (e.g., the sector the leader represents) is not revealed. However, the leaders were given raffled letter codes in random order.

4. Results

This study focused on Finnish female leaders' school memories from compulsory education to vocational and further education. During the first school years, the female leaders' narratives had emphasis on the importance of social relationships, easiness of schoolgoing, accumulating activities and related maladjustment. After compulsory education, the narratives focused on the appreciation of learning and inspiring, downright whopping university education.

The main finding was that the female leaders had quite positive attitudes to schoolgoing and education, which was emphasized already at their childhood homes (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014). Therefore, they mostly enjoyed school because their narratives had a positive tone with smiles and a twinkle in their eyes. Later on their school memories also started to highlight the importance of education, the springboard to the future. Then, their narratives had a more factual, declaratory tone.

4.1 The Importance of Social Relationships

The positive attitude to school was greatly related to the way the leaders' perceived the school as a place for meeting friends. Social relationships therefore formed the primary importance of school rather than for example school work and learning. The importance of social relationships is also shown through life-long friendships they had started during the first school years.

I liked to be at school. — I liked it because I met friends there. I laid back during the lessons. I was not any geek. — Schoolgoing as such was not so important to me but the friends were, and the atmosphere and all the other activities in the school environment. (Female leader c)

Some of the interviewees described their initiative, ability to organize common activities, inventiveness, and how they could motive others to join. A few mentioned that they had actually been the "bosses" of their group of friends already since they were children.

I could always get the others in. Of course, if I came up with something, the others would follow. If someone put a frog in his or her mouth, I would put two, just to be tougher. It was horrible. When we went somewhere, I said "let's go", and then everyone would follow. I believe that you are born as a leader… I have been the chief since a little child. (Female leader f)

One of the leaders had negative school memories too. Changing school due to her family moving to new places or due to transition to another school level were not pleasant because of the changes in social relationships. Finding new friends could be challenging.

I had one horror as a child, to change school, to go to new school. I have been doing this my whole childhood. — Walking through the new school yard, like always when I was a child, I think that it has greatly determined my life for one part … My memories from school years, and losing those friends who I had found. I had to assert myself during the first days in order to get in [the group]. (Female leader i)

4.2 Easiness of Schoolgoing

The easiness of schoolgoing and school success went hand in hand in the analysis. "Schoolgoing" and learning as such happened as if all by themselves. The female leaders interviewed in this study represented average or above average students when it came to their scores. With little effort, they got relatively good grades.

When it comes to my schoolgoing, all the other things interested me more. — Eventually, it was however easy, when I concentrated even a little. But as long as I did not have to concentrate on it, I had something else, more pleasing things to do. (Female leader h)

When I was little, it had emphasis on the group of friends, and I did school almost like in osmosis. Quite nicely. I had 8s and 9s [in the scale of 4 to 10, 10 being the highest test score]. I was not the best pupil in the class but among the good ones. — I did my homework but did not cram. (Female leader d)

Two interviewees also mentioned that good scores do not guarantee success in life or in leadership. Leadership is about the ability to act and get others do things.

I was not any brilliant student. And this is common to female leaders, they are not straight-A students. In my opinion, I was average. — But merely, I was an active doer. Of course, active thinking is important and strategic too, but I want to combine. Not just words, but also this operative action. (Female leader a)

Three leaders' narratives differed from others interviewees. They described how much they had worked for their success and competed against others or themselves. However, their school memories as a whole are positive and represent the general positive attitude to school common to the female leaders in this study.

I have always been relatively good at school. I had to work my butt off in all [school subjects] *because I have been surrounded by better students and I have wanted to reach at least the same level.* (Female leader j)

Instead, I would claim that I had not pressure to have good school grades [by parents]. *— I had high ambitions to get good grades as a child and I would say that I still do compete more against myself than against others. It is interesting and I do not know where it comes from.* (Female leader g)

4.3 Accumulation of Activities and "Maladjustment"

Female leaders were active during their school years, participating in many activities. Here, activity refers to hobbies and other activities outside school too. Leaders' social and active nature seemed positive when it came to their group of friends, but on the reverse side, their narratives revealed that teachers, authority figures, tried to calm down their goings. When the female leaders described themselves as students, six of them expressed how their lively personalities influenced their early school years. Conflicts with authorities, especially teachers, were inevitable:

All my other siblings were much calmer than I was. In the old days, they gave grades in meticulousness and attention, and my siblings had always 10, whereas I had 6 in my first report. — I could not stand still and I would comment on everything. I caused tricky situations to my teacher when I was little. (Female leader h)

Two interviewees talked about the contradictory influence of a nice and strong character. The social female leader as a schoolgirl is a doer who every now and then gets in trouble because of her own active nature — despite the positive endeavor.

I was a really wild and vivid child … I think that that deep down I was really nice. But because I was so wild, it always caused sort of conflicts sometimes. (Female leader c)

The aforementioned comments about tricky situations or conflicts also refer to discipline and order the teacher has to maintain. Lively, active, and social female leaders did not find it so easy to adjust to the adapting and authoritative school culture.

I was so childish … I did find it quite authoritative when I was a child. And perhaps I had some problems with adjusting to it. (Female leader b)

One of the interviewees remembered how she had given "lectures" about how babies born and thus aroused condemnation. Another female leader had organized dance lessons. The consequences were not surprising. The third female leader openly mentioned detentions and trouble accepting authorities because she had perceived herself as one already quite early.

…I was grounded and the teacher gave me detention too. And they called my dad and told that your daughter here makes everyone run wild… (Female leader a)

I was too lively at school. Teachers liked me a lot but they had to give me detention because I had again done something forbidden. Because you were not allowed to open your mouth, and I forgot that at once and opened my mouth. — And I was just thinking creatively. It was difficult for me to accept authorities at school. I am the authority… I have always done it my way. (Female leader f)

Most of the stories revealed how the female leaders were aware of their own lively action and how it was seen inappropriate at school. The teacher's authority position was tested. Despite the disciplinary actions, teachers were described with warm thoughts. The positive teacher descriptions showed that the interviewees understood the teachers' immense responsibility and that the teachers also influenced their future by encouraging their studies and hobbies.

4.4 General Upper Secondary Education Boosted Appreciation of Studying

After compulsory education, nine of the female leaders interviewed in this research went to general upper secondary education which prepared them for university education. One went to vocational school of her field.

General upper secondary education included both positive and negative memories. Two of the leaders talked about the demanding studies: education was perceived difficult and tough because of all rules and requirements. As a whole, general upper secondary education was not mentioned very often in interviews. This implies that this education level was merely a phase aiming at university studies. Puberty brought its own spice to the female leaders' school paths. Some of them mentioned that this developmental phase had influenced the early studies at general upper secondary school while two others had puberty-related trouble at the end of compulsory education. One of the interviewees had to repeat a year then.

Little by little, the female leaders' relationship with studies started to change. Having an education got a central role and the leaders' activity was directed in studies more than before. During their young age, school years became different because the relationship with learning changed: school work and learning were seen important.

… I realized that learning, well perhaps I did not articulate it back then like this, but the fact that it is capital and that learning is interesting and important. This far I had just passed school. But when I was older… I started to notice, understand the capital influence of education and civilization. — Now, afterwards I realize that education appears as an instrumental channel to social position and progress. I could not articulate this as a child at all. (Female leader b)

4.5 Riveted to the University Studies

At university, the female leaders concentrated on their studies and more clearly strengthened their expertise. The interviews revealed that they had studied quite a high number of studies in their field. It seems justified to say that they had been diligent and engaged students. They created solid intellectual capital and expertise through education, which is — beyond any doubt — important to their career development. This concerns also this leader who did not go to university because se constructed her expertise through vocational studies.

None of the interviewees brought up any negative experiences regarding university studies. Time at university meant learning to live and studying life. Maturing and absorption without hurry were highlighted in interviews.

The world of knowledge was incomprehensible. University time was so interesting, and of course, the rhythm between learning to live and learning to study. But it was fun. It was really interesting, nice, and educative. — Surely, when I have a look at it afterward, without any idealization, I think about that many times so that I am happy, a product of a welfare state. — Your own learning is the only limit. (Female leader b)

When I came to the university, I felt like coming to home. I had been reading my whole childhood, even until my parents got annoyed … I loved reading and still love. — When I got to university, I realized that I can read here as much as I ever want. (Female leader g)

One of the female leaders reflected on the relationship between her education and work tasks. Another interviewee described the university education merely as a door to the future, an instrument of obtaining something.

… Then this education I have, it has suited to these tasks that I have had very well. (Female leader h)

This is a good introduction to the future. I quite quickly realized that something one cannot say aloud in Finland, that I want to do something really big and significant. But I could not specify what it really is, which profession or what. But I knew quite early that I will go to university. (Female leader j)

During university studies, the leaders' activity was directed positively: participation in societal activities, student organizations, hobbies, or work alongside studies. Two of the interviewees remembered the reasons for activity. One talked about her active grandmother's influence whose societal interests encouraged this female leader to participate.

I have always been involved in everything … And that, I was not so much into it myself but they would always ask me to come because I was so talkative. (Female leader c)

It appeared that the young female leaders had many irons in the fire. Seven of the interviewees also worked alongside their university studies. They had adopted a positive attitude to work from their childhood homes and expressed this since they were quite young by working (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014).

One interesting detail is also worth mentioning. Eight of the female leaders had spent periods abroad during their school years either related to their studies or work. Five of the interviewees mentioned the importance of knowing languages, also emphasized by their parents or grandparents.

Ever since from elementary education, I had spent summers abroad. My grandmother would always guide me. They wanted me to have this international, global experience. (Female leader a)

5. Discussion

Murphy and Johnson (2011) have divided early developmental factors into three categories: early influences, parenting styles, and early learning experiences. According to their model, these early developmental factors form the basis for the emerging leadership identity and related self-regulation. The early formation of a leader identity is considered essential for the leader skill development (Lord & Hall, 2005). Our earlier findings regarding childhood homes' impact on Finnish female leaders' leadership development proved that secure parenting styles and learning experiences provided at homes could be seen as the keys for their initial leadership development (Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014).

When it comes to school and education, as mentioned earlier, leadership development can be enhanced by special education for gifted children (Matthews, 2004). However, when considering the narratives of Finnish female leaders, we cannot talk about any special education as these women participated in regular comprehensive education. Their study paths also differed from each other after comprehensive education. However, certain common elements can be highlighted.

This study focused on the category of early learning experiences during female leaders' school years. The core interest was is in the possibility of recognizing factors from women leaders' education that would be connected in their development in a leadership position. Next, we will review the results by contrasting them with Murphy and Johnson's (2011) categorization of the development of leadership tasks and skills in the youth. However, this study obtained a multidimensional viewpoint to development: the female leaders did not only describe their school experiences but also themselves as schoolgirls and young students. This perspective provides profound information about the ways leadership development occurred during these female leaders' school years.

The Finnish female leaders' interviews provided multi-dimensional information about their school years. Their stories showed that the emerging leadership appeared as a positive attitude to school and education, and as activity at school and in hobbies. Activity manifested itself as social relationships with friends (the friends' role in positive attitude to school, organization of shared activities, and the ability to inspire others) and with teachers (lively action in the classroom, small conflicts, participation in many).

The female leaders' narratives had similar features with Murphy and Johnson's (2011) age-phase-related developmental challenges in leadership skills. During the elementary school, leadership is learned through coordinating others in teams, early school leadership tasks, and public speaking to express ideas, that all were evident in the Finnish female leaders' school years. Murphy and Johnson's (2011) model and the female leaders' school memories draw a picture of an active student who, by fulfilling her own interests, unconsciously develops herself toward the forthcoming leadership.

The influence of social activity during childhood and adolescence in leadership should not be undermined (see e.g., Charbonneau & Nicol, 2002). Any science that tries to understand human being's behavior should not forget the human being's social nature and the way human relationships influence behavior (Berscheid, 2006). Social and active characteristics appeared positively in the light of peer relationships in this research. According to Mayhew, Wolniak, and Pascarella (2008), diverse peer relationships influence development, including that of leadership, positively (see also Antonio, 2001).

On the other hand, activity and accumulation of duties seemed sometimes maladjustment to the general schooling. Thus, the teacher had the role of a disciplinarian. In positive memories, the teacher's influence on the future solutions through encouragement was emphasized.

The Finnish female leaders had been average students and their school work appeared quite easy, even secondary. School success as good grades does not therefore guarantee success in life and in leadership. The early school years in these female leaders' lives did not directly give reason to expect success in university studies or in worklife. But along with development, the leaders' activity started to change its shape and be directed in studies more than before. The female leaders gathered wide-ranging expertise through studies helping their career development. Indeed, Finnish women stood out in a European comparison that focused on women's higher education (Lehto, 2009). During university studies, the female leaders used their activity in positive action having points of resemblance with Murphy and Johnson's (2011) model of the development of leadership skills.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Limitations of the Study

In this study, leaders were selected based on the definitions provided by AML 2010. In some cases, it did not provide very detailed description of the operations level. However, this did not have any significant influence in

this research but this feature is worth recognizing on a large scale. All participants were called leaders in this study, which directly refers to the leadership position mentioned in AML 2010.

The analysis that was divided into early school years and youth was quite harsh. As the analysis of the female leaders' school years forms one part of a wider research, the purpose is not to focus on just one area of life but to construct a holistic picture of these women's paths to leadership positions and to analyze the role school years have in their memories.

The women's school memories seemed quite positive when it came to their school years. This does not mean that they did not have challenges or problems at school but obviously they did not perceive them important enough to highlight in interviews. The combination of narrative and themed interview methods allowed the interviewees to describe comprehensively their childhood school years and education. Any specific questions about successes or trouble were not asked. Therefore, it is possible that different ways of phrasing questions would produce different kinds of answers and could have provided descriptions of negative events. It is possible to speculate that success causes envy, competition, toughness, or malevolence in others. One of the interviewees mentioned that she should not brag about her success at school and that she had found school work easy.

6.2 Implications and Contribution

A viewpoint that covers the whole life span offers profound understanding about leadership and pays attention to reasons and consequences. But recognizing both childhood homes (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti, 2014) and school and education, it is possible to have the future perspective in leadership development. In our opinion, school can, at its best, support upbringing provided at childhood home and strengthen understanding of one's abilities and idea of a possible future profession.

Early learning experiences in education, activity, social participation, sport, and training provide an excellent starting point to leadership studies (see also Murphy & Johnson, 2011). They also bring welcome change and new perspective to leadership development and research.

The theoretical introduction shows that activity in childhood and youth provides children with a good stepping stone to future. We think that activity can be used in working because nowadays more and more students do work alongside their studies (see e.g., Saloniemi et al., 2013). However, the connection between studies and worklife is also cultural bound. For example, in systems like UK where university studies are started when very young, studies last relatively short time and students graduate when still young, work careers are also started from a low level. In Finland and in Germany, people study for a long time and have relatively high positions at work after graduation. According to international comparisons, focusing only on the graduates' ages is not very well reasoned but the phenomenon should be analyzed from the point of view national labor market (Lindberg, 2009).

Is it so that the future's leader women are found among average students, among those who swim upstream and know how to play social games? Indeed, leadership is about the ability to act and get others to act. Many elements of leadership, action that strengthen leadership and even personality features are mold through school experiences. School, teaching, teachers, and peers at school make a good practicing arena to prospective leaders.

The foundation for later career development is laid at childhood homes (see Hyvärinen & Uusiautti 2014) and education. A young female leader has constructed her expertise through diligence and activity. Significant social relationships and learning have contributed to their leadership development. The career development has been given favorable conditions, and therefore, it will be interesting to know how the female leaders' career proceed after study years and which factors appear the most important for their progress toward a leadership position.

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