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Project researcher Anu Palojärvi, project researcher Tea Kangasvieri, project researcher Liisa Ranta-Ylitalo, senior lecturer Josephine Moate, University of Jyväskylä,



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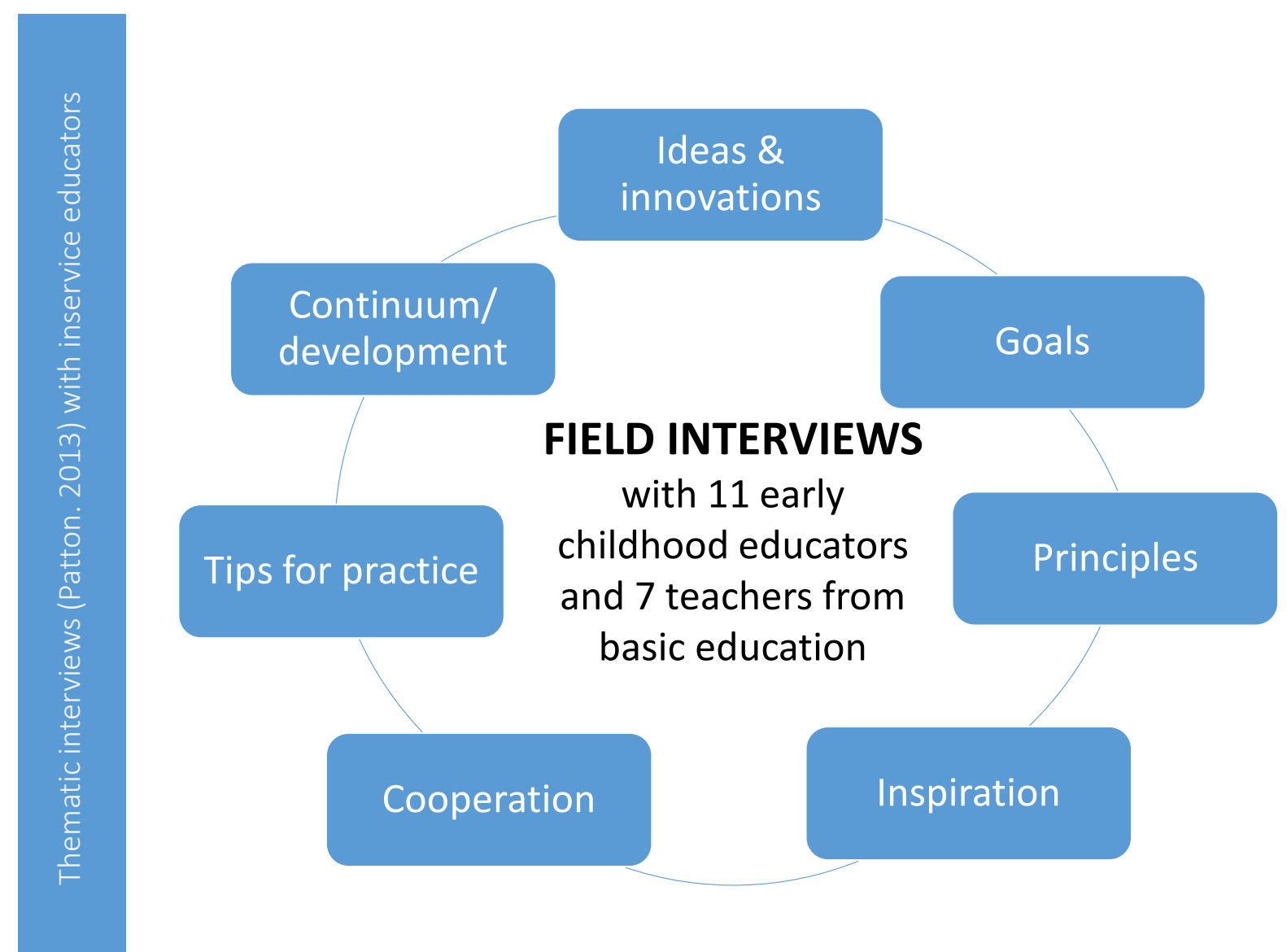


Building a pathway towards innovative language education

ABSTRACT

Funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, the primary task of the IKI project is to support educators navigating the linguistic landscape of Finnish education. As a research-based development project, IKI aims to map current language practices, to share and develop language practices that support student development and language learning, and to encourage the development of innovative teacher communities across educational levels. By identifying the existing practices and innovations, IKI seeks insights into the ways in which the conditions of education vary across Finland and the different ways educators and educational communities respond to these conditions in order to provide a map of language education in Finland. By developing research-based principles to support the ongoing development of language education in Finland, IKI aims to provide a 'compass' to guide the ongoing development of language education in Finland.

The research activities of IKI with field observations, interviews with Finnish educators as well as pedagogical cafés for educators from across the educational pathway has generated a rich dataset. By drawing on an ecological perspective (e.g. Godfrey & Brown, 2019), the theory-driven thematic analysis outlines the co-constitutive way in which environmental conditions inform and are influenced by individual contributions of educators to form the ecology of language education across Finland. This poster presentation focuses on the exosystem of Finnish education. Although the exosystem is situated on the boundary of educational communities and is somewhat distant from the immediate activities and relationships of everyday practice, our research suggests that the exosystem can strengthen connections between educational communities as well as the practice and professional development of individual educators. This poster presentation provides a critical review of the way in which the exosystem influences the practice of Finnish educators and how IKI as part of the exosystem has sought to engage with and to better understand innovation among educational practitioners from early childhood and basic education. The implications of this presentation highlight the potential and vulnerability of the exosystem as an area for professional development.



FINDINGS FROM FIELD INTERVIEWS

The field interview findings highlight the ways in which the exosystem feeds into educators' practice and professional development. **Materials** are seen as inspirational, helping educators achieve goals and interact with colleagues despite the ethical challenges of using readymade materials, inadequate provision or mismatch with perceived needs. **SOME** is seen as a useful source of materials, ideas, and inspiration with the potential to collaborate with other educational stakeholders. **Inservice training and visits** provide ideas and inspiration, support professional development and offer opportunities for collaboration or networking. Visits to other units have offered concrete practices and materials. **Project collaboration** is a rich source for materials, creating opportunities for cooperation, giving ideas and inspiration and support professional development. The financial support from projects is highlighted as an important resource to create time and space for planning and visits. **Policy** (curricula, regional decisions & guidelines) is referred to as an obligation to act and a guide but also an affirmation of the pedagogical thinking and actions undertaken by educators and a significant contributor to the educators' professional identity development.

FINDINGS FROM IKI EVENTS

In a recent IKI pedagogical café 16 participating teachers were asked: i. **why do you participate in IKI events?** ii. **what have you got from IKI in relation to your own work?** iii. **what do you hope to get from IKI events?** In small groups the participants discussed and wrote their remarkably similar answers to each question. The participants wrote that IKI events were an easy way to develop and maintain professional skills and to extend their own networks by seeing how others teach in different settings and hearing tips, ideas and different perspectives from peers. Participants also seemed motivated by the opportunity to reconsider their established ways of working through new eyes as they discussed with colleagues and noted that IKI activities refreshed, strengthened and inspired their everyday work. The participants wrote down that they had hoped IKI would provide stories from the field, 'aha' moments, inspiration from the experiences of others and stronger networks.

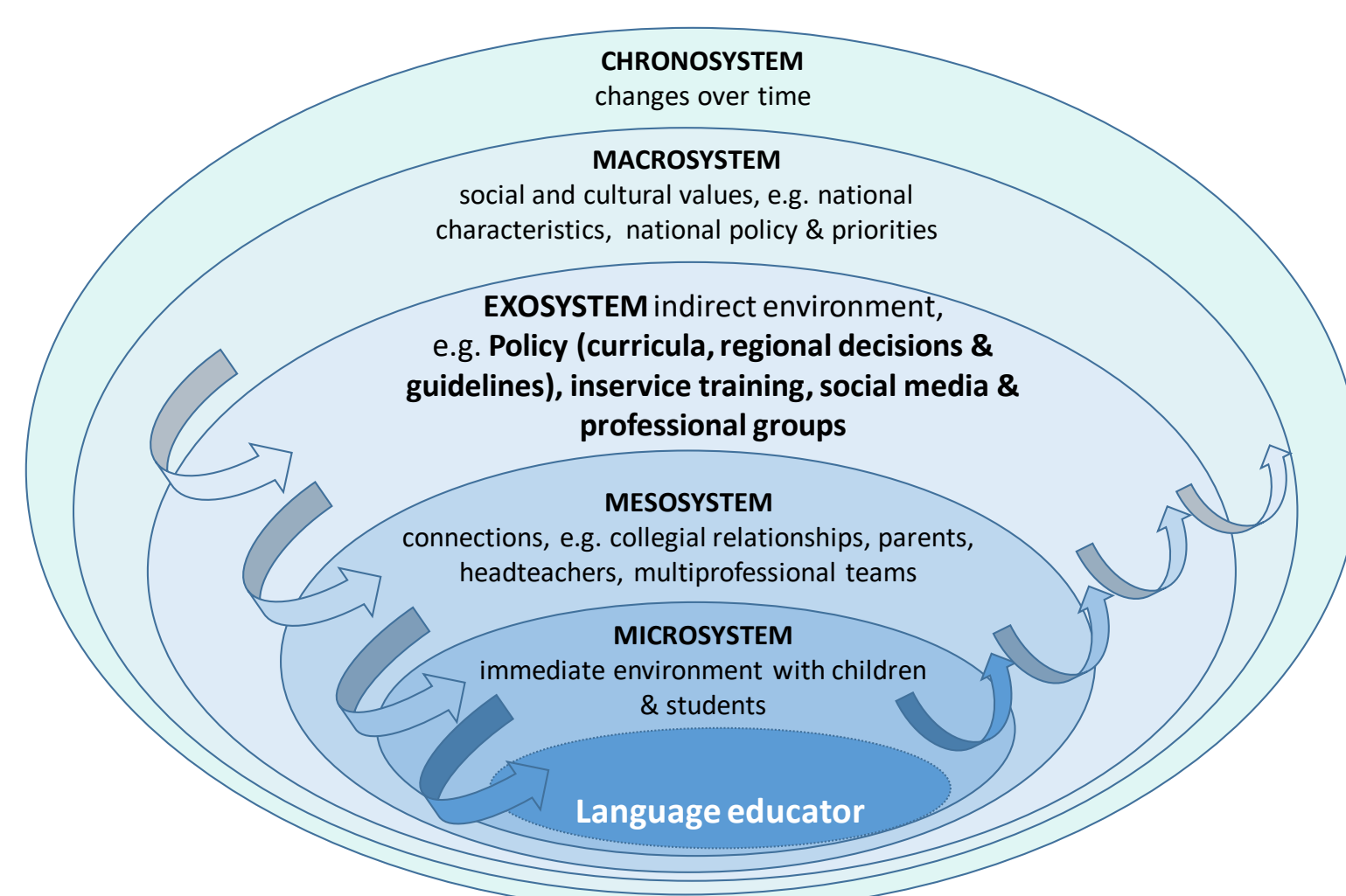
IKI ACTIVITIES

The monthly **IKI-pedagogical cafés** bring early childhood educators, class and language teachers together to listen to short talks and to discuss areas of interest over a coffee. The café aims to provide an accessible forum for educators to share their experiences, to reflect on how to develop their practice and to network with other educators. The winter and spring **IKI seminars** are occasions for exploring new ideas shared by international and local guests and opportunities for the IKI community to bring together pre-service as well as in-service educators around critical issues. These multilingual events have received positive feedback from participants as a safe place to share practices, develop professional skills and gain new perspectives. The **IKI website** publishes a fortnightly **blog** and **IKI-tips** sharing new ideas and inspiring examples.

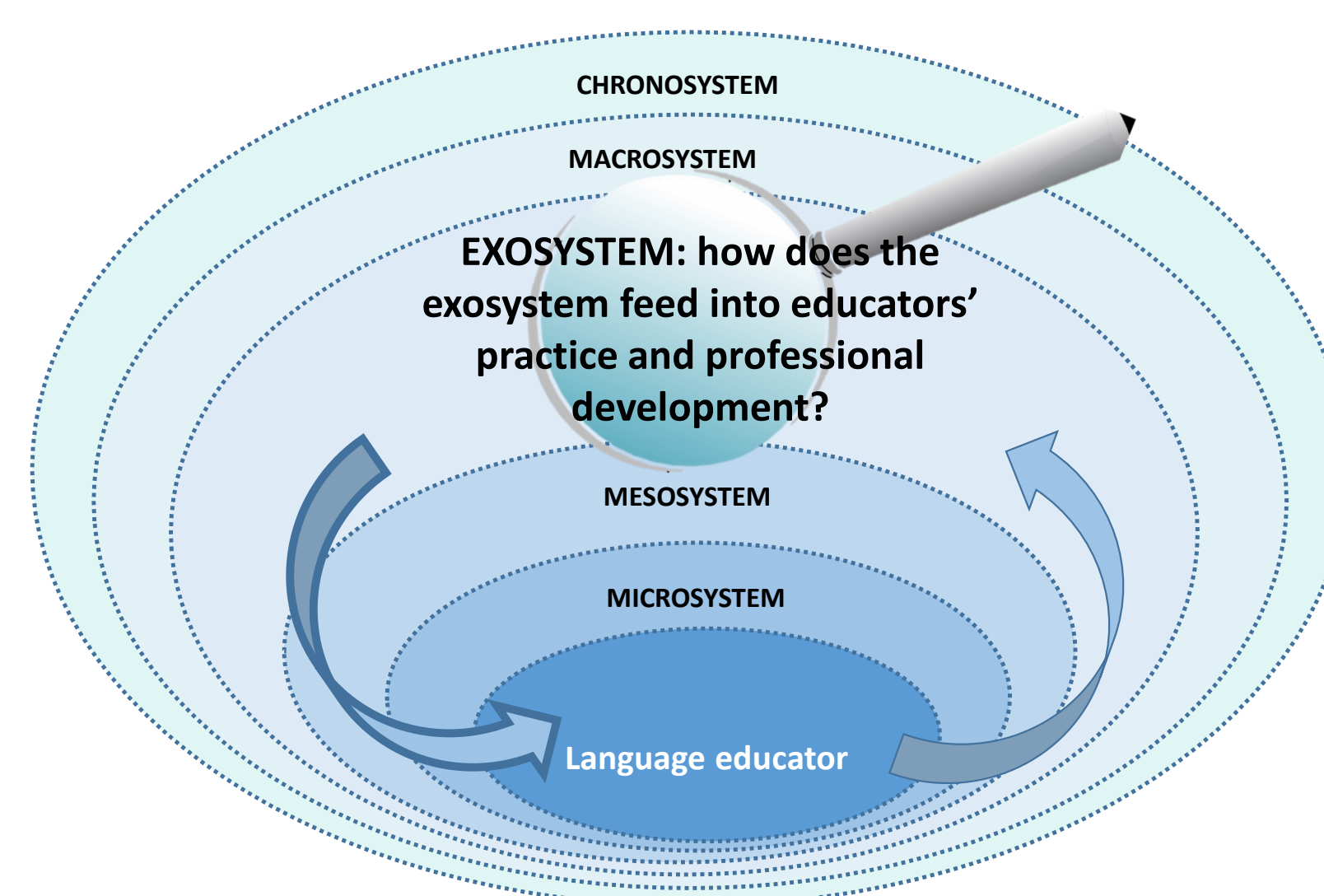
The **topics** of the IKI pedagogical cafés have included idea workshops on functional approaches to language education, differentiation in early childhood and basic education, language awareness and multilingualism, coteaching and cooperating with community partners, everyday language showers, linguistic landscapes as well as using information technology and apps in language education

The **themes** of IKI seminars have included bi- and multilingual pedagogy, dramatizing language education, literary innovation and creative responses, Yhteisopettajuus (co-teaching) and Genreskrivande i ett flerspråkigt klassrum (genre pedagogy).

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, 1979, cited in Godfrey & Brown (2019)



Receptive-responsive relationships (e.g. Rayner, 2017) of an ecological system



IMPLICATIONS

The field interviews suggest that the exosystem nourishes practice and professional development through the provision of ideas and materials, but also through opportunities to cooperate and network with colleagues from the immediate and wider community. The field interviews also suggest a positive orientation towards current policy recommendations suggesting that the voluntary participants in this study are more likely to favour innovations in language education. The IKI participant responses suggest that IKI is successfully providing opportunities for local educators to support their professional development. These responses highlight that educators are not only seeking practical ideas that can be directly applied in their own work, but also appreciate the opportunity to reflect on and develop a broader vision of their work and pedagogical activities. Building stronger local networks through low-threshold events for early childhood educators, class and subject teachers appear to be opportunities for professional development. This approach appears to be a viable way of supporting teachers' pedagogical development and well-being as they discuss interests from different perspectives with peers that are not part of the same daily environment but do share the same exosystem.

This study illustrates the important role of the exosystem and the range of ways it feeds into educators' pedagogical practice and professional development. On the basis of this study, we suggest that by bridging separate units and strengthening relationships between educators working in different communities, the exosystem can provide a pathway for professional development by creating a wider community. If, however, educators choose not to be part of the exosystem or if activities and relationships in the exosystem are not maintained as part of the educational landscape then educators' ability to innovate and professionally develop can be undermined.

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