# Leadership for professional learning during curriculum reform in early childhood centres in Australia

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# CERTIFICATION BY THE CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in the thesis entitled "Leadership for professional learning during curriculum reform in early childhood centres in Australia" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was granted clearance by the Macquarie University Ethics Committee (Human Research); reference number 5201100268D on 31st March 2011 (see Appendix 1). Permission to conduct the research in the early childhood centres involved in this study was also granted by the centre directors and the chairpersons of the management committees of the case study centres.

Kaye Colmer

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of my family. To begin with my partner Bernie, whose support and encouragement never faltered and who with great patience acted as my adviser in all matters associated with the technology essential to undertake research and produce a thesis. Your humour and support were more important than you realised. Last my thanks to my adult children, Kerry, Ben and Sascha whose ongoing interest and questions about the progress of my work was a constant source of encouragement. Each in your own way supported me commenting on drafts, through your assurances that the task was possible and through your role modelling in relation to your own intellectual and academic endeavours.

# STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION AND DETAILS OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This is a statement of my contribution to the publications prepared for and included in this thesis. Listed below are the titles and publication status of the journal articles and book chapter written by me under the supervision of Professor Manjula Waniganayake and Dr Lawrence Field.

I certify that the full data analysis was completed and all publications were written by me. The articles presented in Chapter 4 and 5 included Professor Manjula Waniganayake and Dr Lawrence Field as co-authors. In developing these publications, my supervisors were instrumental in offering critical questions and stimulating my thinking and in guiding me through the technical challenges of writing and structuring research based publications, and in presenting a concise but coherent account of the methodology appropriate for a single paper. In both of these articles, I had the primary responsibility for all aspects of the reported project including design, data collection, analysis and manuscript preparation and revision. The research, conceptual thinking and the essentials of writing were my own work.

| Publication 1 | Chapter 4 | Colmer, K., Waniganayake, M., & Field, L. (2015). Implementing curriculum reform: Insights into how Australian early childhood directors view professional development and learning. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(2), 203–221. |
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| Publication 2 | Chapter 5 | Colmer, K., Waniganayake, M., & Field, L. (2014). Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(4), 103–113. |
| Publication 3 | Chapter 6 | Colmer, K. (2015). Leading professional development and learning in early childhood |

centres: A social systems perspective. In M. Waniganayake, J. Rodd & L. Gibbs (Eds.), *Thinking and learning about leadership: Early childhood research from Australia, Finland and Norway* (pp. 32–48). Sydney: Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW).

Publication 4     Chapter 7     Colmer, K. (in press). Collaborative professional learning: Contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.*

The contents of this dissertation include the above four publications either published or accepted for publication to three different peer reviewed education journals. The third publication which was a book chapter was peer reviewed prior to acceptance for publication. In Part Two of this thesis the publications are presented as submitted resulting in some variation in the formatting and referencing according to the required style formats of the various journals and publications.

7 April 2016

Kaye Colmer                                    Date:


Manjula Waniganayake, PhD
Principal Supervisor                          Date: 2 April 2016


Lawrence Field, PhD
Associate Supervisor                         Date:
                                             5 April 2016

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACECQA | Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority |
| CALD | Culturally and linguistically diverse |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| COAG | Council of Australian Governments |
| CPD | Continuing professional development |
| DEEWR | Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (federal) |
| DECD | Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) |
| DOE | Department of Education (federal) |
| EC | Early childhood |
| ECA | Early Childhood Australia |
| ECE | Early childhood education |
| ECEC | Early childhood education and care |
| EYLF | Early Years Learning Framework |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| NPA | National Partnership Agreement |
| NQA | National Quality Agenda |
| NQF | National Quality Framework |
| NQS | National Quality Standard |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |

PD          Professional development

PD&L        Professional development and learning

PL          Professional learning

PLC         Professional learning community

PSC         Professional Support Coordinator

PSCA        Professional Support Coordinators Alliance

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**Assistant director** is the term used in some centres for the person appointed as the second-in-charge. In some centres this may be a room leader whose primary role is to work with children but who has been appointed with additional responsibilities throughout the centre and therefore holds the title of assistant director. In some centres an assistant director may be wholly or partially allocated to leadership, management and administrative duties.

**Child care centre** or **preschool** will be used where specific identification of a service type is warranted.

**Director** is the title predominantly used within Australia for the site leader of an early childhood centre.

**Early childhood centre; early childhood education and care centre, centre** or **setting** are generic terms applied to any formal or government regulated early childhood centre. The terms 'centre', 'setting' or 'services' are used interchangeably to refer to these centres.

**Educator** is a generic term used in the EYLF to encompass all early childhood practitioners employed within a centre and includes staff with qualifications such as an early childhood teaching degree, a relevant post-graduate qualification, a diploma qualification, a certificate III as well as those without an early childhood qualification.

**Informal leader** refers to an educator who enacts leadership but does not hold a formal leadership position.

**Kindergarten** is a term used to describe children aged between 3 and 5 years. The term may also apply to state-funded preschool services. Typically, "kindergarten" and "preschool" are used interchangeably.

**Leadership group** typically includes educators who have formal leadership roles such as room leaders, assistant directors and directors.

**National Quality Framework** (NQF) consists of separate but interrelated components: the **national law** and **regulations**; the **National Quality Standard** (NQS), a national quality rating and assessment process that rates centres by their performance against the other components; and the national **Early Years Learning Framework** (EYLF). Where appropriate, this research study adopts the terminology used within the Australian NQF reforms (ACECQA, 2011).

**Positional leader** is used to describe any person who has been appointed to a formal leadership role and includes directors, assistant directors and room leaders.

**Project team** or **project group** describes a collective of educators responsible for a specific project.

**Room** is typically used to denote formal groupings of educators and children within centres (similar to "classroom").

**Room leader** is the title used to describe educators who have been appointed to formal leadership positions responsible for a specific room or age group (common usage also includes team leader or group leader).

**Teacher** will be used when specifically referring to early childhood degree qualified teachers.

# LIST OF FIGURES

Numbering of figures within the publications contained in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 has been retained as published or submitted (ie Figure 1, Figure 2 etc.)

# LIST OF TABLES

Numbering of tables within the publications contained in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 has been retained as published or submitted (ie Table 1, Table 2 etc.)

# ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this research was to explore the relationship between leadership and professional learning as early childhood educators participated in professional development and learning (PDL) associated with educational reform. This research met a gap in current knowledge as there is limited understanding of how leadership supports educators' learning within the early childhood discipline.

In recognising early childhood centres as complex social systems (Hujala, 2002, 2013; Nivala, 2002), social domains theory using an adaptive approach (Layder, 1998, 2013) was utilised in theorising this study. This approach enabled consideration of the influences on educators' social behaviours and the role of agency and structure in the enactment of leadership. Data were collected in two stages; first from focus groups of early childhood centre directors and then from case studies undertaken in early childhood centres. The case studies enabled deeper level exploration of the complexities of organisational life over time. Data collection included both qualitative and quantitative methods that captured the perspectives of all staff.

The findings show that the conditions that nurtured educators' professional learning were created through complex interrelationships between leadership, collaborative professional learning and attention to centre organisational systems. A director's capacity to create an enabling professional learning environment included nurturing inclusive, collective and collaborative professional development and learning. Positional leaders also played important roles in translating new knowledge to practice in everyday work with their teams.

Leadership was recognised as behaviours, dispositions and interactions that influenced educators towards improving their pedagogical practice. The findings suggested that in responding to the reforms, a shared focus on practice fostered relationships among educators that were primarily of a professional nature which supported the growth of positive professional

identity and the emergence of distributed leadership within an early childhood centre. These findings suggested that an inclusive, relational and contextual approach to early childhood leadership may be warranted.

# PART ONE

**Chapter One**

# Introduction

**Abstract**

The aims of this study were to gain insights into the relationship between leadership and professional development and learning during a period of major educational reform in early childhood centres in Australia. This chapter briefly considers the policy context of Australian early childhood centres and the implications of the policy reforms embedded within the National Quality Agenda (NQA), specifically the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009a). The implementation of the EYLF requires complex educational change for early childhood centres. Key premises of this thesis are that professional development and learning for educators is integral to curriculum change, yet little is known about how early childhood centre directors lead professional development and learning. This research therefore addresses a gap in knowledge and understanding within the early childhood discipline. The chapter concludes by describing the overall structure of the thesis, outlining the approach and including details of publications presenting the key findings emerging from this research.

**Policy reforms in early childhood education in Australia**

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies in Australia have maintained the historical but artificial separation between education (kindergarten or preschool) and child care (Press, 2007). Many state and territory governments provide funding for children to attend preschool in the year prior to school entry. A parallel but separate child care program for children from birth to school age, primarily designed to support parental workforce participation, is funded by the federal government (Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Productivity Agenda Working Group. Early Childhood Development Sub-Group, 2008a). Although the federal government subsidises child care fees, an increasingly marketised approach to ECEC policy has been adopted since the early nineties (Brennan & Adamson, 2014; Faulkner, 1996; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Such a system encourages child care centres to operate on business models with cost minimisation strategies that affect staffing arrangements.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006, 2012) recognises the significant contribution of ECEC to positive early childhood development and learning with lifelong benefits for children and society. ECEC programs contribute to national productivity through improved economic and long-term social outcomes (see also Heckman, 2004). In 2008, a newly elected federal government recognised the validity of this international research (Rudd & Smith, 2007). However, achieving systemic change within a federation of states was complex as arrangements for the provision of ECEC services involved responsibilities spread across both state and federal jurisdictions (for a detailed account see Sims, Mulhearn, Grieshaber & Sumsion, 2015). In securing a national commitment to improve early childhood services, negotiations were conducted through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) which culminated in a National Quality Agenda (NQA) for early childhood reform with the specific aims of improving system integration and child learning outcomes (COAG, 2008b).

Following the COAG agreement, a comprehensive National Quality Framework (NQF) was developed which articulated several components of an overall reform strategy (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009b). These included the:

- National Quality Standard (NQS) articulating a quality assurance process for ECEC services (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), 2011);

- Australian Early Years Learning Framework (known as the EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009a);

- regulations enacted within each state jurisdiction to improve the ratios of educators to children and educator qualifications (for an example of regulations in one state see the Education and Care Services National Regulations for the state of New South Wales, 2011);

- National Workforce Development Strategy; and

- Universal Access to Preschool Funding Commitment to increase preschool attendance up to 15 hours per week (DEEWR, 2009b).

The reforms were not without controversy particularly for those with interests in operating child care centres for profit, who were concerned about the increased cost of meeting the standards (Australian Childcare Alliance (ACA), 2014). Although there is broad support for the reforms overall (Early Childhood Australia, 2014; PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2014), opposition to the requirements for improvements in qualifications of staff and for documentation of children's learning continued in ensuing years (ACA, 2014) as evident in submissions to a recent Productivity Commission inquiry (Productivity Commission, 2015a, 2015b). The Commission subsequently recommended reducing requirements for educator qualifications for working with children under three years of age in child care. This inquiry contains fundamental differences to an earlier

report released in 2011 (Productivity Commission, 2011), which illustrates the politically charged nature of early childhood policy in Australia. Whereas the 2011 report supported the suite of reforms in the NQF, most notably the improvements in staff qualifications and support for the professional development of all workers in the ECEC workforce, the 2014 draft report proposes a suite of changes reducing overall qualification levels and eliminating funding for professional development and support (Productivity Commission, 2014). In addition, there is widespread community concern at proposals to restrict access to ECEC for those children whose families do not meet eligibility requirements of work or study.

In work to progress the NQA reforms, recent child care data suggests that improvements in the proportion of qualified staff have been achieved, but these remain modest with 50 per cent having only certificate-level qualifications (equivalent to 6 months training) or being unqualified (Productivity Commission, 2015b). The predominantly female ECEC workforce is poorly remunerated, particularly those educators holding diploma qualifications or less, who continue to earn low wages compared to the wider workforce (Productivity Commission, 2015b, p. 317). Poor conditions such as casualisation and a constantly changing workforce, as reported in earlier studies (Bretherton, 2010), have not improved, and attracting and retaining suitably qualified educators remains a challenge (Productivity Commission, 2011, 2015a, 2015b). Researchers have argued that there is a correlation between appropriate remuneration and conditions for ECEC educators and the achievement of quality (Brennan & Adamson, 2014), reflecting that ongoing structural factors within the system have implications for the implementation of the reforms initiated by the Rudd government in the period 2007–2010. Nevertheless, the profound nature of these reforms has had ongoing influence in regard to the governance and practice of teaching and learning in ECEC settings.

This research study focused on centre-based child care, which arguably shares similar organisational arrangements with preschools, wherein

children are assigned to groups with specific educators. Under the reforms, all ECEC programs were recognised as including elements of both care and education and the implementation of the EYLF and the NQS apply to both preschool and child care services (COAG, 2008b).

The EYLF outlines the principles and practice for early childhood pedagogy and curriculum and articulates the expectation that use of the framework will "extend and enrich children's learning" (DEEWR, 2009a, p. 5). However, the achievement of improved child learning outcomes is dependent on educators' learning and understanding of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the EYLF. Given the conditions of employment and qualifications of the ECEC workforce at the time the EYLF was released in mid-2009 (DEEWR, 2009a), the expectations for participation in professional development and change in practice placed significant additional demands on educators and directors.

Early childhood researchers have attested to the significance of the leadership capabilities of a centre director (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2005; Sumsion et al., 2015; Press, Sumsion, & Wong, 2010; Rodd, 2006; Wong, Sumsion, & Press, 2012) and a director's key role in leading educational change (Nupponen, 2005; Rodd, 2014b; Waniganayake et al., 2008). The NQS, which came into effect in January 2012 (ACECQA, 2011) has created ambiguity regarding who holds overall responsibility for pedagogical leadership, as it defines the educational leader as "the person the approved provider of an education and care service designates in writing to be a suitably qualified and experienced educator, coordinator or other individual to lead the development and implementation of educational programs in the service" (ACECQA, 2011, p. 197). These requirements potentially can be interpreted as shifting the responsibility for the curriculum and pedagogy from the director, and in practice it has become commonplace for directors to nominate a degree-qualified teacher (Gowrie SA, 2015) as the leader of the overall educational programs within the centre. However, a question

remains as to who is ultimately responsible for educational change within early childhood centres?

These reforms were significant in content, scope and time frames for implementation, with both the EYLF and NQS being introduced from 2009 to 2012 (ACECQA, 2011). Further, the reforms were introduced into a sector where there was little understanding of how educators can be supported to develop their educational practice. It seems likely that government policy makers may not have appreciated the complexities involved in curriculum reform despite the availability of research which specifically addresses this complexity.

System-wide reform is complex (Fullan, 2009), multidimensional and layered, and large-scale reforms have proven difficult to implement and prone to failure (Harris, 2012; Rodwell, 2009). Fullan (2009) outlines a theory of action for system change that includes six related components: direction and sector engagement; capacity building with a focus on results; supportive infrastructure and leadership; managing the distracters; continuous evaluation and inquiry; and two-way communication. In the implementation of the EYLF, the government strategy was fragmented and lacked an evaluation strategy. Sector engagement has only been partially achieved, which is evident in ongoing resistance to the reforms (ACA, 2014, 2015), while capacity building in centres was deemed to be the responsibility of directors. More than six years later, it is difficult to assess the impact of the NQF reforms and the EYLF framework in particular.

**Rationale for this study**

This study recognises and focuses on educators' learning as a critical component of curriculum reform. Research indicates professional learning is at the heart of improvements in practice (Rinaldi, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2009) and for change of practice to be sustained learning must occur throughout an organisation (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Nuttall, 2013; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari, & van Laere, 2011). Further, the effects of educational reform efforts may be

experienced in multiple ways throughout an organisation, emphasising that change affects but is also influenced by organisational culture (Gordon & Patterson, 2008). Early childhood research has found that there are challenges in achieving genuine change in educators' practice and that many reform efforts result in superficial change only (Cardno, 2008; Deakins, 2007; Keay & Lloyd, 2011; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Pirard, 2011; Winter, 2003).

A large body of research on school education and early childhood education associates leadership with educational change including principal or director leadership, teacher leadership, transformational leadership and distributed forms of leadership (Dinham, 2005; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2010; Whalley, 2006). Likewise, leadership has specifically been connected with educator learning and service innovation (Marsh, 2014; Press et al., 2010; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006).

Indeed leadership has been defined in terms of capacity to support collaborative learning among groups of educators (Thornton, 2009). Researchers have argued that the leadership that best supports educator learning is pedagogical leadership (Heikka, 2014; Rinaldi, 2013; Sergiovanni, 1998) rather than managerial (Aubrey et al., 2013). Thus, the two common factors in successful reform initiatives are leadership and professional development and learning. Despite substantial leadership and professional development research over the previous decade, the nature of the relationship between these two critical factors during the implementation of educational reform is not well understood in practice within ECEC settings in Australia.

Literature relating to teacher professional development suggests that professional learning is socially constructed (Fleet, Patterson, De Gioia, O'Brien, & O'Connor, 2009; Hord, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Nuttall, 2013) and involves complex processes of critiquing existing practice in the light of new knowledge (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). The

collective and collaborative participation of teachers in contextual and interactive examination of their existing practice is considered essential. Many researchers argue that practitioner research methods assist teachers to adopt new pedagogical practices (Campbell & McNamara, 2010; Cardno, 2008; Davies, 2010; Fleet & Patterson, 2009; Fleet et al., 2009) but also that they are intensive and difficult to manage (Maloney & Konza, 2011). A national Australian study of child care directors' views of the value of professional development for improving quality recommended an increase in action research methods (Waniganayake et al., 2008).

Recognition of the collective nature of educator learning is embedded within the Australian EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) and NQS (ACECQA, 2011) frameworks which adopt a position that curriculum improvement is supported through educators participating in collaborative professional development (see also DEEWR, 2010). In contrast, the national implementation strategy relied heavily on transmissive forms of professional development, opting for a national information package to familiarise educators about the EYLF. Although the nationally funded Professional Support Coordinators Alliance (PSCA) proposed a strategy combining information sessions with intensive in-centre forms of support, this was not possible as there was no additional funding allocated to support educators in implementation of the government's reform agenda.

In 2011, the federal government funded the national advocacy body Early Childhood Australia (ECA) to offer a two-tiered strategy (Early Childhood Australia, 2011a). This involved a national "road show" to regional and remote locations, offering an information session to large audiences of up to 100 people on how to build educators' capacity to understand and implement the EYLF in their centres. A second stage provided free access to online resources to support implementation but the critical in-centre work was left to early childhood centre directors to organise.

As the chief executive officer (CEO) of one of the state-based Professional Support Coordinator (PSC) agencies contracted to provide professional development to child care centres in the implementation of the EYLF, I

experienced an insider perspective of the negotiations with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) regarding the strategy. With a long history in senior leadership roles in early childhood education including as a child care centre director, an early childhood educational advisor for state government and as the CEO of a multifunctional and integrated early childhood centre, I have had extensive experience of working with educators to improve pedagogy and curriculum (Colmer, 2008).

Yet the nature of the relationships and processes that were occurring within centres were complex and appeared to be context and person specific. During 2009, and prior to embarking on this doctoral study, I had become concerned by numerous claims by preschools and child care centres, as well as individuals, claiming to have completed implementation of the EYLF. These claims raised the possibility of superficial adoption rather than in-depth exploration and understanding of the theories and philosophies underpinning these reforms. It was unlikely that six months was a sufficient time frame for educators to formulate new and transformative practice.

A further problem I identified was the difficulty of measuring the impact of professional development on educators' practice and child learning outcomes. Unlike with school education, and the long-term systemic use of testing and quantitative assessment of student learning, the assessment of young children's learning is complex, meaning there is simply no reliable and efficient process to assess child learning outcomes within ECEC settings in Australia. These complexities make it difficult to assess the impact of professional development and learning on educators' efficacy in improving child learning outcomes.

Fullan (2009), a pre-eminent educational change scholar, has noted that evaluation is a critical component of system-wide reform. However, over a decade of funding professional development (2006–2015), DEEWR struggled to implement a national evaluation strategy to assess the impact of professional development and learning services on child outcomes. In

2014, the Department implemented a national evaluation strategy of data collection relating to professional development provided by the funded Professional Support Coordinators but the measures adopted failed to capture the nature and intensity of professional learning and change within early childhood centres.

Today, there is only a fragmented understanding of the processes utilised by educators in ECEC settings to improve centre practice or indeed the efficacy of professional development efforts. A further complication is that much of the existing research in Australia into collaborative forms of professional development and learning has involved the researcher as a participant in practitioner research projects (Burgess, Robertson, & Patterson, 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Nuttall, 2013). Researcher involvement means it is difficult to know what occurs within director led centre improvement initiatives. Thus, the relationship between leadership and professional learning remains unclear.

Many questions remain. Of particular relevance to this study are questions of how directors influence educators to participate in learning and improving their practice in contexts of low professional recognition and poor remuneration and conditions. Likewise, the contribution of those in formal leadership positions in supporting educator learning is not known. These are important questions and without deeper understanding of how leadership influences are exercised throughout an early childhood centre to promote professional development and educator learning, there will be continuing struggles to offer meaningful professional development when responding to, or initiating, educational innovation in early childhood settings.

Researchers have argued that specific forms of leadership may be conducive to supporting professional development and educational change (Stoll et al., 2006). In recent years, researchers have proposed that distributed leadership approaches are particularly suited to supporting educator professional development and learning (Glatter, 2009; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Mulford, 2007) through fostering collaborative approaches

(Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Dinham, 2009; Oberhuemer, 2005; Robinson et al., 2009; Thornton, 2010). However, researchers also argue that both positional and distributed leadership are needed to achieve quality in early childhood centres (Hard, Press, & Gibson, 2013; Press, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Stamopoulos, 2012); whether this recognises the director's leadership, or the director working together with other positional leaders to implement leadership is not clear. Overall, little is known about how formal positional leadership combines with distribution of leadership within early childhood settings.

In recognising that early childhood centres exist within a broader structural system and are subjected to government policies and influenced by societal views, an increasing number of early childhood scholars has begun undertaking research adopting a social systems perspective and focusing on the effects of internal organisational factors and external structural forces (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015; Hujala, 2004, 2013; Nivala, 2002; Nupponen, 2005; Press et al., 2010). Thus, early childhood research reflects school-based research findings that agency and structure are connected with leadership and change (Close & Raynor, 2010; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Wise, 2004).

**Research aims and scope**

The implementation of the national reforms, and in particular the EYLF, affords opportunities to study the processes involved in educational reform in early childhood centres. Sociologists propose that in studying complex, situated, real-life problems, in this case the organisation of professional development and learning, it is possible to gain insights into human activity and motivation (Layder, 1998).

In examining the practices of the director, positional leaders and educators as they work together during professional development and learning to respond to the demands of curriculum reform, a social systems perspective (Hujala, 2004, 2013; Nivala, 2002) can offer insights about leadership and the processes adopted. This research will therefore

explore the phenomenon of early childhood leadership during complex social activities as educators participate in professional development and learning to understand how the EYLF can inform their practice.

The Productivity Commission (2011) recognises that early childhood centre directors as site leaders assume responsibility for the development of educators' knowledge. It can be expected that directors will have a key role in organising professional development for educators for the implementation of the EYLF. However, there is currently little understanding about how directors perceive this role. Furthermore, the roles that positional leaders play in professional development and learning, and how educators and teachers contribute to learning and changing curriculum and pedagogy, has received limited attention within the early childhood sector. In exploring the processes involved in professional development that support the implementation of curriculum reform, it is anticipated that this study will offer deeper understanding of how professional learning occurs in early childhood centres and how leadership contributes to educators' participation in organisational change.

This study aimed to gain insights about the relationship between leadership and professional learning, and to focus on explaining how leadership is conceptualised in early childhood centres, how formal leadership positions and authority are organised and experienced, and the existence (if any) of distributed forms of leadership. Moreover, it investigated the attitudes, practices and processes that constitute leadership throughout an early childhood centre.

In conceptualising a relationship between leadership and professional development, the key assumptions underpinning this research study were:

- Specific forms of leadership may be helpful.

- Leadership can be both positional and distributed.

- Early childhood centres operate as complex social environments.

- Curriculum and pedagogical reform generates a need for professional development and learning.

- Collaborative professional learning is effective in changing practice.

In this study, rather than being intimately involved as a participant, an approach commonly adopted in studies of professional learning involving practitioner research, I chose to adopt a removed perspective to enable examination of what occurs under everyday circumstances as centres embark on implementing educational change. In addition, I was interested in investigating the influences of both agency and structure within organisational contexts, which presented conceptual and practical complexities. There are few studies specifically exploring the influence of social systems and the effects of different social domains (see Nivala, 2002; Hujala, 2004, 2013) and this is the first Australian study to explore leadership throughout an early childhood centre.

Attempting to gain insights about agency and structure may be challenging and therefore an existing methodological approach which is specifically designed to address complex sociological problems such as "adaptive theory" (Layder, 1993; 1998; 2013) is arguably suitable. The approach is explained and justified fully in Chapter Three. Layder's approach provided a systematic way to examine social influences throughout an early childhood setting while also accounting for the impact of external structural factors, thereby considering the influences of both agency and structure. The collection of data focused on the questions detailed in the next section and the analysis aimed to gain insights about the nature of leadership interactions, relationships and processes during professional development and learning and the relative influences of social domains.

This research meets a current gap in knowledge and potentially can contribute to the existing knowledge base to support centre directors, aspiring leaders and educators to enhance the effectiveness of early childhood leadership, professional development and learning. Knowledge gained from this research could also contribute to leadership learning

programs, thereby offering social benefits to the community more broadly because of the important role early childhood educators play in the lives of young children and their families. A deeper understanding of leadership and the conditions that encourage rather than discourage educators may contribute to improving the wellbeing of early childhood educators and mitigate against the high staff attrition rates in early childhood service provision.

**Research questions**

A broad range of existing literature across early childhood and school-based research will be examined to explore leadership (in particular distributed leadership), educational change, professional development and learning. Although caution is required in applying findings of school-based research to early childhood contexts (Thornton, 2010) the relatively small research base on early childhood compared to school education means that it is inevitable that school-based research will be considered. Arguably, my in-depth knowledge of early childhood pedagogy, curriculum and context has enabled appropriate analysis of the applicability of concepts from school-based research to ECEC.

Furthermore, in adaptive theory, analytical processes have transparency as the initial coding structure is derived from the summary of the key concepts from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. These key concepts are described by Layder (1998, 2013) as "orienting concepts" and a list of these concepts for this study will be presented at the end of Chapter Two. These orienting concepts provide the reader with early insight into the researcher's thinking regarding the overall research and the initial analysis of data proceeded from these concepts. This process assisted in developing conceptual rather than descriptive explanations for what occurs and supported theorising about the questions (Layder, 2013). This means that from the outset the reader is aware of how the theoretical influences have shaped the researcher's arguments. In this way, existing empirical research has been used to scaffold new research in building new

understanding about early childhood leadership and professional development and learning.

The title of this study is: "Leadership for professional learning during curriculum reform in early childhood centres in Australia". This investigation was aimed at gaining new insights about the relationship between leadership and professional learning, including how early childhood educators experience and enact leadership, behaviours that constitute leadership practices and how leadership influenced educators throughout an early childhood centre to participate in professional learning.

The questions of this study were:

1. How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change?

2. What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)?

3. How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change?

**Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is written in a hybrid style that includes chapters and published articles in accordance with the Macquarie University "Thesis by Publications Guidelines" for doctoral dissertations available at: www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/hdr_thesis/policy.html. According to the guidelines a thesis may include relevant papers (including conference presentations) published, accepted, submitted or prepared for publication. These papers must;

- form a coherent and integrated body of work,

- include a comprehensive and critical introduction and an integrative conclusion, and

- focus on a single project or set of related questions or propositions.

This thesis comprises four publications. At the time of submitting this thesis, three papers had been peer reviewed and published: Chapters Four and Five are journal publications and Chapter Six is a book chapter. Chapter Seven has been peer reviewed and was accepted for publication on 25 January 2016. A difficulty in presenting research by publication is that there is unavoidable repetition as each publication requires an explanation of the literature and justification of the methodology and procedures used in this study. Likewise, some key findings may reappear in supporting and developing a cohesive line of argument within individual papers. While these problems seem inevitable, every effort has been made for common explanatory accounts to be succinct and sufficient to meet the editorial requirements of each journal publication.

Chapter One offers a broad canvas of the policy context of early childhood education in Australia. It identifies the research problem and includes an explanation of the key aspects and the parameters of the research study. This includes the specific aims, scope and questions of the research study and a justification of the significance and benefits of meeting a current gap in knowledge within the early childhood discipline.

Chapter Two offers a review of the literature, identifies key conceptual and theoretical ideas that frame this study and identifies the key factors that are involved in undertaking curriculum reform. The chapter concludes by identifying the orienting concepts that informed the research.

In Chapter Three an exploration of the theoretical perspectives that informed the selection of the methodology is presented. Methodological procedures used are explained and justified including decisions relating to the collection and analysis of data.

The findings section is presented next, beginning with a preamble that explains the decisions about the presentation of published papers included in this thesis. These four publications are presented as chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 providing an analysis of the key findings of this study. Publishing

during the candidature afforded me a means to circulate the findings to the early childhood sector in a timely manner, and thereby influence thinking about the provision of professional development and learning as early childhood centres continued to engage with the reforms.

Chapter Four presents findings from focus groups of directors, highlighting directors' beliefs in their own pedagogical leadership responsibilities and their responsibilities in relation to educators' professional development and learning. The distinct functions of professional development and collaborative professional learning offer explanations that may be of value to centre directors in planning organisational processes for curriculum improvement. Key supportive factors include the impact of organisational culture and structural arrangements, which are explained.

Chapter Five presents case study findings specifically posing the question of who has responsibility for educational leadership in early childhood centres. This question is particularly relevant because of the ambiguity associated with the requirement for an educational leader within the NQS. Notwithstanding directors' specific responsibilities, findings indicate that positional leaders play important roles in supporting professional learning but leadership may also be distributed to educators who are not in formal leadership roles.

In Chapter Six, the findings presented confirm the value of conceptualising early childhood centres as complex social systems wherein different social domains interact to influence educators' perceptions. This chapter builds on a conference presentation exploring the findings relating to the influence of different social domains (Colmer, 2013). A director is portrayed as holding a highly influential position, able to influence the culture or ethos of the organisation while also influencing educators' inter-subjective and subjective meanings.

Chapter Seven brings together all of the data analysis to explain the dimensions of leadership that support educators' participation in professional learning and addresses the complexity of how the various

components interact during a period of major educational reform. The findings relating to educators' meanings are considered holistically, offering an explanation that educator professional identity is socially constructed within an environment that offers collaborative professional learning. Specific behaviours and dispositions support educators' participation in professional learning. This includes opportunities for inclusive professional conversations; nurturing critically reflective practice, articulating change processes and applying learning to create new practice. Hence, participation in professional learning contributes to the growth of leadership among educators and to educators' sense of meaning and purpose and building professionalism throughout an early childhood centre. This chapter was developed from a paper presented to the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society (NZEALS) (see Colmer, 2014).

Chapter Eight includes reflections and discussions regarding the implications of this study and argues the value of an ongoing collective and collaborative professional development and learning system within each early childhood centre. Such a system could potentially make ongoing and lasting contributions to the quality of curriculum and pedagogy and to educator wellbeing and professional identity. The chapter concludes that professional learning and leadership are interrelated and that different factors and conditions interact to create an environment and culture that is conducive to learning and leadership. Both the leadership of the director and the enactment of positional leadership are necessary in developing distributed leadership throughout an organisation.

For ease of reading Table 1.1 identifies the publications and provides an abstract of the content for each chapter.

**Table 1.1: Overview of the thesis**

| Chapter 1 | Introduction |
|---|---|

The aims of this study are to gain insights into the relationship between leadership and professional development and learning during a period of major educational reform in early childhood centres in Australia. This chapter briefly considers the policy context of Australian early childhood centres and the implications of the policy reforms embedded within the National Quality Agenda (NQA), specifically the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The implementation of the EYLF requires complex educational change for early childhood centres. Key premises of this thesis are that professional development and learning for educators is integral to curriculum change, yet little is known about how early childhood centre directors lead professional development and learning. This research therefore addresses a gap in knowledge and understanding within the early childhood discipline. The chapter concludes by describing the overall structure of the thesis, outlining the approach and including details of publications presenting the key findings emerging from this research.

| Chapter 2 | Literature review |
|---|---|

This chapter examines the literature to understand how curriculum reform affects educators within educational institutions, anticipating that educational change is complex and requires professional development and learning. The nature of professional learning is explored to identify processes that assist educators to learn about new theoretical positions to improve their practice. These insights highlight the nature of leadership practices that encourage participation in professional learning and curriculum reform. Distributed leadership models are positively associated with educators' professional learning. This chapter examines and describes the interrelationships between leadership and professional development and learning during educational change. The concepts identified in this review as particularly relevant in examining the relationship between leadership and professional learning are summarised as orienting concepts.

| Chapter 3 | Methodology |
|---|---|

This chapter outlines the theoretical approach that underpins this research. This study seeks to examine the interrelationship between leadership and professional development and learning. An argument is presented for utilising social domains theory and, specifically, an adaptive approach (Layder, 1998). This approach offers two specific advantages in understanding complexity in early childhood education and care centres. First, it facilitates an examination of the influences of different social domains on organisational social behaviours. Second, a rationale for the use of orienting concepts drawn from the literature to guide analysis is embedded, which assists in the development of plausible explanations. The chapter outlines and explains the methodology including how the

processes relate to the research questions, sources of empirical data and sampling, data collection methods and the analytical procedures. The chapter concludes with observations about the quality of the research.

| Findings | Preamble to the findings section |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| **Chapter 4** | Colmer, K., Waniganayake, M., & Field, L. (2015). Implementing curriculum reform: Insights into how Australian early childhood directors view professional development and learning. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(2), 203–221. |
| Publication 1 Article | A range of studies has demonstrated that collaborative professional development and learning (PD&L) is effective in implementing curriculum reform. PD&L which is contextualised within a specific setting enables educators to explore new theoretical perspectives, review existing knowledge and beliefs, and examine their current practice. This article reports on an investigation of how Australian early childhood centre directors understand and lead PD&L during a major reform of curriculum. Qualitative analysis was undertaken drawing on orienting concepts from the literature. Analysis of data collected from two focus groups of early childhood centre directors show the importance of the director as overall educational leader but suggests that distributing leadership supports PD&L. Although directors articulated belief in the value of collaborative professional learning, individualised, one-off, external PD events remained a common strategy. Directors' perceptions about managing curriculum reform, their understanding of leadership and PD&L, together with considerations of broader social and system influences such as organisational culture and structural arrangements are factors that contribute to professional learning. A model for a centre-based professional learning system is proposed. |
| **Chapter 5** | Colmer, K., Waniganayake, M., & Field, L. (2014). Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 39*(4), 103–113. |
| Publication 2 Article | In early childhood centres directors have responsibility for ongoing professional learning to support the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Currently there is limited understanding about how early childhood leaders support educators to participate in professional learning. This article presents findings from two case studies undertaken as part of a larger research project aimed at exploring the enactment of leadership for professional learning in early childhood centres. Key findings from this research show that directors played a key role as the centre's educational leader and distributing leadership to room leaders was critical in supporting educators' professional learning. |
| **Chapter 6** | Colmer, K. (2015). Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: A social systems perspective. In M. Waniganayake, J. Rodd & L. Gibbs (Eds.), *Thinking and learning about leadership: Early childhood research from Australia, Finland and Norway* (pp. 32–4 8). Sydney: Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW). |
| Publication | The Australian early childhood policy reforms arising from the National |

| 3 Book chapter | Quality Agenda (NQA) (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2008) have raised expectations for improved professional development of educators in early childhood centres. There is however, limited understanding of the role of leadership in professional development and learning. This chapter reports on research that collected data from director focus groups and case studies of two early childhood centres. The analysis adopted a social systems perspective (Layder, 1998) which examined external and internal factors that impact on centre-based staff during professional learning. Findings reveal the influence of external structural factors, internal organisational systems and the interactions and relationships among educators. Conditions that nurture educators' professional learning are created through complex interrelationships between leadership, collaborative professional development and attention to centre organisation. Both agency and structure are implicated. |
|---|---|
| **Chapter 7** | Colmer, K. (in press). Collaborative professional learning: Contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.* |
| Publication 4 Article | This article contributes to understanding of professionalism in early childhood education and supports an argument that an externally imposed curriculum framework can enhance professional identity and professionalism (Miller 2008). While primarily focused on examining the nature of leadership practice during professional development and learning to implement the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR 2009a) this research offers insights into educators' subjectivities. A particular focus was to examine the influence of different social domains to understand how agency and structure were implicated in the enactment of leadership. Analysis of data from two case studies in early childhood centres suggested that professional identity was socially constructed with collaborative professional dialogue contributing to educators' sense of agency. |
| **Chapter 8** | **Discussion and conclusion** |
| | This chapter synthesises the findings of this research, highlighting the significant interrelationships between key concepts. A relationship was identified between leadership and professional development and learning during implementation of curriculum change. The conditions for professional learning resulted from a complex interplay of a director's pedagogical and organisational leadership. Enabling organisational factors were necessary to promote opportunities for educators' participation in collective professional learning. Positional leaders also played a crucial role in facilitating professional learning. An alignment of leadership and favourable conditions for collective professional learning supported the emergence of distributed leadership among educators, which strengthened educator professional identity and professionalism. |

# Chapter Two

# Literature review

## Abstract

This chapter examines the literature to understand how curriculum reform affects educators within educational institutions, anticipating that educational change is complex and requires professional development and learning. The nature of professional learning is explored to identify processes that assist educators to learn about new theoretical positions to improve their practice. These insights highlight the nature of leadership practices that encourage participation in professional learning and curriculum reform. Distributed leadership models are positively associated with educators' professional learning. This chapter examines and describes the interrelationships between leadership and professional development and learning during educational change. The concepts identified in this review as particularly relevant in examining the relationship between leadership and professional learning are summarised as orienting concepts.

**Introduction**

This chapter examines literature relating to educational reform, leadership and professional learning with the aim of identifying orienting concepts to frame this research study (Layder, 1998). In Chapter One, the policy context was introduced and key structural issues identified. In this chapter, these structural issues are examined in detail with a specific focus on the impact on child care centres and early childhood educators. Overall, the political and economic climate for the implementation of the curriculum reforms is considered together with extant literature to understand the parameters of the research questions.

The educational research literature confirms that both leadership and professional learning are necessary to achieve curriculum change. By understanding the processes that assist educators to learn about new theoretical positions underpinning the curriculum, insights may be gained about the nature of leadership practices that encourage educators' participation in professional learning. Such understanding is important, because there are inherent complexities in encouraging educators to be motivated to participate in professional development and learning to improve their practice.

Distributed leadership approaches are associated with professional learning in educational contexts. Research about distributed leadership may provide insights into how positional leaders, such as directors and formal leaders (referred to as room leaders), develop relationships with educators during professional learning for the purpose of engaging in educational reforms.

In this chapter, the relationships between leadership and professional development and learning during educational reform within early childhood centres are explored and explained. Key concepts are also summarised to highlight the essential components of a centre-based professional learning environment that enables educational change.

**Context of early childhood education in Australia**

The Australian reform agenda has many similarities with European early childhood reforms, as governments become increasingly aware of the value of early education and aspire to improve outcomes for children's learning and wellbeing (COAG, 2008b; OECD, 2006). These objectives are being implemented within a climate of increasing economic pressures to achieve efficiencies (Brennan & Adamson, 2014; Productivity Commission, 2014). The Australian child care system remains dependent on a low paid (and therefore arguably low skilled) workforce (Bretherton, 2010), which seems to be contradictory to the reform objectives. The next section examines the organisational issues that shape the context of early childhood education.

*Early childhood centres as complex social systems*

In her pioneering leadership research, Jorde-Bloom (1991) conceptualised early childhood centres as social systems. Nivala (2002) employed a similar theoretical approach in developing an explanation of early childhood leadership in Finland. He proposed a "contextual model of leadership" (p. 15), drawing on an ecological framework using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original work, which has influenced both early childhood policy and practice. In understanding an early childhood centre as a social system, all of the actors within a centre together constitute "leadership as a cultural system" (Hujala, 2004, p. 54). This approach acknowledges that all organisational stakeholders can be considered as actors who potentially can have influence within the social system (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006).

Although organisational actors influence each other, the social system itself is the product of people's interactions (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). In Nivala's theorising, the structural components of the cultural system include a "macro" level of broader societal values and the institutional structures of the centre; a "micro" level representing the internal actors (children, parents, educators and other staff) and a "meso" level

representing the interactions that occur within the micro levels (Hujala, 2004, pp. 54–55).

Within Australia, early childhood centres exist within a broader macro social system that exerts multiple external influences. The National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011) as summarised in Chapter One constitutes a complex legislative framework that centres are required to implement. In addition, early childhood centres are subject to multiple federal, state and local government laws covering industrial awards and conditions, taxation, health and safety legislation, equal opportunity and privacy laws, funding and accountability requirements.

The internal organisation of early childhood centres can be expected to play a role in how leadership and professional learning are enacted. Despite differences in the value that societies place on early childhood education and care, services for children under five years are universally organised into similar institutional structures (Karila, 2002). These arrangements comprise of social groupings of children with their assigned educators, which anticipate close and nurturing, emotional relationships between educators and children, and between educators and families. Within these structures, educators also work collaboratively within social relationships with their colleagues (Kuisma & Sandberg, 2008).

The nature of the work involves nurturing children and working interdependently with other educators. This work constitutes emotional labour (Murray, 2013; Osgood, 2006, 2010; Taggart, 2011), which historically is associated with highly feminised workplaces and strong connections to community (Hard, 2005; Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004; Nupponen, 2005). At the heart of early childhood provision are complex webs of interdependent relationships that develop among internal stakeholders (Hard, 2005; Hujala, 2004, 2013; Karila, 2002; Nivala, 2002; Nupponen, 2005; Press et al., 2010). While such relationships organically influence the centre culture (Press et al., 2010), it is not possible for an early childhood centre director to overtly manage the impact of these multiple relationships to ensure that

the focus of all stakeholders remains on the organisational priorities and goals.

A social systems perspective offers a means to consider the influences of multiple internal and external stakeholders with diverse interests and expectations. External stakeholders include policy makers, government officials and various community members with specific expectations that may not be congruent with the interests of families or educators. Competing expectations present ambiguities and inconsistencies for early childhood leaders (Hujala, 2004, 2013). For example, an Australian study noted the complexity of interaction between different levels of government, non-government and community stakeholders and practitioners and concluded that these relationships influenced both leadership and service provision (Press et al., 2010). In understanding what occurs internally within a centre during curriculum reform, some researchers have argued that the impact of both the internal and external systems should be considered (O'Gorman & Hard, 2013), and that recognition of an early childhood centre as a social system (Hujala, 2004, 2013; Nivala, 2002) may facilitate insights into the complex relationships involved.

***Effects of an education and care dichotomy in early childhood service provision***

The historical dichotomy between education and care in Australia is firmly entrenched, as discussed in Chapter One. In Australia, funding for education and care has been separated historically with state and territory governments providing education for four-year-old children in the year prior to school entry (known as preschool or kindergarten) and federal government funding of child care for children under school age (birth – five years), specifically to enable parental workforce participation (Brennan & Adamson, 2014; Press, 2007). Simplistically, these different service types have been categorised as education in the case of kindergartens and preschools, and care in relation to any programs offering long day services and funded by the federal government. In reality the distinctions have blurred considerably and contemporary views recognise that education

and care functions are inextricably interwoven (Bretherton, 2010; OECD, 2006, 2012).

This historical understanding has far-reaching implications in terms of societal expectations but also for child care educators' perceptions of their value and, potentially, their preparedness to participate in the reforms. Major policy initiatives (such as the NQA) challenge the boundary between education and care, and research increasingly highlights the holistic and integrated nature of young children's learning from birth regardless of the setting. Although the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) promotes a view that both preschools and child care services should attain equivalent levels of quality (COAG, 2008b), policy settings have not been adjusted to address the significant differences in qualification levels of staff between preschool and child care.

The national agreement committed to increased expenditure which was justified by invoking Heckman's economic analysis of the long-term economic benefits of government investment in early childhood (COAG, 2008b). Despite an increase in government expenditure arising from the reforms, it may be questionable whether the level of investment matches the stated goals (COAG, 2008b). Under the NQF no additional funding was allocated to enable child care centres to employ additional early childhood teachers to reach an equivalent standard available in preschools. According to a report by PwC Australia (2011),

> The recurrent funding model should also distribute resources equitably and efficiently … This includes the need for government to develop a rational basis for the determination of the costs of delivering a high quality service and linking the level of funding to this model (p. 27).

In 2010 an overall assessment of the Australian government's investment in ECEC as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) ranked Australia the lowest of those countries surveyed by the OECD, at 0.06 per cent public investment and overall investment of 0.11 per cent. This rating

compared unfavourably with other overall ratings with, for example, New Zealand in excess of 0.6 per cent and Denmark in excess of 1.0 per cent. The average investment across countries surveyed overall was 0.5 per cent (OECD, 2013). Australia's investment is below European levels and considerably behind the OECD averages (Brennan & Adamson, 2014).

Government investment levels have failed to address the difference in educator qualifications between child care and preschools, as evident in the 2013 workforce census (Social Research Centre, 2014). This report provided a snapshot of educator qualifications, revealing that preschools continue to have higher proportions of early childhood trained teachers compared to child care. In child care, 11.5 per cent of educators held a Bachelor of Teaching qualification, 35.4 per cent a diploma-level qualification, 40.1 per cent a certificate, and 11.7 per cent had no formal tertiary qualification. In contrast, in preschools 38.8 per cent of educators held a Bachelor of Teaching, 19.4 per cent a diploma and 30.5 per cent held a certificate (Social Research Centre, 2014, p. 12).

Furthermore, the purpose of each type of provision is quite different in the perception of the public and of policy makers. The national Australian child care program was founded by the feminist movement of the seventies (Brennan, 1994) and is still regarded by contemporary feminists as primarily a women's issue (Jha, 2014). This rationale foregrounds women's rights to independence and access to workforce participation. Likewise, federal policy assumes the primary purpose of child care is to enable parents (specifically mothers) to participate in the workforce (Brennan & Adamson, 2014; Press, 2007). This pattern is reflected in the way that child care policies have been embedded within workforce participation and national productivity agendas (Productivity Commission, 2011; Rudd & Smith, 2007), underpinned by assumptions of market forces and affordability (Productivity Commission, 2015a, 2015b).

For the past two decades, successive Australian federal governments have relied on neoliberal child care policies emphasising privatisation, marketisation and managerial mechanisms (Brennan & Adamson, 2014)

and a conceptualisation of child care as a "user pays" system (Sumsion, 2006). Within such models, typically there are expectations of keeping parent fees as low as possible (Productivity Commission, 2015a) which has implications for centre expenditure, including funding available for staff professional development and learning. Within these policies, the intrinsic value of early learning and children's right to access education prior to school, struggle to be recognised (ECA, 2014), which has implications for the reform agenda.

Political and media interest questioning the justification for the reforms continues and reflects diverse social views and community understandings of the value and purpose of early education and care. Despite the COAG agreement of 2008, the separation of early education and care in Australia is entrenched and current policy continues to be influenced by philosophical, historical and ideological positions.

An examination of recent federal government policy illustrates the extent to which ideological assumptions underpin policy. In the last term of government, political intervention in policy has seen unprecedented ministerial intervention that threatens to undermine the National Quality Agenda (Sumsion et al., 2015). In the two year period 2013–2015, federal ministers have moved the child care portfolio between the federal departments of education to social services and back to education (Krieg, 2015). These moves can be understood as symbolic, and reflective of different political perceptions of the purpose of child care.

More confusing have been the policies for the professional development of early childhood educators enacted during this period. In 2013 an estimated $200 million was made available nationally in direct payments to child care centres to purchase professional development services (see Sumsion et al., 2015). The next minister withdrew all federal funding for professional development following the Productivity Commission's report (2015b) that argued that centres, as small businesses, are responsible for funding their staff development. Despite a consolidated body of research indicating the importance of ongoing professional development for early

childhood centres (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Nuttall, 2013; Press et al., 2010; Productivity Commission, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2008), the government-subsidised professional development program will be dismantled from June 2016. It is unlikely that a similar decision would be made in relation to schools.

Although the NQA had sought to stabilise and build systemic reform, improve long-term policy planning and establish consistent standards of quality for all children regardless of service type (COAG, 2008b), ongoing political intervention has resulted in the Australian early childhood education and care system remaining fragmented. It can be argued that there is a fundamental contradiction between government expectations for reform and the structural conditions in child care. In particular, child care programs have fewer resources available overall than preschools, lower qualification levels of educators, less access to external professional development, and less time and opportunities for professional learning.

### *Structural arrangements, funding and workforce issues*

Under the National Partnership Agreement (COAG, 2008b) the Australian ECEC system relies on statutory and regulatory systems to achieve nationally agreed standards. These systems and the associated requirements for compliance constitute an external structural force that impacts on early childhood centres.

Within the Education and Care Services National Regulations, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is the "declared approved" learning framework for early childhood services that cater for children from birth to school age. This is a requirement of compulsory participation in the National Quality Standard (Education and Care Services National Regulations (NSW), 2011, p. 253). A national statutory body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), oversees the national quality assurance processes while external

assessment of centres is undertaken by state-based regulatory authorities (DEEWR, 2013).

The design of the Australian system has drawn heavily on international research and western neoliberal policy approaches to early education and care with elements of internal and external accountability requirements. For example, Kagan (2014) argues that a system-wide perspective utilising early learning standards are central in achieving high quality programs. Likewise, Nutbrown (2012) calls on governments to adopt system-wide standards to raise the quality of early childhood education through attention to the quality of the workforce. Both of these elements are evident within the Australian reforms.

Marketisation forces that underpin child care policy contribute to the structural instabilities of the ECEC system in Australia. Bretherton (2010) refers to the high rates of attrition for educators employed in child care. Educators are predominantly female: women comprise 97.3 per cent of the early childhood workforce across preschool and child care settings in Australia (Social Research Centre, 2014). As discussed in Chapter One, these educators are poorly remunerated while also experiencing rising expectations from families as consumers (Productivity Commission, 2015b). The reforms exert pressures to move away from an emphasis simply on nurturing and care to increasing complexity relating to curriculum and pedagogy (Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011). Such complexity is evident in an acknowledgement that the EYLF Working Party which was appointed to oversee the development of the EYLF advised the writing team that "the primary audience for EYLF would be degree and diploma qualified ECEC practitioners" (Sumsion et al., 2009, p. 8).

The new regulations that commenced on the first of January 2012 (Education and Care Services National Regulations (NSW), 2011) require progressive improvements in overall educator qualifications. Specifically, this meant the employment of a degree-qualified early childhood teacher in each child care centre and 50 per cent of educators having a diploma-level qualification by 1 January 2014 (ACECQA, 2011). These conditions

were, however, not in place when the EYLF commenced in January 2010. At that time, government regulations required only one third of child care staff to hold a diploma-level qualification. This allowed a majority of staff to have a minimal "entry-level" certificate qualification and many educators had no qualifications (Bretherton, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2011).

Staffing conditions arguably are also relevant to this study. Although there have been improvements to qualification levels stipulated under government regulations, structural difficulties resulting from overall poor resourcing of early childhood settings have continued to impact on educators' professional learning. Non-contact time (when staff are working away from the children) remains an area of difficulty for teachers and educators in child care centres (Bretherton, 2010). Whitington, McInnes and Sisson (2015) found considerable variation in the non-contact time available to early childhood teachers working in child care centres, with one third of respondents reporting receiving two hours per week only and over half of respondents receiving three or less hours per week. It may be anticipated that limited opportunities exist for educators in child care settings to work collaboratively on developing curriculum and pedagogy.

Affordability for families has remained a key issue (Brennan & Adamson, 2014). The market-driven imperative dictates that child care centres operate within a business model where fees are kept as low as possible (Productivity Commission, 2014). Such pressures are likely to contribute to ongoing poor employment conditions for educators with casualisation and part-time work compounding low remuneration rates (Bretherton, 2010; Harrison et al., 2011). Research also highlights the tensions between business and education orientations of early childhood service provision (Nupponen, 2005), with competing priorities between funding educator professional development to deliver the reforms on the one hand, and pressure to keep fees low to maintain affordable access to services on the other.
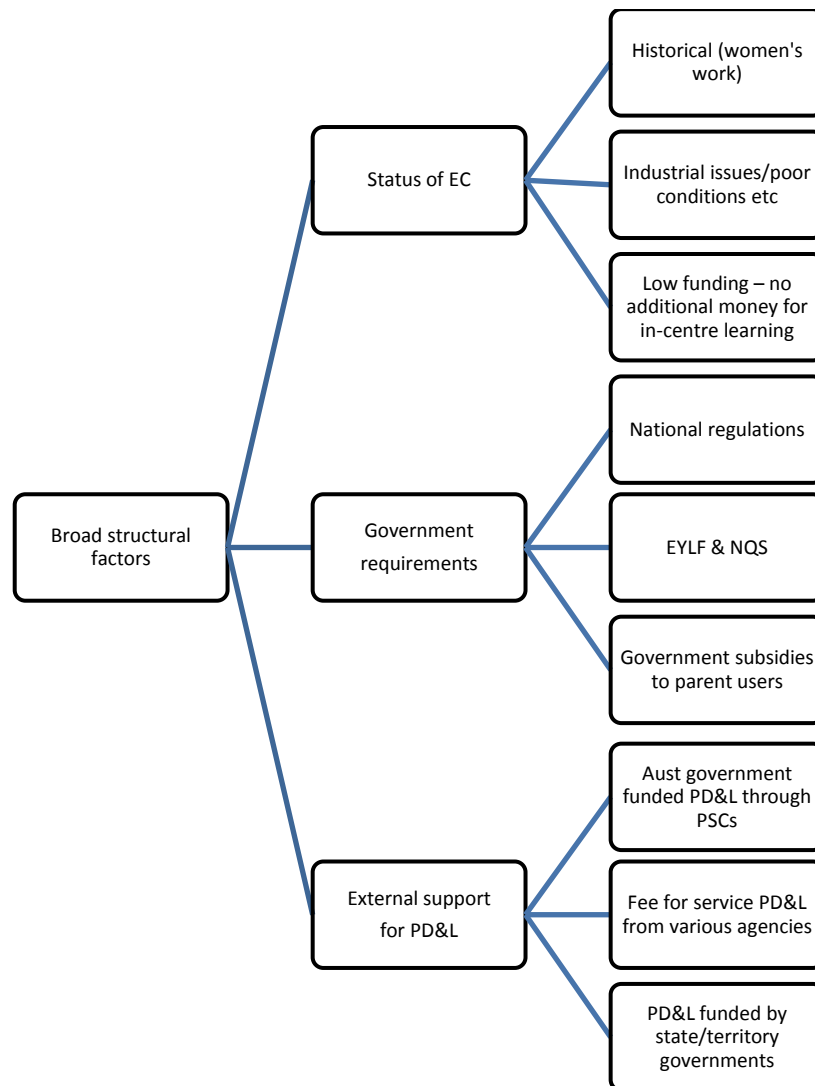
**Figure 2.1: Depiction of broader structural influences**

Figure 2.1 summarises the structural conditions that have been discussed as factors that influence the internal organisational culture or social world of an early childhood centre. Key external structural factors include:

- the status of ECEC which has been shaped by historical and policy understandings of the purpose of early education and care;

- the impact of government systems and policies on ECEC; and

- the different sources of external influence that impact on centres.

Structural issues of high attrition rates, casualisation and poorly qualified staff present challenges for the implementation of curriculum reform (Harrison et al., 2011). The NQF requires the implementation of certain quality mechanisms but it does not address the impact of existing structural issues on quality in child care centres, namely qualifications and workforce stability. This represents a significant contradiction in the COAG agreement (COAG, 2008b) which may have an impact on achievement of the desired improvements. These factors highlight the importance of a systems perspective to understanding the many forces that contribute to shaping ECEC.

**The nature of leadership in early childhood**

In this section, the literature relating to leadership in early childhood centres and educational institutions is explored to gain insights about the role of leadership in reform. This discussion initially focuses on the internal complexities of organisational structures with an emphasis on the extent to which leaders influence and shape centre systems. To understand the inherent tensions within the ECEC system in Australia, early childhood leaders require contextual knowledge and an ability to analyse political, economic, cultural and structural meanings that influence the internal centre system (Close & Raynor, 2010). Internal structures influence educators' ability to respond to, and adapt to external demands, and to engage with changes required (Deakins, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mulford, 2007; Mulford & Johns, 2004). Internal structures can also influence the enactment of leadership (O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Hard, 2005) and the formation of organisational culture (Hard et al., 2013).

*Contextual literacy: influences of structure and agency*

Educational institutions are "complex dynamic system[s]" (Coppieters, 2005, p. 137). Accordingly, contextual knowledge is vital in shaping strategies for organisational change (Hujala, 2004, 2013). In planning responses to curriculum reform, early childhood leaders need to

understand the impact of external factors as well as the internal organisational and social context in which change will occur.

As an organisation, a centre is a system with a specific culture (Nupponen, 2005; Wong et al., 2012) that operates within understandings that are heavily influenced by internal organisational policies and practices. The organisational culture of an early childhood centre is implicitly involved in educational change, affecting how professional development and learning is received (Gordon & Patterson, 2008; Hard, 2005; Hujala, 2004; Mulford, 2007; Nupponen, 2005). In understanding a systems perspective, leaders can appreciate a reciprocal relationship where centre culture not only influences organisational processes but is also simultaneously shaped through processes of staff professional development and learning.

In early childhood education, educators work in relationships that are interrelated and interdependent (Nupponen, 2005; Thornton, 2009). The formation of professional relationships among educators is dependent on internal organisational structures that enable educators to work cooperatively. Educational leaders (such as principals and directors) have significant responsibility and power to plan internal organisational structures (Harris, 2012; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Seashore Louis, 2009) that are conducive to developing a collaborative culture throughout an institution (Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

The formation of organisational beliefs is, however, also influenced by external discourses arising from diverse perspectives on how professional practice should be organised (Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; McGillivray, 2008; Ortlipp et al., 2011; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010). For example, traditional notions of the organisation of work in early childhood education have historical roots and are also shaped by contemporary external discourses emphasising professionalisation (McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010; Dalli et al. 2012; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015). Such discourses include codes of ethics and curriculum frameworks (Ortlipp et al., 2011; Taggart, 2011),

while in turn, also reflecting societal views of childhood, motherhood and women's work (Dalli et al., 2011; Hard, 2005; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Nutbrown, 2012;). According to Layder (1998), the organisation of work in any particular context is the result of historical and social factors that influence attitudes, work arrangements, workplace relationships, time and resources. Such historical and social contexts also provide structure and meaning to work (Wenger, 1998).

Internally, within a social system, actors understand the social "rules" and assumptions that underpin the organisation (Layder, 1998; Nuttall, 2013). Although these rules are largely unwritten, they shape social conduct in interactions among educators and ultimately influence emotional life within the social system (Layder, 1998; Sibeon, 2004).

The impact of structural influences does not mean that early childhood educators are powerless. In any setting, people possess agency in enacting processes and exerting influence on others, both individually and collectively (van Keulen, 2010). In enacting agency, educators make decisions that either embrace or reject initiatives associated with government reform (Deakins, 2007). Further, educator wellbeing may also be a factor affecting the implementation of educational reform (Kilgallon, Maloney, & Lock, 2008a). Research into educator wellbeing is complex, encompassing multiple dimensions including compensation and conditions, turnover, education level, quality of the teaching and learning environment, as well as self-efficacy, job satisfaction and teacher stress (Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, McKay & Marshall, 2014). These researchers consider that physical health, emotional competence, teachers' perspectives related to opportunities for professional growth and the overall professional climate may also be implicated in educator wellbeing.

Thus it appears that multiple factors are involved, and individuals are influenced by both external and internal forces, suggesting that structure and agency can be viewed as interdependent (Close & Raynor, 2010). In Chapter Three, an analysis of the relative influences of agency and structure is presented.

## *Positional leadership*

Research indicates that considerable ambiguity and contradictions surround understandings of what constitutes early childhood leadership (Hard, 2005; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Muijs et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2005; Rodd, 2014b; Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009). Leadership in early childhood education has been recognised internationally as essential for achieving quality provision (Hujala, Waniganayake, & Rodd, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) with the quality of leadership having direct links to the quality of the overall early childhood service (Kagan, 2014). Educational research emphasises that a vital function of leadership is to influence others (Layen, 2015; Murray, 2013; Robinson, 2009; Rodd, 2014b), suggesting that leadership is enacted through relationships.

## *Designated formal roles*

Despite a powerful rhetoric that leadership in early childhood settings should be enacted in non-hierarchical and collaborative ways (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2005) centres continue to be organised hierarchically with traditional positional leadership structures (Aubrey et al., 2013). These models suggest positional power and authority is used to emphasise tasks and outcomes (Muijs et al., 2010). These hierarchical models appear to be culturally entrenched and accompanied by a leader–follower mentality (Ryder, Chandra, Dalton, Homer, & Passingham, 2011). Although centre directors and educators claim to support sharing of leadership, authority remains closely associated with formal leadership positions (Aubrey et al., 2013; Ryder et al., 2011; Thornton et al., 2009), where positional leaders are assertive in their leadership roles (Chandler, 2007). Studies suggest that accountability remains firmly connected with the director (Hard, 2005; Heikka, Hujala, & Waniganayake, 2010; Waniganayake, Morda, & Kapsalakis, 2000).

The contradiction between the rhetoric of collaborative and shared leadership and the strength of hierarchical approaches and director responsibilities may be explained through the organisation of work,

particularly where in small services directors fulfil dual roles of working with the children as well as assuming management and administrative responsibilities. By simultaneously acting as both supervisor and colleague to other staff, ambiguity may be created, resulting in confusion about professional relationships (Hard, 2006; Hujala, 2004, 2013). Confusion may also arise from practices of shared decision-making in relation to children, and teaching and learning that occur throughout a day, thereby blurring pedagogical and leadership roles.

An alternative explanation may be that the highly feminised nature of early childhood education influences both the enactment of and perceptions of leadership. Many claims have been made regarding women's caring, facilitative and relational leadership styles (Geoghegan, Petriwskyi, Bower, & Geoghegan, 2003; Henderson-Kelly & Pamphilon, 2000; Nupponen, 2005; Thornton, 2009), which are claimed to underpin the development of democratic communities (Nupponen, 2005). A further possibility is that women may perceive the enactment of leadership as masculine (Hard, 2006) and consequently seek to avoid being seen as the boss. Whether these claims are overstated or generalisable cannot be verified. Nevertheless, collaborative and nurturing accounts of leadership reflect an ethic of care that underpins working with young children and their families (Murray, 2013; Noddings, 2012; Nupponen, 2006; Ortlipp et al., 2011; Osgood, 2004, 2010). Regardless, research suggests that early childhood leadership is commonly depicted as centred on the director (Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Hujala, 2004, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

*Centre director leadership: complex and multidimensional roles*

The responsibilities of centre directors have been well researched and highlight diverse and multiple roles encompassing leadership, management and administration. Within the Australian context, the director's authority, responsibilities and accountability have been recognised (Productivity Commission, 2011). Extensive typologies of early childhood leadership have been developed, outlining characteristics, personal attributes, behaviours and the capabilities required (Ebbeck &

Waniganayake, 2003; Geoghegan et al., 2003; Hard, 2005; Muijs et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2005; Rodd, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). These approaches identify overwhelming lists of isolated skills and attributes required for the role, rather than offering insights about contextual leadership, principles of leadership, or promoting understanding of the interrelationships between complex factors. Close and Raynor (2010), for instance, argue that an overt focus on the director's leadership capabilities over emphasises agency encouraging "simplistic solution-seeking rather than appreciation of complexity and paradox" in leadership (p. 209).

In their study of effective early childhood provision, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) found that key leadership capabilities include a director's ability to develop a collective vision, build a collaborative professional development and learning culture among the staff and monitor practice through supporting critical reflection, shared professional dialogue and action research. Others argue that a director has a primary responsibility to act as a transformational leader in organisational change (Brownlee, Nailon, & Tickle, 2011; Hard, 2005; Retna & Tee, 2008). Yet complexity arising from simultaneously enacting a dual role as director and educator in program delivery has been identified as an impediment to the development of a collective vision (Deakins, 2007; Hujala, 2004; Nupponen, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Wong et al., 2012). In turn, this duality can exacerbate the challenges in leading and managing complex organisational change (Boardman, 2003a).

These challenges have prompted researchers to conclude that, in addition to demonstrating leadership capabilities, early childhood leaders require specific dispositions for their role. Thornton (2005) identified courage, commitment and collaboration as essential; while Press et al. (2010) recommended that early childhood organisations require collaborative, cooperative and inclusive leadership. While subjective personal dispositions such as courage and commitment may be difficult to quantify and unlikely to progress understanding of the complex nature of early

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childhood leadership, concepts regarding the nature of leadership as collaborative, cooperative and inclusive can potentially contribute towards understanding strategies that can create supportive learning environments.

### *Pedagogical leadership*

Particular attention to pedagogical leadership is warranted in order to understand the relationship between leadership and educator professional learning, which is the primary focus of this thesis. Definitions of pedagogical leadership recognise the association between teacher learning and child learning (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Rinaldi, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1998) and thereby foreground the importance of educator professional learning for child learning outcomes (Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007).

Pedagogical leadership is considered critical for the achievement of quality early childhood programs (Early Childhood Australia, 2011b; Nutbrown, 2012). In a Best Evidence Synthesis of school-based leadership in New Zealand, Robinson et al. (2009) argue that the work of school principals is specifically focused on the exploration of teachers' theoretical understandings. In applying this research to early childhood contexts, a director is considered to have responsibility for facilitating meaningful professional discussion to enhance pedagogy (Thornton, 2010).

There are many studies that explore the roles and responsibilities of centre directors highlighting specific responsibilities for guiding educators in the development of curriculum and pedagogy (Aubrey et al., 2013; Hujala, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2010; Urban et al., 2011). In the Australian national policy reform documents, however, ambiguity exists in relation to a director's role. While the Productivity Commission review interpreted the EYLF as highlighting that "directors and teachers act as pedagogical leaders" (2011, p. 58), the Educators' Guide to the EYLF suggests that "the Framework encourages everyone who works with young children to see themselves as pedagogical leaders"

(DEEWR, 2010, p. 6). The latter position seems naive given the high proportion of educators with entry level or no relevant early childhood qualifications (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). These ambiguities are compounded by the NQS requirement for the appointment of an "educational leader" (ACECQA, 2011) which, was defined in Chapter One. Although the NQA associates a degree qualified educator with pedagogical leadership (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 58), under the NQS provisions, it is possible for a person with a certificate level qualification or no early childhood qualification to be appointed by a centre as the educational leader.

It is difficult to comprehend how an individual with no early childhood qualifications could fulfil the role of an educational or pedagogical leader. Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) identified broad but specific responsibilities associated with pedagogical leadership. Furthermore, a recent study identified interrelated components of pedagogical leadership as including; working with educators to examine their philosophies of teaching, teaching methods and strategies, curriculum content and theory, and working to promote change in teacher's values and attitudes (Singh, Han, & Woodrow, 2012). These diverse dimensions of pedagogical leadership highlight that educational reform is dependent on making linkages between theory and practice (Campbell & McNamara, 2010; Muijs et al., 2004; Whalley, 2007a). From these perspectives, a pedagogical leader requires specific early childhood theoretical knowledge.

The research across schooling assumes the pedagogical leadership role of the principal: following this premise, it would seem reasonable to argue that early childhood centre directors hold the primary position of pedagogical leadership. This logic has prompted researchers to state explicitly that directors require specific professional early childhood knowledge (Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007). In addition to a director's contribution, researchers acknowledge the value in distributing the responsibilities for pedagogical leadership to support the development of

pedagogy throughout a centre (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jäppinen & Sarja, 2011; Stamopoulos, 2012).

**The EYLF as educational change**

*Purpose of the EYLF*

The EYLF draws on contemporary learning frameworks (Sumsion et al., 2009), reflecting current research and theoretical understandings of early education. Considerable effort was made to incorporate concepts from state-based curriculum frameworks which had been introduced in several Australian states over the previous decade (Wilks, Nyland, Chancellor, & Elliot, 2008). The EYLF adopts a broad definition of the curriculum that includes "all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (DEEWR, 2009a, p. 9).

Rather than offering a prescriptive account of what young children should learn, the EYLF outlines the principles, practices and outcomes considered essential in optimising children's learning and wellbeing in the period birth to five years (DEEWR, 2009a). There is a particular emphasis on educators' pedagogical roles and offering guidance for educators' practices in relation to teaching and learning and for developing curriculum for local communities. Although both process and content are embedded holistically in the EYLF, the relative weight to be applied to content is dependent on teacher judgement and interpretation (Krieg, 2011), highlighting the centrality of educators' professional knowledge and pedagogical leadership in guiding the development of curriculum and pedagogy.

*The nature of educational change*

Regardless of the specific reform objectives, there is commonality in explanations of educational change as complex, dynamic, and a process that occurs over time, involving multiple interactions between individuals throughout a system (Deakins, 2007; Engeström, 2008; Fullan, 1997,

2009, 2014; Hargreaves, 1997). Educational change may have philosophical or policy objectives but the complexity of the task depends on "the scale, scope, or magnitude of change and whether the change is superficial … or substantive" (Dibella, 2007, p. 232). Dibella further clarifies that organisational change arises from internal or external forces.

The EYLF constitutes fundamental change in both content and pedagogical knowledge. In advocating social constructivist philosophies of early childhood education (DEEWR, 2010), the EYLF presents educators with theoretical perspectives that children's learning is socially constructed as teachers and children co-construct knowledge collectively (DEEWR, 2009a). This approach represents a departure from the developmental perspectives that have dominated the early childhood curriculum in the past (Bennett, 2008; Ortlipp et al., 2011).

Educational reform requires educators to learn about new theories and pedagogical approaches (Muijs et al., 2004; Skouteris, 2008; Thornton, 2009) with professional development and professional learning being necessary to achieve curriculum change (Rinaldi, 2012; Burgess et al., 2010; Thornton, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Additional accountability measures are embedded within the Australian system including the requirement that educators assess and document children's learning (ACECQA, 2011), which in early childhood education involves processes of continual interpretation and professional judgements by educators (DEEWR, 2010).

Every aspect of teaching and assessment in early childhood education involves professional practice, pedagogical decisions and theoretical interpretation (Oberhuemer, 2005). Research also suggests however, that such decisions are influenced by educators' philosophical beliefs about teaching and learning (Frost, 2012; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Winter, 2003). Nuttall, Edwards, Mantilla, Grieshaber & Wood (2015) highlight the need for the exploration of the contradictions and complexities in translating new possibilities into practice that acknowledges professional cultural beliefs about children's learning. Thus,

research highlights that educational change is complex and not simply technical in nature (Ortlipp et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the curriculum and pedagogical changes in early childhood education as outlined in the EYLF are not neutral, but are influenced by social and cultural attitudes about young children, their rights and capacities (Hard et al., 2013; Nuttall et al., 2015). School-based research, such as that undertaken by Rodwell (2009), suggests that in widespread reform initiatives broader structural influences of government policies and the political climate play critical roles. Internationally, government interest in early childhood curricula reflects the political and social environment as elaborated by Aubrey (2008) in reflection on experiences in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This means that in reform, influences are exerted through internal and external sources (Hard, 2006; Hard et al., 2013; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Press et al., 2010) including educators, children and families and structural influences arising from societal values and political imperatives exercised through state and federal governments and agencies.

***Limitations and risks of curriculum reform initiatives***

Large-scale reform initiatives in schools have revealed difficulties in achieving reform (Engeström, 2008). Often superficial pedagogical changes are achieved with limited impact on improving student learning (Fullan, 2000, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009; Harris, 2003; Rodwell, 2009). While studies of mandated reforms in early childhood are limited to small-scale studies predominantly relating to the early years of school (Boardman, 2003a; Burgess et al., 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; Ho, 2008; Kilgallon et al., 2008a, 2008b; Ng, 2009), results are not encouraging.

Several studies have indicated that teachers struggle to make genuine changes to their existing teaching practices (Kilgallon et al., 2008a) or make shallow interpretations resulting in minimal changes (Burgess et al., 2010). In early childhood programs for children under five years of age, similar difficulties have been noted, with researchers suggesting intensive

educator support is needed to achieve deeper level changes in practice (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Jordan, 2008; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Nuttall, 2013; Pirard, 2011; Thomas, 2009; Thornton, 2009; Winter, 2003).

There may be valid explanations for why change is rejected or only adopted superficially. As professionals, teachers could legitimately make professional judgements to reject new curriculum or decide the rationale for a reform is unconvincing. A more likely explanation may be that professional learning opportunities are inadequate for the development of genuine understanding of new theoretical possibilities with insufficient time and support available.

## Professional development and learning for curriculum change

If fundamental improvements in children's learning and wellbeing, as articulated in the EYLF are to be achieved, then curriculum reform needs to be transformational rather than superficial. The research literature identifies that the quality of professional development and learning is a critical factor in supporting educators to change their practice. In the next section, research relating to how professional development is understood and offered during educational reform is considered with the aim of gaining insights into how participation in professional development generates change in educators' practice.

### *Understanding of professional development*

The term "professional development" has multiple definitions and explanations across a broad range of occupations and professions, encompassing activities from simple dissemination of information, to skills-based activities to improve competence, to mentoring and participation in interactive seminars and conferences. The concept of continual professional development (CPD) with prescribed annual hours of participation has encouraged understanding of individual skill development and knowledge transfer (Frost, 2012). The Productivity Commission (2011) review of the early childhood education and care workforce reflects such an understanding, emphasising that professional development

"augments formal qualifications and assists in the maintenance of ECEC workers' skills" (p. xxxvi).

The prevalence of the idea that individual competence underpins professional development is not restricted to early childhood education. A narrow focus on training and individual attendance at professional development is viewed as problematic for achieving change in educators' practice (Fullan, 2014; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Nuttall, 2013, Oberhuemer, 2005). Across educational contexts, one-off events have been commonplace (Timperley et al., 2007) with widespread acceptance by teachers that professional development means experts imparting information to a relatively passive audience with little consideration of participants' existing knowledge (Kennedy, 2005). Although these approaches can be effective in disseminating information of a technical nature (Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett & Buchting, 2014; Timperley et al., 2007), one-off professional development events have been assessed as having limited impact on an educator's practice or the achievement of curriculum reform (Burgess et al., 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Nuttall, 2013). In the absence of follow-up activities undertaken within the participants' workplace new information cannot be critiqued against existing practice (Brown & Inglis, 2013).

A potential concern arising from the policy requirements of the NQS is that early childhood centres are required to maintain learning plans for each educator (ACECQA, 2011), which is likely to perpetuate individualised, fragmented and ineffectual approaches to professional development, thereby limiting educational reform and innovation.

### *Limitations of professional development*

Although definitions of professional development that elaborate professional learning processes exist (see for example Buysse et al., 2009; Rinaldi, 2012) it appears difficult to challenge the prevalence of one-off events (Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Kennedy, 2005). The strength of passive and individualised conceptualisations of professional development as

external events can be seen in training calendars promoted to early childhood centres.

Buysse et al.'s (2009) definition of professional development breaks new ground in incorporating content knowledge, collaborative professional activities and adult learning principles. However, this definition is criticised as conceptually weak because of a bias towards skills-based needs, and failure to adopt social constructivist theoretical approaches (Nuttall, 2013). A further concern with this definition is a premise that professional learning is transacted, implying some kind of trade-off between employer and employee, with connotations of conditional participation in professional development associated with reward, and a suggestion of an event removed from ongoing professional practice. Such a view contradicts the understanding that professional dispositions of critical reflection and professional dialogue are intrinsic to educators' professional practice (Burgess et al., 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; Rinaldi, 2012, 2013; Simpson, 2011; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013).

Transmission approaches to professional development are unlikely to engage educators in professional learning and change. Researchers have noted the enduring power of educators' prior knowledge and beliefs in perpetuating existing pedagogical practices, despite access to professional development (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; Winter, 2003). In the absence of professional learning, rather than understanding the intent of the curriculum framework, educators' interpretations can be restricted, encouraging perceptions of standardised requirements (Ortlipp et al., 2011; Pirard, 2011). Research has suggested that although educators may adopt the language and structure of a new curriculum their practice may remain unchanged (Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; Winter, 2003).

Views of professional development as external and individualised may obscure understanding of the professional learning processes involved in contextualising new theory. Little is known about early childhood centre directors' assumptions in relation to undertaking educational reform,

beyond their awareness that professional development has a role in supporting quality practice (Waniganayake et al., 2008). Any new definition that explicitly combines professional development and learning would need to be explicit about individual and group learning.

*Understanding of professional learning*

Educational research scholars such as Hord (2009), Rinaldi (2012) and Timperley et al. (2007) view professional learning as both a process and outcome of professional development. Nuttall and colleagues (2015) define professional development as "any learning on the part of practitioners which results in persistent change in practice within that profession, either individually or collectively" (p. 224). Professional learning processes enable educators to contextualise theory through professional dialogue with other educators within their setting (Brown & Inglis, 2013; Fleet et al., 2009; Marbina, Church, & Tayler, 2012; Timperley et al., 2007; Fleet & Patterson, 2001). Nuttall et al., (2015) also examine the complexity of the intellectual and values work embedded in professional learning to achieve enhancements in practice. For these reasons, in educational contexts, professional learning is considered a collective and collaborative process (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Fleet et al., 2009; Nuttall, 2013; Rinaldi, 2006, 2012; Timperley et al., 2007; Urban et al., 2011; van Keulen, 2010; Whalley, 2007a) in which groups of educators explore new possibilities in theory and practice with the intention of changing practice.

Exploring new theory involves educators in considering their existing beliefs, values and practices (Ho, Campbell-Barr, & Leeson, 2010; Kilgallon et al., 2008a; Pirard, 2011; Winter, 2003) both in relation to new theories and children's learning. This work includes critical reflection about existing practice which can be understood as a fundamental component of professional learning and educational change, designed to synthesise theory with practice (Fleet & Patterson, 2001; Fleet et al., 2009; Urban et al., 2011). Through such processes transformative change in practice is possible (Nuttall, 2013; Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Furthermore, processes

of professional dialogue involve critical thinking, debate and feedback (Hedges, 2007; Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Thornton, 2009, 2010). Where these processes are integrated into ongoing pedagogical work, possibilities emerge for educators to "behave and think differently", generating attitudinal change (Humphries & Senden, 2000, p. 29) and sustained long-term change in practice.

In commentary in response to Argyris' explanation of how learning occurs in organisational contexts, Tsoukas explained that for learning to occur there needs to be an open mindset where "doubt, debate and reflexivity are the very qualities needed to promote learning" (Argyris, 2002, p. 15). It is essential that there are also possibilities for hearing dissenting voices (Stoll et al., 2006) to truly challenge thinking.

Curriculum and pedagogy is enhanced as educators work collaboratively to understand the implications of their practice through assessing the impact of their work on children's participation and learning. If reflection in relation to practice is to support professional learning and the improvement of practice, critical thinking is essential (Cardno, 2008; Ortlipp et al., 2011). Practical explanations of critical reflection and thinking have been offered by researchers, recommending that educators examine their practice to "deconstruct, confront, theorise and think otherwise" (Macfarlane, Cartmel, & Nolan, 2011, p. 13). For example, ongoing critical reflection encourages "educators to think carefully about what is happening, analyse why it is happening, to challenge assumptions and "taken for granted" practices, to consider alternatives and make conscious choices to reconceptualise practices" (Winter, 2003, p. 69).

Processes of critical reflection and professional dialogue are intertwined. Collaborative critical reflection and professional dialogue can be understood as active processes of professional learning that present challenges to educators' thinking and actions, which are essential for enhancing practice (Selkrig & Keamy, 2015; Wong et al., 2012). This type of professional learning "disequilibrates" existing systems and educators' assumptions about children and their families (Whalley, 2006, p. 10),

potentially disrupting the status quo within a centre (Hard, 2006) and stimulating change. Where educators can contribute in open and honest discussion in both formal and informal ways (Bickmore, 2012) collaborative curriculum decisions are possible (Burgess et al., 2010; Kilgallon et al., 2008a; Ortlipp et al., 2011). Such processes are rarely linear but progress concurrently as educators participate collectively in both critical reflection and professional dialogue about their practice.

These opportunities for professional discourse among educators constitute socially constructed contextualised knowledge (Hord, 2009; Nuttall, 2013), whereby educators participate in professional conversations about knowledge, theories and perspectives (Kuisma & Sandberg, 2008). These processes underpin the development of curriculum and pedagogy as articulated in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a) and according to Rinaldi (2012) are embedded within day-to-day pedagogical practice. However, the demands of professional learning combined with curriculum change can be intense, and can involve significant emotional impact for educators as familiar ways of working are challenged (Beatty, 2007; Kilgallon et al., 2008a).

***Conditions for collective and collaborative professional learning***

Research indicates multiple benefits arising from participation and engagement in collaborative professional learning (Hord, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006) including contributing to positive staff morale (Muijs et al., 2004; Nupponen, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), promoting the development of shared organisational understanding and values (Thomas, 2009; Wong et al., 2012), and building meaning and a sense of belonging (Boardman, 2003b; Campbell & McNamara, 2010; Wenger, 1998).

As educators question taken-for-granted practices or propose alternative theoretical perspectives (Colmer, 2008), their existing beliefs, values and theories are exposed to their peers (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Kilgallon et al., 2008a; Mulford & Johns, 2004; Robinson & Timperley, 2007). These processes involve inherent risks (Oberhuemer,

2013) and therefore it is essential to create a safe professional environment in order to develop trust amongst educators (Stoll et al., 2006). One element of a safe learning environment is the development of sensitive and respectful communications during professional dialogue (Oberhuemer, 2005). It seems likely that early childhood centre directors have significant responsibilities for developing and maintaining safe and supportive emotional environments to encourage educators to participate fully.

The research literature widely endorses the establishment of "professional learning communities" or simply "learning communities" (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2010; Wenger, 1998) as approaches that can foster collective and collaborative professional learning. Learning communities are argued to embed critical reflection and examination of the implications of educators' practice. Further, strong connections exist between learning communities and practitioner research (Cardno, 2008). Practitioner research methodologies encompass action research, action learning or practitioner inquiry (Campbell & McNamara, 2010) covering a broad continuum of professional learning experiences (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). Typically, practitioner research adopts systematic processes involving a "continuous spiral of input, action and reflection" amongst a group of educators (Fleet et al., 2009, p. 4).

Through conducting research into their own practice, educators have opportunities to theorise about their practice, and data collected about children's learning provides evidence to stimulate improvements to teaching and learning (Cardno, 2008), which in turn contribute to changing practice (Davies, 2010). In investigating their practice, educators can appreciate the immediate relevance of their learning, as information and data illuminate the effects of their pedagogical practice. Although there can be wide variations in the intensity and quality of practitioner research, common themes from the literature are that learning amongst a group of educators is socially constructed (Cordingley & Needham, 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; Hord, 2009; Nuttall, 2013; Thornton, 2009) and that

opportunities to contextualise professional knowledge are important (Campbell & McNamara, 2010; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Marbina et al., 2012; Selkrig & Keamy, 2015).

Where educators can participate in constructive professional dialogue in small groups, the resulting social interactions can assist educators to be critical about their own practice while also assisting a group of educators to appreciate and subscribe to collective learning responsibilities (Stoll et al., 2006). Multiple learning groups within an organisation offer manageable group sizes for learning, while also promoting both individual and shared interests which can contribute to achieving organisational goals (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). An effective learning community features shared purpose and is dependent on respect and concern among group members with an emphasis on integrity (Hord, 2009). Thus, collective and collaborative professional learning approaches conducted in supportive and constructive ways can contribute to the creation of cooperative and safe learning environments. It seems likely that positive experience and practice in critical reflection and professional dialogue with peers offers multiple benefits to both educators and their organisations.

However, it is possible that professional learning communities may fail to achieve the desired learning goals (Maloney & Konza, 2011; Servage, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007), raising questions about the overall guidance needed. In the absence of leadership to develop safe environments for collective and collaborative professional learning, professional dialogue can be experienced negatively which results in an erosion of educator professional identity, motivation and commitment to teaching (Bradbury, 2012). These research studies suggest that environments for professional learning require sensitive leadership and guidance.

***Leaders' role in creating environments that support professional learning processes***

Maloney and Konza (2011) argue that encouraging the participation of all teachers or educators in "confronting and challenging" (p. 75) professional

dialogue requires sophisticated leadership. In leading learning, leaders require high-level interpersonal and facilitation skills (Burgess et al., 2010) to promote respectful professional relationships among educators, particularly in building professional confidence, to encourage educators to take risks and to guide professional dialogue.

The development of trust among leaders and educators is a key contributor to professional learning and curriculum change (Overton, 2009; Stamopoulos, 2012). Leadership is recognised as a significant factor in collective and collaborative professional learning (Aubrey et al., 2013; Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; Curtis & Burton, 2009; Hord, 2009; Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). At times, consideration of the role of leadership is curiously absent or downplayed in early childhood studies associated with professional learning communities (Burgess et al. 2010; Fleet et al., 2009; Pirard, 2011), leaving a gap in understanding how leadership supports intensive modes of professional learning, and how educator learning is nurtured and maintained.

A possible explanation is that practitioner research conducted in schools and early childhood settings has frequently promoted the value of external, academic or expert facilitators to support professional learning processes (Burgess et al., 2010; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Fleet et al., 2009; Hadley, Waniganayake & Shepherd, 2015; Nuttall, 2013; Pirard, 2011; Thornton, 2009; Winter, 2003). For example, Pirard's (2011) study of implementation of the Belgian early childhood curriculum involved expert facilitators in coaching, nurturing participatory processes and supporting democratic debate. As the researchers themselves have often assumed prominent leadership roles, it raises questions about the capacity of early childhood centre directors to lead professional learning within their centres. Researcher led projects, arguably mean that opportunities for insights about how early childhood centre directors lead the learning of professional development and learning within their centres are lost.

Yet, it is difficult to conceive of any person other than a centre director holding a position of power and authority to develop the environmental

conditions that nurture and maintain enabling learning environments. While other positional leaders within a centre such as assistant directors and room leaders can be expected to offer supportive roles, directors have major responsibilities. Notwithstanding the requirements of the educational leader role in the NQS (ACECQA, 2011), directors have responsibility to ensure professional learning enables the organisation to progress towards achieving its mission and goals. In other countries, the pedagogical responsibilities of the centre director in leading professional learning are less ambiguous (Aubrey et al., 2013; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Hujala, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2010).

The extent to which the NQS provisions relating to educational leadership is causing tensions within the Australian system is not known, although a project to support early childhood teachers working in child care has shown some indications that directors have relinquished their pedagogical responsibilities with negative outcomes for quality (Whitington et al., 2015). Furthermore, whether early childhood centre directors possess the leadership knowledge and capabilities to create the internal conditions for collective professional learning is unknown and remains an area that is poorly researched, highlighting the need for this research. This research is also timely as the Australian government's reforms are scheduled for progressive implementation over several years from the introduction of the EYLF in 2010, to the quality system and regulations in 2012 and progressive improvements to regulations scheduled to 2020.

### *Leading curriculum change*

The leadership roles associated with the implementation of major reform involve multiple functions. These include the coordination of professional development and learning (Urban et al., 2011), the development of processes for implementing new curriculum (Deakins, 2007), managing the emotional impacts of change (Beatty, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Leeson et al., 2012), engaging staff in improved ways of working together (Press et al., 2010), and ensuring that change is sustained and becomes embedded in ongoing practice (Harris, 2003; Rodd, 2014b).

Insights into these leadership roles can be gathered from school-based research, which has found that principals draw on pedagogical, curriculum and assessment knowledge to support teachers' professional learning, while also having the ability to make administrative decisions that support the processes needed (Robinson & Timperley, 2007). It seems reasonable to assume that early childhood centre directors require similar leadership and management capabilities to lead curriculum reform. This includes specific curriculum and pedagogical knowledge, understanding of professional development and learning, and the capacity to make the management decisions necessary to support educators' learning.

Research has portrayed a view that early childhood centre directors are "change agents" who are responsible for initiating and creating the circumstances for change (Boardman, 2003a; Hard, 2005; Nupponen, 2006), which has parallels with school-based research (Fullan, 2014). Such terminology may be problematic, inferring that curriculum change is a special event and separate from everyday work. An alternative perspective acknowledges the continuous nature of change as an integral function of early childhood centre work (ACECQA, 2011; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2014b) where enhancing curriculum and developing pedagogy is an important ongoing responsibility of directors (Waniganayake et al., 2008).

Within such a paradigm, change is dependent on professional learning during day-to-day practice throughout a centre, where directors act as pedagogical leaders to their staff, leading learning within their centres (Whalley, 2006). Professional learning is argued to be a core function of everyday practice with intrinsic links to child learning outcomes (Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Rinaldi, 2012). One explanation is that an early childhood centre can be understood as consisting of two interdependent micro-systems, one of developing children and the other of developing adults (Lower & Cassidy, 2007).

In addition, a key leadership function for leaders is to act as role models to their staff by participating and engaging in complexity and change within

their organisations (Fullan, 2014; Marsh, Waniganayake, & De Nobile, 2013; Robinson et al., 2009). The progress of reform efforts is affected by the combined effects of the principal, teachers and system factors (Robinson et al., 2009), indicating the interaction of different social domains. Across educational contexts, researchers argue that leadership models that address the complexity of educational change combine the positional leadership of the principal or director together with shared leadership throughout an organisation (Leithwood et al., 2006; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Robinson et al., 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Woods et al., 2004).

**Relationship between professional learning and distributed leadership**

In recognising the link between professional learning and leadership, this section explores research findings relating to distributed leadership as a form of leadership that may be particularly suited to educators' growth and development. School-based research recognises the role of a principal as a leader in guiding professional learning (Fullan, 2014; Mulford, 2010; Robinson, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) and suggests that distributed leadership approaches are particularly successful in engaging teachers in educational change (Dinham, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Mulford, 2007; Robinson, 2009). Similarly, Aubrey et al. (2013) argue that early childhood leaders can fulfil roles in guiding professional learning.

Distributed leadership approaches have been found to support collaborative professional learning (Dinham, 2009; Harris, 2009; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007); encourage the development of participatory cultures (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2005; Thornton, 2010); affirm educators' knowledge (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007, 2011); and have the propensity to build on the knowledge and expertise of a range of staff (Curtis & Burton, 2009). Distributed leadership approaches are particularly compatible with professional learning communities (Hord, 2009;

MacBeath, Oduro & Waterhouse, 2004; Mulford, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006) and support the development of environmental and social conditions that nurture trust and professional relationships among educators (Seashore Louis, Mayrowetz, Smiley, & Murphy, 2009; Woods et al., 2004).

Encouraging participation in collective and collaborative professional learning throughout an organisation can stimulate the growth of distributed leadership (Dinham, 2009; Glatter, 2006; Robinson et al., 2009). Similar research findings in early childhood studies in England and New Zealand highlight a relationship between distributed leadership and participation in professional learning (Aubrey et al., 2013; Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2009). However, caution may be required in translating these findings to Australia, where early childhood contexts, particularly child care centres, have minimal obligations to employ teachers (ACECQA, 2011).

Whilst multiple leaders can potentially encourage participation in professional learning and change, research has not explicitly addressed how leadership is distributed in practical terms, or how the role of the principal or director is conceptualised in a distributed model in institutions that are hierarchical. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) argue that within ECEC settings strong leadership is required of a director together with a distributed leadership approach. Yet, how such an arrangement can be operationalised within an early childhood centre has not been adequately investigated by early childhood research.

*Theoretical challenges associated with distributed leadership*

Distributed leadership has broad descriptive and theoretical meanings which may explain the adoption of the term as a normative construct (Harris, 2007). Distributed leadership draws on several key theories, in particular, "distributed cognition" and "activity theory" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 5). However, there is little agreement among theorists as to the relative weight of these contributing theories. Activity theory derives from socio-cultural activity theory (Engeström 1987 as cited

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in Nuttall, 2013) while also including aspects of Giddens' (1979) structuration theory of social dimensions of agency and structure (Hartley, 2009).

These theoretical positions have particular relevance in studying leadership within educational contexts, as there is congruence with the theoretical perspectives associated with learning for both adults and children, and acknowledgement of the dual influences of agency and structure in enabling or constraining activity. The concept of distributed cognition relates to common and codified knowledge that is embedded within institutions (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; Hatcher, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004), which influences educators' learning.

Further theories that are argued to relate to distributed leadership include organisational learning (Hutchins, 1996), transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998). An important concept is that leadership is an emergent phenomenon of a group (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; Woods et al., 2004), where leadership arises from collective professional activity such as professional learning. Distributed leadership offers a rich amalgam of theoretical influences (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2004, 2008; Spillane, 2006) which revolve around concepts of learning within a community for specific organisational purposes (Harris, 2013; Hulpia, Devos, Rosseel, & Vlerick, 2012; Thornton, 2009).

A view of distributed leadership as "concerted action" (Bennett et al., 2003; Woods et al., 2004), whereby organisational members work together in interpersonal professional relationships rather than as individuals, supports arguments for collective and collaborative professional learning. However, the diverse theoretical influences add complexity and contribute to a lack of theoretical coherence (Robinson, 2008) and fail to address imprecise definitions and descriptors of key concepts such as "shared" and "distributed", which are often used interchangeably and in non-specific ways. There is also a tendency for the term "distributed leadership" to be

used as an overarching term to describe any form of devolved leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Problems with the imprecise use of terminology are evident in early childhood research. For example, the term "distributed" is used in the context of "distributed organisation" (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015, p. 93), wherein the term relates to organisational structural arrangements necessitated through government policy and funding, which requires one director to assume responsibility for several early childhood centres. The use of the term distributed organisation (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015) has many similarities with the systems leadership work from the United Kingdom (Sharp et al., 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Sum, 2013) but there is less similarity to the theoretical ideas of distributed cognition and leadership emergence among a group of educators. From a theoretical perspective, whether the forms of leadership described by Eskelinen and Hujala constitute distributed or delegated forms of leadership enactment depends on the specific institutional context.

A further consideration is the recognition within distributed leadership theoretical perspectives that leadership embeds aspects of both agency and structure, and a task for researchers is to understand how these dimensions interact within institutions (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Ritchie & Woods, 2007; Woods et al., 2004). This perspective has relevance for this research as the proposed application of a social domains approach to understand leadership may offer insights about the interaction of agency and structure in shaping leadership.

### *Distributed leadership in educational contexts*

Conceptually, distributed leadership has become synonymous with school reform (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Seashore Louis, & Smylie, 2007) with key ideas including interdependence and emergence (Gronn, 2002), and teacher professional learning (Dinham, 2005; Glatter, 2009; Harris, 2009). A synthesis of Australian school leadership research for the period 2001–

2005 (Mulford, 2007) found that distributed approaches to leadership are associated with overall organisational success. Specifically, collaborative and facilitative approaches to teacher learning that focus on children's learning is motivating for teachers and contributes to creating a culture that is oriented towards reform (Mulford, 2007, p. 11).

In school contexts, leadership is recognised as contextual, involving activities in which leaders engage others for specific outcomes (Spillane et al., 2004). From a slightly different focus, Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that leadership is more about direction and influence rather than action, whereby the aim of leadership is school improvement. According to Dinham (2005) and Robinson (2009), distributed leadership focuses on the social dimension of leadership to drive improvement of school performance and improved student outcomes. Harris (2007) argues that distributed leadership approaches can create the conditions for innovation from the ground up, enabling teachers to act as informal leaders, especially when working with others in networks and relationships (Bennett et al., 2003; Glatter, 2009).

Research by Mulford (2007) and Robinson et al. (2009) suggests that school leadership is both positional and distributed, with both forms contributing to school performance. Distributed leadership can be seen to occur within hierarchical organisational structures, where both positional leaders and educators who do not hold formal leadership positions contribute to achieving educational outcomes (Spillane, 2006). Distribution of roles and responsibilities does not replace formal positional leadership structures (Glatter, 2009), and positional leaders do not abrogate their leadership responsibilities but play an ongoing role in coordinating leadership and developing leadership capacity of group members (Lewis & Murphy, 2008).

Importantly, distributed leadership does not mean that everyone is a leader and assumptions that more leaders equate to improved organisational outcomes are not substantiated (Harris, 2013; Hulpia et al., 2012). However, in developing organisations, to be "leaderful"

(Sergiovanni, 1998; Whalley, 2006) space is created for a fluid and dynamic enactment of leadership where any individual can exercise leadership in specific circumstances thereby becoming "informal leaders" (Spillane et al., 2004). Such circumstances involve individuals leading through utilising their knowledge, skills or disposition (Spillane, 2006), which is possible in collaborative professional learning (Glatter, 2006) A key goal is the engagement, participation and cooperation of all organisational participants (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Distributed leadership offers a way to understand leadership as a property of groups rather than an individualistic notion (Woods et al., 2004) as reflected in traditional ideas of heroic leadership. Such an understanding can affect power relations within an organisation by blurring the "distinctions between followers and leaders" (Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 113). Issues of power justifiably require consideration and Bennett et al. (2003) advocate that, conceptually, distributed leadership is a philosophical approach to leadership that involves relinquishing power to others. Robinson's observation that "if there is no change in follower thought or action, then there has been no leadership" (2008, p. 249) provides a clear reminder of the purpose and focus of distribution of leadership.

### *Distributed leadership research in early childhood contexts*

The concept of distributed leadership has increasingly gained the attention of early childhood researchers and scholars internationally including researchers from New Zealand, Australia, Europe and Asia (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Hard et al., 2013; Heikka, 2014; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, 2013; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jordan, 2008; Leeson, Campbell-Barr, & Ho, 2012; O'Gorman & Hard, 2013; Ryder et al., 2011; Thornton, 2009, 2010; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014; Press, 2012). In early childhood centres, distributed leadership may provide a means to enhance collaborative professional learning through promoting cooperative professional relationships which build trust among educators, enabling processes of critical reflection and professional dialogue (Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2010). Early childhood researchers

argue that distributed leadership promotes opportunities for the growth of pedagogical leadership through strengthening the ability of early childhood leaders and educators to work collaboratively in examining theory and practice (Heikka, 2015; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

While the research suggests that distributed leadership can potentially provide improved outcomes for overall service operation (Hard, 2005; Jordan, 2008; Nupponen, 2005), the nature of how the relationship works is not entirely clear. Associated benefits include improvement in staff engagement and morale (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Hard, 2005; Jordan, 2008; Nupponen, 2006; Thornton, 2009; Thornton et al., 2009), educators experiencing a sense of being valued (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011; Thornton et al., 2009) and promotion of organisational values (Thornton, 2005, 2010). Yet little is understood about the complex factors that intersect in promoting professional development and learning. This has left a gap in our knowledge and understanding of how to create or harness distributed leadership effectively in establishing quality service provision in early childhood settings.

Within a hierarchical system, it could be expected that positional leaders play a role in developing supportive environments and in influencing others (Hard, 2005; Thornton, 2009). While directors can plan formal leadership structures, to a large extent the enactment of leadership during collaborative learning cannot always be pre-planned or controlled. Potentially, distributed leadership offers an approach to the early childhood sector that is congruent with the collaborative nature of work among early childhood educators and the social organisation of the environment. This approach is sympathetic to the underlying democratic traditions of shared teaching and decision-making in early childhood settings (Muijs et al., 2004; Oberhuemer, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

*Distributed leadership: processes and practices*

While distributed leadership approaches have been widely recommended, researchers have cautioned that there has been little research conducted to identify the actual behaviours associated with distributed leadership practice or the nature of the interactions and relationships that occur within groups in educational settings (Leithwood et al., 2006). A school-based study examining the operationalisation of distributed leadership (Hulpia et al., 2012) identified that the quality of cooperation and support emanating from the leadership team is a key factor in gaining teachers' commitment. These findings suggest that, rather than a prescribed set of behaviours, distributed leadership may be understood as a "way of thinking about leadership" (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 2) where leadership practice is focused on interactions (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Thornton et al., 2009) and influence (Robinson, 2009). Distributed leadership may be specifically suited to creating an organisational climate that is conducive of change.

It appears that nurturing, trusting professional relationships may have more impact than the actions of leaders. However, existing organisational cultures can also exert powerful influences on attempts to establish distributed leadership. Murphy et al. (2009) observed that egalitarian cultures can work to constrain teachers from enacting leadership, and teacher autonomy can be a disincentive to challenge the status quo to make improvements. Parallel findings exist in early childhood studies with arguments that an organisational "culture of niceness" may mask underlying tensions and conflict that encourage educator conformity to existing practice rather than to innovation (Hard, 2005, p. 128).

**Linking distributed leadership, professional learning and curriculum change**

Throughout this chapter the linkages between leadership, professional learning and curriculum change have been explored. Researchers across school education and early childhood (Dinham, 2009; Glatter, 2009; Harris, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006, Mulford,

2007; Robinson, 2009; Thornton, 2010; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014) have noted a relationship between distributed leadership and collaborative professional learning. This final section draws together the concepts identified in this literature review to support the rationale of this study. This discussion identifies key factors that can be expected to be involved and concludes by presenting a set of orienting concepts which will be employed in the early data analysis (Layder, 1998).

### *Relationship between collaborative professional learning and leadership*

Educational research across schools and early childhood education indicates the power of distributed leadership and collective and collaborative professional learning to increase the participation by teachers through offering meaningful experiences that support the achievement of educational change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Murphy et al., 2009). In turn, collaborative professional learning approaches may have a positive impact on strengthening leadership (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007, 2011; Thornton, 2009). In short, research suggests there is a complex interplay between distributed leadership, collaborative professional learning and the emergence of leadership, where each factor strengthens the other.

This research study examined the nature of early childhood leadership that occurred among educators in the context of their professional learning experiences to improve curriculum and pedagogy. This exploration will attempt to explain the interplay of "structural and agential dimensions" as proposed by Woods et al. (2004, p. 440). The aim was to gain insights about the various organisational factors that influenced leadership and educators' participation in professional learning including contextual influences, individual influences, perceptions of educators, and the dynamics of the relationships that existed among a group of educators within a child care centre.

Drawing together the concepts identified in this literature review, early childhood centres are complex social organisations in which the nature of work is collective, necessitating groups of educators to work collaboratively in interdependent professional relationships. Early childhood centres exist within a broader social system where internal and external stakeholders can influence what occurs within the organisation (Hujala, 2013). From a social domains perspective, different social layers can be expected to influence educators' participation in professional learning and educational change (Layder, 1998, 2013).

Educational change is anticipated to necessitate professional learning that involves complex processes of accessing new knowledge and examining existing practice and beliefs. This involves educators' beliefs needing to be reformulated in the light of new evidence and requires the collaborative development of new practice that enhances children's learning. Further, this work must be sustained to become embedded as everyday practice within the centre. Thus a primary purpose of centre leadership may be to influence how educators conduct their work, which necessitates both pedagogical and organisational leadership and management capacities in developing an environment that enables collaborative professional learning.

Although the extant literature indicates that an effective site leader is essential for creating the structures, conditions and emotional environment which then nurtures distributed leadership (Murphy et al., 2009; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), the processes and circumstances that are needed in early childhood centres is not clear. How early childhood leaders develop the leadership capacity of educators which then supports their ability to influence change at their level (Retna & Tee, 2008) is an area that is poorly understood.

This literature review draws on research that suggests that distributed leadership and professional learning may be considered as complementary factors in educational change. The research also suggests that distributed leadership has the capacity to improve both child and

educator learning outcomes. Although distributed leadership approaches can contribute much to build a positive internal culture for change (Harris, 2004), the inherent complexities of organisational cultures may or may not be conducive to supporting the distribution of leadership.

## *Orienting concepts for this study*

Several key factors have been identified in this literature review. As the site leader, a director has been widely held to occupy a role of considerable power, authority and influence, making both leadership and management decisions that affect a centre's work environment. The extent to which a director's leadership impacts on how a centre functions and the nature of the internal work environment is not clearly understood.

The research reviewed has also suggested that there may be specific conditions that contribute to the establishment of professional learning environments that support educational change in early childhood centres. In reviewing distributed leadership across schools and early childhood settings, a defining feature was a focus on collective and coordinated rather than individual professional development. Distributed leadership with its emphasis on group learning may prove a useful conceptualisation in exploring the relationship between leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres participating in educational reform.

An ethos of collaborative practice throughout an early childhood centre has also been presented as a factor that facilitates the conditions for collective and collaborative professional learning among groups of educators. Centre culture has been considered to both affect participation in professional development and learning while simultaneously being shaped by new learning. Yet we have limited understanding about how centre cultures are formed and shaped over time.

The role of positional leaders in contributing to and supporting the professional development and learning of educators is poorly understood and this study will offer insights into these relationships. Whether the director makes key decisions about professional development and how

professional learning opportunities are organised within an early childhood centre is unknown.

The key concepts that are important in understanding the complex interrelationship between leadership and professional learning are outlined in Table 2.1. These concepts offer insight into the researcher's orientation in examining what occurred in early childhood centres as educators participated in professional practices to implement the EYLF. The aim of this research was to develop understanding of the nature of the relationship between leadership and professional learning, and the orienting concepts guided the preliminary analysis of data collected.

In adopting an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998), which is described and justified in the methodology chapter, key concepts from theory and literature serve as orienting concepts (Layder, 2013) for the preliminary analysis of data. This process is explained fully in Chapter Three.

**Table 2.1: Orienting concepts and preliminary codes**

| Code | Orienting concept |
|---|---|
| **Centre organisation** | Internal centre structures comprise the system level (eg time, staffing, etc) |
| **Challenges** | Emotional responses influence implementation of curriculum reform (subjective and inter-subjective influences fear, resistance, no learning, no change in practice) |
| **Collaborative ethos** | Centre culture and philosophy influences educators' behaviours |
| **Curriculum change** | Nature of curriculum change is complex and multi-dimensional (what occurs?) |
| **Director responsibilities** | What is the extent of the roles directors play and how is it "strong" leadership? |
| **Distributed leadership** | Enactment of leadership as an emergent phenomenon |
| **Individual agency/meaning** | Educators' attitudes, motivations, beliefs about their experience (subjective and inter-subjective domains) |
| **Individual/group** | Explore face-to-face interactions -how do educators participate in professional development and learning (is it individual versus collective?) |
| **Leadership structures** | Formal and positional leader arrangements in centres influence what occurs |
| **Positional leadership arrangements** | Leadership roles affect educators engagement |
| **Processes for professional development and learning** | Face-to-face activities at inter-subjective level are involved in learning-what is the nature of processes/interactions) |
| **Project approaches** | Practitioner research is a form of professional learning that can engage and challenge educators (action research, inquiry projects) |
| **Structural factors** | External influences affect educators (identify and consider the nature of the influence of broad structural considerations) |

# Chapter Three

# Methodology

## Abstract

This chapter outlines the theoretical approach that underpins this research. An argument is presented for utilising social domains theory and, specifically, an adaptive approach (Layder, 1998). This approach offers two specific advantages in understanding complexity in early childhood education and care centres. First, it facilitates an examination of the influences of different social domains on organisational social behaviours. Second, a rationale for the use of orienting concepts drawn from the literature to guide analysis is embedded, which assists in the development of plausible explanations. The chapter outlines and explains the methodology including how the processes relate to the research questions, sources of empirical data and sampling, data collection methods and the analytical procedures. The chapter concludes with observations about the quality of the research.

**Introduction**

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodology including the supporting theoretical positions adopted in this research. This thesis seeks to understand the relationship between leadership and professional learning during educational reform in early childhood education and care centres. Recurring themes from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggest that early childhood centres can be viewed as complex social systems that are influenced by both external structural forces and internal forces. Within this paradigm, the impact of broader social structures and human agency can be considered in exploring the research question.

The discussion of methodology begins with a brief examination of sociological theories and methodological approaches that were considered prior to the selection of an "adaptive theory" frame which conceptualises a stratified social world (Layder, 1998, 2013). Such an approach enables the examination of the effects of different social domains, which is suitable for researching the "complex interrelationships between individuals, interactions and their social settings and contexts" (Layder, 2013, p. 114).

Following the justification for the approach, an explanation is provided of how the research methods relate to the research questions. A detailed account is provided of the sampling strategies, characteristics of the research participants, processes of data collection and analysis, and the procedures employed to develop theoretical ideas and constructs in adaptive theory approaches (Layder, 2013). Finally, issues associated with assessing the quality of the research are offered for consideration.

**Locating a suitable methodology**

Social theory is concerned with understanding the human condition. In developing theoretical foundations, debate has traditionally been polarised between objectivism and subjectivism (Sibeon, 2004). An objectivist orientation was favoured by the classical sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Talcott Parsons, whereby society or societal institutions were understood to possess structural properties that were

capable of shaping political, economic and social life (for a full discussion see Sibeon, 2004, pp. 62–64). From an objectivist paradigm, the individual is understood as relatively powerless (Sibeon, 2004). In contrast, a subjectivist orientation focuses on human agency, whereby people are viewed as purposeful, competent and thinking actors able to act upon their social environment. Subjectivist orientations attempt to understand the effects of human agency and are primarily associated with interpretivist approaches in the analysis of empirical data (see for example Charmaz, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2007). Thus, within social theory, the concepts of agency and structure are recognised as two key constituents of social reality (Archer, 1998; Giddens, 1979; Layder, 1993; Mouzelis, 2000).

### *Agency and structure*

There are, however, variations in how theorists conceptualise agency and structure (Archer, 1998) which affect research approaches that account for the respective influences of these concepts. Indeed, the term "social structure" is argued to be conceptualised differently by theorists according to their ontological view (Porpora, 1998; Sibeon, 2004). Sibeon (2004) proposes that social conditions or "structure" are the result of interactions between agency and structure. Structure, as the classical objectivist theorists argue, is associated with broad macro-social factors such as economic, political and social forces which influence the philosophy and concepts of a society. Individuals within a society are influenced by systems of thought or social practices, described as social discourses, which affect interpretations of the possibilities for behaviour within certain contexts (Sibeon, 2004).

The term structure has, however, also been used by theorists to explain localised internal social structure that exists within organisations (Archer, 1998, 2003; Giddens, 1979, 1987; Layder, 1998, 2006; Mouzelis, 2000; Sibeon, 2004). Giddens (1993) argues that structure incorporates rules for social behaviour and therefore influences people's behaviours and relationships, but Porpora (1998) considers that relationships are more

significant than rules because relationships are defined by position and are inherently associated with power. Layder (1994), however, argues that discourses have power only when used by particular groups or individuals and that they require an institutional context. According to Layder (2006), structural forces are embedded within organisations, resulting in historical and cultural traditions associated with particular organisations. Such organisational-level influences are described as occurring at a "system" level (Layder, 1998, 2013).

The impact of social discourses is relevant in early childhood education contexts (Dalli et al., 2012; Ortlipp et al., 2011; Osgood, 2010; Sachs, 1999; Simpson, 2010). In this study, it is proposed that both external broader structural influences as well as internal understandings within specific early childhood organisations can influence the organisational environment. External structural discourses include traditional understandings of what constitutes early childhood practice, the historical dichotomy between education and care, societal attitudes towards the purpose and value of early childhood education and care and the status of women and children. Indeed, within a society a curriculum framework, regulations and a quality system are the products and embodiment of social structures used by government to shape early education policy and practice (Aubrey, 2008; Bennett, 2008).

Structure is important to consider because it may either enable or constrain action taken by organisational members (Giddens, 1979, 1993). Over time, people also contribute to shaping the structural and cultural properties of society (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1993). Agency is explained by Archer (1995) as human purposiveness and includes people's emotions, beliefs and meanings derived from their social experiences. According to Archer (2003, p. 27), through processes of "internal reflexive dialogue", individuals process their social experience and, importantly, their interpretations are influenced by others in the setting. Layder (2006) and Sibeon (2004) adopt a perspective that people within an organisation have the capacity to act to influence their own and others' behaviours and

meanings, and therefore they both refer to agency as action. Thus people affect the social relationships within their context (Layder, 2006) and interpret their experience in ways that are meaningful to their individual situations (Archer, 2003).

Social experience is interpreted both individually and collectively (Layder, 2013; Sibeon, 2004). In this study, it is recognised that human agency is enacted in early childhood education and care centres, as educators work both independently and collectively. In understanding their interactions and meanings it is essential to acknowledge their social interdependencies (Layder, 2006). However, accounting for both agency and structure within a research study is complicated with inherent practical challenges. The following section outlines the examination of theoretical approaches undertaken to determine a methodology suitable for this research to examine both agency and structure within early childhood centres.

### *Structuration theory*

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1987, 1993) provides a methodological approach to analysing complex problems in studying organisations and management (Hujala, 2004; Jack & Kholeif, 2007). Giddens conceptualises a duality of agency and structure, which are seen as complementary social dimensions rather than opposing forces. Giddens (1979) theorises that institutions or broader societies possess structural properties that are the outcome of people's actions that are repeated continuously over time. In turn, members of a specific social group understand, identify with, and replicate the unwritten rules of that society, thus guiding members' behaviour (Giddens, 1979).

The concept of duality is central, meaning that agency (or action) and structure are not separate but are "two aspects of the same thing … inseparably rolled together" (Sibeon, 2004, p. 49). Giddens (1984) proposes that structure cannot be understood as external or separate from action because unless structure is being practised by human actors it has no existence other than as memory in people's minds. In this theorising, it

is only through people's actions that structure becomes activated (Giddens, 1993).

Giddens' assertion of duality results in complicated analytical practices that reduce the ability to examine the impact of people as organisational actors and the influences of social mechanisms that constrain individuals (Sibeon, 2004). While Giddens' theory is conceptually rich, social realists argue that Giddens conflates agency and structure (Archer, 1998; Porpora, 1998; Reed, 2005; Sibeon, 2004). These theorists argue that agency and structure have different properties and it is the interplay between these two social dimensions that provides insights about organisational processes and therefore social change.

From a practical perspective, duality complicates the capacity to appreciate the effects of structure when viewed as a force imposed on organisations through mandated government requirements such as the EYLF or the NQS. Government legislation has a pervasive influence whether individuals are aware of it or not; meaning structure exists beyond individuals' subjectivities. Overall, Giddens' (1979) methodological processes and his concept of duality were valuable in framing the research problem. However, viewing agency and structure as inseparable in analytical terms presents challenges for researchers.

### *Adaptive theory*

In contrast to Giddens' conceptualisation of duality, sociologists such as Archer (1993), Layder (1993) and Sibeon (2004) conceptualise agency and structure as a "dualism" in which action and structure are separate and relatively autonomous elements (Archer, 1998; Layder, 1993). In any social setting, different social dimensions will potentially interact to influence people's interactions and relationships (Syed, Mingers, & Murray, 2010), Hence, the role of the researcher is to discover the interconnections between social dimensions to understand how social structure may influence the behaviour and interactions of individuals within organisations (Sibeon, 2004).

In locating a practical approach to explore the complex interplay between structure and agency in an early childhood centre, Layder's adaptive theory (1998) offers a theoretical approach that recognises a stratified social life. In proposing a stratified social world, processes and events are considered to be different dimensions of social reality than the underlying social structures (Fairclough, 2005). Furthermore, the interpretation or sense that people make of their experience is influenced by factors that cannot be fully observed (Archer, 1998; Outhwaite, 1998; Reed, 2005). Layder (1993) conceptualises a matrix of social domains comprising individual biography (the subjective); situated activity or "face-to-face" interaction (inter-subjective); social settings (locations in which situated activity occurs); and macro-social (contextual resources or structural considerations).

These social domains are relatively autonomous, possessing specific properties and effects (Layder, 1993; 1998) which can be readily applied to the context of an early childhood centre, thereby offering a workable analytical framework for this research. Layder (2013) does not propose that there are direct links between social domains but advocates that analytical processes should seek to discover the influences. In working across social domains searching for connections a researcher may explore how social layers interact to influence phenomena (Sibeon, 2004).

According to Layder, the relations between agency (or activity) and structure are embedded within the social domains. Much of everyday social life is conducted at the "face-to-face" level where individuals' behaviours are responsive to the actions and influence of others within the social setting (Layder, 1997, p. 1). In examining an early childhood centre as a social setting, it is essential to understand the dynamic where educators work interdependently, constantly interact with each other and work within networks of relationships where individuals influence others, and in turn are influenced by their co-workers.

Layder's social domains are depicted in Table 3.1. His interpretations of agency and structure allow for "active and 'reflexive' agents", as Archer

(2003, p. 23) argues, but also enable a researcher to take account of structural influences that affect individuals and groups. The structural level includes the broader social structure or context within which activity occurs. Importantly, Layder's inclusion of a domain of "social setting" is a specific strength, allowing for the examination of a centre as an organisation or system that has structures or structural properties (Giddens, 1979). Within contextual theories of leadership, an organisation (or centre) is understood to exist at a meso level between the micro level of an individual's subjective experience and the macro level of broader structural factors and societal influences (Hujala, 2004, 2013; Nivala, 2002).

**Table 3.1: Matrix of research levels and stratified social domains**

| Social domain | Research level | Focus of research |
|---|---|---|
| Structural level | Context | Broader structural aspects including macro-social organisation and cultural forms, political, social, economic forces, values and traditions, power relations that may have implications over time and space |
| System level | Social setting | Organisation including institutions, local organisations such as individual early childhood centres, formal groups |
| Inter-subjective level | Situated activity | Face-to-face interaction and immediate social activity that occurs among educators and staff but not including children and families |
| Subjective level | Self | Self-identity and individual subjective experiences and interpretation of events, includes conscious and unconscious behaviour, life experience, values and commitments |

Source: adapted from Field (2000) and from Layder (1993).

An adaptive theory analysis incorporates subjective and inter-subjective interpretations of individuals and their actions allowing the researcher to explore people's meanings, understanding and motives while also including an analysis of structural domains. Thus, the approach enables

consideration of an early childhood organisation as a social setting adopting a middle position methodologically, and enabling consideration of both subjective and objective perspectives (Kristiansen & Hviid Jacobsen, 2011), offering a practical means to explore the research questions in this study.

A further factor is that not all social domains can be treated equally. This enables the researcher to make decisions about the significance of specific social dimensions within any particular situation and context including consideration of temporal factors (Layder, 1998, 2013). Field's (2015) diagrammatic representation of the weight afforded to particular social domains offers a practical way to access and apply Layder's social domains matrix.

In this study, data and analysis focused predominantly on the inter-subjective activity that occurred within the centres. However, other social domains yielded important information to enhance interpretation of organisational activity. For example, Layder (2013) argues that it is necessary for the analysis to include an exploration of participants' emotions and meanings rather than being limited to descriptions of behaviours and activities that occur during situated activity. Yet, according to Charmaz (2004), in studying people's actions it is possible to gain insights about their meanings. However, it is important not to conflate behaviour with attitudes and meanings. Where participants in this research offered information about their perceptions of their experience this information was collated in the matrix. The matrix offered a practical way of analysing the influences of different social domains in researching complex organisational change (Field, 2000), providing a constant discipline at an early stage of data analysis to resist inappropriate inferences (see Figure 3.1).

Concepts derived from studying inter-subjective activity were fine-tuned through cross referencing with insights from individuals about their perceptions of participation in professional development and learning and

leadership engagement within their early childhood centre. These processes supported interpretation of both actions and meanings.
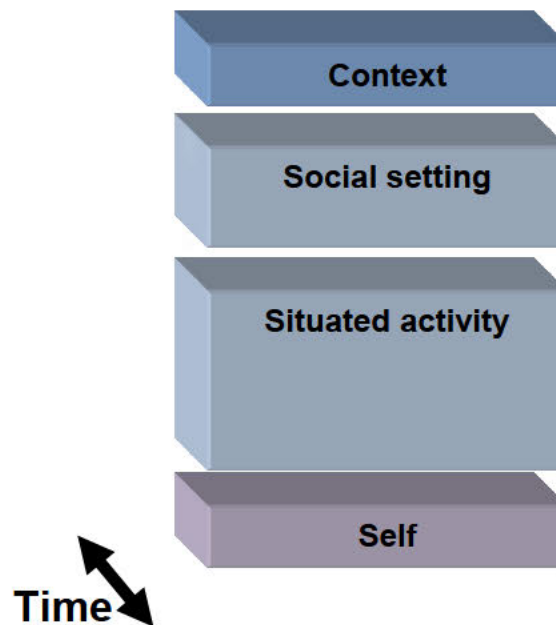


Figure 3.1: Depiction of the weight afforded to analysis of social domains in adaptive approaches

Source: adapted from Field (2015)

A further consideration for the value of an adaptive approach is that the methodology provides a structured means of combining pre-existing theory with theory generated from empirical data. Adaptive theory utilises prior research to identify orienting concepts which form the basis for the initial coding frame (Layder, 1998). The orienting concepts used in this research were presented at the end of Chapter Two. Orienting concepts are particularly valuable in supporting the organisation of preliminary data analysis and assist a researcher to focus on the search for conceptual rather than descriptive codes (Layder, 2013). The relationships between pre-existing theory and empirical research in the generation of new theory within an adaptive theory approach are depicted in Figure 3.2.
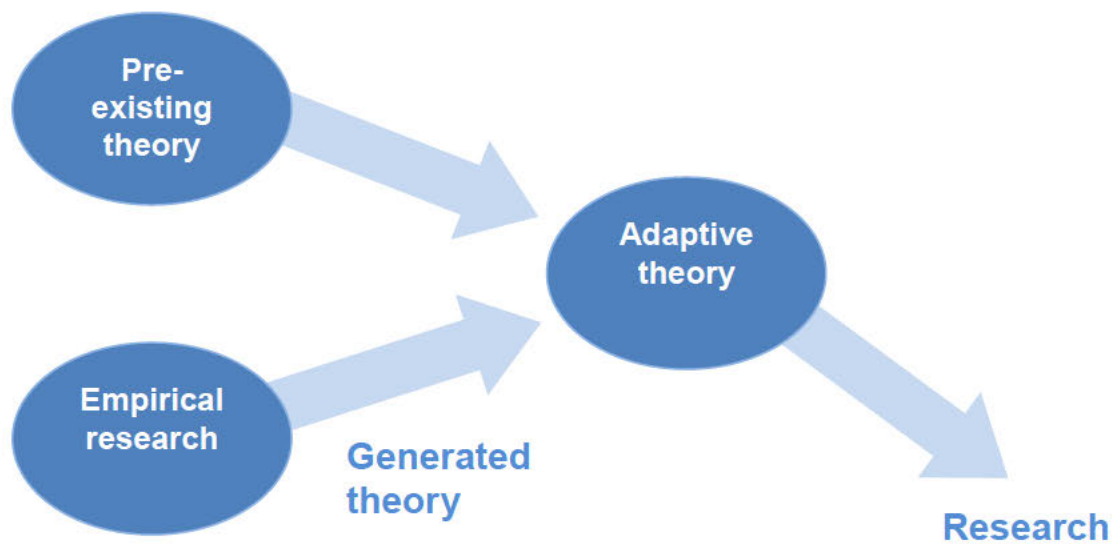
**Figure 3.2: Depiction of adaptive theory processes**

Source: adapted from Gross, Logg-Scarvell, Clarke, Ashhurst, & van Kerkoff (2013)

## Research design

The orienting concepts developed from pre-existing theory identified in Chapter Two (Table 2.1) supported the critical examination of the research questions, influenced decisions about sampling strategies and processes to be implemented, and provided a preliminary frame in which to commence data analysis. Adaptive theory views extant theory derived from research and literature as critical for framing the analysis of empirical data (Layder, 2013). Such use of extant literature in analysis is not confined to adaptive theory. However, a legacy of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which remains a highly influential methodological approach in qualitative research, is a view that existing empirical knowledge does not play a role in formulating new theory; however

contemporary grounded theorists argue that such perspectives are misconceived (Charmaz, 2007; Kelle, 2007; Suddaby, 2006).

In addition to utilising previous extant research, a matrix of different social domains provides a constant reminder of the need to examine empirical data for influences that could arise from different social domains (Layder, 1998) and relationships that are not immediately observable (Bergene, 2007; Reed, 2005). Thus, a matrix can enhance insights about underlying mechanisms that could influence social behaviours in early childhood centres.

Layder (1993) also advocates that a diversity of methodological and theoretical resources be used, particularly recommending that qualitative and quantitative methods be combined and integrated (Layder, 2013). Although Layder endorses the use of mixed methods, he states that the rationale must be linked to the overall research questions and practical considerations to collect a range of data from sources likely to yield useful information about the research questions (Layder, 1998). Within mixed methods a researcher selects the most suitable techniques based on the research question, integrating qualitative and quantitative aspects (Bryman, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012).

In a critical analysis of mixed methods approaches Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes and Onghena (2013, pp. 306–313) identified nine criteria for appraising the quality of a study that includes both qualitative and quantitative aspects:

1. The theoretical framework of the study is stated.
2. The research aims and questions are clear.
3. An appropriate design is selected.
4. Sampling and data collection methods are appropriate and explained.
5. Appropriate data analysis methods are applied.
6. The interpretation, conclusion and inferences and implications of the study are elaborated.

7. The context of the research is clear.
8. The impact of the researcher is considered.
9. The reporting of the study is transparent.

The design of this study is integrated (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008; Heyvaert et al., 2013; Leech, 2012) and includes both qualitative and quantitative components by employing a combination of focus groups and case studies in centres, where individual interviews and a survey of all staff were used to collect data. This type of approach has been previously adopted by Australian early childhood researchers Press et al. (2010) and Waniganayake et al. (2008), involving participants from early childhood education and care centres throughout Australia.

In stage one of this study, the views of early childhood centre directors were sought to gather their understandings of attitudes towards professional development and leadership for educational change. Focus groups have been endorsed as suitable for the early stages of an exploratory study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) and can be justified in this research as there is little empirical evidence about how early childhood centre directors and leaders organise and lead the professional development of their staff. In the second stage, case studies involving a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were conducted in two early childhood centres, enabling an examination of the processes and practices involved in professional development and learning associated with implementation of major educational change.

The research design for this study comprised two stages as depicted in Figure 3.3. In this design, the collection of data was sequential, with each source of data influencing the next (Ivankova, 2014), while analysis was to a large extent undertaken concurrently, moving between qualitative and quantitative data as Layder (2013) recommends.

Figure 3.3 summarises the organisation of the research stages and forms of data collection. In Stage one, focus groups were undertaken with early childhood centre directors to collect qualitative data of their perspectives

about how professional development and learning support educational reform. In Stage two, case studies were undertaken in two early childhood centres, beginning with in-depth interviews with each of the directors and four educators in each centre. The data gathered from these processes were analysed, which assisted in shaping the development of a predominantly quantitative survey which was offered to all staff in the case study centres.
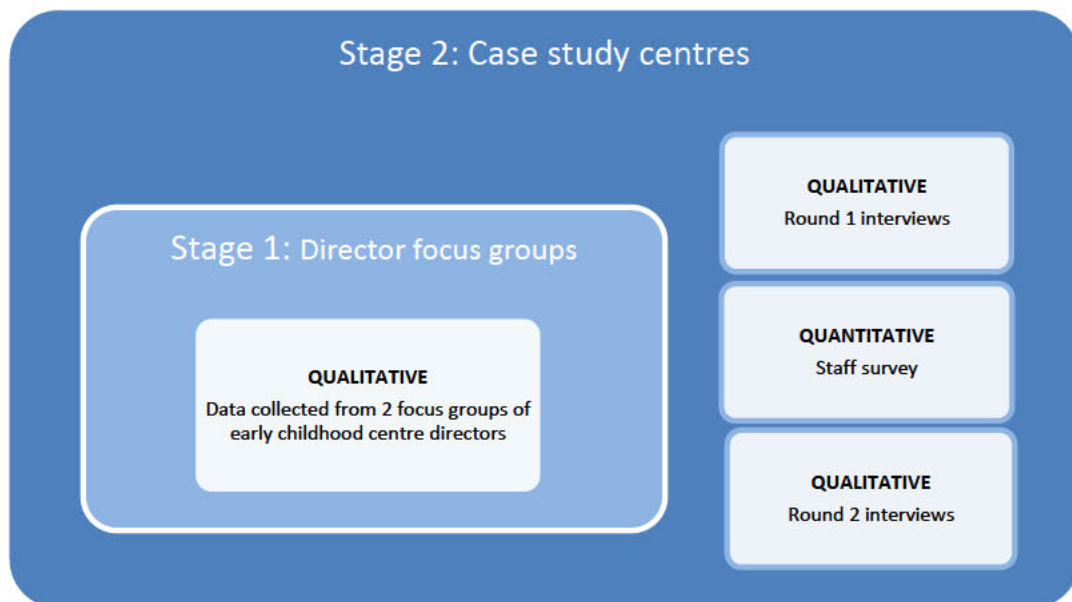


**Figure 3.3: Stages and types of data collection**

Comparison of concepts emerging from the analysis of the data was undertaken, which included comparison of the appropriateness of the fit of concepts to both case study centres. This included mapping concepts against social domains in a matrix. A second round of case study interviews of directors and educators was undertaken, with a particular focus on understanding how participants perceived and enacted leadership to influence other educators' participation. Following the collection and analysis of this data, and in reviewing all data and coding, leadership principles for professional learning were developed.

As can be seen, the study design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. Achieving complementarity of data sources (Bergman, 2009; Bryman, 2006; Layder, 1998) through gathering multiple perspectives can strengthen the analytical and theoretical claims from research (Charmaz, 2004).

An analytical process of constant comparison is advocated in adaptive approaches (Layder, 2013), although such measures are commonly also utilised in grounded theory approaches (Glaser, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where constant comparison of new data and coded data are made against the emerging theories and categories (Field, 2015). Such processes have also been recommended in case study research, where cycling between data and analysis enhances the understanding of participants' meanings (Charmaz, 2007; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapungavan, & Boerger, 1987). However, Layder's approach (2013) has subtle differences: he also recommends cycling between empirical data and analytical processes while constantly comparing data, codes and data sources, but he additionally recommends examining assigned codes and concepts against extant research.

In addition, concepts should be cross-checked (Layder, 2013), as was the case in this research, whereby two case study centres were used to examine contextual factors that may contribute to either a fit or disconnect in the applicability of concepts (Silverman, 2010). Here, the use of the matrix also allowed consideration of the impact of different social domains and these combined measures ensured that a credible explanation for the phenomenon could be ascertained (Layder, 2013). Bazeley (2012) argues that mixed approaches with different data sources and methods are particularly useful where comparative analysis is undertaken in qualitative research.

Another feature of an adaptive design is utilising overlapping stages where data collection and analysis occur concurrently and refinement of all sources of data is managed as an iterative process (Layder, 2013), whereby each method informs the other (Creswell, 2003; Layder, 1998).

This approach allows subsequent data collection to be influenced by continuous analysis, offering ongoing "synthesis and theoretical integration" (Sibeon, 2004, p. 30). Rather than being understood as a linear progression, data collection and analysis are therefore integrated throughout the study. Such a method is not unique to adaptive approaches, as Glaser and Strauss (1967), for example, also advocate simultaneous data collection and analysis when conducting research driven by grounded theory.

In this research, for example, data analysis arising from the focus groups was embedded in the subsequent case study interviews. Ongoing analysis of data from both sources was utilised in formulating a predominantly quantitative survey which was administered to all staff in the case study centres. The rationale for the survey was to obtain multiple perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and to examine the validity of the concepts identified from the in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with all educators by comparing them with those of the group overall (Verschuren, 2003).

The collection and analysis of qualitative data allowed an in-depth examination of the nature of the inter-subjective domain in each case study centre as well as individual educators' subjective meanings derived from their professional experiences. The quantitative data from the survey provided complementary information that either confirmed or highlighted potential discrepancies arising from individual's subjective accounts of processes and events of relevance to this research. Thus, the survey enhanced the relevance of the analysis of the qualitative data. Both the data collection strategies and overall research design enabled the creation of a fuller picture of activity and understandings than was possible from one method alone (Bryman et al., 2008; Hammersley, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2004), resulting in a rich body of data on diverse individuals' experience of social life within early childhood education settings.

Figure 3.4 depicts the concurrent and overlapping nature of data collection where data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously. Thus data,

methods and analytical processes in the research design were integrated and complementary, contributing to the insights derived from the research as well as to validity (Bryman, 2006; Bryman et al., 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

- Gather focus groups data
- Analysis of focus groups
- Select case study centres

**Preliminary coding structure**

**Refinement of coding data**

- Round 1 Interviews
- Analysis of interviews
- Development of survey
- Analysis of survey

- Round 2 interviews
- Analysis of interviews
- Exploration of interrelationship between professional learning and leadership
- Comparison of conceptual codes

**Final categories**

**Figure 3.4: Processes of data collection and refinement**

## Research questions

The focus of this study was to explore the relationship between leadership and professional learning during educational reform in early childhood centres. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the research design acknowledges that influences are likely to emanate from agency-level factors as well as broader system and structural level factors. The research design involved collecting multiple perspectives ranging from early childhood centre directors through to educators working with curriculum reform in early childhood centres. The research questions were:

1. How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change?

2. What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about the EYLF?

3. How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change?

These specific questions were aligned with the data collection strategies and analytical processes as depicted in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Summary of research questions and methods**

| Research questions | Data collection method | Data analysis |
|---|---|---|
| 1. How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change? | Stage 1: Focus groups | Qualitative data analysis undertaken – local data and theoretical ideas from the literature |
| 2. What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about EYLF? | Stage 2: Case study centres:<br>• Round 1 semi-structured interviews with director and four educators (in each centre)<br>• Staff surveys<br>• Round 2 interviews (at 18 months) with director and several educators | Qualitative analysis of interviews<br><br>Quantitative analysis of staff survey including concept mapping |
| 3. How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change? | Use of data generated in previous two stages to review the influence of different social layers on all data sets | Application of Layder's social domains matrix |

## Ethical considerations

A comprehensive application for ethics approval was required prior to commencing data collection. Considerations included documenting sampling strategies and the research design to ensure that any potential risk of harm to participants was identified and strategies for prevention and

management were put in place and approved by the university ethics committee. This application included details of all proposed communication to participants and the forms to be used in obtaining participants' consent. Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee Macquarie University and notification of ethics approval (Reference Number 5201100268D) is included in Appendix 1. Annual reports on the study program have been submitted and acknowledged as having met the requirements as outlined in the letter of approval.

A key factor in conducting the research was to ensure that the identity of the organisations and individuals participating through the case studies were protected at all times. Centres were referred to as A and B, and participants' identities were withheld in all papers published and presented based on this research.

A list of all information letters and consent forms developed for this study is located in Appendices 2-9. All participants were fully informed of the procedures and purpose of the research through the initial letters of invitation, which provided a detailed outline of the study prior to seeking approval to participate. Participants were informed that their involvement and their continuing participation were entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without an explanation or fear of retribution. Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants. In relation to the case study centres, directors who had accepted an invitation to participate were asked to obtain the signed permission to proceed as a case study centre from the chairperson of the centre governance group. Sites were selected to ensure that senior staff were supportive of the study and would facilitate staff involvement in data collection.

Where particularly sensitive material was shared by a participant or could identify an individual, care was taken to ensure that such data was not cited in written reports or publications. For example, on one occasion a participant offered unsolicited information that was highly personal, which

was deemed unnecessary for the research purpose. This information was subsequently deleted from the audio recording and not transcribed. The researcher's reflective journal maintained during the data collection period 2011–14 also served an important function in ensuring that research participants were not placed at emotional risk and their privacy was protected. All materials collected from participants were stored and maintained securely, accessible by only the researcher, to ensure confidentiality and privacy for participants and centres. Pseudonyms were used in records and the researcher ensured that electronic records were stored on password-protected devices.

**Sampling strategies**

This section provides an overview of the data collection methods used in this study, outlining how the approaches are compatible with the research questions and design. This research was exploratory, aimed at generating new ideas about a complex social phenomenon where there is little previous research (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2007). It focused on the interrelationships between leadership and educator professional learning in early childhood centres. Prior research has examined aspects of either of these factors, or explored professional learning led by an external researcher (see for example Pirard, 2011; Nuttall, 2013). Furthermore, there have been no published rich descriptions of holistic, centre-wide professional development and learning occurring within early childhood centres in Australia. In exploring the research questions, for the reasons outlined, it was necessary to select research participants with adequate knowledge, understanding and experience of the phenomenon in order to be able to progress the research aims (Layder, 2013).

It should be noted that for this study, case studies did not include all of the organisational stakeholders such as children, families, local community representatives or members of formal parent committees but was focused on educators and staff only. The rationale for this decision was tied to the research topic and questions emphasising the focus on understanding the experiences associated with professional development and learning and

leadership. Educators and staff that are involved in everyday experience were the appropriate sources of data to meet the research aims.

Through studying educators' perspectives on professional development and learning it was anticipated that insights might be gained about the processes employed in early childhood centres and the role of leadership in responding to educational change. In adopting a realist ontology such as adaptive theory, the possible impact of social processes and mechanisms and factors such as individual agency and structure could be considered (Sibeon, 2004).

### *Participant selection and description*

Purposive sampling strategies were necessary to recruit participants who had experience of the activity being studied and could shed light on the research issues (Layder, 2013). Sampling strategies also needed to match the research goals, objectives and rationale (Collins et al., 2007). As such, selection of participants with specific characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Kemp-Graham, 2015) was justified.

According to Ivankova (2014), the selection of data collection sources and participants is a key quality indicator. However, I experienced initial challenges in locating sufficient participants who were prepared to contribute information to advance the research questions. Assistance to locate suitable participants was sought from providers of government-subsidised professional development organisations (Professional Support Coordinators) who were deemed to have local knowledge of centres in their states and territories. For example, although I had hoped to find directors with more than five years of director experience this proved difficult and some participants were selected that did not meet all of the criteria.

### *Focus groups*

The criteria developed for the focus group participants sought to locate early childhood centre directors who:

- accessed a range of professional development for their staff in implementing the EYLF;
- had at least 5 years' experience as a director of an early childhood centre;
- were employed at centres that had more than 40 child places (thereby providing complexity regarding the number of staff); and
- worked within a variety of management arrangements (for example, community-based service, for-profit service, and part of a larger group).

All participants were active in providing ongoing professional development and learning opportunities for staff in their centres and were able to talk about their beliefs about curriculum change. A mix of participants reflecting the diversity of centres by size, location and management structure was achieved with the exception of one director who was responsible for a small centre of 30 places. Her experience of working under the auspices of a larger body, however, offered insights regarding complexity and achieving curriculum change. The remainder of participants were from larger centres ranging in size from 40 to over 100 child places which could be anticipated as requiring complexity in communication because of the size of the staff teams. These centres included a mix of community-based with one for-profit centre; centres that were part of larger organisations and groups, and stand-alone centres. Some of the centres operated in culturally and linguistically diverse communities and thereby offered a further dimension of complexity. All of the centres provided child care services and two attracted state funding for the kindergarten component for four-year-old children. Table 3.3 provides details of the participants that were involved in the focus groups.

*Case study centres*

Purposive sampling has been recommended as suitable for case studies (Stake, 2000) to explore particular phenomena in depth. In adaptive theory, "problem sampling" is the term used in the selection of case study sites to ensure "typicalness" (Layder, 2013, p. 102). In this research

design, this involved early child care centres that were enacting Australian government policy, and therefore were relevant to the research topic being investigated. The case studies were specifically selected because of the likelihood of being able to gather empirical data to address the research questions and of achieving explanatory outcomes (Layder, 2013).

**Table 3.3: Director focus group participants**

|   | ECE teacher bachelor qual | Other related bachelor degree qual | No early childhood qual | Centre size (number of child places) | Years in early childhood education | Director years in current centre |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FOCUS GROUP 1** | | | | | | |
| 1 | ✓ | | | 60–80 | 16+ | 6–10 |
| 2 | ✓ | | | 60–80 | 11–15 | 1–5 |
| 3 | ✓ | | | 40–50 | 6–10 | 1–5 |
| 4 | ✓ | | | 40–50 | 16+ | 6–10 |
| 5 | | | ✓ | 80+ | 6–10 | 6–10 |
| **FOCUS GROUP 2** | | | | | | |
| 6 | ✓ | | | 40–50 | 6–10 | 1–5 |
| 7 | ✓ | | | < 40 | 16+ | 6–10 |
| 8 | ✓ | | | 60–80 | 16+ | 1–5 |
| 9 | ✓ | | | 60–80 | 16+ | 11–15 |
| 10 | ✓ | | | 80+ | 16+ | 15+ |
| 11 | ✓ | | | 40–50 | 16+ | 610 |
| 12 | | ✓ | | 60–80 | 16+ | 11–15 |

In pursuing purposive sampling, two case study centres were required in which staff were participating in professional development and learning. The rationale for selecting two case studies was to enable analytical comparison during data analysis, thereby affording strong and relevant

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conceptual and analytic potential (Layder, 1998, 2013). Those directors who had participated in the focus groups, and had indicated support for collaborative professional development and learning together with shared leadership arrangements were assessed as offering possibilities for relevant data collection for this research. Two directors were invited to participate as case study centres and both accepted.

The two centres selected were similar in many respects and could be considered as typical of Australian child care centres in their organisational structural arrangements. These comprised three children's rooms in age-related groupings of infants, toddlers and kindergarteners with 70–80 children attending each day. The size of the staff teams were similar, with more than 15 educators employed at each centre. Both centres were located in inner metropolitan areas located within five kilometres of a state capital city.

Centre A was located in a mixed socio-economic community with complexity arising from the provision of a state-funded preschool program and federally funded child care services. Centre B operated in a low socio-economic area with a culturally and linguistically diverse community. The positional leadership structures were also similar with a room leader responsible for each of the children's rooms. All of these positional leaders held diploma-level qualifications. Although Centre A employed two early childhood teachers neither held a formal leadership position at their centre.

One difference in the organisational structures of the case study centres was that Centre B had introduced a tiered leadership structure in which each children's room had a position titled "senior" (leader) and a second position of "team leader" (or room leader). The director explained that this structure was designed to encourage more educators to accept leadership responsibilities with the aim of increasing educators' engagement and motivation. Within this model, the seniors were responsible for leading the quality of the curriculum and pedagogy while the team leaders were responsible for operational tasks such as organising the day-to-day

staffing and relief. In terms of functionality the senior role was similar to a typical room leader position and it became apparent after the first round of interviews that the senior leader held the decision-making power. In the publications arising from this research and in the discussion chapter, for ease of expression and to safeguard the anonymity of the centre, the generic term of "room leader" was applied to the seniors who were leading the staff groups. Where necessary, however, a distinction was made between the teachers and positional leaders in Centre A and between the senior leader and the team leader in Centre B.

**Table 3.4: Summary of Centre A and Centre B organisational conditions**

|  | Centre A | Centre B |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Centre community | Mixed clientele, predominantly professionally employed families<br><br>15% children from CALD background | Low socio-economic demographic<br><br>Culturally diverse<br><br>80% children from CALD background |
| Complexity | Integrated state-funded preschool and federally funded child care | Kindergarten children attend a local preschool |
| Number of children | 70–80 | 70–80 |
| Organisation of rooms/groups | 3 groupings of children: babies, toddlers and kindergarten | 3 groupings of children: babies, toddlers and kindergarten |
| Director qualifications | Bachelor of ECE | Bachelor of Social Science |
| Early childhood teachers | 2 | None at commencement<br><br>1 EC teacher employed during course of the data collection |
| Diploma-qualified educators | 9 | 6 |
| Certificate lll educators | 3 | 8 |
| Unqualified staff | 2 | 3 |

*Survey questionnaire*

Much of the existing professional development and leadership research has relied on data from leaders only and has not gathered the perspectives of staff that do not hold positional roles. The aim of collecting data from educators and staff throughout the case study centres was to give voice to all educators, to explore the perspectives of all of the staff regarding their experience of professional development and learning and leadership. In addition, a survey also performed an important methodological function of collecting complementary data which enhanced theory development and application in real world contexts.

Survey data were sought from all educators and staff in the case study centres. Although the survey questions were primarily aimed at educators employed on a permanent basis, casually employed relief staff, administrative and ancillary staff were also invited to complete the survey to offer a richer picture of experiences. Both directors recommended that the most efficient way to administer the survey was to provide time for staff to complete the survey during a regular staff meeting. Completed surveys were received from 18 staff at each centre including two ancillary staff in each centre. Details of the qualifications of the survey participants appear in Chapter Five, Table 1.

Staff that participated in the survey ranged across diverse qualifications, age and years of experience in early childhood education and care. Of the 18 participants completing the survey in each centre, two participants in ancillary roles in each centre were not included in the analysis of data in Chapter Five. However, these participants' responses indicated knowledge of the overall conditions and added value in interrogating analytical concepts that were developing, and were particularly helpful in confirming trends in each of the centres. With the exception of one male qualified educator, all participants in this research were female. Participants varied in their years of experience working within the centre. Across the two case study centres, there were nine participants that had in excess of 11 years of service and these were equally divided between the

centres. Centre A had two staff that had less than 12 months' experience and across the two centres there were similar distributions of staff with less than 5 years' service with Centre A having 10 and Centre B having 12 staff.

No patterns were discernible for age of participants, qualifications and their perspectives. Rather, patterns could be seen amongst educators within each centre. These patterns were discussed in Publication 2 (Colmer et al., 2014), which is reproduced as Chapter Five of this thesis.

*Individual interviews*

Individual interviews with educator participants from the two case study centres were held on two separate occasions. The first interviews were held at the commencement of the case study work, and the second round of interviews were held 15–18 months later. Interviews were designed to explore the attitudes and understandings of the two case study centre directors and a selection of educators regarding their experience of professional development and learning and their views of how educational change occurred within their centre.

In locating interviewees, the case study centre directors were invited to nominate four educators who could talk about professional development and learning. Directors were invited to select interviewees for Round 1 interviews because, as directors, they could be expected to choose educators who were knowledgeable about professional development and learning. In this way, the principles of purposive sampling could be realised (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) through the involvement of a key informant, the centre director.

Round 2 interviews enabled gaps in the data to be explored and provided an opportunity to examine the concepts forming through ongoing analysis of all data. During analytical processes, several gaps in data sources had been identified which resulted in me making specific requests for interviewees. For example, neither of the teachers in Centre A had been interviewed initially and the analysis of the survey data had indicated that

one teacher held views that professional development for teachers occurred only with other teachers, rather than being inclusive of child care educators. Not only was this perspective contrary to the majority of perspectives of educators in Centre A but the director had observed her error in not involving the teachers in the centre inquiry project. Analysis of Centre B data had revealed that an early childhood teacher had been employed following Round 1 interviews but the survey indicated that educators with diploma-level qualifications lacked understanding of the value and purpose of the teacher's pedagogical role. I requested interviews with the early childhood teachers in both centres.

Further, the data analysis from interviews, and the survey of Centre B, had revealed tensions between formal leaders and educators who had not attained diploma-level qualifications or those educators who worked on a part-time basis. Although two educators in Centre A who did not hold formal leadership positions had been interviewed in the first round, there was no comparable data from an equivalent position for Centre B. The selection of an educator who did not hold a formal leadership position offered an opportunity to gain insights into experiences at different levels of the organisational hierarchy within Centre B.

It was hoped that the second interviews would provide insights about interactions and relationships throughout the centres, as educators worked to progress the reforms. There was also perceived value in re-interviewing some of the previous interviewees to understand how their perceptions may have changed over time as they engaged in professional development and learning to implement the national reforms. By the time of the second interviews there had been staff changes due to resignations of staff in both centres; both of the teachers in Centre A had been replaced and there were two new positional leaders in Centre B.

**Table 3.5: Details of interview participants**

| Participant | Position | Qualification | Years in current centre | Round 1 | Round 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | CENTRE A | | | |
| A1 | Director | Bachelor Early Childhood Education | 1–5 | ✓ | ✓ |
| A2 | Qualified Educator | Advanced Diploma Children's Services | 6–10 | ✓ | ✓ |
| A3 | Qualified Educator | Diploma Children's Services | 6–10 | ✓ | ✓ |
| A4 | Room Leader | Diploma Children's Services | 1–5 | ✓ | ✓ |
| A5 | Assistant Director | Diploma Children's Services | 6–10 | ✓ | ✓ |
| A6 | Teacher | Bachelor ECE | 1–5 | | ✓ |
| | | CENTRE B | | | |
| B1 | Director | Bachelor Social Services (EC) | 11–15 | ✓ | ✓ |
| B2 | Room Leader | Diploma Children's Services | 6–10 | ✓ | ✓ |
| B3 | Assistant Director | Diploma Children's Services | 15+ | ✓ | |
| B4 | Qualified Educator | Diploma Children's Services | 1–5 | ✓ | |
| B5 | Room Leader | Diploma Children's Services | 11–15 | ✓ | ✓ |
| B6 | Educator | Cert lll | 15+ | | ✓ |
| B7 | Teacher/ Room Leader | M Early Childhood Education | < 1 | | ✓ |

### *Data collection processes*

In implementing a methodological process aligned with Layder's (1998) adaptive theory, a multi-method approach to data collection was designed. Processes were selected and arranged to gather broad data initially, followed by deeper exploration using data from individuals within the specific social settings. This design also represented a mixed methods approach enabling the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to explore the research questions adequately (Collins et al., 2007). The four data collection strategies utilised in this study are described next.

### *Focus groups*

Focus group discussions yield qualitative data and are often utilised at a preliminary or exploratory stage of a research study (Gibbs, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). By enabling the efficient collection of a diversity of perspectives, this strategy can assist in clarifying issues in a holistic way (Silverman, 2010). Focus groups involve a socially constructed conversation among diverse participants, thereby producing rich data (Onwuegbuzie, Dickenson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009) that can contribute to understanding the scope of the phenomenon being researched.

This method is relevant in this study because of the lack of empirical evidence relating to the research questions within early childhood contexts. The focus groups gathered data from early childhood centre directors to canvass broader insights about the rationale for their decisions relating to professional development and learning and how curriculum reform was supported within their early childhood centres. During the focus groups, participants engaged in a conversation that was guided by the researcher (Macnaghten & Myers, 2007) and which developed through the interactions between the participants (Gibbs, 1997; Peterson & Barron, 2007). Although such conversations are recognised as constructed because they would not normally occur, the data obtained is held as valuable in offering "slices of modified ordinary conversation" (Macnaghten & Myers, 2007, p. 76), collected at a particular time and place. Indeed,

these authors argue that focus groups provide meaningful conversation about a familiar topic, providing deeper insights because of the highly focused nature of the data collection.

Each focus group was of 90 minutes duration, with participants encouraged to contribute to the shared discussion about their experiences of professional development and how curriculum changes were made in their centres. In supporting the inclusion of all participants, the researcher had prepared prompt questions and was prepared to facilitate contributions from less vocal participants (Macnaghten & Myers, 2007). There was little need for researcher guidance during these focus group discussions, however, as participants joined freely in a rich and focused professional conversation offering reflections of their experiences of educational change. Embedded within these conversations was information about the directors' experiences of implementing the EYLF and their underpinning beliefs and attitudes regarding educators' learning and educational reform.

*Case study centres*

For the purposes of this research, case studies were considered well suited to the research questions and aims and offered a procedural approach (Stake, 2000) to undertake a holistic and systematic exploration of complexity (Verschuren, 2003). Case studies enable in-depth examination of processes within a particular cultural context (Verschuren, 2003). A rich picture of activities undertaken within a specific setting can be anticipated, enabling the development of understanding of how different social factors interact (Swanborn, 2010) in influencing organisational members. Case studies are also considered effective in studying a process after an event and are commonly advocated to allow researchers to gain insights about people and settings that reflect what occurs in everyday life (Willis, 2007). In addition, case studies are considered to be effective for discovering relationships (Stake, 2000) or associations between various variables or interdependent factors (Gummesson, 2007). Indeed, Gummesson argues that case studies

enable the examination of "complexity, context, ambiguity and chaos" (2007, p. 229), suggesting strong possibilities for explaining an interrelationship between leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres.

The purpose of the case studies in this research was to provide insights about the complex interplay of the interactions, relationships and behaviours that occurred among educators during professional development and learning, thereby enabling the interconnectedness of leadership to be studied (Verschuren, 2003). The rationale for undertaking a case study approach of an early childhood centre as a specific case was to enable exploration of the impact of different social domains. These included external and internal influences, how educators were influenced by events, and the effects of interactions that occurred among educators during professional development and learning. The methods of data collection gathered information about what happened within the centre as the organisation responded to the reforms and the actions undertaken, while also providing insights about educators' attitudes, meanings and relationships. A case study approach facilitated the exploration of the influence of both structure and agency.

Verschuren (2003) argues that in holistic case studies where complex processes are studied there is lower variability in complex issues than when studying separate variables. Therefore, small samples of strategically selected cases were considered sufficient to address the research aims. In selecting two centres as cases, the aim was to strengthen the analysis by undertaking constant comparisons of the developing analytical concepts, enabling every research decision to be "filtered through a comparative viewpoint" (Layder, 2013, p. 116). This is an important clarification, as the purpose was not to compare the efficacy of professional learning across the two centres or to make judgements about the quality of leadership; rather the two centres were included in this research as a way of enhancing the quality of the data and analysis,

capturing perspectives of early childhood educators engaged in everyday work.

Analytical comparisons of cases can support explanation of a particular phenomenon through offering a mechanism to question the relevance of concepts against both of the cases (Layder, 2013; Verschuren, 2003). In qualitative case study research, such an approach offers opportunities to challenge concept development during analysis of qualitative data and to study the limits of a theory (Silverman, 2010; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2010).

Although differences can be expected within the case study settings, such as organisational social rules, roles, positions, and the expectations of educators that could influence interactions, there is likely to be a great deal of similarity in how social life within the centres is organised. This is due to the influence of broad structural traditions or discourses (Cunliffe, 2010) of early childhood education and care that affect conceptualisations of how early childhood settings are organised (Winter, 2012).

*Survey questionnaire*

In adaptive theory approaches, Layder (2013) advocates flexibility in design and sampling strategies and the integration of qualitative and quantitative data. In particular, the use of "questionnaire surveys" (Layder, 2013, p. 100) are advocated as valuable when exploring cases or sites, as they enable the exploration of the empirical links between different social domains.

In this study, the use of a survey questionnaire within the case study centres was relevant and represented purposive sampling, enabling the collection of data from all members of the case study centres (Layder, 2013). According to Layder, the members of an organisation comprise a bounded group and undertaking a survey within a case can offer new insights. For example, the first round of interviews were conducted with educators in positional leadership roles which was not representative of all organisational members in the case study centres. The survey questionnaire collected data from all staff in the case study centres which

provided complementary data (Bryman, 2006) and a richer perspective of experiences.

The staff questionnaire was developed after undertaking analysis of the qualitative data from focus groups and the first round of interviews. The questionnaire was an amalgam of the key concepts and questions arising from the analysis of the early qualitative data and facilitated the examination of the preliminary concepts, thereby offering a means of either supporting or challenging the ideas being developed.

Principles applied in the construction of the survey included avoidance of ambiguous questions, double-barrelled questions and double negatives (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Prior to the administration, the survey was piloted with educators with varying experience and qualifications from a non-participating centre, which enabled ambiguities to be corrected. Further, it was deemed unnecessary to undertake factor analysis to establish reliability because of the small sample size (Ivankova, 2014) comprising 36 participants across the two case study centres. The purpose of this survey was not to argue statistical relevance; rather, the survey offered a way to meet the research goal of gathering data from all educators throughout an organisation and thereby ascertaining a wider range of perspectives on what was occurring in relation to professional development and learning within the case study centres.

The survey sought to probe staff attitudes and perceptions about their opportunities and to corroborate details about attitudes towards leadership and collaborative professional learning. While predominantly quantitative, the survey (refer to Appendix 12) included 30 statements about professional development, professional learning and leadership which were presented in a Likert scale with choices of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. One question invited participants to select from a list of categories and two open-ended questions sought qualitative data exploring staff understandings of the concepts of professional development and professional learning.

The value of the analysis from the survey questionnaire can be seen in Chapter Five (see pages 191-194), where specific concepts were examined. For example, in relation to the distribution of leadership throughout a centre, the analysis of the first round of interviews in Centre A suggested that most of the positional leaders interviewed, held the view that leadership of professional development and learning could be enacted broadly within the centre. The questionnaire enabled this concept to be examined more deeply through the statement "in our centre any educators can have a role in leading professional development and learning". The analysis of this survey question indicated that this concept reflected the wider perspective in Centre A with 77% of educators and staff agreeing with this statement. In contrast, survey data indicated that such a view was not representative of Centre B where only 38% of educators endorsed this perspective and all of these respondents were in leadership positions. Each statement in the questionnaire was interrogated in this way to examine the relevance of the emerging concepts.

*Individual interviews*

Face-to-face interviews need to be recognised as a social encounter between an interviewer and interviewee, in which the interviewee may be focused on presenting themselves as a credible candidate for interview (Rapley, 2007). An inherent power imbalance exists in an interview situation (Rapley, 2007) and therefore, caution is needed and a researcher cannot assume that an interview provides a true and accurate account of reality but rather offers a perception or an interpretation of events or a context. Charmaz (2004) maintains that researchers must be fully present in interviews, in order to obtain a sense of an interviewee's experience which can provide additional insights.

The interviews were aimed at exploring how centres typically organised professional development and learning, the processes utilised and the relationships that interviewees perceived as helpful in encouraging professional learning. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used to obtain data in qualitative research and can be expected to elicit candid

accounts from participants which offer insights into people's subjective experience (Rapley, 2007; Silverman, 2010). Prepared questions served as prompts to keep the conversation focused but most of the interviews were free-flowing conversations (see Appendices 11 and 13 for interview guiding questions). An open and reflexive style of conversation was pursued and interviewees were invited to talk about their own experiences of professional development. The informal nature of the conversations enabled topics that appeared to have relevance to the participants to be pursued.

All interviews were held during normal centre operating hours with casual relief staff organised to enable participants to leave their rooms. At the commencement of each interview permission was sought to tape the interview and the researcher explained that the discussion was confidential to the researcher and research supervisors and that no-one else had access to this information. In being mindful of the power differential, I worked to create a rapport with each interviewee to gain their trust (Rapley, 2007). I was conscious of my behaviour and body language (Charmaz, 2004) and had arranged informal seating, in particular avoiding the use of a table which would have created formality and a physical barrier. Although I aimed to maintain a neutral demeanour there was, at times, a need to be empathic and to respond where participants shared their personal challenges of working in early childhood contexts. I am aware that claims of neutrality are not possible (Rapley, 2007) and I recorded notes regarding my own emotional responses in my researcher journal.

For the first round of interviews, prompt questions were developed from the preliminary analysis (Silverman, 2010) of the focus group data and from the extant theoretical materials examined during the literature review (Layder, 2013). For example, Robinson's work (2009) had suggested that it was possible to identify leaders by asking participants who were the people that influenced them. The relevance of Robinson's theorising about influence was explored progressively. During the first interviews attention

was paid to the explanations of how educators sought others to support their learning about new practice and considerable attention was paid to specific positions or educators who were identified in the various interviews. A question was then included in the staff survey asking participants to nominate the person who most supported their professional learning. Rather than asking for names, which may have been threatening, a list of role positions was offered for selection. When mapped in a social network diagram, responses to this question revealed patterns of influence throughout each of the centres. These diagrams can be found in Chapter Five.

The Round 2 interviews enabled specific themes and questions that had arisen from the ongoing analysis of data and the refinement of the coding system to be explored. These included the centre professional networks, the people who were influential within each of the centres and participants' understandings of their own contribution to professional development and learning and their ability to influence others. This line of inquiry offered insights about how educators sought to exert influence through their relationships and professional conversations, yielding valuable data about the complex relationships that contributed to educator satisfaction with their work. Thus, specific questions in Round 2 interviews were influenced by the analysis of the survey data, enabling the exploration of the interrelationships between different social domains in the case study centres.

**Data collation and analysis**

Following data collection and analysis from the second round of interviews it became apparent that there was a reduction in new information being offered by the participants. For example, in Centre A all Round 2 interviews were shorter in duration with most being around 35 minutes compared to over 60 minutes in Round 1. Likewise, at Centre B new perspectives were gathered during Round 2, but only from the teacher and the educator with certificate-level training. Overall there was a repetition of themes from the first interviews. In practical terms, sampling can cease

once a researcher is satisfied that sufficient information has been collected to answer the core problem (Layder, 2013) or when there is no new information or insights appearing from the analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Layder's (2013) adaptive approach offered a systematic method of analysing the data while incorporating a social domains matrix to depict different social dimensions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in using a matrix for analysis (see Table 3.1), the social domains do not all need to be examined equally. Depending on the nature of the research questions, some domains will attract more analytical attention than others (Layder, 1998, 2013). In this way, the influences of different social domains (Layder, 1993) could be considered. In proposing that methods be used that address the macro–micro context, researchers are encouraged to "tack between aspects of social life (subjective and objective), which requires different kinds of theoretical, conceptual or theoretical depictions" (Layder, 1993, p. 203). Analysing data from different sources concurrently also supports processes of integration of data sources and can enhance the analysis and interpretation (Collins et al., 2007).

As the research questions in this study examined the nature of the social interaction that occurred among the educators during their professional development and learning experiences, there was a larger focus on the situated activity or inter-subjective domain. The system domain also attracted my attention, as the organisational infrastructure can be expected either to support collaborative activities or to impede such social activity among educators. Although there was less emphasis on both the context and the subjective domains, analytical insights from both of these domains assisted greatly in understanding the impact of crucial interactions and relationships. For instance, in analysing participants' subjective experiences it was possible to glean insights into how interactions at the inter-subjective domain either encouraged or discouraged their initiatives in professional learning. Likewise, it was possible to explore the broader social discourses to understand the

leadership role of a director in positively interpreting external pressures for educators. These relationships were presented in Chapter Six.

Data were initially analysed utilising a preliminary coding framework that had been developed from the orienting concepts derived from extant theoretical concepts identified in the literature in Chapter Two. These concepts were progressively refined through constant comparison of codes, data and concepts, as Layder (2013) suggests. The matrix was particularly helpful in the latter processes of data analysis, supporting an examination of the interrelationships of influences at subjective, inter-subjective and organisational (system) levels, as will be shown later in this chapter (see Table 3.12). In this way, the analytical processes supported the investigation of influences and interactions in different social domains and integrated the data sources and analysis.

### *Data transcription*

The focus groups and interviews were recorded digitally and converted to transcripts using Word documents. The transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy by the researcher and the Word files thoroughly compared with the audio files. During the review of the transcripts, notations were made to reflect pauses in speech and emotional exchanges, which was particularly relevant for understanding participants' emotional responses. This process of checking transcripts against audio files provided an opportunity to become intimate with the detail of each interview and focus group discussion. All interviewees were invited to review the transcript of their interview to incorporate a process of member checking (Creswell, 2003). However, only one participant (Director of Centre B) requested a copy of her transcript. Although the transcript was emailed to her with an invitation to provide feedback none was received despite the researcher following up on more than one occasion.

### *Data management*

NVivo 9 software (QSR International, 2010) is a comprehensive software program that offered a systematic storage and retrieval system for all

records associated with this research project, which assisted in the analysis of qualitative data. NVivo supported analysis of text through the use of nodes that represented codes or categories that were constructed by the researcher. Particular strengths of the program were the ability to create reports of coding structures and summaries, visual depictions of patterns and themes to support the examination of relationships, and the maintenance of records of decisions during analysis; all of which contributed to providing a strong audit trail which supported validity and rigour (Bazeley, 2007).

The quantitative data from the survey were collated in Excel spreadsheets and the qualitative questions included in the survey were transcribed into a Word document and coded to the specific participant. Excel allowed the creation of graphs which assisted in depicting the relative importance of particular responses. These spreadsheets were subsequently imported into NVivo. These processes enabled comparison between the findings for the two centres which were used in the discussion of findings. An example of how data from the surveys was used can be found in Publication 2, where quantitative responses to particular questions were counted to provide either supporting evidence for a particular finding from the qualitative data, or were used to query the relevance of the concept within a particular centre (see Chapter Five).

*Establishing a coding system*

The process of analysing qualitative empirical data began by using provisional codes or segments of text, drawing where appropriate on the orienting concepts listed in Table 2.1. Layder's (2013) rationale for the use of orienting concepts is that they assist in locating conceptual rather than descriptive codes which encourages abstract and analytical thinking rather than focusing on descriptive codes. Such a technique is not unique to adaptive theory approaches; for example, Charmaz (2007, p. 80) proposes the term "sensitizing concepts" to provide an initial "analytic handle". Grounded theory approaches advocate open coding or initial coding, whereby codes are generated directly from the data (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967) to avoid data being forced into particular conceptual categories. However, Kelle (2007) observes that attempts at theory-free coding in qualitative data derive from misunderstanding of the nature of grounded theory. According to Hammersley (2009), referring to several existing theories to explain results is a widely endorsed practice in research which has coherence with Layder's adaptive approach.

In practical terms, orienting concepts provided an umbrella for the coding system developed in this study. Constantly tracking back to the orienting or theoretical concepts from the research literature proved valuable in labelling and categorising new codes which maintained focus and direction in the early stages of the research (Layder, 2013). The freedom to apply theoretical concepts also supported deepening understanding of relationships between groups of codes, enabling the refinement of the codes.

### *Coding processes*

A feature of the adaptive approach is that, although data collection occurred sequentially, analysis and reflection occurred concurrently (Layder, 1998). Coding of all Word documents was carried out as an iterative process that cycled backwards and forwards through the data to check the fit of the assigned codes to the data and to check the relevance of the concepts being developed. Throughout the coding of the qualitative data, codes were allocated where possible to reflect the initial orienting concepts.

There were, however, challenges in restricting the initial coding to the orienting concepts alone where multiple nuances became evident almost immediately. For example, a key orienting code was the significance of the overall site leadership of the director with "strong leadership" recommended (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). In analysing the data using an orienting concept of [strong] "director role/responsibilities" with a particular emphasis on how a director may exert strength in this role, multiple and diverse aspects of a director's role were identified in the data.

Eventually, this list ballooned into 22 aspects of a director's leadership functions, attributes and attitudes, and none of these easily reflected the terminology "strong".

The value of the orienting concept, however, was the conceptual power in keeping the researcher focused on the purpose of identifying a director's leadership in relation to professional learning and specifically supporting collaboration, as Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) argue. Without an umbrella or orienting concept for guidance, the multiple aspects of leadership may have resulted in a predominantly descriptive account of a director's responsibilities and qualities. This was not the goal of this research as such explanations have been explored thoroughly in earlier leadership research (see for example Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Jorde-Bloom, 1991; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006).

Furthermore, the decisions relating to coding involved ongoing examination of the transcripts and re-listening to the audio files on several occasions as part of the analytical processes (Yin, 2010), which assisted the researcher in recalling the interactions between the researcher and the participants, thus promoting a nuanced appreciation of meaning (Rapley, 2007). An adaptive approach recommends the continuous assessment of codes and data to determine whether the data matches the code allocated or whether an alternative code may be required (Layder, 2013).

Table 3.6 outlines the initial orienting codes, together with associated codes that emerged in the early analysis of the qualitative data from focus groups and case study centres. It is worth noting that the code "casual staff", had not been evident in the literature review but as data was analysed this code was persistently evident, if not frequently. For this reason, it was added as an additional code when analysing data from Round 1 interviews.

## Refinement of the coding system

As the coding work progressed, the orienting concepts were refined as appropriate. Where an orienting concept did not present an adequate explanation, a new code derived from the data was assigned. During these processes efforts were made to focus on conceptual rather than descriptive codes so many of these alternate codes were influenced by the researcher's reading of the literature. These alternate codes, where possible, were organised either under the orienting concepts or as an associated code, resulting in clusters of satellite codes. Layder (2013) distinguishes between core and satellite concepts, arguing that core concepts are those that are central because of their ability to support several related or supporting concepts.

**Table 3.6: Extract of the coding system in the early stages of analysis of data**

| Code | Sub-codes |
|---|---|
| 1. Director responsibilities | <ul><li>Building staff capacity</li><li>Delegation</li><li>Analysis and problem solving</li><li>Pedagogical leadership</li><li>Control</li></ul> |
| 2. Collaborative ethos and approaches | <ul><li>Shared time</li><li>Group work</li></ul> |
| 3. Centre organisational structures (including leadership structures) | <ul><li>Rooms/team arrangements</li><li>Formal leadership arrangements</li><li>Distributed leadership</li></ul> |
| 4. Processes for professional development and learning | <ul><li>Outside PD (individuals)</li><li>External providers</li><li>Internal facilitation (collective)</li><li>Assessment of staff needs</li></ul> |
| 5. Professional learning activities (incorporating project approaches) | <ul><li>Processes and exploration</li><li>Project approaches</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| 6. Curriculum change | • Events |
| | • Planning |
| | • Processes |
| 7. Individual agency/meaning | • Emotional responses |
| | • Motivation |
| | • Choices |
| | • Resistance |
| 8. Casual staff | • Impact |

Source: NVivo file Node Summary (dated 7 March 2012).

Layder recommends the adoption of a coding system using satellite codes which are subsidiary codes; these subsidiary codes are critical in the development of an explanation of a phenomenon because they contribute both to the elaboration of the core concept and in understanding the interrelationships between concepts (Layder, 2013).

As analysis progressed, codes were examined and constantly checked against the full data set and existing codes to explore the relationships between codes for the purpose of differentiating between core and satellite concepts. Processes of ongoing refinement of the coding system are critical in qualitative research as is the modification or elaboration of codes over time (Layder, 2013). For example, returning to the example of the director's role, initially 22 aspects of a director's role were identified and examined in detail, which included a process of asking questions about the implications of the various codes. These codes were progressively grouped into abstract conceptualisations of a director's role in leading professional development and learning, which supported an umbrella code of the director as pedagogical leader for the centre.

**Table 3.7: The codes relating to director roles and responsibilities prior to refining**

| Director responsibilities |
| --- |
| • building staff capacity<br>• assessment of staff needs<br>• collaboration<br>• confidence<br>• director as facilitator of PD<br>• driver of PD&L<br>• director as pedagogical leader<br>• consultation<br>• delegation<br>• control<br>• problem solving<br>• analysis<br>• nurturing<br>• identifying potential leaders<br>• networking<br>• director role/affirmation<br>• capitalises on learning opportunities<br>• support projects approaches<br>• as learner<br>• monitoring staff engagement & participation in PD&L<br>• have high expectations of staff<br>• creates the culture. |

For example, under the code of "analysis", directors were clearly making a range of assessments which involved complex consideration of not only the needs of the centre and individual educators but also strategies to enhance educators' participation in professional development and learning. Table 3.8 provides an extract of the detail from a researcher

memo exploring all the nodes associated with the director's role. In this memo, processes of fine tuning the coding structure included comparison of codes with actual data.

As part of the processes of assessing the specific leadership roles played by the director, relationships were examined between groups of nodes and data sources. For example, there was overlap with the coding for the formal positional leaders where some of the codes for director leadership were the same for positional leaders. When all the nodes relating to leadership of professional learning were examined and collated, the following codes were identified from the broader list which related to both directors and in some instances to others who occupied formal leadership positions (see Table 3.9).

**Table 3.8: Extract from memo re director leadership responsibilities for professional learning**

| FOCUS GROUP 1 | FOCUS GROUP 2 |
|---|---|
| Director analyses situations and PD&L needs for whole of centre | |
| "analysed needs and planned internal leaders day with Asst Dir"<br><br>"as leaders [director] is to ground our staff before they go out to these things"<br><br>"been in my role a year ... and still find it hard to get the message out at a 56 place centre"<br><br>"working out who were the best staff to then hone in on and then say, this is how we need to get the message out about the new curriculum"<br><br>"as a leader you have to know your staff and their needs so that you can give them the direction" | "Role of director to analyse situations (that can be addressed via PD). "I think as leader, in regards to the Early Years Learning Framework, it is just having an idea about what we are needing to ... it's having that vision, where we need to go, having the time frame in which it needs to be achieved."<br><br>"I laid the foundation then earmarked some training for different people, because I think people are all different levels."<br><br>"I think also as a leader [it's] about looking forward, I also have to spend time for myself looking back. And I have to, sort of go, 'What has happened? How does that impact where we might go or where we are going ahead?'"<br><br>"as a leader I like to think that I am, I think I am [a] big picture person and have that vision" |

| Leaders are active learners with staff (includes director and room leaders) |
|---|

"we [did it] together with three staff that have the best leadership qualities and what we were trying to achieve"

"[I am] someone there to help lead at all times"

"if they are leaders then they really need to go into it very deep so that they can then explain it as we roll stuff out"

"And that you do need people to help you – my first role was to identify the staff and their strengths and what they understood about their Early Years Learning Framework."

"Senior leadership team to brainstorm approach to PD&L together"

"director & TL undertaking PD&L to lead others in team"

[with team] "Each time you learn more. You never stop learning."

"lots of support from the Assistant Director, she had her head into it, into the Early Years …"

Source: NVivo Memo (dated 7 October 2012).

**Table 3.9: Memo exploring data linkages between leadership and PDL**

- Director analyses situations and PD&L for whole of centre.
- Director drives PD&L.
- Director acts as a facilitator of PD&L within centre (and externally).
- Staff are supported to facilitate PD&L.
- Director capitalises on learning opportunities.
- Leaders support inquiry or project approaches.
- Leaders are active learners with staff (includes director and room leaders).
- Leadership group drives PD&L.
- Shared leadership of learning.
- Leaders monitor staff engagement, participation and progress in PDL.
- Leaders give staff a voice in PD&L.
- Staff have power and autonomy in decisions about learning (staff are leaders of their own learning).
- Leaders have [high] expectations of staff and expect staff to take responsibility.

- Leaders support learning from failures.
- Leaders value networking outside of the centre as part of learning.
- Leader creates the culture [of PD&L]

Source: NVivo Memo dated 7 April 2013).

The above list of aspects of leadership linkages to PDL was organised conceptually which resulted in the following organisation of conceptual codes and sub-codes.

**Table 3.10: Refinement of director roles/responsibilities coding**

| Concept | Sub-codes |
|---|---|
| **Director analyses (and assesses) situations for PD&L for whole of centre (capacity building)** | • Director "drives" PD&L.<br>• Director is a facilitator of PD&L within centre.<br>• Staff are supported to facilitate PD&L.<br>• Director capitalises on learning opportunities. |
| **Director creates the culture of professional learning (PL)** | • Collaboration<br>• Nurturing and affirming<br>• Creating learning opportunities. |
| **Leadership group (formal leaders) have responsibilities for PD&L** | • Leaders have [high] expectations of staff and expect staff to take responsibility.<br>• Leaders support internal project approaches (including inquiry).<br>• Leaders monitor staff engagement, participation and progress in PD&L.<br>• Leaders give staff a voice in PD&L. |
| **Shared leadership of professional learning** | • Leaders are active learners with staff (includes director and room leaders).<br>• Staff have power and autonomy in decisions |

| | about learning. |
| | • Leaders value networking (outside of the centre as part of learning) |

Through these analytical processes of examining the codes, the related data and the relationships among different but related codes and sources of data, a conceptual code of "director as pedagogical leader" offered an explanation of all of these related aspects of a director's role, which in turn provided an elaborated picture of the behaviours and attitudes that specifically constitute a director's responsibilities for educators' professional development and learning.

Within Layder's approach (2013) the new code is an "emergent" code, whereby the new code replaces the initial orienting code; in this case the code of the director's [strong] leadership role. The validity of the analytical process was strengthened because the new core concept of pedagogical leadership was found in the extant literature (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Stamopoulos, 2012; Sumsion et al., 2009; Thornton, 2010) and, importantly, could contribute to shaping understanding of the elements of the strong leadership proposed by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007). This process of elaboration encouraged a deeper level of thinking about the concept of strong early childhood leadership particularly when juxtaposed with "nurturing" and concern for staff wellbeing as another category of the director's role.

Examining interrelationships among multiple concepts enabled a more subtle and nuanced approach to understanding how directors might exercise their leadership. Later, while mapping the codes against a social domains matrix, it was possible to see that strong director pedagogical leadership also coexisted with concerns for staff wellbeing, but the focus on pedagogy actually supported educators' sense of worth as seen in the analysis of the subjective domain. This analysis also illuminated another factor of leadership, as a director's capacity to present enabling

interpretations of external discourses that arise from the broader social structure which served to mitigate against negative societal views of early childhood education and hence protected educators from debilitating influences. These connections are discussed in Chapter Six.

These processes of data analysis were undertaken progressively and utilised comparative techniques which illuminated nuances and specificities. In the process of refinement, some initial codes were collapsed into other core concepts while others gained prominence. Similar processes were undertaken with all of the original orienting concepts and, where these proved less satisfactory in offering an adequate explanation for a cluster of codes, alternate codes were identified that provided a better explanation. In these processes of data analysis and refinement, the research log captured coding decisions based on the entries depicting researcher observations, queries and emerging theoretical insights (Layder, 2013). In this way, consolidation of categories occurred throughout analysis of the entire data set, resulting in the refinement of the original coding index.

### *Comparative measures*

A key requirement of adaptive approaches is to constantly compare data sources and social domains (Layder, 1998). Proponents of case study approaches advocate that the examination of two cases can yield contradictory data where the inclusion of a second case may provide a "negative" or "deviant" case (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Silverman, 2010). The techniques of constant comparison and negative cases contribute by providing challenges that prevent a researcher from succumbing to bias (Yin, 2010). White, Drew and Hay (2009) argue that examining more than one case is valuable because it enables an examination of how a phenomenon occurs in different circumstances, thereby offering more reliable understanding. However, according to Stake (2000), conclusions about the differences between any two cases are less likely to be trusted than conclusions about one. In being mindful of this warning, the purpose of studying two cases in this research was to assist

in examining the emerging theoretical concepts. Two cases allowed the developing concepts to be examined for how the complex factors and relationships within each organisation affected the conditions and perceptions of educators.

The following researcher reflection illustrates how questions relating to the data analysis were recorded and relationships considered.

**Table 3.11: Extract from researcher reflective journal exploring coding questions**

| Researcher reflective questions |
| --- |

At each centre there are room leaders who involve educators in discussions and decisions but there are others who are controlling; ie they are in charge! This can be easily explained in traditional roles/position hierarchical ideas. It is interesting to see such different leadership styles within the one centre. In Centre A, I noted only one room leader who tended to this style but in Centre B there was only one leader who didn't use this approach. Both of the directors say they encourage all educators to be involved in discussion.

The question is WHY does this happen – what causes this? And WHAT are the impacts? There is evidence in the data from interviews and the survey that this hierarchy tends to de-motivate educators – for example in Centre B where most room leaders use a controlling style the survey was very powerful in educators believing that they didn't have leadership opportunities. Overall these educators held more negative responses generally, ie about feedback, opportunities for professional development, etc. So the style of leadership could influence educators' state of mind?

I'm not sure what words I can use to describe these different styles of leadership? I need to look in the literature re styles of leadership again. Could this be explained by psychobiology (Layder, 2013) ie a person's disposition? Or could leadership style be learned? Are some room leaders working on traditional models of leadership that they observe socially more broadly? How does the

social setting have a mitigating impact? I'm wondering if the director's role modeling perhaps shapes room leaders' styles?

Is this strong leadership? (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). But this doesn't fit with the discourse about early childhood being based on societal views of women as caring, etc, gender, women's work, motherese???

I'm also wondering about the impact of the ideas of horizontal violence (Hard, 2006) to consider – this was also evident in one of the centres with the description of some staff as "dead wood" – it sounds harsh (I'm sure I've used it myself at times …) but it also reflects the frustration when educators aren't/won't be engaged – the "quit but stay" difficulties when people aren't committed to their roles anymore but won't move on of their own accord.

Source: Reflective journal, 26 July 2013

The use of theoretical memos assisted in analysing and arguing in respect of theoretically influenced decisions. For example, the above extract from my reflective journal highlighted questions arising during analysis of the data from focus groups and case study centres. Here, I raise a number of theoretical questions associated with thinking about my analysis of data relating to different leadership styles. The memo argues that the two distinct leadership styles are:

1. a style that is open, involves others, allows exploration, is encouraging and motivates educators, where knowledge is co-constructed

2. a style that manages and controls what happens, directs and disseminates information to others, where the leader has the knowledge.

The theoretical memo on "leadership styles" outlines the theories examined and the decision making involved in describing the two different leadership styles as either "inclusive" or "directive (and authoritative)" (see

Appendix 15 for an example of a theoretical memo). The memo addresses the need to apply a descriptive but accurate terminology which has meaning for the early childhood sector and justifies the decisions with reference to the literature. In exploring these questions, an observation is made that, these two leadership styles are directly … connected with the style of [professional] learning and perhaps the nature of the learners in the relationship (researcher's memo). Thus, the memo supports the argument and justification of these terms which is presented in Chapter Five.

A later process involved re-examination of the codes utilising Layder's matrix of social domains of structure/social/context; system/organisational/centre; inter-subjective/face-to-face; and subjective/self (see Appendix 16). The aim was to understand the relative influences of various social layers. This task proved difficult to achieve in NVivo and again spreadsheets and diagrams were used to gain insights. This process also contributed substantially to the further refinement of the analysis and coding system. For example, this exercise illuminated the unique and complex social positioning of an early childhood centre director within the social world, exercising influential roles that simultaneously operate at the inter-subjective domain of staff interactions during face-to-face activity while also having potential to shape the system domain of the organisational structure (Colmer, 2013). These social domains combined to influence the subjective domain of educators' meanings. These relationships are presented diagrammatically in Chapter Six.

The above process also clarified thinking in relation to understanding the implications of educators' sense-making and interpretation of their experiences. In reviewing the coding, all nodes were examined against the actual data to determine allocation to a specific social domain. This exercise was done for each centre which also enabled a comparison of key concepts, facilitating comparison where there were inconsistencies or contradictions between codes and searching for explanation. Table 3.12 provides a collated summary of a selection of this work as presented for

Centre A. This exercise was particularly valuable in identifying linkages between a director's leadership and the influences on the inter-subjective and subjective domains, as it revealed patterns of influences. For example the leader's "narrative" about the NQS is likely to influence all educators' views about the impact of engaging with the NQS.

**Table 3.12: Extract from memo exploring linkages between layers of social life following second round of interviews**

| Social domain | Data examples | Key ascribed nodes | Conceptual node |
|---|---|---|---|
| Face-to-face<br><br>Inter-subjective domain | Communication (written & verbal), Professional conversations & reflection among staff<br><br>Centre-wide PD leads to understanding & dialogue<br><br>Collective engagement: staff can collectively have influence/affect actions<br><br>Collaborative professional environment offers:<br><br>- Mutual influence<br><br>- Director presence/influence<br><br>- Staff have opportunities to share & are encouraged to have professional conversations<br><br>- Staff value & respect each other<br><br>- Staff support each other<br><br>- Staff informally discuss professional issues & PD<br><br>- Staff appreciate feedback/guidance<br><br>Inclusive approaches: consulting, questioning, dialogue & exploration (in teams)<br><br>Dynamic room processes<br><br>- Rooms have autonomy for analysis & solutions<br><br>- Shared decision making<br><br>- Sharing leads to team learning and | Influences & motivation<br><br>Processes PDL<br><br>Relationships<br><br>Distributed leadership<br><br>Staff lead in PDL<br><br>Collaborative approaches<br><br>Dialogue & exploration<br><br>Consulting & questioning<br><br>Team learning<br><br>Room autonomy<br><br>Responsibilities (shared)<br><br>External Networking | Professional relationships<br><br>Inclusive leadership styles<br><br>Collective engagement in PDL |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | collective responsibility (deliberately finding ways to engage staff who might be resistant/not participating) | | |
| | Value of networking with external educators via PD | | |
| **Self** **Subjective domain** | Professional growth & self-development and sense of satisfaction | Staff make choices | **Sense of professional identity** |
| | - Staff feel director is interested in them | Sense of agency ownership/auto nomy | **Sense of professionalism** |
| | - Higher access to PDL/PD as a right | Staff take responsibility | |
| | - Ongoing learning beyond qualification | Motivation/satis faction | |
| | - Staff able to pursue individual PD interests (connected to perception of professional growth) | Sense of trust | |
| | - Engage in own critical reflection | Participate in reflection | |
| | - Staff have influence | Director affirmation of staff | |
| | Staff interests coincide with NQS | | |
| | Staff can build their careers | | |
| | Individual sense of ownership & autonomy | | |
| | - Sense of belonging & feeling supported & valued for knowledge, contribution & skills recognised, sense of trust in peers | | |
| | - Staff with individual interests are able to "run" with things | | |
| | - Individual staff have power to institute things | | |
| | - Staff judgement is respected | | |

Source: Memo researcher's journal (dated 2 March 2014)


## Assessing the quality of the research

### *Researcher interests*

My leadership role over many years as the chief executive officer of a large, well-known, integrated and multifunctional early childhood centre, places me in a prominent position within the early childhood field. This has

equipped me with intimate knowledge of day-to-day life within early childhood centres and the nuances involved in the relationships among people within these contexts. In possessing a deep understanding of the context being studied in this research I was able to develop a "deep understanding of [the] studied life" (Charmaz, 2004, p. 980).

When collecting data, I was very aware of the potential for power differentials to impede frank responses from participants. I adopted several strategies to support participants to feel at ease during the focus groups and the interviews. For example, the first focus group was held outside of South Australia and none of the participants knew me personally or professionally. Although some of the participants in this focus group were aware of my professional role, from the outset, I positioned myself as a peer; that is, as an early childhood centre director responding to the demands of educational reform. The second focus group was undertaken with directors in my home state, all of whom I had met in a professional capacity. Again, I conducted the group as a peer within the discussion.

When I reviewed the content of both focus group transcripts there was a great deal of similarity in the content of the discussions, and importantly, each group had progressed as a free flowing conversation in which participants took the lead, took turns, and spoke confidently and authoritatively about their experiences. There was little need for me to guide or prompt either group. The similarity of these discussions suggested to me that my professional relationship with the South Australian participants had not affected their participation. Chapter Four discusses examples of similarities in the content of the focus groups.

Most of the interview participants were aware of my professional role and my association with the organisation that provided some of their professional development. With the exception of the two centre directors who had participated in the focus groups, I had not met any of these interviewees previously. My strategy in interviews was to assure participants at the outset, that my research was not related to my

organisation and that I was not seeking information about professional development courses. Rather, I emphasised that my study was a personal pursuit and that I was grateful that they had agreed to share their experiences of working within their centre with me. Again I positioned myself as a peer within the early childhood field, and worked hard to be fully present in the conversation, responding with empathy and understanding where warranted. An example of my success in this regard, was an interviewee who frankly criticised facilitators from my organisation who had facilitated a workshop in the case study centre. For further details regarding interview techniques see pages106-8.

Much of the research associated with leadership of professional learning involves researchers positioning themselves overtly as observer and participant, and sometimes as facilitator and leader of professional learning (see for example Fleet et al., 2009; Pirard, 2011; Thornton, 2009). From the outset, however, this was not my intention. Rather, the aim of this research was to gain understanding of leadership practices that are enacted during everyday professional development and learning that occurs under normal circumstances within each centre. For these reasons, it was not considered desirable that the research questions and aims would influence directors' decisions regarding professional learning approaches to be adopted in implementing national reform. In this study, the formulation and implementation of each centre's approach to professional development and learning was a product of that centre's leadership and management approaches.

Likewise, direct questions about how leadership was enacted within the centres were avoided as I was aware that there is a tendency for people to report an idealised view of their leadership. Siraj-Blatchford & Manni (2007) explored leadership from the 'ground up' through examining "concrete leadership behaviours rather than simply eliciting leadership beliefs" (p. 7). Their research influenced my approach towards piecing together how leadership was enacted from accounts of centre life.

At all stages of data collection, analysis and write up, I was aware of the risk of personal bias arising from my own experience in early childhood service provision and my involvement in professional development support roles. This required diligence in monitoring how my understandings and beliefs about early childhood influenced my reactions to situations and my interpretations during data collection and analysis. By maintaining field notes that accompanied data collection and by writing a critically reflective journal throughout the study, I aimed to examine my predisposition to various interpretations, both during contact with the centres and in ongoing collection and analysis of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Qualitative research requires that a written trace of the processes and decisions of all aspects of analytical and conceptual development be maintained both to challenge the researcher's assumptions and to offer explanation of decisions. In this research, the journal recorded questions that emerged during data collection and analysis, the decisions relating to coding of data including justifications and categorisation, observations and emerging theoretical insights. Maintenance of this journal contributed to reducing researcher bias and the development of valid interpretations (Golafshani, 2003). Examples of the use of the researcher's journal to raise coding questions and to explore more complex relationships are available in Appendices 14-16, as well as an extract from the researcher's reflective journal displayed in Table 3.11.

Finally, my methodology, which utilised constant comparison (see pages 86 and 131) assisted in reducing potential bias. For example, see the section of how different sources of data were used to verify concepts in Chapter Five (pages 191-193). Concepts arising from the theoretical ideas generated from the literature were also examined for representativeness in relation to both of the case study centres (see Appendix 16). In this way, concepts were developed by combining critical reflection, review of the data and constant comparison across data sets and codes (Layder, 2013). Contradictions were examined to build the plausibility of the concepts selected. The research journal was cross-referenced to the NVivo files and

offered a constant source of data analysis that assisted in contributing to the validity of theory generation in this study.

### *Validity and credibility*

Considerations of research validity are recognised as a concern for qualitative researchers (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Silverman, 2010). In particular, validity in qualitative research is arguably achieved through producing research that is "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 249). These concepts are interconnected in qualitative research and are argued to be achieved through the quality of the researcher, the processes employed and the credibility of the inferences drawn from the data (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Silverman (2010) presented five criteria to judge the quality of qualitative research: the refutability principle, the constant comparative method, comprehensive data treatment, deviant case analysis and using appropriate tabulations (p. 278). Layder's (2013) approach is similar, advocating multiple strategies and methods, the transparency of the arguments and the plausibility of explanations to contribute to validity.

Indeed, quality begins with design and methodologists advocate that the philosophical and methodological design of research should have internal consistency and be complementary (Archer, 1995; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Layder, 1998; Sibeon, 2004). For these reasons the adoption of a systematic paradigm such as adaptive theory offers internal coherence within this research, as it utilises processes of progressively gathering empirical data with iterative and concurrent analysis (Layder, 1998, 2013).

In combining qualitative and quantitative data collected from multiple sources and perspectives there was an ability to cross-validate data (Kemp-Graham, 2015). Thus, complementary sets of data were available and by combining sources and methods a more complete picture was achieved (Bryman et al., 2008) while the risk of missing new insights that can occur with a single method or one source of data was reduced (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). However, issues may arise at points

where different stages are connected and the methodological strategies employed to move from one stage to the next are crucial (Ivankova, 2014). In this research care was taken to ensure that each data source was integrated with the next (Leech, 2012) and the overall analysis and inferences were well connected between and within stages (Ivankova, 2014). Such complementary data collection and analysis assisted in the overall analysis and theory development, providing a means of checking the accuracy of analysis and emerging themes while also contributing to validity (Layder, 1993).

Triangulation is viewed as a validity measure that can be used to assess the quality of research (Hammersley, 2009). Rather than focusing on different types of validity measures, Johnson and Christensen (2004) advocate the possibility of considering the evidence of overall validity within a study. Indeed, Layder (1993) claims that processes of triangulation are in-built within the adaptive theory approach through the use of comparative measures: constant comparison between data sources in conceptual and theory development, and through comparison of empirical data with extant research and broader structural theories (Layder, 2013). Multiple sources of data collection are also seen as providing opportunities to triangulate findings through convergence of categories or concepts arising from different sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and enable corroboration of findings between sources (Bryman, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). These features combined within a research study improve interpretive rigour (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

In this study, data collection began with focus groups of early childhood centre directors from diverse centre backgrounds, enabling a broad scoping of the research issues. This was followed by case studies of two early childhood centres that enabled the collection of data from various individuals reflecting diverse perspectives of social life throughout an early childhood centre. A quantitative staff survey enabled multiple views to be collected, providing data that contributed to the triangulation of the

concepts developed from analysis of the qualitative data from interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Verschuren (2003, p. 130) argues that such a survey embedded within a case study approach provides insights about overall group characteristics, which assists in avoiding "tunnel vision". The survey data enhanced the analysis of the influences of different social domains throughout an organisation, particularly supporting the investigation of influences and interactions among organisational members. Thus quantitative data was able to corroborate qualitative data and analysis from the semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2006).

By combining approaches to data collection from different sources and perspectives over a period of time, multiple perceptions of a single setting or reality (in this research the case study centres) were gathered. Comparison of analysis from within the case study centres, in particular comparing data from interviews with examination of the survey data, assisted in challenging concepts. Furthermore, the selection of two case study sites provided opportunities to challenge concept development through examining supportive or disconfirming evidence and the complexity of associated factors.

In qualitative research, exceptions can be used to modify theories (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, two cases increased the ability to question and challenge the explanatory concepts arising from data analysis which enhanced the theoretical insights developed. Data from different sources and types enabled different perceptions of experience to be gathered, assisting the researcher in clarifying whether the "meanings of different people are really different" (Swanborn, 2010, p. 160). Furthermore, data from individuals provided different perspectives of the social environment and contributed to understanding and verifying events (Stake, 2000) through providing complementary information (Hammersley, 2009). In particular, data of different types deepens the researcher's understanding and contributes to the assessment of possible interpretations of phenomena (Hammersley, 2009).

For example, in Centre A an event was reported by participants in Round 1 which was of significance to many educators and which had the capacity to cause conflict and ongoing animosity. During interviews, four of the five participants referred to the event, commenting on their own interpretation and speculating about other educators' perspectives, with some individuals hypothesising about other research participants' explanation of the event. An examination of these accounts of one event from different individuals revealed there was consistency in participants' descriptions of the event and verified the accuracy of the information provided by interviewees. Importantly, similarities in participants' interpretation provided insights about the level of coherence among the staff in their focus on shared goals and alerted the researcher to the effects of the director's leadership in creating a shared narrative about a difficult situation. This analysis was supported by the subsequent survey data.

Likewise, complementary data for Centre B enabled deeper examination of dissonance between the director's views of opportunities for participation and educators' views of their opportunities. In this centre there were examples of low coherence in interpretation of perspectives between the director, room leaders and educators.

These insights led to an examination of the survey data specifically searching for data relating to coherence, collaboration and synergy between directors' perspectives and those of the staff. These measures supported the development of theorising about the role of leadership in the case study centres, where triangulation was achieved through matching events with what people reported (Goffman 1989 cited in Charmaz, 2004) and in examining for dissonance in attitudes (Rodd, 2014b).

**Chapter summary**

Overall, adaptive theory provided an organic process for tacking back and forth between sources of data. By using adaptive theory where extant research was analysed initially to identify orienting concepts for data analysis, the initial analytical codes were directly linked to conceptual

rather than descriptive ideas emerging from this research. A link was created between the data and the literature analysed and therefore the theory developed.

Where case study research is undertaken in a setting that is similar to others it can be considered a typical setting and a representative case, allowing findings that can "in principle, be generalised more widely" (Layder, 2013, p. 116). While the two case study centres had many similarities, there were key differences. The value of this research lies in the possibilities inherent in the explanation of the complex factors that combine to promote an enabling environment. The typicalness of the centres suggests that the explanations offered could be applied in other early childhood centres.

It is argued that a holistic approach to exploring leadership throughout an organisation as undertaken in this research can contribute to addressing an existing gap in knowledge and understanding about the relationship between early childhood leadership and educators' professional learning. A whole-of-centre focus that includes perspectives of multiple individuals, contextual and organisational factors, as well as consideration of structural influences is an innovative approach to understanding early childhood leadership that moves beyond accounts of leadership as the result of individual agency.

# PART TWO

# Preamble

## Findings chapters

This preamble introduces Chapters Four to Seven comprising the four publications which consider the findings of this research. Three of these publications are journal articles and one is a book chapter. Each publication was peer reviewed prior to publication (as specified in Table 1.1). These four publications are replicated next in Part 2 of this dissertation, presented as published or as a publication submitted for review to an educational journal.

Early childhood centres were recognised as complex social systems that are subject to internal and external influences. An adaptive approach (Layder, 1998) was adopted in theorising this study, enabling different social domains to be examined. In exploring the relationship between leadership and professional learning during curriculum reform in early childhood centres, it was anticipated that leadership would be influenced by both an individual's agency and by structural factors. Through studying how educators within a specific context interacted with each other during professional development and learning, the complex relationships between individuals and the influence of their social settings and contexts could be explored (Layder, 2013).

As there was little published research that encompassed the overall research focus of this study, the first stage of data collection involved an initial scoping exercise to obtain a diversity of views held by early childhood centre directors about responding to curriculum change. The second stage of data collection involved case study centres, which enabled examination of the processes and practices that centres adopted in learning about the EYLF.

An iterative analysis of data was undertaken as the data collection progressed, with ongoing analysis influencing the subsequent data collection. These cycles enabled the development of progressively deeper understanding about how professional development and learning occurred

within a centre and offered new insights about what constituted leadership in early childhood education. Analysis was also undertaken to understand how different social domains were interacting within the case study centres to seek explanation of how leaders and educators were influenced to participate in professional learning. These processes suggested that collective professional learning supported the growth of leadership and the emergence of distributed leadership beyond the positional leaders. Additional significant benefits arising from collaborative professional learning included the development of cohesion within a centre, the development of positive educator professional identity and the growth of a sense of professionalism within a team of educators.

The four publications were linked to key research questions and the associated data collection stages (see Table 1 below). Each publication progressively contributed to building understanding of the complex interrelationship between leadership and professional learning, and the nuanced nature of leadership practices that were effective within centres. As insights developed the search for relevant literature to illuminate explanation was expanded. This can be seen in the exploration of the professional development and learning literature which was undertaken for the first article; progressing to consideration of the impacts of positional leaders' styles for article two; how various social domains influenced professional learning; and finally examination of literature relating to professional identity and professionalism for article three.

In researching this area, I have been motivated to understand how educators are encouraged to engage in learning, as well as the conditions that enable educators to exercise leadership. This interest is both personal and professional, as in my current role I am responsible for overseeing the planning of professional development programs for child care educators working in South Australia. Increasingly, I have wondered about the processes whereby following professional development and learning some centres undertake dynamic changes to their practice that serve to

enhance children's learning and wellbeing, while others, despite access to new information or knowledge continue to replicate their past practices.

I have worked in various early childhood leadership roles over the past 25 years which has given me an intuitive understanding of the value of distributed leadership approaches, I reflected on my impressions of the various factors involved in distributing leadership in an article published in 2008 (see Colmer, 2008). However, despite my experience of achieving distribution of leadership within the children's programs in the organisation in which I work, I have been unable to influence distribution of leadership within the training section of the organisation. This has been perplexing and I realised I lacked understanding of the mechanisms that interact to support individuals' engagement, and the specific practices that encourage distributed leadership. I have also puzzled about anecdotes of early childhood centre directors experiencing success in one setting but struggling in another.

I was unable to locate research that comprehensively addressed these questions. In commencing this research study, an analysis by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) that "strong" leadership by the director is required to support collaborative team work, resonated with my own experience within the children's programs. Yet the elements of such leadership remained unclear to me. The research drawing connections between distributed leadership and collaborative professional learning (Clarkin-Philips, 2007; Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2009) was helpful in formulating the research questions and in identifying key aspects of my study, notably the significance of collaborative and participative environments as conducive to both the overall quality provision in early childhood education and to the distribution of leadership.

My decision to publish the findings chapters was motivated by a desire to encourage debate within the early childhood sector, particularly in the first years of the implementation of the EYLF. I also hoped to encourage discussion with my national colleagues responsible for the provision of professional development services to child care centres, particularly to

consider how educators could be motivated to move beyond surface engagement to participate in professional learning at a deeper level.

As discussed in the introductory pages of this thesis, two articles were assigned joint authorship with my supervisors in recognition of their support in the technical challenges of writing research-based publications. My supervisors contributed by challenging my thinking, and in their technical advice regarding structuring research based publications, particularly in providing concise and coherent accounts of the methodology appropriate for a single paper. However, the research, conceptual thinking and the essentials of writing were my own work. Having drawn on their inputs, the latter two publications were produced through my efforts alone.

**Publication # 1**

The first article, "Implementing curriculum reform: Insights into how Australian early childhood centre directors view professional development and learning", reported on qualitative data collected from two focus groups of early childhood centre directors. Analysis utilising orienting concepts drawn from the literature revealed tension in the directors' beliefs about the value of collaborative professional learning and their behaviours in selecting individualised, external, transmission type professional development for educators.

An opportunity became available in early 2014 for the submission of articles for inclusion in a thematic edition of the international journal *Professional Development in Education*. This edition was published in January 2015 and explored themes associated with professional development and learning of early childhood educators and discussed the differentiated outcomes associated with different modes of professional development and learning.

In addition, the article presented the specialist role of a centre director in leading pedagogy and professional learning through developing an environment supportive of collaborative professional dialogue.

Professional development and learning for curriculum reform was found to be situated, contextualised and linked to everyday practice. The article concluded that, although directors possessed knowledge of professional development approaches, many struggled to develop a cohesive professional learning system within their centres.

**Publication # 2**

The second article, "Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders?" examined how professional development and learning occurred within the two case study centres included in this thesis. Interviews were conducted with the director and four other educators in each centre, yielding rich data about educators' beliefs and experiences of professional development and how learning was translated into new practice. Although the individual interviews focused on the topic of professional development, broader insights were gained about centre organisational systems and leadership practices that supported development and change at each centre. A quantitative survey completed by centre staff in the case study centres offered complementary data that corroborated concepts arising from the analysis of the interview data. The literature reviewed for this paper was invaluable in offering insights about curriculum change and positional leadership in early childhood centres. Furthermore, the literature relating to the value of distributed leadership in early childhood education was also considered in this paper.

An important finding emerging from this study was that both centre directors and other positional leaders such as room leaders were fulfilling roles as educational leaders. This finding was significant within the Australian context because of the national policy requirement for the appointment of an educational leader in each centre that was introduced in 2012 as a part of the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011) and the additional requirement from the commencement of 2014 for the appointment of a qualified early childhood teacher.

Anecdotal information arising from my work in the government funded national professional development program for child care centre staff suggested that the two requirements of an early childhood teacher and an educational leader were often conflated; some directors interpreted the provisions to mean that the early childhood teacher was solely responsible for educational leadership. Thus, Publication #2 was a contribution to professional discussion within the early childhood sector. It should be noted that the term "educational leader" was deliberately used in this publication (rather than "pedagogical leader") to achieve consistency with the National Quality Framework. This article was published in the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* in December 2014.

**Publication #3**

The third publication, "Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: A social systems perspective" was a book chapter submitted as a contribution towards an edited book on early childhood leadership research carried out by Australian, Finnish and Norwegian researchers. The book, published in 2015, was aimed at providing international perspectives on early childhood leadership research to prompt debate within Australia and overseas about early childhood leadership matters.

This chapter was developed from the analysis of the full set of data collected from the two case study centres and utilised a social domains perspective, recognising that early childhood leadership and professional development and learning occurred within a complex social environment. Such a perspective enabled the consideration of the influence of external and internal forces in analysing how leadership was experienced within a centre. Particular consideration was given to how leaders and educators were influenced and sought to influence others.

In examining the relative influences throughout a social system, such as perceived within the case study centres, it was possible to understand leadership as influenced by both personal agency and structural factors.

This analysis revealed that a centre director holds a unique position within the centre's social system, with power to design and adjust organisational structures. In addition, a director simultaneously operates in the inter-subjective domain as an actor in face-to-face activity with other educators and as an individual who derives personal meaning in the subjective domain. The data analysis revealed that the director also fulfilled an important role in influencing educators' interpretations of external structures and societal meanings, and in influencing the interpersonal relationships among educators within their centre.

**Publication #4**

The fourth publication, "Collaborative professional learning: Contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism" presented findings from all the data collected for this research. There was a specific emphasis on the analysis of data from the second round of interviews conducted within the two case study centres. This analysis probed deeper into the subjective social domains, examining participants' meanings drawn from their experiences and analysing how educators were being influenced to improve their practice. Educators' subjective meanings provided insights into leadership practices that were supportive of professional growth and conversely those behaviours that impeded participation and learning.

This publication sets out to explain the nature of leadership practices and to illustrate how both distributed leadership and professional relationships emerged from collaborative learning among a group of educators employed within an early childhood centre. Educators' subjective meanings suggested that collaborative professional conversations enhanced their sense of agency and professional identity. Specific factors combined in one of the case study centres which were claimed to result in the development of cohesion among educators, enhanced professional identity and a stronger centre-wide sense of professionalism. Furthermore, there was evidence that distributed leadership had emerged within the context of collaborative reflection and professional dialogue within an

inclusive environment. Thus collaborative professional learning contributed to the development of a positive centre culture where educators were motivated and prepared to take responsibility for professional learning.

This article was submitted to the *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, with the aim of making a contribution to the European Early Childhood Educational Research Association's ongoing examination of questions of professionalisation and professionalism in early childhood education centres. Many articles published in this journal over the past decade have considered issues associated with professionalism in early childhood education (McGillivray, 2008; Bleach, 2014; Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012; Lehrer, 2013; Miller, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010). The work of these authors suggested interrelationships between contextual experiences and educator professional identity. Publication 4 contributes new knowledge to this growing body of scholarly literature on early childhood leadership and professionalism.

**Table 1: Summary of the research questions and findings as presented in the four publications**

| Publication | Research questions | Data Sources and Key research findings |
|---|---|---|
| Publication #1 | RQ1.<br>How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change? | Data source: **Focus groups** with early childhood centre directors.<br><br>Lack of consistency between directors' beliefs about the value of collective professional learning and their decisions to utilise external one-off professional development.<br><br>Professional learning involved reflection and professional dialogue undertaken among groups of educators.<br><br>Early childhood centre directors viewed themselves as the pedagogical leaders assuming responsibilities for organising internal environments and acting as key decision makers for professional development and learning for educators at their centres.<br><br>The findings suggested value in distinguishing between transmissive forms of professional development and collective and collaborative forms of learning and in viewing professional development and learning as a |

continuum.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Publication #2** | RQ2.<br><br>What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about EYLF?<br><br>RQ3.<br><br>How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change? | Data source: **Interviews** with educators in case study centres.<br><br>Role of the centre director as a key leader of pedagogical change but also indicated the substantial contributions of positional leaders in supporting ongoing professional learning with educators in their teams.<br><br>Data source: **Survey** with staff in case study centres.<br><br>Complexity in perceptions of who could lead with indications from one centre that educators that were not in positional leader roles could lead professional learning.<br><br>Primary professional support networks were mapped, indicating broader influences in one case study centre. |
| **Publication #3** | RQ1.<br><br>How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change? | Data source: **Focus groups and case study centres**<br><br>Exploration of how social domains influenced educators during professional learning associated with educational reform.<br><br>A centre director played a critical role in establishing an enabling environment and in assisting educators' interpretations of both external and internal social forces.<br><br>Educators' subjective interpretations were related to participation in collective and collaborative professional learning and indicated positive impacts on professional identity. |
| **Publication #4** | RQ2.<br><br>What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about EYLF? | Data source: **Second round interviews** with educators from the case study centres.<br><br>Detailed exploration of the processes and practices undertaken during professional learning associated with educational reform. Examined how leadership is enacted throughout a centre.<br><br>The intrinsic value of participation in collective professional learning was associated with positive educator professional identity and a sense of professionalism generated within a specific context. |

In presenting these publications as four chapters, each is included as appropriate in its current status, either as published or as submitted for review to an education journal. This means that there are different referencing conventions applied depending on the specific requirements of

the journal or the publisher. This variation in style is unavoidable in a thesis by publication. It also means that there are minor differences within the thesis in organisational styles.

I have taken the liberty of applying a consistent formatting style to the tables which has not in any way altered the content presented in publications but rather, I hope contributes to the overall design aesthetic of presenting this dissertation as a single manuscript. The four publications produced as a result of the research undertaken in this doctoral study offer new perspectives about the complex factors involved in professional learning and the significant benefits for centres and educators that result from participation in such professional work. The interrelationships detailed between collective and collaborative professional learning, leadership and educational change also offer new insights into leadership in early childhood education, which will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

**Chapter Four**

# Implementing curriculum reform: Insights into how Australian early childhood directors view professional development and learning

**Abstract**

A range of studies has demonstrated that collaborative professional development and learning (PD&L) is effective in implementing curriculum reform. PD&L which is contextualised within a specific setting enables educators to explore new theoretical perspectives, review existing knowledge and beliefs, and examine their current practice. This article reports on an investigation of how Australian early childhood centre directors understand and lead PD&L during a major reform of curriculum. Qualitative analysis was undertaken drawing on orienting concepts from the literature. Analysis of data collected from two focus groups of early childhood centre directors show the importance of the director as overall educational leader but suggests that distributing leadership supports PD&L. Although directors articulated belief in the value of collaborative professional learning, individualised, one-off, external PD events remained a common strategy. Directors' perceptions about managing curriculum reform, their understanding of leadership and PD&L, together with considerations of broader social and system influences such as organisational culture and structural arrangements are factors that contribute to professional learning. A model for a centre-based professional learning system is proposed.

**Introduction**

In 2009, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) was launched by the Australian Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (ADEEWR 2009) with expectations for implementation in early childhood settings nationwide by 2011 (Council of Australian Governments 2008). The EYLF defines early childhood curriculum as 'the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (ADEEWR 2009, p. 9). This definition reveals the nature of the EYLF as a framework for guiding educators' teaching and learning practices and for developing curriculum at a local level (ADEEWR 2010). Pedagogy as reflected in the EYLF encompasses professional practice including the complexity of relationships that nurture young children, intentional teaching and critical reflection (Sumsion et al. 2009, p. 10), as well as the use of diverse theories in analysis of learning and teaching (Fleet et al. 2011). In reflecting contemporary research and theoretical understandings of early education, the EYLF challenges traditional understandings about teaching and learning in early childhood (Ortlipp et al. 2011) and can be expected to represent significant educational change for educators.

Nationally, the Australian Government funded EYLF professional development (PD) workshops that were delivered primarily as one-off events. This pattern reveals assumptions often employed in national curriculum initiatives that transmission of information to large audiences is cost-effective and efficient (Dadds 2014). A review of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce reflects a narrow understanding of PD as transmission of knowledge and skills to augment qualifications (Productivity Commission 2011). This finding reflects widespread views of educators that PD means 'going on a course' (Keay & Lloyd 2011b, p. 15). Typically, PD involves one-off sessions that are delivered by experts who disseminate information to a (more or less) passive participant with little account of existing knowledge or local context (Burgess et al. 2010).

Research is ambiguous about the benefits of one-off PD. A recent review of literature suggested that short courses can achieve outcomes for individuals in education and human services (Lauer et al. 2014). Conversely, when examining educational change and curriculum development, research suggests that collaborative follow-up activities are essential for achieving change (Timperley et al. 2007, Brown and Inglis 2013). Research has also revealed that transmissive and individualised approaches to PD are unsuitable for achieving complex educational reform (Fleet et al. 2009, Nuttall 2013).

Transmissive models of PD perpetuate an understanding that educational change is a logical and linear process simply requiring implementation rather than interpretation (Oberhuemer 2005). Furthermore, transmissive modes of PD may result in superficial adoption of new curriculum with little or no change in existing practices (Burgess et al. 2010, Nuttall, 2013), such as the use of the language and structure of a new curriculum without adopting new pedagogical practices (Winter 2003) or through interpreting frameworks as prescriptive (Ortlipp et al. 2011, Pirard 2011).

**Professional development and learning: prerequisites for curriculum change**

In education and early childhood contexts, contemporary understandings of PD embed professional learning (PL) as an essential component of PD (Buysse et al. 2009, Keay & Lloyd 2011a). Indeed, Rinaldi (2012) defines PD as integrating educator learning with their pedagogical practice, which occurs collaboratively during day-to-day work. Educators focus on curriculum and pedagogical impacts on children's learning (Rinaldi 2012) through examining the gap between what children are expected to learn and their actual performance (Fleming and Kleinhenz 2007). Professional development and learning (PD&L) therefore comprises activities designed to improve children's learning, achieved through adjusting pedagogical practice. Perhaps a defining feature of PD&L is encouraging educators to participate in critical reflection to undertake 'intentional investigation' of their practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001 cited Cardno 2008, p. 90).

PL occurs through praxis, which is the synthesis of theory and practice to produce new contextualised knowledge (Campbell and McNamara 2010). PL involves multiple processes as educators access new theoretical concepts, develop understanding of the implications of new theories and critically examine new curriculum through deconstructing their existing theoretical beliefs and practices (Timperley et al. 2007, Pirard 2011). Adult learning principles provide insights into how educators develop new conceptual knowledge where learning is contextualised to the specific setting, related to the educator's practice and can include peer support (Fleet et al. 2009). Processes that engage educators in collaborative work enable new knowledge and learning to be integrated and embedded as new professional practice (Groundwater-Smith and Campbell 2010). These complex processes overlap and are undertaken in dynamic environments where educators' interactions with colleagues can influence their PL. Educators may bring knowledge gained from many different sources that is processed collaboratively to build new contextual knowledge and understanding which is generated socially and constructed within a group of educators (Hord 2009). These constructivist educational theories reflect the situated nature of educator PL (Cherrington and Thornton 2013) and are particularly important in early childhood contexts where educators teach interdependently in team situations.

Early childhood researchers have recognised PL as a prerequisite for curriculum change (Muijs et al. 2004, Clarkin-Phillips 2007, Thornton 2009). For practice to change, educators need access to information about new curriculum theories and pedagogical approaches (Muijs et al. 2004; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007), which can be obtained through transmission modes of PD. PL however, encompasses transformative processes through which educators re-examine their existing beliefs, leading to cognitive and behavioural changes in practice (Zwart et al. 2007 cited Nabhani et al. 2014, p. 230). Transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1991, 1996 cited Shields 2010, p. 565) emphasises the importance of processes that bring about change in people's frame of reference or their unexamined assumptions and beliefs about the world.

The concept of 'creating dissonance' with existing values of educators is considered fundamental in educational change (Timperley et al. 2007, p. xv). PD&L for curriculum reform therefore involves a complex mix of transmissive and transformative learning activities (Keay and Lloyd 2011a). In this paper, the term PD will be used in relation to events that are predominantly transmissive in nature, such as one-off events (workshop, conference etc), whereas the term PD&L will be used where processes are available for examining prior knowledge, integrating new information and skills into existing beliefs systems and exploring possibilities for new practice (Timperley et al. 2007). The area of formal study undertaken to obtain professional qualifications is outside the scope of this paper.

### *Understanding professional learning*

Transformative PL is considered to be predominantly a collaborative undertaking because of the complexity inherent in processes. Learning is aligned to the assessment of children's learning rather than to individual fulfilment (Rinaldi 2012). While recognising that an individual educator may undertake transformative learning, the impact on educational outcomes throughout an institution may be significantly less than efforts achieved by groups of educators. The intrinsic nature of collective teaching in early childhood means that teaching and therefore PL occurs within a collective of professionals, is contextual, occurs during everyday practice and focuses on improving and developing practice (Rinaldi 2006).

Within educational literature, systems that encompass PD&L have been termed professional learning communities, which are characterised by shared purpose, collaborative work and collective responsibility (Stoll et al. 2006), with the goal of PL to interpret and assimilate new theories into everyday practice (Groundwater-Smith and Campbell 2010). The synthesis of theory and practice necessitates critical reflection and informed action with transformative intent (Freire 2000 cited Petrarca and Bullock 2014, p. 268). Therefore, to formulate new curriculum practice, educators need opportunities to participate in critical reflection and

professional dialogue about their curriculum and pedagogy (Cardno 2008, Ortlipp et al. 2011).

Critical reflection and professional dialogue are dispositions that enable educators to look beyond routine decisions to analyse the impact of their pedagogical decisions on children's learning and wellbeing and to consider alternate possible practices that are based on research and theoretical evidence (Miller 2011). While these dispositions are considered as ongoing professional practice to achieve quality curriculum (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007) professional dialogue can be challenging. Dispositions for critical reflection and professional dialogue necessitate the development of sophisticated professional skills, including sensitivity to enable educators to discuss different pedagogical and ethical viewpoints (Oberhuemer 2005), and resiliency to manage their own emotional responses as familiar ways of thinking and acting may be challenged (Beatty 2007). Urban et al. (2011) proposed that PL activities which bring all staff in an organisation together are effective because learning occurs through participation in pedagogical reflection where staff with different qualifications and knowledge share intellectual exchanges, building on existing knowledge and generating new knowledge. Such learning is iterative and intensive, building over extended periods of time (Buysse et al. 2009), as educators work collaboratively, participating in formal and informal interactions to interpret new theories for their specific context (Nuttall 2013, Oberhuemer 2005).

### *Leading professional development and learning*

Research has commonly identified early childhood centre directors as holding responsibilities for pedagogical leadership (Stamopoulos 2012), assuming pedagogical, curriculum and assessment knowledge (Fasoli et al. 2007). Furthermore, pedagogical leadership encompasses learning of both children and their educators, with ongoing educator PL considered a core function of early education (Rinaldi 2012). Such responsibilities are reflected in the Australian system, with directors seen as responsible for

building educator knowledge and understanding of child development (Productivity Commission 2011).

Within school-based research, effective educational leadership assumes an ability to make administrative decisions necessary to support PL processes (Robinson and Timperley 2007), including the power to allocate resources and develop and plan structures to support implementation of change (Leithwood et al. 2006). Leaders have therefore been integrally linked to achievements of educational reform. Leadership models proposed as supportive of complex PD&L and educational change combine positional leadership with shared leadership (Leithwood et al. 2006). While sharing leadership has been found to support PL in groups (Hord 2009, Maloney and Konza 2011), distributed leadership approaches specifically promote participatory cultures through emphasising collective rather than individual PL (Oberhuemer 2005, Thornton 2010). Distributed leadership provides an enabling environment for PD&L (Thornton 2009). This occurs because collaboration provides opportunities to develop professional relationships among educators, which nurtures interdependence and promotes valuing of diverse capacities of educators (Heikka et al. 2013). Furthermore, collegial work promotes support and trust throughout a team (Aubrey et al. 2013).

Distributed leadership approaches enable formal positional leaders to recognise the leadership of educators who are not in formal leadership positions (Harris 2004). Through combinations of distributed and positional leadership, specialist knowledge and dispositions for PL are nurtured, resulting in multiple leaders exerting influence throughout an organisation, which builds organisational culture (Lewis and Murphy 2008).

Achieving the conditions for leadership distribution and PL requires both pedagogical and organisational leadership. Pedagogical leadership involves a complex interplay of knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment but also organisational leadership to make the administrative decisions required to support pedagogy and PL (Robinson et al. 2009).

Despite extensive school-based educational research about the conditions for PD&L to achieve educational change, little is known about how educators in early childhood centres learn to change their pedagogy and improve curriculum. Whether the Australian reforms will result in improved child learning outcomes remains to be seen. The Educators' Guide to the EYLF proposes that PL is collaborative and contextual, where educators learn together with colleagues building professional knowledge through 'questioning, planning, acting and reflecting' (ADEEWR 2010, p. 6). However, little research has been undertaken to investigate how this might occur or be organised in early childhood centres. This lack of knowledge represents a significant gap and a risk to Australia's early childhood national reform agenda. It is argued that research is specifically required to determine how early childhood educators can be supported to participate in collaborative, collective and situated processes of PD&L (Nuttall 2013) essential for improving their practice.

**Methods and participants**

This research aimed to explore how early childhood centre directors understand and lead PD&L during a major reform of curriculum. As early childhood directors appear to be primarily responsible for organising PD in their centres, two focus groups with 12 centre directors were conducted as the first stage of a larger research study. A second stage included case studies undertaken in two early childhood centres. Focus groups have been recommended for exploratory stages of research (Johnson and Christensen 2004), and provide an efficient way to gather data from diverse participants. A purposive sample of directors (see Table 1) was recruited by invitation through existing PD organisations.

The focus groups sought to gain insights into how early childhood directors lead curriculum change, their choices regarding PD and the rationale underpinning their decisions about processes for PD&L. The researcher aimed to facilitate an open and interactive conversation among the participants about how curriculum changes occur.

**Table 1: Profiles of participants**

| Participant | Age | Qualifications | Years in EC | Years in current centre | Type of centre | Number of child places |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FOCUS GROUP 1** | | | | | | |
| 1.1 | 45+ | B ECE | 16+ | 6–10 | Community, group of centres | 80 |
| 1.2 | 35–44 | B ECE | 11–15 | 1–5 | Community, group of centres | 80 |
| 1.3 | 25–34 | B ECE | 6–10 | 1–5 | Community, group of centres | 55 |
| 1.4 | 45+ | B ECE | 16+ | 6–10 | Community, group of centres | 40–45 |
| 1.5 | 35–44 | Other bachelor | 6–10 | 6–10 | For-profit, group of centres | 90 |
| 1.6 | 25–34 | B ECE | 6–10 | 1–5 | Community, group of centres | 40–45 |
| 1.7 | 45+ | B ECE | 16+ | 6–10 | Community, group of centres | 40–45 |
| **FOCUS GROUP 2** | | | | | | |
| 2.1 | 35–44 | B ECE | 16+ | 1–5 | Community, integrated (state & federal funding) | 70 |
| 2.2 | 45+ | B ECE | 16+ | 11–15 | Community, integrated (state & federal funding) | 40–45 |
| 2.3 | 45+ | B ECE | 16+ | 15+ | Community, stand-alone | 100 |
| 2.4 | 35–44 | B ECE | 16+ | 6–10 | Community, stand-alone | 40–45 |
| 2.5 | 45+ | Other bachelor | 16+ | 11–15 | Community, stand-alone | 80 |

The researcher's non-verbal language encouraged participant contributions and where necessary direct invitations were made to individuals to gain their perspectives. Discussion began with an invitation to talk about experiences of PD initiatives undertaken within centres to improve curriculum. Unexpectedly, each focus group began with a participant offering an account of experience deemed to be unsuccessful. These contributions supported the development of trust within the groups and dialogue was free flowing. Participants took turns and all participants contributed with diverse experiences of curriculum change and processes used to learn about the EYLF (ADEEWR 2009). The researcher's professional role in early childhood may have been a contributing factor in promoting trust and candid accounts. In both groups, participants commented that the professional conversation had been enjoyable. Each focus group was of 90 minutes duration, recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed. Data collation and analysis began with using qualitative software (NVivo).

The overall analysis of data was located within an 'adaptive' approach (Layder 1998) that advocates using orienting concepts drawn from the literature to assist in the development of a preliminary coding structure for data analysis, enabling matching of concepts with empirical data (Layder 2013).

An iterative process of data review was undertaken with continual assessment of the data to determine the extent to which codes matched the data and whether modification or elaboration was required (Layder 2013). For example, initial coding resulted in multiple descriptions of forms of PD such as one-off events, external workshops, courses or information sessions, full-day, and short forms, through to examples of in-centre PD such as staff meeting discussions, presentations, small group work and various projects. These were later categorised based on the nature of activities involved, examining for passive versus interactive forms of PD with a final category of 'collaborative' or 'individualised'. In this way, explanations for directors' rationale for PD became apparent. In adaptive

research, orienting concepts are used to examine relationships between groups of codes in order to identify core concepts emerging from the data (Layder 2013).

Focus group data analysis continued concurrently with collection and analysis of incoming data gathered in the second phase of this research (Layder 2013). Through each round of analysis, patterns, and commonalities in participants' responses were identified and emergent themes were documented. A research journal that included a record of decisions and justifications for coding and categorisation, observations, and queries arising from the analysis assisted the researcher to review coding decisions and maintain consistency in categorising data. The journal assisted in keeping track of developing ideas and emerging theoretical insights.

**Results and discussion**

This paper reports on the findings from the focus groups. Orienting concepts drawn from educational research point to a link between leadership and PL in educational reform. In this research, data analysis suggests that leadership is indeed a factor in early childhood curriculum reform but indicates that other influences are involved in PD&L. The findings and discussion are organised into four key themes.

(1) Leading professional development, learning and change.

(2) Collaborative versus individualised approaches.

(3) Conceptualisation of professional development and learning as a continuum.

(4) Organisational structures.

The discussion includes a diagram illustrating a continuum of PD&L and concludes with a model illustrating the collaborative processes that educators may undertake during centre-based PL.

### *Leading professional development, learning and change*

As expected from orienting concepts, early childhood centre directors positioned themselves as the educational leaders of their centres, accepting primary responsibility for planning PD&L and monitoring improvements to curriculum and pedagogical practice (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). Data revealed that each participant believed their role as director encompassed responsibility and authority to lead change. As explained by one participant: 'You are the person with that positional authority to be able to make changes.' The director's role included power in exercising overall decision-making about PD&L strategies and the focus of change initiatives at the centre, as explained by another participant: '… no matter how much talking you get from the staff team … if you don't want it, more than 9 times out of 10 it's probably not going to happen'. Another participant also captured the director's leadership role in motivating educators' learning '… they can't do that without a leader who is empowering them …' Yet another participant observed the director's responsibility for leading curriculum initiatives: '… I was also aware that the staff were looking at direction on how to do that.'

These directors embraced their responsibilities as leaders of curriculum change, demonstrating understanding that leaders are critical to achieving educational reforms (Stamopoulos 2012) and recognising their significant decision-making powers relating to staff PD&L (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). In this study, directors were highly influential (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007), determining the focus of PD&L (Buysse et al. 2009), selecting external PD for educators, organising subsequent follow-up work (or not) and making arrangements regarding the extent of collaboration among educators (Waniganayake et al. 2008).

Although the majority of directors participating in this study were qualified ECE teachers, it was noteworthy that two directors who were not ECE teachers also positioned themselves as the educational leader of their centre. This finding raises questions about the importance of the director's

knowledge and understanding of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy (Fasoli et al. 2007, Clarkin-Phillips 2011) for leading PD&L.

Data across both focus groups indicated that participants sought to share leadership through involving their positional leaders comprising assistant directors and room leaders to support educators' learning (Aubrey et al. 2013). One participant explained that 'room leaders pass on their learning to their staff' suggesting an understanding that PL may occur informally in day-to-day work (Fleet et al. 2009, Rinaldi 2012). Participants expected their positional leaders to assist through leading PD&L with their room staff, suggesting that early childhood leadership is distributed within a centre (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007), at least amongst the formal leaders.

For several participants, however, there was a gap in their positional leaders' capacity to lead PL. One participant described an unsuccessful inquiry project: '… the reason it was a disaster was that there wasn't a leader leading it'. From this experience she had decided that as director she was responsible for pedagogical leadership (Hujala 2004), as well as monitoring and guiding centre-based projects. Another participant described her difficulties in distributing leadership: '… we deliberately did it [the project] in groups in the rooms but we found that we could tell (who were?) the leaders and the not leaders [sic]'. This comment 'elicited spontaneous laughter with all participants smiling and nodding agreement' (researcher field notes), suggesting that participants were familiar with situations where leadership was not enacted.

When distributing leadership to their positional leaders, participants found it necessary to relax control, relinquishing power to enable positional leaders' autonomy to lead work within their teams (Bennett et al. 2003). One participant had recognised the importance of trust in this relationship and had allowed room leaders to explore a pathway in their learning despite her own concerns about their direction: 'I had to let them go there to start with ....' This account revealed the contradictions and complexities of leading collaborative PL and the subtle demands on the director in

distributing leadership. It also suggests that directors undertake a rebalancing of power and must know when to take charge and when to step back.

An important component in building a safe environment for critical reflection and professional dialogue during collaborative PD&L is respectful communication. This allows different perspectives and dissenting views to be heard (Thornton 2010), essential for learning but also for developing trust and recognition of existing knowledge within a group (Clarkin-Phillips 2011). Several participants elaborated views respecting educators' knowledge. As one participant observed: 'much of it is just coming back to empowering them really … and believing that they have got something that is worthwhile'. In contrast, four participants expressed their frustration through negative attributions towards their staff, which is unlikely to be conducive in creating a trusting work environment.

In reality, distributing leadership was not always successful. One participant described a situation where the positional leaders had been content with superficial change in relation to the EYLF (ADEEWR 2009), which compromised the learning of educators: 'they became very, very skilled at being able to talk about how the EYLF supports the practice they currently use and they have no intention of changing!' While this insight could be interpreted as resistance to change, an alternative explanation may indicate limitations with the PL conditions within the centre. Learning occurs through ongoing, challenging reflection where existing beliefs are disrupted, allowing educators to reconsider the explanations that underpin their practice (Wong et al. 2012).

A key orienting concept in this research was the existence of a relationship between leadership and PL (Muijs et al. 2004, Oberhuemer 2005, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007), with distributed leadership specifically found to promote PL and curriculum change in early childhood (Clarkin-Phillips 2007, Thornton 2009, Heikka and Waniganayake 2011). All participants in this study recognised the link between leadership and PD&L. Although concepts of distributed leadership were not well understood, several

directors were nevertheless attempting to distribute leadership to positional leaders. As such, an emergent theme from this study was that all positional leaders understood they had a role in supporting educators' PD&L within their centres.

### Collaborative versus individualised approaches

Although there were accounts of successful collaborative PD&L, the majority of participants used external, one-off PD for their staff. Analysis revealed tensions in the participants' rationale regarding the purpose of PD: for three participants a primary focus was developing the competence of individual staff, while the majority recognised that collaborative work helped in translating new knowledge into practice.

#### One-off events

Of the 12 participants, 11 reported the use of one-off PD events referred to variously as 'training', 'PD' or 'a course' and indicating the prevalence of one-off events as a preferred PD response (Brown and Inglis 2013, Nabhani et al. 2014). Two participants aligned external PD to educators' existing knowledge and skills: 'make sure we are targeting them to a workshop that is appropriate for their level' - rationalising a need for differentiated levels of PD to motivate advanced educators or to provide technical information for educators with lower-level qualifications. In particular, conference attendance was valued by participants as suitable for motivating experienced educators to access new knowledge. An emerging theme was how subsequent follow-up work was viewed and organised within centres. Although individualised PD potentially supports personal understanding, impacts are enhanced when shared (Cherrington and Thornton 2013).

Educators' expectations also emerged as being likely to influence the use of individualised PD. Analysis of the data revealed participants' awareness that educators struggled to recognise in-centre collaborative work as constituting PD. One participant explained educators' perceptions as: 'devaluing of something that happens in-house …' Furthermore, this

participant explained that despite participation in a PD&L project within the centre, educators claimed they were not receiving PD. Narrow conceptualisations of PD by directors and educators reflect historical understandings of PD where 'training' is understood as an external activity delivered by experts (Productivity Commission 2011). Yet four participants reported poor outcomes from external, one-off PD. One participant noted; '… one-off training was not effective and it [PD] had to become embedded and we had to do it continually' while another observed: 'you can … send them on all of the professional development they like and not come back and not discuss it, so it doesn't go anywhere.' Such experiences reflect findings from other research that one-off events have limited impact in transforming practice (Winter 2003, MacNaughton and Hughes 2007, Nuttall 2013).

For many participants, one-off PD events were used as a response to individual educator's goals identified in annual performance reviews. From analysis, a common practice was for individual staff to select PD from training catalogues. Risks inherent in such approaches are that PD choices are ad hoc, may not align with centre needs and fail to support common goals and understanding. Only four participants had developed centre-wide PD plans for integrating PD choices into a coherent centre strategy.

*Collaborative approaches*

One participant reported only using whole-centre approaches for PD&L where collaborative processes were supported by an external expert or were facilitated within the centre to encourage team exploration. Eight participants had used project approaches where specific educators worked together towards a common goal. A participant explained such a project: 'so it was then very collaborative … building on each other's skills but sharing their knowledge as well'. Another participant had developed a 'curriculum renewal project' where educators acted as critical friends in reviewing each other's documentation of children's learning.

The benefits of collaborative PD&L were seen to assist educators to participate in professional dialogue about their pedagogy. This was articulated by a participant as:

> … a really useful tool of bringing them together, having questions, investigating … and so, for the whole process, basically they, just were forced to discuss and come and have some clarity about what it was going to look like.'

Another participant commented that shared professional dialogue enabled educators to engage in change within their centre: 'through that dialogue and that empowering, to feel that [they] do have the opportunity to facilitate some change or try something new'.

Overall, the data collected in this research reveal that nine participants used some form of collaborative PD&L with processes consistent with PL communities (Stoll et al. 2006). The majority of participants reported using regular staff meetings to provide opportunities for professional dialogue and learning (Shields 2010). Collaborative PL processes enabled professional dialogue (Maloney and Konza, 2011, Marbina et al. 2012). At least one-half of the participants reported that groups of educators were involved in learning collaboratively over extended periods of time (Clarkin-Phillips 2011). Participants' accounts suggested that project work involving a shared focus, cooperation and collaboration supported the development of shared meaning and contributed to building a centre culture (Hord 2009) conducive to professional learning and development.

For a small number of participants, PD&L was organised deliberately to ensure the promotion of collaborative processes. For instance, two participants had sent several educators to the same one-off event to enable projects to be undertaken. Subsequent follow-up project work involved examining the practice implications of the new information: '… what does that mean for us … how can we use that to inform our practice?' Through developing their own practitioner research projects, centres created opportunities for authentic PL (Stoll et al. 2006,

Groundwater-Smith and Campbell 2010), which encouraged shared professional conversations to process new information. There was evidence that professional dialogue included debate (Sumsion et al. 2009) enabling educators to examine differences in theoretical perspectives, as outlined by a participant: '… they had really massive differences in their thinking and it really helped bring it together and move the team forward in lots of positive ways'.

Whether transformative learning was taking place cannot be determined from the data collected in this research. Collaborative PD&L, however, was viewed as contributing to curriculum innovation and included critical reflection, professional dialogue and debate, and exploration of links between theory and practice (Timperley et al. 2007, Fleet et al. 2009, Urban et al. 2011). An ability for educators to participate in genuine debate is essential if existing practise is to be critically examined (Stoll et al. 2006) to promote understanding and make space for examining beliefs and the co-construction of new knowledge. The data suggested that in at least one-half of the centres collaborative PL had encouraged informal professional conversations that have the potential to strengthen educators' commitment to collaboration (Cardno 2008). These findings reveal the presence of PL communities within several centres.

### *Conceptualisation of professional development and learning as a continuum*

The analysis of data from this study indicates that the majority of participants used a mix of individualised and collective PD&L approaches, attempting to juggle the need to develop skills, access new curriculum content knowledge and provide opportunities for educators to work collaboratively to explore new knowledge. Furthermore, analysis revealed that four participants were deliberately supplementing individualised, one-off events with follow-up work within the centre, revealing an active role in leading PD&L.

An emergent finding is that choices for PD&L may reflect a director's knowledge and beliefs about the purpose of PD. If a director believes that PL occurs through shared processes and is socially constructed, then PD&L is likely to be viewed as a predominantly collaborative and centre-wide phenomenon. In contrast, if a director prioritises improving an individual educator's knowledge, skills and capabilities, then their choices are likely to be predominantly individualised approaches. Not surprisingly, there appeared to be a correlation between a participant's account of previous positive experience of collaborative approaches and their preference to pursue follow-up collaborative activities in the centre. Those directors who were organising practitioner research within their centres had in excess of five years of experience as a director but significantly indicated past experience of an externally supported inquiry or action research project. In contrast, two directors who had less than two years experience in their leadership role, and one director who was not a qualified ECE educator appeared to favour skill development through individualised and external PD for their staff. Despite the obvious limitations of the small sample size, the directors in this study shed light on possible influences on directors' capacity to lead collaborative PD&L and more specifically practitioner research.

Planning follow-up activities for collaborative work to explore new knowledge suggests deeper-level understanding that professional knowledge is co-constructed within a group context (Campbell and McNamara 2010). The extent to which a director organises follow-up work after external PD distinguishes those directors who understand the nature of praxis and the need for time for professional dialogue and critical thinking in developing informed action and transformative possibilities (Petrarca and Bullock 2014). As an educational leader, the director's knowledge and understanding of PL approaches and how learning occurs cannot be easily ignored (Keay and Lloyd 2011a, Urban et al. 2011).

Directors' decisions about PD&L could be seen as falling along a continuum with one-off PD at one end and in-centre self-directed

processes at the opposite end (Winter 2003). In this research, categories of 'collaborative' (focus on processing acquired knowledge and developing new contextual knowledge) and 'individualised' (focus on skills) emerged as distinct conceptual orientations that assist in describing and explaining how PD&L contributes to curriculum innovation. Figure 1 illustrates a continuum of PD&L from individualised to collaborative approaches.

**Opportunity for follow-up activities**

| Information, new knowledge and skill development | Interpretation of new knowledge | Research about practice |
|---|---|---|
| Transmission of information Technical skills Individuals attending external PD or online forum without professional dialogue or sharing with others One-off collective internal events | Critical reflection and professional dialogue in day-to-day practice – exploring practice problems, developing new curriculum and pedagogy | Practitioner inquiry or action research methodologies developing pedagogy interrogating practice – praxis including analysis of practice and outcomes for children, collection & analysis of data |

**Individualised**                                         **Collaborative**

**Figure 1: Continuum of professional development and learning**

Access to new information and knowledge via transmission approaches can lead to interpretation as depicted by the one-way arrow in Figure 1. Where there are opportunities for follow-up work with other educators, the two-way arrow between interpretation and research about practice depicts a reciprocal relationship between these forms of PL. When educators participate in research about their practice, processes can cycle back to enhancing interpretation of knowledge accessed. In turn, interpretation through critical reflection and professional dialogue can generate deeper-level contextual PL through practitioner research within centres.

### Organisational structures

In practice, organising collaborative PD&L may be difficult to achieve in ECE centres (Brown and Inglis 2013). Furthermore, the work of developing organisational structures and work environments to sustain PL is a challenge for directors (Stamopoulos 2012). Data collected in this

study reveal there was little understanding of the director's role in developing the centre infrastructure to support PL (Stamopoulos 2012). While knowledge and facilitation skills are required to support reflective practice (ADEEWR 2010, Marbina et al. 2012), organisational structures are also critical. As noted by Cardno (2008), participants in this research also reported several challenges including lack of time and opportunity, staff turnover and limited leadership capabilities of positional leaders. This has led to views that early childhood environments are not conducive of practitioner research and arguments that external facilitation is therefore required for deep-level PL in early childhood centres (Cardno 2008, Pirard 2011).

Although many participants made links between centre culture, common goals and educators' attitudes towards PL (Aubrey et al. 2013) there was limited understanding that collaborative PD&L actually contributes to shaping a positive culture (Fleet et al. 2009). Rather, directors in this study saw centre culture as achieved through overt processes where their own influence and expectations, can shape educators' behaviours.

A widespread reliance on individualised PD plans at the expense of centre-wide plans (Nuttall 2013) is likely to reduce the effectiveness of PD&L efforts. Where centre-wide plans existed, directors appeared to plan for collaborative work following one-off PD. A director's ability to see PD&L opportunities as falling along a continuum (Winter 2003) may enhance their understanding of the limitations of one-off PD and emphasise the need for follow-up collaborative work. Deeper understanding about how PL occurs may encourage directors to create work environments with more opportunities for educators to process new knowledge, investigate their practice and learn from each other (Urban et al. 2011).

Figure 2 depicts PD&L processes, illustrating the interface between individualised and collaborative PD&L and the processes undertaken by educators to change their practice. While an individual may access new theories via one-off PD, the processes involved in changing practice within a team teaching environment involve exploring linkages between theory

and practice, which occurs as educators participate in critical reflection and professional dialogue about their practice (depicted by large arrows). Practitioner inquiry processes are particularly useful in providing collaborative, contextualised and situated PL (Nuttall 2013).
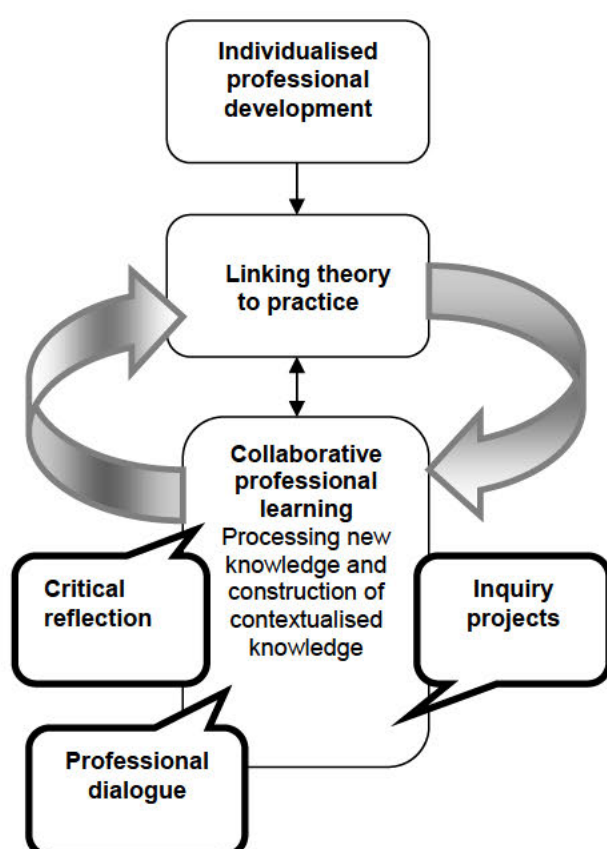


**Figure 2: Professional development and learning components and interrelationships**

Directors may be encouraged to plan environments to ensure that individualised one-off PD events contribute to curriculum innovation through follow-up with learning undertaken collaboratively. Organisational structures such as child-free planning time, resources, staffing arrangements, the extent of collaborative opportunities and centre leadership arrangements interact to impact on educators' learning within the centre. Indeed, the manner in which the director shapes the work

environment has a significant impact on the processes and interactions that sustain educators' learning.

**Limitations**

This research was small scale and exploratory. Participants in the focus groups were directors who were already engaging their staff in regular PD&L and the majority had achieved bachelor degrees as ECE teachers. These two factors are not present in all early childhood centres in Australia, and therefore these participants are not representative of the ECE workforce throughout the country.

A further limitation is that data were collected and analysed by one researcher. The focus group method has been commonly applied in exploratory stages of research, but a limitation is that individuals may not feel confident to express their own views in focus groups (Gibbs 1997). It is possible that the group dynamics may suggest stronger agreement than may be the case, however, because less confident group members may have been reluctant to speak out. In this research, focus groups were facilitated to support all participants to contribute and non-verbal responses were recorded in field notes.

**Conclusion**

This study explored directors' understanding about leadership and PD&L when undertaking curriculum reform in early childhood centres. As the site leader, the director fulfils a critical role making both pedagogical and management decisions (Heikka and Waniganayake 2011) that influence the nature of PD&L for educators. The director was seen as the principal designer of the work environment, making decisions about organisational structures and therefore creating conditions conducive to PL.

The director's ability to support collaborative professional dialogue was a critical component of PD&L, revealing the specialist nature of the director's leadership role and the importance of pedagogical knowledge (Fasoli et al. 2007), fundamental in guiding educators in practitioner research linked to

everyday practice (Fleet et al. 2009, Burgess et al. 2010). Findings from this study revealed the complexity of the director's PL support role and the subtleties required in leading professional dialogue and inquiry, knowing when to make decisions about how, when and where to intervene to guide staff learning or to step back to allow exploration. Directors require sophisticated interpersonal skills combined with professional knowledge to enable staff to explore different theoretical positions and provide subtle guidance as necessary. Through the exercise of such practice wisdom, directors build trust (Maloney and Konza 2011), which contributes to the growth of educator professional dialogue and collaboration, and also contributes to the development of a professional culture (Groundwater-Smith and Campbell 2010). The findings suggest that enabling factors within an organisation and the facilitation of PL are interdependent. Likewise, the relevance of 'strong' and visionary leadership in promoting PD&L is evident (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007).

The findings further suggest that early childhood directors possess knowledge about the range of processes for leading PD&L. How such knowledge is acquired is not clear from this research but could constitute what Aubrey et al. (2013) describe as 'tacit' leadership knowledge. However, directors may lack understanding about how to assemble the possible components to develop supportive PL environments that embed change in everyday practice. Tensions were evident in directors' beliefs about the value of collaborative PD&L and their decisions to select one-off PD.

Collaborative approaches such as practitioner research seemed to be episodic rather than embedded in future planning and/or everyday practice. Nevertheless, elements of PL communities were evident in directors' accounts. Directors' years of experience may be a contributing factor in their preference for collaborative PD&L, but prior experience of practitioner research supported by an external provider seemed to be a factor in directors' decisions to attempt their own practitioner research within their centres.

This research is not suggesting there is no role for external PD. It does suggest that one-off external PD attended by individuals has limited impact in curriculum change unless there are follow-up opportunities to process new knowledge, enabling educators to collectively and collaboratively work together to examine new knowledge and the implications for their practice (Timperley et al. 2007). The importance of follow up activities after PD events represents a critical step in PL that is essential for translating new curriculum knowledge to practice, which can then become embedded as everyday practice.

In sharing knowledge gained individually, educators can experience opportunities to build their own leadership capacity (Cherrington and Thornton 2013), which may be particularly useful in building motivation for PL and change. In representing PD&L as a continuum ranging from individualised to collaborative, directors and educators may be assisted to understand how PL and change occur, which could assist in the development of integrated and cohesive responses to PL within early childhood.

Finally, the research reveals that for curriculum reform, PD&L is situated and contextual, and intrinsically linked to everyday practice. PL results from a complex interplay of the director's pedagogical and organisational leadership, collaborative practice, organisational structures and leadership exercised throughout a group of educators. When the components come together, an environment conducive of PL is created, enabling educational change designed to improve children's learning and wellbeing.

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# Chapter Five

## Leading professional learning in early childhood centres: Who are the educational leaders?

### Abstract

In early childhood centres directors have responsibility for ongoing professional learning to support the implementation of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF). Currently there is limited understanding about how early childhood leaders support educators to participate in professional learning. This article presents findings from two case studies undertaken as part of a larger research project aimed at exploring the enactment of leadership for professional learning in early childhood centres. Key findings from this research show that directors played a key role as the centre's educational leader and distributing leadership to room leaders was critical in supporting educators' professional learning.

**Introduction**

The implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is a key component of the Early Childhood Reform Agenda, with expectations that curriculum reform will deliver improvements in the quality of programs in early childhood services (DEEWR, 2009). Continual professional development and support are integral to quality early childhood provision (OECD, 2006). In Australia, to a large extent childcare centre directors have primary responsibility for determining the nature and availability of professional development (Waniganayake, et al., 2008).

Research of educational change found that where curriculum reform had significant impact both leadership and professional learning were crucial (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004). Overall however, curriculum reform initiatives have limited impact in improving student learning (Fullan, 2000). Poor results for educational reforms have been attributed to factors such as inadequate leadership (Stamopoulos, 2012), superficial interpretation, failure to engage in deep-level professional learning (Hargreaves, 1997), new learning not being embedded in practice (Fullan, 2000), and educators being overwhelmed by the degree and pace of change (Rodwell, 2009). Small-scale early childhood research has revealed challenges in translating new curriculum to changes in the day-to-day practice of educators (Burgess, Robertson & Patterson, 2010; Winter, 2003).

Although early childhood research has identified the importance of both positional and distributed leadership in improving educational practice (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), these concepts are difficult to apply and appear contradictory. In this paper, any formally appointed leadership and management role such as director, assistant director and room leaders are categorised as 'positional' leaders and educators who are not in formal leadership positions but who exercise leadership will be described as 'informal' leaders. The notes section contains an explanation of titles and terminology. This research is exploring the nature of leadership during professional development and learning to gain insights about the

interactions and relationships involved, and who has opportunity to lead educator learning.

**Professional development and learning for curriculum change**

The *Educators' Guide for the EYLF* recommends that educators participate in reflective practice and in-depth professional conversations to support curriculum development and change (DEEWR, 2010). Within the *National Quality Framework* (NQF), requirements include the establishment of a professional learning community and regular processes of collaborative learning within centres (ACECQA, 2011). While these recommendations are consistent with research findings (DECS, 2008), in practice, such approaches to professional learning may be difficult to achieve in childcare centres, due to both limited resources and managerial approaches (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Managerialism focuses on business efficiency (Osgood, 2004) and is likely to emphasise direction of staff rather than time for professional dialogue for learning and curriculum development.

In educational contexts, professional development has predominantly been offered as one-off workshop-type sessions and conferences (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Such approaches are prevalent in early childhood, yet the effectiveness of one-off events in achieving changes in practice are questionable (Burgess et al., 2010; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007). Professional development continues to be narrowly interpreted as transmission of knowledge or development of skills to enhance proficiency (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. xxxvi). In contrast, professional learning has been explained as 'the assimilation of knowledge rather than its gathering' (Campbell & McNamara, 2010, p. 20). Fleet and Patterson (2001) propose that professional learning involves ongoing contextualised activity including in-centre collaborative inquiry projects that enable educators to work collectively to explore links between theory and practice, thereby supporting educator learning. In particular, professional learning is supported where groups of educators with varying qualifications work collaboratively in documentation of practice and co-

construction of pedagogy (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari & van Laere, 2011).

In implementing the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), educators may confront new philosophical and pedagogical approaches (Ortlipp, Arthur & Woodrow, 2011) such as sociocultural and constructivist theories that depart from a traditional emphasis on developmental theories. Implementation processes begin with exploring the underlying values and theoretical perspectives embedded within the EYLF, and require educators collectively to review their existing knowledge, practices and beliefs. In reforming curriculum, educators are called upon to make conscious decisions about what aspects of the new curriculum approach will be adopted, and how to change their pedagogical practice; decisions which are affected by their existing beliefs (Winter, 2003). A review of research into professional development for schools found that teacher learning involved three iterative processes: engaging with prior knowledge and practices, developing awareness of new information, and creating dissonance with current practice (Timperley et al., 2007). In this study, professional learning is highlighted as intellectual processes that occur as educators participate in professional dialogue (Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008) and collective reflection (Ortlipp et al., 2011), jointly examining their practice in ongoing cycles.

Achieving such conditions requires a professional learning community that is supported by effective leadership, and a high investment of time and effort to develop supportive, safe environments that sustain engagement with learning (Burgess et al., 2010). Today, educational leaders in early childhood potentially have significant pedagogical roles that require linking theory with practice and building the professional capabilities of educators (Stamopoulos, 2012). While the role of the director has been identified as critical for in-centre professional learning (Fleet & Patterson, 2001), less is understood about the role of other educators in supporting professional learning throughout an organisation. This study seeks to explore

leadership as a distributed phenomenon potentially occurring among educators throughout a centre.

**Distributed leadership and professional learning**

The term distributed leadership has broad theoretical meanings but commonly includes concepts of interdependence, leadership practice and professional learning (Harris, 2009). Rather than a specific model, there are potentially many ways of distributing leadership. However, distribution does not replace positional leadership structures (Glatter, 2009) and site leaders play an important role in coordinating leadership and developing leadership capacity within group members (Lewis & Murphy, 2008). Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) found that to achieve positive educational outcomes, leadership of the director is required, together with collaborative leadership approaches. This suggests that the director's leadership is essential to create the conditions necessary for collaborative and distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership is associated with professional learning with the focus on collective rather than individual development (Glatter, 2009). Distribution is achieved through creating opportunities that enable individuals with specific knowledge or expertise to lead the development of others in the team (Spillane, 2006).

Therefore, distributed leadership is possible within a hierarchical structure and both positional and informal leaders contribute to achieving educational outcomes (Spillane, 2006). There is however, considerable complexity and Robinson (2009) cautions there is a 'disjunction between leadership structures and leadership work' (p. 230). Narrow understandings of hierarchical organisational structures and positional leadership have persisted in early childhood, where individuals are seen to hold authority by virtue of their formal leadership position and educators defer responsibility to the director (Waniganayake, Morda & Kapsalakis, 2000). Hierarchical models accept that formal positional leaders lead and followers fulfil subordinate positions (Rodd, 2013), meaning that

leadership is dependent on the exercise of positional authority and the use of power to emphasise tasks or outcomes (Muijs et al., 2010). For example, Grarock and Morrissey (2013) found that teachers in childcare centres who did not hold formal positional leadership titles or roles had limited capacity to influence change in their centres.

In contrast to hierarchical models, distributed leadership approaches recognise that positional leaders can move beyond a leader/follower mindset to understand leadership as distributed across both positional and informal leaders. Within distributed leadership, a vital leadership function is influencing others (Robinson, 2009), which includes collaborative professional development and decision making. New Zealand early childhood researchers have linked distributed leadership and professional learning (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007, 2011; Thornton, 2009). These studies identified that distributed leadership assists in creating professional learning environments where educators can debate, disagree and provide critical feedback to each other (Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2010).

Distributed leadership approaches were found to support teachers' sense of being valued (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011; Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken & Tamati, 2009), support the maintenance of professional learning activities (Jordan, 2008), and simultaneously encourage the leadership growth of individuals (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007). Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) propose that distributed leadership approaches that promoted the involvement of early childhood leaders and practitioners could build pedagogical leadership.

Distributed leadership may be particularly suited to early childhood contexts because of the emphasis on relationships and interdependence among people within a centre. The distributed leadership literature has conceptualised leadership as 'practice' focusing on interactions rather than actions (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Thornton et al., 2009), suggesting that influence occurs through relationships, rather than what leaders do.

This research aimed to explore leadership practice and relationships during everyday practice in early childhood centres. The overall research question was to explore the role of leadership in professional learning during a period of major educational reform in early childhood centres.

**Research methodology**

The data reported in this paper were from Phase 2 of a larger study. In Phase 1, focus groups were held with early childhood directors enabling initial scoping of diverse views about leadership, professional development and educational change.

In Phase 2, case studies were conducted within two early childhood centres. Case studies offer processes that allow deeper examination within context-rich settings (Stake, 2000), and have proved particularly useful for examining leadership and professional development in recent early childhood studies (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010; Waniganayake et al., 2008). In this research, the case studies comprised a two-stage process of data collection, namely semi-structured interviews with positional leaders and educators, followed by a survey that sought views of all educators and staff at each centre.

*Selection of the two case study centres*

Directors who had expressed commitment to collaborative professional development in Phase 1 were invited to allow their centres to participate as a case study in the continuing research. Several centres volunteered and one centre was selected on the basis of a recent collaborative professional learning project ('Centre A'). Subsequently, the researchers sought out and received agreement from another centre that was located within a different socioeconomic and cultural operating environment ('Centre B'). Thus, the selection of the two case study centres relied on purposive sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

This selection of two centres enabled the examination of leadership for professional learning within two different contexts:

- Centre A was located in a diverse socioeconomic community and offered child care and preschool for 70–80 children each day. Around 15 per cent of the children were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Centre A's director held an early childhood teaching degree and there were two teachers employed in the kindergarten room.

- Centre B was located in a lower socioeconomic community and offered a childcare program for 70–80 children each day, with four-year-old children attending an external preschool. In Centre B, approximately 80 per cent of the children were from CALD backgrounds, and several staff had English as a second language. Centre B's director held a degree in social science, but there were no early childhood teachers in the centre.

See Table 1 for a summary of the qualifications of the survey participants.

Both Centres A and B had structures that reflected typical childcare centre arrangements, with three children's rooms organised in age-based groupings with a room leader. In both centres, all room leaders held diploma-level qualifications. In Centre A the teachers were not positional leaders.

**Table 1: Qualifications of survey participants in education and care roles**

| Qualification | Number of staff | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Centre A | Centre B |
| Bachelor ECE | 3 | none |
| Diploma Children's Services | 7 | 6 |
| Cert III Children's Services | 5 | 8 |
| No qualification | 1 | 2 |

## Research procedure

Following approval from the University's Human Ethics Committee and background investigation of each centre's organisational structures, staff qualifications and work arrangements, interviews were held during the latter part of 2012, with the director and four diploma-qualified educators (including room leaders) from each centre. The interviews were recorded digitally and converted to transcripts.

Next, drawing on the preliminary analysis of this interview data, a questionnaire was developed and administered during a staff meeting at each centre. The survey included 30 statements with each accompanied by a four-point Likert scale with choices of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree', together with two open-ended questions. Eighteen completed questionnaires were received from each centre, representing a return rate greater than 80 per cent. In parallel with conducting the case studies, the primary researcher maintained a reflective research journal throughout the period of data collection and analysis and notes from this journal were included in data analysis.

## Analysis of data

Excel software was used for analysis of the quantitative data and Nvivo software (QSR International, 2010) was used to analyse the qualitative data. An 'adaptive theory' of social domains approach (Layder, 1998, 2013) was applied throughout. This approach recognises that within a social setting various elements potentially interact to influence interactions and relationships. According to Layder, these domains comprise the individual (subjective), situated activity as 'face-to-face' interaction (inter-subjective), settings, and macro-social influences (structural). Adaptive theory endorses the value of not only seeking insights from empirical field data (in this case the qualitative and quantitative data from the two case studies), but of also drawing on extant theory. In this study, orienting concepts from the literature influenced the initial coding categories: for example, drawing from the literature relating to distributed leadership

during professional learning (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2009). Codes included interpersonal relationships between educators, shared activity, collaborative professional development, shared dialogue, educators helping each other, individuals taking responsibility and reduction of control by leaders.

Drawing on both the field data (interviews, questionnaires and reflective journal) and orienting concepts such as those cited above, qualitative data analysis involved a gradual process of identifying and refining codes and categories. Consistent with the adaptive theory approach, the emphasis during analysis of qualitative data was on balancing fidelity (coding that accurately reflects the data) and parsimony (producing a simple coding representation). During the whole period of data analysis, a research log recording coding decisions, observations, queries and emerging theoretical insights was maintained.

**Key findings**

This section presents key findings from the two case studies, which have been organised into three themes following preliminary analysis:

1. Director as overall educational leader.

2. Collaborative professional development and learning.

3. The role of distributed leadership.

Under each theme, insights from interviews are presented, followed by findings from the analysis of the survey data.

***Director as overall educational leader***

The directors at both centres viewed themselves as the overall educational leader of their centre. Centre A director stated that she understood her role as being responsible 'for determining the pedagogy and how that will look within the Centre'. Centre B director described her role as monitoring how educators were interpreting the EYLF: 'I find that my role is to ask questions … and that actually generates discussion

within the staff.' From the initial data collection and director interviews, each director reported exercising broad decision making that included determining how positional leaders and project groups were organised. Interviews with directors also revealed that they made decisions about how much child-free time was available for professional development and how that time was used.

Interviews and survey data showed that Centre A director was highly visible, promoting her vision for the centre and suggesting professional development opportunities to specific staff. 'The Director was interested in … exploring the idea of [concept] and how it would impact on toddlers … so she sent me and my Room Leader over for the three day course' (Diploma-qualified staff A). Centre B director was considered to be available when needed: 'I talked to [Director] … she gave me … something very good … some point … so I looked at that …' (Room Leader B), but overall her influence in day-to-day operations was subtle because she had distributed leadership for professional development to the assistant director who maintained an ongoing day-to-day presence supporting staff. In Centre B, interviews revealed that decisions about what professional development would be accessed were made collaboratively between the director and assistant director.

Nonetheless, all interviewees recognised their respective director as primarily responsible for overall planning for staff professional development and leading change. However, survey data of all staff were ambiguous regarding the role of the director as educational leader. In response to the statement 'in our centre the Director takes the lead in planning professional development and learning', in Centre A, 12 educators agreed but two disagreed and four did not respond, while in Centre B only nine agreed, seven disagreed and two did not respond.

*Collaborative professional development and learning*

Both directors had organised whole-centre collaborative professional development for introducing the EYLF using external presenters followed

with ongoing small group work. Director A explained that she preferred collaborative professional development rather than individual staff attending one-off events: '… what has changed is that there probably is less individuals doing individual training … the *Early Years Learning Framework* that tends to have been more group training and sessions'. Director B also valued collaborative professional development: 'we have concluded that workshops for a whole group … was really, really important'.

In both centres, educators reported opportunities to work together in professional development. Centre A director had planned for several educators to attend the same external session, which stimulated a centre-wide inquiry project exploring approaches to documentation of children's learning. A project leadership team comprising the assistant director, two room leaders and two diploma-qualified educators devised mechanisms to engage all staff. The director maintained close involvement with the project, offering support and guidance: '… we presented it at the staff meeting … so they all had input and were engaged, it wasn't something that happened to them it was happening with them' (Director A).

In Centre B the director had organised for room leaders to work together as a leadership group to introduce the EYLF. The director recalled that staff with no early childhood qualifications had asked for EYLF professional development early when program implementation began. She had however, decided to wait until room leaders were confident in their knowledge so that 'at section meetings they [room leaders] would actually filter that information [to their staff]'. Interviews revealed that room leaders undertook professional learning as a group and accepted responsibility for EYLF learning of their room staff.

Interview data indicated that educators in Centre A had developed a central communication hub during the inquiry project and were engaging in ongoing informal professional dialogue across the centre using displays, project updates and interactive memos for information and communication. Interviewees indicated that informal and spontaneous

across-centre professional conversations continued beyond the inquiry project. In the survey, educators in Centre A supported collaborative professional development and were positive about the allocated time for professional development and feedback.

In Centre B, interviews revealed that across-centre dialogue was restricted to the room leaders and most opportunities for professional conversations occurred in room teams. Educators in Centre B indicated in the survey that receiving feedback was important for learning, but their satisfaction that this occurred was low at 60 per cent. Furthermore, only 50 per cent of educators at Centre B were satisfied that there was sufficient time available for the team to work together on program development. Of those dissatisfied, six were Certificate III level but two room leaders also believed there was insufficient time.

In both centres, data showed that regular room meetings were important for ongoing sharing of information to assist educators develop their practice. Room leaders had considerable responsibility and autonomy in translating professional learning into practice with their teams. As highlighted by Director A: '… I definitely like to empower staff to make some of those decisions about the "how" within their rooms and how that looks'. In Centre B, room leaders enjoyed similar responsibilities: '… we used to take our teams out for a coffee, ... given two hours a month … it worked so well, and people just opened up and … felt comfortable to come forward with things that were probably also a bit hard' (Room Leader B).

Collaborative approaches within rooms were recognised as beneficial by educators: '… it does make you feel, I think, more of a collective when everyone puts in and works together on things and you do feel like you've got a voice in the curriculum and how it's programmed, how it's planned …' (Diploma-qualified educator A). In both centres, the survey (see Table 2) revealed that educators understood the value of collaborating in professional development with educators indicating support for helping each other in their professional learning in informal ways.

**Table 2: Examples of survey data relating to findings in the results section**

| Survey statement | Centre A agreement (%) | Centre B agreement (%) |
|---|---|---|
| To be effective EYLF PD should involve time to think about and discuss the impact of our practice on children | 88 | 88 |
| I enjoy opportunities to work with other educators in the centre to find ways to improve our programs and practice | 88 | 83 |
| In our centre professional learning creates conversation and debate among educators | 88 | 77 |
| In our centre after PD educators help each other to understand what the new learning means | 88 | 88 |
| Receiving feedback is an important part of my professional learning | 94 | 94 |
| In our centre other educators provide feedback to me about my practice | 77 | 60 |
| In our centre any educators can have a role in leading professional development and learning | 77 | 38 |
| Our team has regular time to work together to talk and improve our programs and practice | 94 | 50 |

### *Role of distributed leadership*

Both directors expressed beliefs that sharing leadership was necessary indicating that room leaders played a key role in supporting professional development and learning. There was commonality in leadership roles articulated for room leaders including supporting professional development and learning of room staff, translating learning into practice during daily work, and contributing to learning projects throughout the centre.

Interview data across both centres revealed that all room leaders had accepted responsibility for leading professional development and learning for their staff. In analysing how room leaders approached this work, differences in room leaders' styles appeared. Some leadership styles were

inclusive: '… listening to everybody's ideas … realising the strengths of other people in your team' (Room Leader A), while others tended towards directive or authoritative approaches: '… we brought it to section meetings and I guess this highlights that we probably need to get a bit more feedback or we just take over as … leaders' (Room Leader B).

Organisation of professional learning groups varied. In Centre A, inquiry project work was led by a team that included positional leaders and diploma-qualified educators who were not in formal positional roles. The teachers in Centre A had not participated in the inquiry project as the Director had assessed it to be unnecessary because of the teachers' existing knowledge of assessment of children's learning. Subsequently, the Director viewed this decision as unhelpful in building collaborative professional learning among the team and invited the teachers to participate. During the inquiry project, educators that were not in formal leadership roles experienced opportunities to enact leadership: 'I was able to come back to the staff meeting and say this is what we are going [to do], this is how it's going to affect each room, let us know your feedback …' (Diploma-qualified educator A). The concept of who could lead in professional learning was explored in the staff survey. In Centre A, where diploma-qualified educators had opportunities as informal leaders, a majority of participants (77 per cent) considered that leading professional learning was not restricted to positional leaders. In Centre B, where projects were led only by positional leaders, only 38 per cent of participants indicated such leadership was possible, while 43 per cent thought that educators who were not positional leaders could not lead professional learning.

Data from interviews suggested that room leaders as positional leaders played significant roles in leading professional development of their room staff. In exploring this concept, the survey asked participants to nominate the person (by position) who was the 'most important person in our centre who helps me with my professional learning'. Participants were able to select from a list of all centre positions, children or families. Analysis of this

question was undertaken using a graphic representation in NVivo. The professional learning and support relationships at the two centres are depicted in the following diagrams (see Figures 1 and 2).
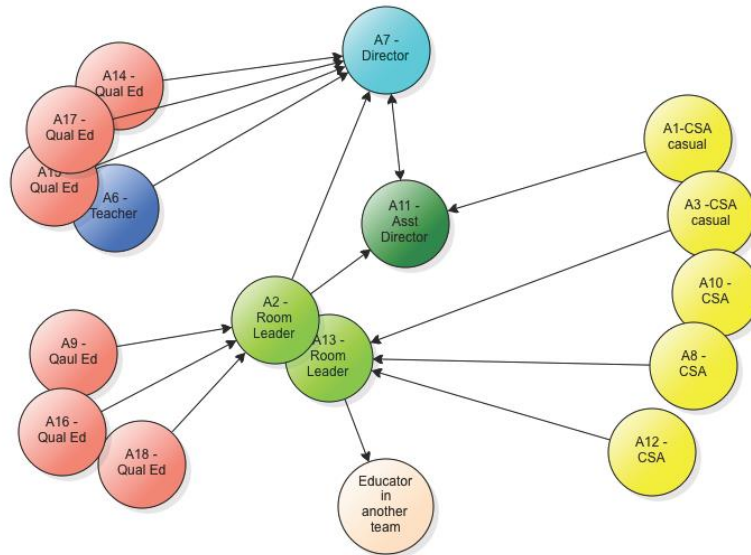


**Figure 1: Key professional support relationships – Centre A**
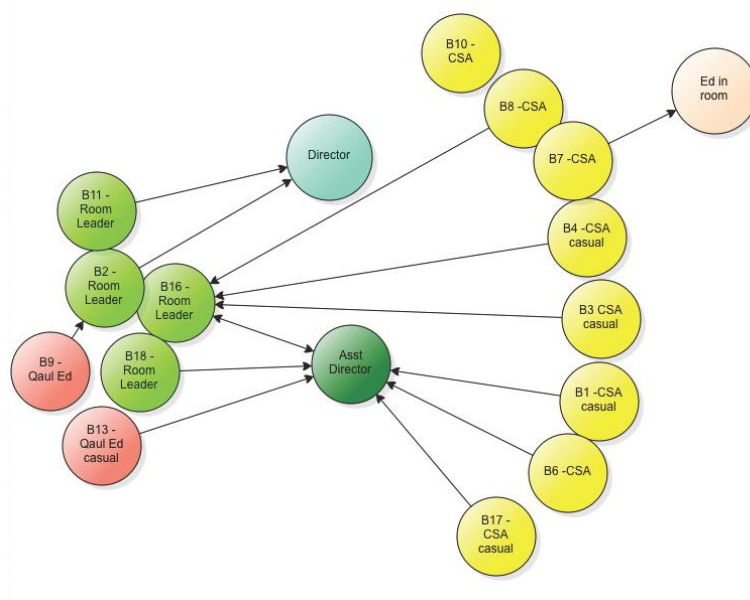


**Figure 2: Key professional support relationships – Centre B**

The analysis revealed that in each centre, room leaders were fulfilling roles supporting professional learning. Cohesive but slightly different

patterns were found between the centres. The majority of educators without qualifications or with Certificate III qualifications nominated the room leader, which supported the interpretation that room leaders were significant in supporting the learning of staff. Both assistant directors were also room leaders. In contrast however, room leaders, teachers and diploma-qualified educators tended to nominate the director (Centre A) or the assistant director (Centre B) as their primary source for professional learning, which suggests the existence of differentiated professional learning relationships related to qualification levels and to position. Educators holding Certificate III sought support from their room leaders or diploma-qualified staff, while diploma-qualified staff and teachers looked to the director. Such a pattern could be interpreted as reflecting a hierarchical understanding. Both the teachers in Centre A nominated the director. A key difference between the two centres was the role of the director and assistant director. In Centre A, the director appeared central in everyday professional learning but in Centre B, the director's role was limited and the assistant director fulfilled this role. These results were consistent with the analysis from interviews. In graphically representing this data, the relationships were indicative, as it was not possible to match survey participants to their specific room leader. This analysis confirms the significance of room-based learning but suggests that informal professional learning also occurs beyond room teams through networks that exist within a centre.

**Discussion**

In this study, leadership was integrally linked with professional development and learning (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Both directors saw themselves as educational leaders with responsibility for professional learning within their centre (Fleet & Patterson, 2001). Directors were distributing leadership to assistant directors and room leaders, recognising that positional leaders were able to support professional learning of educators in their rooms during day-to-day work.

***Collaborative learning***

Professional learning occurred collaboratively: either in across-centre project groups, in groups of positional leaders (room leaders) and in room teams. It was evident that a significant amount of learning occurred in daily work as educators translated professional development to practice in their teams. Room leaders accepted responsibilities as educational leaders to their room staff, demonstrating broader interpretation of room leaders' roles beyond administration and management.

There was ambiguity in the findings regarding educators' perceptions about the director's role in leading professional development. The variations in responses may indicate that when leadership for professional learning is distributed, educators realise that others beside the director can lead. The two directors employed different strategies with the director at Centre A being highly involved and visible throughout the centre, while the director at Centre B allowed the assistant director to be responsible for day-to-day support (see Figures 1 and 2). Each approach could be interpreted as distributed leadership and may mask from educators the extent of the director's decision making in relation to staff professional development.

Educators recognised the role of room leaders in leading professional learning. Most educators with base-level qualifications deferred to the room leader for support in their professional learning (see Figures 1 and 2). More complex patterns were revealed in the preferences of teachers and diploma-qualified educators, suggesting the existence of additional learning networks beyond room teams. More research is needed to explore how these additional networks function, and the role of teachers more generally as curriculum leaders. The teachers in Centre A worked apart from the childcare team revealing a lack of teacher involvement and leadership in the inquiry project. While it is possible that the lack of a positional title reduces teacher leadership influence (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013), this may not be a full explanation because diploma-qualified educators in Centre A who were not in positional leadership roles had

recognised opportunities to adopt 'informal' leader roles during professional learning. Regardless, a lack of teacher engagement in collaborative professional development represents an underutilised source of knowledge within the centre, and is an area that warrants further research.

Both centre directors believed that collaborative professional development supported educators' professional learning and had sought to create environments that supported collaboration (Burgess et al., 2010). In turn, educators acknowledged the value of collaborative professional development and the value of supporting each other's professional learning, revealing that their understanding of professional learning extended beyond one-off training events. Processes included collective professional development sessions, group work, projects and room meetings. These activities involved professional conversations, giving and receiving feedback and ongoing formal and informal communication as reported in a national study by Waniganayake and colleagues (2008).

### *Organisation of professional development*

There were differences in approaches to the organisation of professional development, with Centre A undertaking a centre-wide project together with ongoing work in room teams, and Centre B focusing on positional leaders forming a learning group and then filtering information to their room teams. The use of the word 'filter' by the Director at Centre B could be interpreted as instruction rather than exploration. In Centre B educator learning about the EYLF was delayed until room leaders felt confident, and opportunities for all educators to be involved in professional dialogue were limited.

Research has highlighted the value of project approaches for enriching professional conversations (Fleet & Patterson, 2001), and increasing the potential for learning where educators with differing levels of knowledge and expertise participate collaboratively (Burgess et al., 2010; Urban et al., 2011). Such practices can promote more sophisticated understandings

about practice. In Centre A, (with the exception of the teachers), a mixed group of educators and positional leaders across the centre had participated together in an inquiry project, allowing educators with different levels of knowledge and experience to interact, to contribute and listen to each other's viewpoints. From this work a communication hub that facilitated ongoing informal professional conversations throughout the centre had developed. Informal across-centre professional conversations arising from inquiry projects has been found to enhance the richness of feedback and increased educator satisfaction (Kilgallon et al., 2008).

In Centre B, participation in across-centre projects was restricted to positional leaders (room leaders) which did not afford opportunities for less experienced educators to participate in potentially richer professional conversations with peers. In Centre B, the networks appear less complex with positional leaders forming a network and room teams forming smaller networks (refer Figure 2). The absence of centre-wide professional dialogue in Centre B meant that room leaders were the main source of feedback for educators in their team. This may also explain why educators in Centre B held a limited view of leadership as residing with positional leaders only.

In Centre A, where professional learning networks included the director and where educators who were not in formal positional leader roles had opportunities to lead during professional learning, the survey results revealed agreement among educators that leadership roles were not restricted to positional leaders. For example, room leaders in Centre A were distributing leadership to educators through making space available for all educators to contribute, actively listening to ideas, promoting discussion and sharing decision making which opened opportunities for 'informal' leaders, both in their teams and in centre-wide groups.

### *Professional dialogue networks*

Variations in centre networks may provide explanations related to satisfaction levels regarding feedback. Educator satisfaction with feedback

received was enhanced through opportunities to participate in across-centre professional dialogue rather than restricted within room groups. In Centre A, where there were higher levels of satisfaction, a network of diploma and teacher-qualified educators revolved around the director. In contrast, in Centre B with lower levels of satisfaction, sources of professional learning were reduced because the director was not active in day-to-day professional learning which she had devolved to the assistant director. Such variations reflect the complexity of relationships, but are consistent with the distributed leadership research literature which identifies different models of distribution (Glatter, 2009). Further exploration about the effectiveness of different models of distribution, particularly whether the director adopts a prominent or peripheral role in day-to-day support, is needed. In distributed leadership in schools, Robinson (2009) found that where the principal was highly visible and active in teacher professional development, outcomes for students were improved.

Room leaders' roles in leading professional learning with their room teams highlight the importance of positional leaders' pedagogical knowledge. As positional leaders, room leaders' capacity to support pedagogy, together with their leadership styles, are likely to influence how educators engage in the professional dialogue and reflection vital for professional learning. While some room leaders in this study articulated inclusive approaches as conducive to professional learning within their teams (Keay & Lloyd, 2011), others adopted authoritative, directive approaches, suggesting reliance on positional leadership authority and an emphasis on tasks (Muijs et al., 2010). Directive leadership styles may be linked to managerial concepts such as understandings of staff supervision, direction and time efficiency which may limit open exploration and participation by educators (Nupponen, 2006). Research has found that positional leaders have significant roles in creating inclusive organisational climates for participation (Robinson, 2009), and inclusive attitudes are needed to create space for those not in formal leadership positions to lead where they have specific expertise (Glatter, 2009).

*Impact of organisational structures*

Organisational structures have been identified as critical for supporting the enactment of distributed leadership including group structures and planning time (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006). In both of the case study centres, aspects of distributed leadership included positional leaders having responsibilities for supporting professional learning, use of leadership teams in professional development, and collaborative learning including project groups (Thornton, 2009). The directors' capacity to design organisational structures and projects was dependent on their administrative and management knowledge and abilities, and their capacity to design centre budgets to resource professional learning. In creating environments to support educator professional learning, directors combined leadership and management skills. The enactment of distributed leadership in the two case study centres was supported through organisational structures, the roles of positional leaders (such as room leaders), and the use of collaborative learning processes as identified by Clarkin-Phillips (2007).

**Limitations**

The case study centres were selected for this research because of their involvement in professional development activities, and may not be representative of early childhood centres generally. The research also did not assess the efficacy of professional development and learning undertaken nor attempt to establish connections between leadership, professional learning and outcomes for children. Data analysis raised questions about the significance of leadership styles, and the impact of leaders' understanding about how professional learning occurs, but the nature of data collected does not enable detailed analysis of these aspects. The small scale of the study design also limits the ability to generalise the findings. Despite these limitations, the research raised issues that are relevant within the current context of the national policy reforms and the need to consider how leadership and professional learning are implicated in early childhood reform.

**Conclusion**

This research found that both distributed leadership and collaborative professional development support educational reform within early childhood centres. While centre directors were the overall educational leaders in their centres, leadership was distributed to positional leaders (room leaders) who were leading professional development and learning of educators in their rooms, playing a pivotal role in engaging educators in processes of translating new knowledge from professional development into everyday practice. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the emergence of informal leadership by educators not in positional roles may be supported through inclusive across-centre projects.

In recognising centre directors and room leaders as educational leaders, the importance of both pedagogical knowledge and leadership capabilities of all positional leaders is highlighted. Models of distribution where the director maintains a central role may be more effective for professional learning. Further research is necessary to explore the complexity of factors that contribute to collaborative professional development and learning and the growth of distributed leadership. Understanding leadership in early childhood centres as a distributed phenomenon may contribute to higher levels of engagement in professional learning and the growth of strong, sustainable leadership in early childhood centres.

Notes:

1. Terminology: 'Room Leader' – educator responsible for a room of children; 'Leadership group' and 'positional leaders' – includes some or all educators with formal positional leadership roles such as room leaders, assistant director and director; 'informal leader' – educator who enacts leadership but does not hold a formal positional role; 'Project team' or 'project group' – educators responsible for a specific project.

2. Figures 1 and 2: the number refers to the participant code, abbreviations include: 'CSA' (children's services assistant, either Certificate III or unqualified; Ed (educator); 'ed in other room' – nominating an educator outside of the room team.

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**Chapter Six**

# Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: a social systems perspective

**Abstract**

The Australian early childhood policy reforms arising from the National Quality Agenda (NQA) (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2008) have raised expectations for improved professional development of educators in early childhood centres. There is however, limited understanding of the role of leadership in professional development and learning. This chapter reports on research that collected data from director focus groups and case studies of two early childhood centres. The analysis adopted a social systems perspective (Layder, 1998) which examined external and internal factors that impact on centre-based staff during professional learning. Findings reveal the influence of external structural factors, internal organisational systems and the interactions and relationships among educators. Conditions that nurture educators' professional learning are created through complex interrelationships between leadership, collaborative professional development and attention to centre organisation. Both agency and structure are implicated.

**Introduction**

This chapter discusses a study investigating the relationship between leadership and professional development and learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres. Australia's National Quality Agenda (NQA) will be realised through improvements in practice that enhance children's learning and wellbeing. Yet, we know little about the actual processes that occur within a centre, how educators become motivated to participate in professional learning and how professional learning translates to changes in practice and long-term improvements in early childhood education. Research specifically focused on professional development in early childhood centres is scarce (see Waniganayake et al., 2008 for a study of directors' views about the link between professional development and quality).

The role of leadership in supporting professional learning and educational change is also poorly understood. The implications are that the early childhood reforms have been implemented without understanding the complexity of the work required within centres or the specific leadership requirements needed to support educational change.

**Theoretical and contextual issues**

Additional challenges for the reforms may be anticipated because of the effects of the market-driven and business oriented conceptualisation of the Australian child care system (Brennan & Adamson, 2014). Within this paradigm, managerial responses have dominated and encouraged views that change can be achieved through rational and linear processes and transmission modes of professional development that focus on the educator's skills and knowledge. However, a focus on individual professional development and skills is problematic (Nuttall, 2013) and fails to recognise the complexity of educational change, the nature of professional learning involved in new curriculum initiatives and the interdependent nature of work in early childhood education.

In early childhood centres, educators work in teams involving social groupings of children. Hence an early childhood centre can be understood as an organisation that is a complex social system involving multiple and diverse relationships, between educators and the children and their families, and among the educators. Consequently, a commitment to collaboration is fundamental for achieving quality provision in early childhood centres (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

In interpreting the meanings and application of the theoretical positions embedded with the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009) educators need opportunities to work together. However, internal centre systems influence how educators participate in collaborative learning (Nuttall, 2013). Therefore, this research aims to explore the various social influences that impact on educators during professional development. The approach considers how educators influence each other within the immediate social world of the centre but also considers the impact of the internal centre organisational systems as well as broader external influences.

**Educational reform**

Contemporary depictions of educational reform suggest complex and cumulative processes where changes in practice are dependent on educator professional development and leadership (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004). Professional learning occurs as teachers participate in collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) (Hord, 2009). An additional complexity for early childhood centres is that improving pedagogy occurs locally with directors working in relative isolation with small teams of educators. The director's knowledge of early childhood pedagogy (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007) and their ability to design and lead professional development and learning within their centre is critical.

In the absence of educator learning there can be no genuine growth in practice (Nuttall, 2013). Educational reform necessitates collaborative professional learning (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013) because learning is dependent on shared and collaborative professional dialogue. Constructivist processes are used in a PLC (Hord, 2009) and may include educators working together to understand new theories, participating in critical reflection to examine existing beliefs, considering the impact of their pedagogy on children's learning and formulating alternate practice (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Learning may not translate as directly observable or discrete changes but rather as subtle and iterative changes as educators "critically connect knowledge, practices and values" (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari & van Laere, 2011, p. 104).

## Leading educational reform in early childhood

Educational change involves complex concurrent processes and leading a PLC requires sophisticated leadership to build and sustain trust to nurture educator professional dialogue (Hord, 2009). Studies examining PLCs established during early childhood educational change have proposed that distributed leadership can foster collaborative professional learning (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Thornton, 2009). Distributed leadership approaches were found to promote participation, build confidence and value existing knowledge and expertise (ibid) which in turn encourages professional dialogue among educators.

## A social systems perspective of early childhood settings

A social systems perspective facilitates examination of leadership as shaped and influenced by contextual factors (Hujala, 2004) including broader social structures, organisational systems and social interactions. Here, leadership is understood as a social phenomenon intrinsically connected with the interactions and relationships within a specific context and situation (Hujala, 2013).

The influences of agency and structure are traditionally recognised as two key constituents of social reality (Giddens, 1979) and arguably studies of

leadership need to account for both individual agency and structural factors (Glatter, 2006). Agency refers to human purposiveness (Archer, 1995) and people's capacity to do things that affect their social relationships (Layder, 1998). Structure refers to broad macro-social conditions or to localised organisational social structures and networks that influence people's actions (see discussion in Sibeon, 2004, p. 54). In considering agency and structure, the "complex interrelationships between individuals, interactions and their social settings and contexts" can be appreciated (Layder, 2013, p. 114).

Early childhood centres can be viewed as complex social settings, typically hierarchical as well as collaborative (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2013) where multiple internal and external factors interact to influence educators (Hujala, 2013). Influences are interrelated and interdependent and may be direct or indirect (Nupponen, 2005). Nivala's contextual model of leadership (2002) portrays three social layers: a micro-level of individuals within a centre, a macro-level of external forces and a meso-level representing interactions among people in the setting. Educators' professional practice is influenced through the intersection of these social domains (Hujala, 2013).

The relative influences of social domains may be obscured when leadership is considered only from a perspective of individual agency. However, understanding an early childhood centre as an organisation that is itself a social system existing within a broad or macro structural system (Siraj-Blatchford & Sum, 2013) may offer insights about the influences of various internal and external factors.

Layder's (1998) theory of social domains conceptualises a stratified social world depicting four interrelated social domains. These comprise a 'structural' domain of broad external influences; a 'settings' domain representing organisational structures and systems (a centre); an 'inter-subjective' domain of situated activity or face-to-face interactions among educators and their influence on each other; and a 'subjective' domain of individual meaning derived from lived experience within the social setting.

This depiction is compatible with Nivala's contextual model (2002) and provides an analytical framework for this study (see Figure 1.)
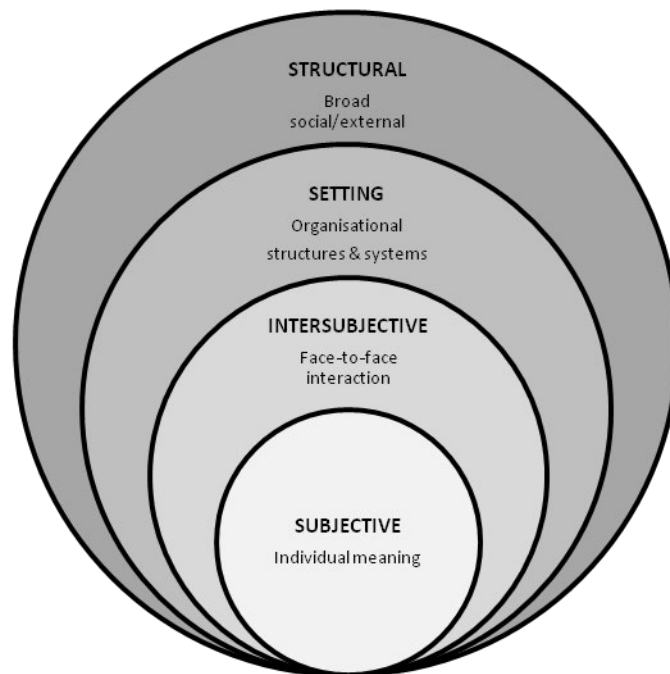


**Figure 1: Social domains (adapted from Nivala, 2002 and Layder, 1998)**

*Structural domain*

Structural factors such as economic, political, societal and cultural issues (Nivala, 2002; Sibeon, 2004) can influence educators' attitudes to educational reform and professional learning. Current government requirements including the EYLF, regulations and statutory compliance measures directly affect educators' work. Societal expectations of women's roles in society may influence leadership enactment and may be reflective of women's reticence to assume leadership positions (Rodd, 2013). In Australia, the political and societal devaluation of early childhood education and care is evident with public denigration of early childhood teachers' roles (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013) and

arguments for a rationale of care rather than education (Productivity Commission, 2014). Such views may be associated with historical associations of women with mothering where educators' work is perceived as an innate quality held by women. The result is an undermining of the recognition of the specialised skills and professional knowledge base of early childhood educators (Leeson, Campbell-Barr & Ho, 2012).

*Setting domain*

The internal structures and systems of an organisation influence its members (Sibeon, 2004). Internal structures in early childhood centres include governance, centre policies, the director's leadership and management, other positional leadership arrangements, staff qualifications and ratios, professional development processes and resources for educators. Further, organisational history, traditions and the 'unspoken organisational rules' (Layder, 1998) can influence educators.

Directors make decisions that directly influence the organisational structures (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010) and actively shape the work environment in which professional learning occurs. Through their interactions, the director participates in and influences the inter-subjective world of educator interactions and relationships and the meaning that educators make of their work. The director therefore occupies a unique space within the social world; operating within the inter-subjective domain, subject to the influence of centre structures including governance but also having power to modify organisational systems.

*Inter-subjective domain*

The inter-subjective social domain depicts face-to-face interactions where educators influence each other individually and collectively (Layder, 1998). Educators work interdependently either encouraging and motivating each other to participate in professional learning and educational change or constraining each other through their attitudes and actions.

### *Subjective domain*

Educators interpret and make sense of their experience. Individuals' subjective meanings are socially constructed, influenced by history and culture and are shaped through interaction with other people within a social context (Creswell, 2003).

## Methodology

This study investigated the relationship between leadership and professional development as early childhood educators participated in professional learning about the EYLF. In exploring this relationship the research sought to explore the following questions:

- How do early childhood directors approach curriculum change?

- What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about EYLF?

- How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change?

The methodology utilised an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998, 2013) which combined both qualitative and quantitative data resulting in complementary data sets. The analysis from all data sets has been incorporated in this chapter, and included the application of Layder's (1998) theory of social domains.

Data were gathered initially from focus groups made up of early childhood centre directors. Subsequently, two early childhood centres that were participating in ongoing professional development were selected as case study sites. Over an 18 month period, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted at two separate times with a total of 21 educators. A survey of all centre staff was undertaken to gather multiple perspectives of educators' experiences of professional development and learning.

Qualitative data was managed in a software package, transcribed and analysed using conceptual orienting codes (Layder, 2013). These codes are a key feature of an adaptive approach where preliminary codes are drawn from the extant literature to guide initial analysis. Another key feature of adaptive theory is that data collection, analysis and reflection occur concurrently and earlier stages contribute to shaping subsequent stages (ibid). Ongoing refinement of codes continued throughout the analysis with an examination of connections and relationships among codes. In this way categories were developed with the aim of identifying core concepts and clusters of supporting codes. Quantitative data from the surveys was collated into Excel spreadsheets, tables and models. This data assisted in deepening understanding of the influences of different social domains and in supporting concepts developed from analysis of qualitative data.

## Analysis and key findings

The four social domains described by Layder (1998) and summarised above provided a helpful theoretical framework for thinking about the data collected in this study. Through considering the influences at various social domains insights about the relative influences of agency and structure can be appreciated in the enactment of early childhood leadership.

### *External structural influences*

Broader external structural issues influenced educators in both positive and negative ways. Across the two case study centres, educators' interpretations of the reforms reflected their director's views. Where the director supported the reforms educators were positive; where the director expressed concerns, educators held mixed views including concern about the additional work load and fear of the changes. In both centres, educators commented that early childhood education was undervalued and perceived as unskilled child minding. Two educators in one centre specifically commented on the impact of public derision about teachers in

early childhood as presented in the media (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013). These educators observed however, that within their centre prompt action had repudiated the negative views and affirmed the value of early education.

Educators' understanding of leadership reflected societal views about women, femininity and female leadership with some participants reluctant to be identified in a formal leader position. Several educators proposed that kindness and concern for staff emotional wellbeing (Beatty, 2007) were desirable director leadership qualities and that the director was responsible for providing supportive environments (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Importantly, in one centre, educators' views were mirrored in the director's explanations about prioritising staff wellbeing. Overall, the analysis revealed that broader structural influences impacted on the centres, educators and the meanings they derived from their work.

### *Setting influences*

Data analysis revealed the director's role as fulfilling functions associated with organisational systems and governance (Press et al., 2010). The directors contributed to shaping the centre structures and systems, and were seen by educators as 'the management'. Directors modified and adapted the internal centre structures making decisions about leadership arrangements, the roles and responsibilities of positional leaders (room leaders), processes and systems for professional development and determining resources to support educators' learning. Simultaneously, directors operated across the setting (centre) domain and the inter-subjective world (see Figure 2).

All of the focus group participants considered that their role as a director encompassed pedagogical leadership (Nupponen, 2005) with primary responsibility for planning professional development and learning of educators (Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). Directors made decisions about topics, the extent of individualised professional

development, processes for collaborative professional learning, selection of projects and the composition of project groups (ibid).

However, there were differences in the levels of engagement of the case study centre directors. One director played a key role in promoting professional learning among educators (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) by being highly visible in professional development, making personal recommendations of topics to individual educators, fostering individuals' interest in new knowledge, giving feedback to individuals and groups, maintaining overview of project work, participating actively in whole-of-centre professional development and guiding educators' learning. Educators were acutely aware of the director's interest in their individual professional development and growth.

These benefits of the director's presence corresponded with school based research that leader involvement and participation in professional development and learning as 'leader, learner, or both' had positive impacts (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008, p. 663). Data analysis revealed that director presence coincided with cohesion within the educator team, evident in educators' stories of events being consistent (even when relating difficult situations), positive professional relationships among educators and engagement in professional learning (Woodrow, 2012) and greater educator satisfaction with feedback received.

Conversely, the other case study director, although involved in decision-making and overview of professional development had delegated communication and guidance to the assistant director. From the perspectives of the educators she was absent from professional development. Low director presence was associated with less cohesion among educators, diversity of interpretation about situations and lower satisfaction with feedback received.

A director's commitment to professional learning has been found to contribute to strong internal systems (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013) and the development of a 'compelling narrative' for the centre (Horwath &

Morrison cited in Press et al., 2010, p. 44). High director presence contributes to collegial interactions which in turn contribute to a shared centre vision (Aubrey et al., 2013), building shared values and beliefs and promoting connectedness and unity (Wong, Sumsion & Press, 2012), all of which are invaluable in shaping the organisational culture within a centre.

In this research, the case study directors distributed leadership to other positional leaders within their centres, who as a collective enjoyed strong professional relationships with each other. Positional leaders also contributed their knowledge and expertise to other educators (Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, 2013). All positional leaders were initially diploma qualified educators but by the second round of interviews, one of the centres had employed an early childhood teacher who was in the leadership group, while the other centre had not allocated a positional leader role to the teacher.

Conditions that promote leadership distribution are complex. For example, the director who had delegated professional development to her assistant director could be interpreted as enacting distributed leadership. However, educators in that centre did not think that any educator could lead professional development. Paradoxically, where the director maintained high presence, educators considered that others within the centre had opportunity to lead. Edwards (2009) adopts the term "distributed expertise" highlighting that distributed leadership is connected with sharing in knowledge creation. The results suggest that distributing leadership requires more than simply making space for positional leaders to lead.

In each case study centre, educators' attitudes towards government reforms reflected the views of the director, suggesting that educators' attitudes were influenced by the director's interpretation of the impact of external influences on the centre. The findings suggest the influence of the director in shaping meaning and the value of synergy between director and educator perspectives in building a cohesive team. Director presence in everyday professional learning was influential in creating shared understanding and values within the centre.

### *Inter-subjective influences*

The inter-subjective domain where leaders and educators influence each other shapes the collective emotional mood (Beatty, 2007), in turn influencing engagement and motivation. In both centres, collaborative professional learning involved educators in small group work. Analysis of educator survey data revealed that the majority of educators appreciated the value of collaborative professional development and agreed with the notion of supporting each other's professional learning. This pattern reflects what Edwards (2009) refers to as the concept of "relational agency", which describes an individual's capacity for working purposefully with others.

The composition of project groups is likely to be important for building professional dialogue. Where across-centre projects included positional leaders and educators from different rooms, informal professional conversations were fostered throughout the centre. These conversations contributed to building professional relationships and enriching professional dialogue and feedback (Urban et al., 2011). Where collaboration was restricted to positional leaders or room groups, there appeared to be fewer opportunities for leadership and professional conversations.

Data analysis highlighted the positive effects of educators' valuing each other professionally and respecting each other's knowledge and contributions. Some participants however, revealed negative attributions towards educators, particularly where there was a perceived lack of commitment. It would be reasonable to assume that valuing each other's contribution can support a sense of cohesion among educators but negative views towards others can erode trust and disrupt professional relationships.

Room leaders utilised inclusive or authoritative styles. Although some room leaders encouraged open professional conversations and valued educator contributions, other room leaders perceived their role as

disseminating information to their team and directing change. Authoritative leaders presented themselves as possessing appropriate knowledge and were less inclined to allow others opportunity to contribute and take responsibility. As a result opportunities for the emergence of leadership were reduced. Conversely, inclusive leadership styles can be motivating, encouraging educators individually and collectively and may be essential in distributing leadership (Sharp et al., 2012). Further, inclusive approaches promote professional learning because open professional dialogue is essential for critical reflection. Leadership style therefore, is a factor in building relationships among educators and promoting participative environments (Leeson et al., 2012) which, in turn are conducive to educators being confident in sharing their expertise (Edwards, 2009).

Collectively, in professional dialogue, educators interpret and challenge the 'unwritten rules' of the organisation influencing others' perceptions (Nuttall, 2013). Over time, the collective professional agency of the educators can modify organisational culture and understanding of how organisational life is conducted, thereby influencing the setting (organisational) domain (Layder, 1998).

### *Subjective influences*

The inter-subjective world of a centre comprises the personal and professional relationships among educators and has a vital influence on the centre as an organisation (Woodrow, 2012), influencing the meanings derived from work. In examining the subjective social world it can be seen that the other social domains influence an individual's interpretation of their experience. Factors that educators reported as providing a sense of satisfaction included being valued and respected for their professional knowledge and judgement (Wong et al., 2012), shared decision-making, professional conversations, opportunities for professional development, collegiality and the value of working with others. It appeared that educators' sense of professional autonomy and their capacity to contribute influenced their sense of professional identity. Several educators

recognised their own power to influence others and to institute action indicating the existence of distributive expertise (Press et al., 2010) and the emergence of leadership beyond positional leader roles (Heikka et al., 2013).

Several educators focused on the importance of having power to pursue their own professional interests in their professional development choices. An intriguing finding was that where the director had high presence in professional learning the educators were satisfied that they possessed autonomy in their professional development choices. Yet according to the director their individual choices aligned with government reforms and the centre goals. The value of a synergy created as a result of the director's interpretation of the broader structural domain corresponded with educators in this centre sharing professional goals, enjoying a sense of belonging, and satisfaction with their opportunities for personal and professional growth (Wong et al., 2012).
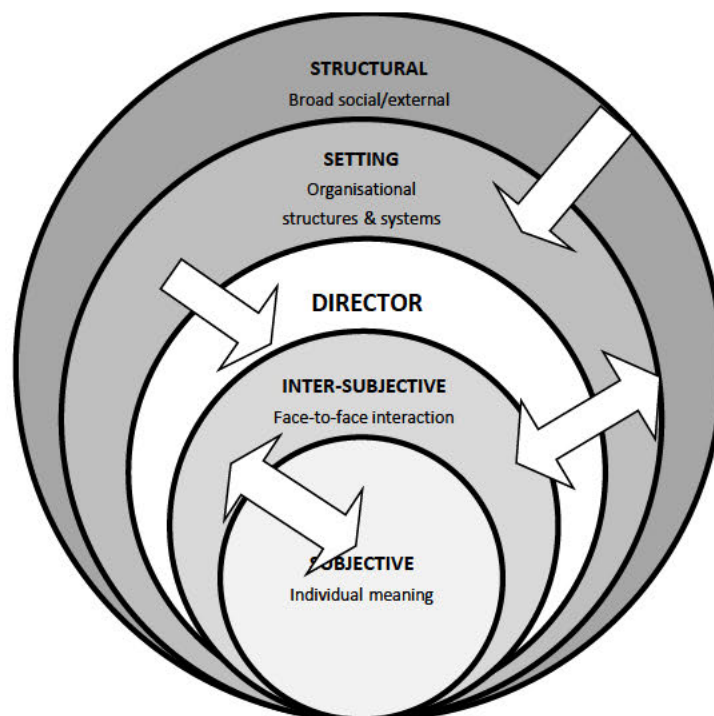


**Figure 2: Director influence and depictions of influences between social domains**

**Concluding comments**

In adopting a systems perspective, this research provides an alternate paradigm for understanding the challenges of leading centre based professional development and learning. Through analysing data from different social domains, the multiple factors that interact in complex ways to influence educators during educational change can be appreciated. Directors can play a powerful role in monitoring and interpreting external structural influences for educators, in shaping centre structures to enable participation in inclusive professional learning processes and through their presence as leader and learner in professional development and learning. In modelling inclusive leadership styles and in facilitating distributed leadership, directors can be influential in building professional relationships among staff. These factors combine to influence the inter-subjective world of educator interactions, relationships and sense of purpose, and ultimately the subjective meaning that educators derive from their work. An educator's sense of professional identity and worth are fostered through professional relationships and feelings of satisfaction thereby influencing whether an educator's agency will be channelled towards achieving organisational goals.

Although some factors can be attributed to individual agency, other factors are connected with broad structural and organisational influences. A centre director occupies a unique position that encompasses both the organisational setting and the inter-subjective domains. A director holds a position of significant influence interpreting and communicating information from different social domains, nurturing professional relationships and making management decisions that shape the environmental conditions for professional learning.

The creation of early childhood organisations that build processes and systems for collaborative professional learning is critical for achieving educational change. Distributing leadership among educators has been associated with professional learning but may be dependent on complex

factors that combine to create an environment conducive of collaboration, interdependence and leadership emergence.

Complex challenges exist for policy makers to understand and acknowledge the significant role of collaborative professional learning and how professional dialogue and interactions among educators are integral components of learning in early childhood education reform. The cost implications of resource allocation to support this work require urgent attention.

Furthermore, approaches to leadership learning for centre directors and other internal positional leaders within centres must move beyond traditional professional development that emphasises fragmented leader skills and capabilities to understanding systems and contextual leadership. An inherent component of such an approach relies on an understanding that professional learning within early childhood centres is fundamentally collaborative rather than individualised.

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# Chapter Seven

# Collaborative professional learning: contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism

## Abstract

This article contributes to understanding of professionalism in early childhood education and supports an argument that an externally imposed curriculum framework can enhance professional identity and professionalism (Miller 2008). While primarily focused on examining the nature of leadership practice during professional development and learning to implement the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009) this research offers insights into educators' subjectivities. A particular focus was to examine the influence of different social domains to understand how agency and structure were implicated in the enactment of leadership. Analysis of data from two case studies in early childhood centres suggested that professional identity was socially constructed with collaborative professional dialogue contributing to educators' sense of agency.

## Introduction

Australia's introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (known as EYLF) (DEEWR 2009) and the National Quality Standard (NQS) (ACECQA 2011) reflects international approaches that rely on statutory measures to lift quality in the early years (Oberhuemer 2005). The Australian early childhood system separates education and care services and there are inherent tensions throughout the system with competing discourses of quality and affordability evident in government expectations (Productivity Commission 2013). As with the ECEC system in England, a diversity of qualifications contributes complexity in how professional identity may be understood (Lightfoot and Frost 2015). Under current Australian provisions all practitioners working with children are referred to as educators, yet in child care half the workforce hold only a certificate level (equivalent to six months of training) or no qualification, 35 per cent hold diploma qualifications and 12 per cent hold teacher qualifications (Social Research Centre 2014). An educational leader must be appointed in each centre and from 2014 the employment of a degree qualified teacher (ACECQA 2011) was mandated. This requirement may add additional tensions to internal centre operations as most Australian jurisdictions do not require centre managers to hold an early childhood teaching degree and therefore, a director may be less qualified and potentially paid less than a teacher.

## Literature

Studies of curriculum improvement initiatives highlight the importance of ongoing professional development and leadership in improving practice (Cherrington and Thornton 2015; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). However, the extent to which leadership is a product of an individual's agency and attributable to personal capabilities, or influenced by social structures or organisational systems remains poorly understood. This research sought to examine the influences of agency and structure to gain deeper insights about the nature of leadership during professional learning for educational change.

The Australian reforms recognise the value of collaborative learning with the National Quality Standard (NQS) explicitly stating that 'reflective practices enable the service to function as a learning community' (ACECQA 2011, 165). Ongoing professional development is considered essential for curriculum change where professional learning occurs through shared processes of critical reflection (Bleach 2014; Lehrer 2013) and professional dialogue. This work can be sustained through collaborative work in professional learning communities (PLC) that are contextualised to a specific setting (Cherrington and Thornton 2015; Nuttall 2013). Yet conditions to sustain a PLC are complex requiring enabling organisational structures, shared leadership and vision, collective learning and shared practice (Hord 2009), demanding a sophistication that may be challenging for small centres (Maloney and Konza 2011). Critical reflection and professional dialogue focused on pedagogical practice stimulates professional learning through assisting educators to consider their values and to transform their practice through examining the implications of new theoretical perspectives (Lehrer 2013). Yet processes of deep level critical reflection are challenging and widely considered as needing intensive support (van Keulen 2010). Knowledge is therefore, the product of localised actions but reflects external professional discourses and educators' shared history (Nuttall 2013) suggesting that forces of agency and structure are involved.

Competing explanations of the impact of external discourses exist (Simpson 2010). Many researchers have observed that early childhood education has increasingly been subjected to external discourses of professionalisation (Dalli, Miller and Urban 2012; Lightfoot and Frost 2015; McGillivray 2008; Osgood 2010; Simpson 2010). In particular, managerial understandings are evident in the form of mandated learning frameworks and quality standards (Thomas 2009) while traditional forces from within the profession produce discourses such as codes of ethics (Sachs 1999). Within the Australian context both forces are exerted simultaneously. Professional discourses embed understandings of broader structural forces of 'history, society, ideologies and discourse' which inevitably

influence how educators see themselves (McGillivray 2008, 246). Whether imposed curricula disempower and deprive educators of professional decision-making remains unclear (Simpson 2010). As institutions examine external discourses such as learning frameworks, local interpretation can be anticipated to influence the construction of professional identity (Miller 2008; Ortlipp, Arthur and Woodrow 2011) which could be negative or positive depending on contextual factors.

Educator professional identity can simplistically be understood as how members of a profession define themselves (Ortlipp et al. 2011) but is also thought to be linked to personal identity (Lightfoot and Frost 2015) and external discourses (Woodrow 2008). In recognising early childhood centres as complex social systems, the formation of professional identity would be argued to be socially constructed, subject to multiple influences and changing with circumstances (Lightfoot and Frost 2015; McGillivray 2008). PLC processes support the formation of professional relationships among educators (Wenger 1998) thereby influencing how educators see themselves. Early childhood education has suffered from a lack of social recognition and poor remuneration which has been argued to contribute to poor professional identity (Hard 2006). However, Simpson (2010) and Miller (2008) challenge deterministic explanations as failing to account for social complexity within early childhood centres where individuals actively make sense of their experience through the professional relationship dynamics of each setting. Collaborative professional learning with dual aspects of cognitive challenges combined with socially constructed learning (Hedges 2007) may neutralise the impact of externally driven social expectations and attitudes.

Much of the existing research of contextual professional learning in early childhood centres has been undertaken with external facilitation (Cherrington and Thornton 2015; Lehrer 2013; Maloney and Konza 2011; Pirard 2011) assuming that expert accompaniment is essential to avoid standardisation or narrow interpretation of new curriculum (Ortlipp et al. 2011). Such approaches could be interpreted as representing a deficit

external discourse of early childhood education. In contrast, alternate views suggest that educators can learn how to become reflective researchers of pedagogical practice in day-to-day work (Whalley 2007).

Leadership has been recognised as a vital component in supporting professional learning. In particular, distributed leadership has been proposed to be specifically suited for building a PLC to support educational change (Cherrington and Thornton 2015; Thornton 2010) but strong site based leadership has been argued as necessary for supporting and sustaining the complex processes and relationships involved in team work (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007). Furthermore, a director fulfils an important role as both a leader of learning but also as a learner with educators (Robinson 2009; Woodrow 2012). Robinson (2009, 223) argues that leadership presence and influence for learning comprises of two components:

> First, leadership comprises goal-relevant influence – that is, those acts which take a group or organisation closer to its goals. Second, the source of the influence is followers' personal liking or identification with the leader, the leader's goal relevant expertise or the perceived legitimacy of his or her authority.

Robinson's (2009) explanation encapsulates possibilities for distributed leadership recognising that groups require leadership and individuals throughout an organisation can be identified by others as influential. A conceptualisation of leadership that accentuates influence rather than power emerges. However, navigating the contradictory positions of strong site leadership together with distributing leadership presents complexity for early childhood leaders. In this paper, it will be argued that leadership is integral in early childhood professional identity formation (Rodd 2014) and therefore professionalism.

Professionalism has been defined as 'the dispositions and orientations of professional groups and individual professionals to their status and work' (Simpson 2010, 6). However, images of leadership drawn from the corporate world may promote site-based managerialism that de-

professionalises educators, controlling and limiting their educational decision making (Thomas 2009). In contrast, democratic forms of professionalism encourage inclusive and collaborative approaches (Oberhuemer 2005; Osgood 2010) to produce internal institutional knowledge. Concepts of democratic professionalism foreground educator learning (Miller 2008; Osgood 2006) and are compatible with participative and distributed leadership and collaborative professional learning (Oberhuemer 2005; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007).

Inclusive styles of leadership are essential to foster reflective practice and professional dialogue and may be conducive to support educators' participation as both leaders and learners (Colmer, Waniganayake and Field 2014). While a relationship has been proposed to exist between perceived professional identity and leadership capacity (Hard 2006) evidence suggests that internal centre environments and positional leadership are major influences (Hard, Press and Gibson 2013) that contribute to educators' professional identity and their sense of agency to lead.

**Research methodology**

This article drew on data collected as part of a larger study exploring the relationship between leadership and professional learning. University ethics approval was obtained before commencement of data collection. In the first stage of the research, data was gathered from two focus groups of early childhood centre directors to gain understanding of a diversity of views about professional development. A preliminary coding structure using orienting codes derived from the literature review (Layder 2013) and incorporating the analysis of focus group data was developed (see discussion in Colmer, Waniganayake and Field 2015).

In the second stage, two early childhood centres were recruited as case studies. These centres were located in the metropolitan area of an Australian city, catered for up to 80 children per day and offered child care and preschool. Both centres were organised into groups based on children's age which resulted in babies, toddlers and kindergarten rooms.

An educator in each room was designated as the 'room leader' and was responsible for the daily operation of each room. The selection of case study centres relied on purposive sampling with centres offering slight differences in operating environments but both utilising collaborative professional development approaches. Data was collected from the directors and four educators from each centre using semi-structured interviews conducted on two occasions (late 2012 and mid 2013) and from a survey of all staff undertaken at a midpoint.

Analysis was undertaken using adaptive theory (Layder 1998) offering a social systems framework to examine the respective influences of external structural forces, internal systems and inter-subjective and subjective domains, recognising that different social domains influence interactions and relationships (ibid). Qualitative data analysis involved a gradual process of identifying and refining codes and categories where concept development was achieved through matching of concepts with empirical data and comparisons across the case studies. Analysis and categorising of data to different social domains in a matrix (Layder 1993) enabled patterns to be identified (see Table 1). For example, initial analysis had categorised simple concepts such as 'resistance' but examination of the influences of social domains illuminated a less obvious relationship of the effect of leader control. A social domains perspective enabled influences throughout the system to be considered and connections to be made between specific conditions and educator subjectivities. The quantitative survey assisted in verifying analysis of the qualitative data while the second round of interviews enabled deeper probing of emerging concepts such as 'influence'.

Contrary to many practitioner research studies, the researcher was deliberately unobtrusive in the professional learning that occurred in the two centres in order to gain insights about the internal processes that centres implemented as they engaged with external reforms. Further, the interview questions focused on professional development rather than leadership directly.

**Table 1: Matrix of research levels and stratified social domains**

| Social domain | Research level | Focus of research | Analytical categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Structural level* | **Context** | Broader structural aspect including macro social organisation and cultural forms, political, social, economic forces, values and traditions, power relations that may have implications over time and space | Early childhood discourses, EYLF, NQS, societal views of early education, concept of educator, funding, regulations |
| *System level* | **Social setting** | Organisation including institutions, local organisations such as individual early childhood centres, formal groups | Organisational arrangements for collaborative/collegial ways of working, whole-of-centre groups, project groups, room groups, leader group, staff meetings, time, frequency of opportunities |
| *Inter-subjective level* | **Situated activity** | Face-to-face interaction and immediate social activity that occurs among educators and staff but not including children and families. | Exploring practice, problem solving, shared PD sessions, consulting with others, listening to others' perspectives, & hearing new information, shared decision-making, analysis, debate, professional dialogue, informal and formal feedback, mentoring, asking questions, guiding others, instructing others |
| *Subjective level* | **Self** | Self-identity and individual subjective experiences and interpretation of events, includes conscious and unconscious behaviour, life experience, values and commitments. | Able to make decisions, judgement respected, power to influence others (ie helping, including, supporting), recognition (of contribution, knowledge and experience), initiating action, confidence, participation, own reflection and critical thinking, satisfaction with achievements, choices in pursuing professional interests/build own career, sense of ownership, feeling belonging, valued and supported |

Source: Field (2000); Layder (1993).

**Findings and discussion**

Earlier findings from this study suggested that the centre director played a vital role as the educational leader, planning professional development for the centre, distributing leadership to positional leaders (room leaders) and structuring a work environment that supported collaborative learning (Colmer et al. 2014). Directors were organising collaborative and reflective professional dialogue which was considered to be more effective within a room team rather than across the centre as a whole group. Organisationally, arrangements for professional development were similar in both case study centres with room leaders (diploma qualified with the exception of one teacher) taking responsibility for nurturing educators' professional development to implement educational changes arising from the reforms. Processes for structuring professional conversations in teams varied between the centres and among positional leaders.

*Factors that support participation in professional learning*

Data were analysed to identify those behaviours and dispositions that constituted leadership that supported educators' professional learning. Five categories that encompassed behaviours and dispositions that seemed particularly relevant for engaging educators in professional learning and educational change were identified:

- Disposition towards being collaborative

- Promoting inclusive professional conversations

- Nurturing critically reflective practice

- Articulating change processes

- Applying learning to create new practice

*Disposition towards being collaborative*

Both directors believed there was value in all educators in a team participating in collaborative learning (Oberhuemer 2005) which primarily

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occurred in room team meetings. The majority of educators valued collective professional learning with their peers (Maloney and Konza 2011) and appreciated that collaborative professional work in groups was beneficial for learning (Bleach 2014; Thomas 2009). Although individual educators also attended external professional development sessions, efforts were made to share information and knowledge arising from such events with other team members with the aim of improving shared pedagogical practice.

*Promoting inclusive professional conversations*

Variations existed in the capacity of positional leaders to structure and facilitate open-ended exploratory conversations with their teams. Those room leaders that valued the contribution of all educators supported educators to participate in professional conversations (Thornton 2010) including and respecting diverse voices and perspectives, listening for understanding and allowing exploration of perspectives different to their own. Conversations about practice were valued by educators which was evident in comments such as: 'the [staff] are really good, they will listen to each other and we discuss things'. Open conversations supported educators to share differing viewpoints (Pirard 2011) and helped in developing shared values and vision (Maloney and Konza 2011).

In stepping back from authoritative processes of instructing or directing, positional leaders contributed to build educators' confidence to speak out (Bleach 2014). The importance of such support was revealed by an unqualified educator who observed: 'it was great, because you just sit there otherwise and think "oh, is that ok to talk about?"' The influence of positional leaders on educators' participation became evident when following up on data from the first round of interviews. An educator who had been described by her room leader as 'disengaged' was interviewed in the second round. Contrary to earlier accounts she presented as highly motivated in her learning which she attributed to a new room leader who valued her as a contributor:

> … my confidence level now is a lot better … A few months ago
> I was just feeling like I wasn't part of the team … but with [new
> room leader], she has made me feel that I am valuable, that
> I've got a lot of knowledge.

Osgood (2010, 130) reflects on the importance of confidence, advocating the concept of 'professionalism from within' wherein educators engage collegially valuing the life experience and wisdom of others. Inclusive and encouraging leaders were better positioned to create an environment of trust where educators felt included in collaborative learning, developed a sense of belonging and community membership (Wenger 1998) and took risks in their exploration.

### *Nurturing critically reflective practice*

Both directors articulated the value of professional dialogue and reflection to encourage educators to collectively question their practice and explore new possibilities within the EYLF. However, processes were dependent on structural conditions (Cherrington and Thornton 2015) with analysis suggesting that where centre systems were weak, regular time for shared reflective practice and learning were not provided. An educator in Centre B commented that professional reflection '... doesn't occur in any formalised group type way'. Thus there was a gap between the director's vision and the centre's internal structures that were aimed at facilitating professional development and learning.

It was not possible from the data collected to gauge the depth of educators' reflection or whether it was of sufficient complexity to support critical thinking or transformative change (van Keulen 2010). Research has suggested that the specific support of the director is a vital factor in developing deeper level reflective practice, essential for educators to genuinely debate theory and practice (Whalley 2007). While it seemed likely that a director played a key role in supporting practices for reflection through their expectations of educators, there was insufficient evidence to understand precisely how the two directors in this research were involved

in the co-construction of knowledge within the centre. However, positional leadership appeared to be a factor in building educators' preparedness to participate in reflective practice and develop relational trust during professional conversations that occurred in room teams.

There was also evidence that the educators within these centres adopted compromise rather than robust professional dialogue during reflection and shared decision-making as seen in one educator's account: '… so everyone, you know, will have a different idea and it's about sort of coming to the middle … about things like that and say "oh, we'll do this but, you know, let's try this as well"'. The director of Centre B utilised direct questioning to scaffold educators' thinking. As explained by an educator at this centre:

> … she will come and sit in on our meetings … and when we asked her for input she put it in and if we didn't ask for it she would sit there and just listen to us. And if she thought we could add a little bit more she would just say 'what else could you do?' without butting in or saying 'this is what you should be doing' … encourage[s] us to keep going.

In Centre A, evidence suggested that educators that were not positional leaders were embracing responsibility to lead collaborative reflection, as a qualified educator who was not in a positional leader role commented: 'I think maybe I'm more of the one that challenges'. Professional conversations in room meetings had been formalised through the use of an agenda which enabled room leaders to structure their shared conversations in meetings to retain a focus of theory and practice, curriculum and children's learning. Room leaders in Centre A tended towards self-reflective questions rather than directly questioning others' practice as occurred in Centre B. Overall in Centre A, collaborative reflective dialogue appeared superficially as informal but was structured and encouraged participation and self-reflection.

***Articulating change processes***

An ability to articulate change processes was a key leadership behaviour that was used to support educators' inclusion, described by an educator as enabling others 'so that they can come on board'. Overt explanations helped educators to understand that incremental improvements occurred through 'making baby steps' (Diploma qualified) with other educators explaining the 'lay[ing] foundational steps' and advocating a need to 'tread lightly at first' ensuring everyone had 'a sense of ownership' (Teacher). These analogies echoed the director's guiding voice (Aubrey, Godfrey and Harris 2013) and illustrated the coherence within Centre A and the critical role of the site leader in building cultural expectations (Press, Sumsion and Wong 2010; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007).

***Applying learning to create new practice***

Success in embedding new practice appeared to be linked to participation in shared decision-making and ongoing commitment to understand and support each other in sustaining agreed practice. Shared decision-making was stronger in Centre A as explained by a teacher who was not a positional leader: 'everybody is involved in the decision-making process … so we really share the learning, explain it to [each other] model some of the ways to teach with it' (Teacher). In addition, team meeting processes included evaluative measures to review the effectiveness of practice including considering the effects of pedagogy on children's learning.

***Factors that impeded participation and professional learning***

Several factors were identified as inhibiting educators' participation and learning. As mentioned earlier a significant impediment was a failure to develop robust structures to ensure that regular time was available (Bleach 2014) but other factors could also undermine collaborative professional dialogue and professional learning.

*Positional leaders' control*

Where room leaders held traditional hierarchical models and were exerting power and control there seemed to be less participation. In Centre B, despite the director encouraging inclusion some educators were inhibited in taking risks: 'there are some staff that will sit back and you can see they want to talk but they are too scared to, or just don't have that confidence to speak out in front of people' (Unqualified educator). Control manifested in different ways but was evident in some room leaders' perceptions of their role. As explained by a room leader in Centre B: 'the leader is in charge and they have to organise everything and, you know, do the lot, and have control and power and all that sort of thing'.

Such beliefs could be expected to limit participation, particularly if room leaders were the primary decision makers and educators had little opportunity for influence. There was also a preferred style by these room leaders of direct questioning of educators which reflected the director's style of leading but this may have been less effective in encouraging participation in professional dialogue with colleagues in their own room. Another room leader complained of an inability of her team to make decisions in her absence but when asked how she felt about this, her response provided insights about her own needs: 'Well, I like it … (laughs) and like [Director] tells me off, she says "you need to start letting go" and I'm going "I'm trying, I really am" but I'm finding it really difficult sometimes.'

This room leader's conceptualisation of a leader as being knowledgeable, in charge and indispensable could be seen to be linked with her sense of professional identity that came from educators being dependent on her. In such circumstances however, educators may struggle to grow in confidence to participate in professional conversations, which is essential for reflection (Lehrer 2013). Further, there was evidence in this account that the director had been unsuccessful in articulating her rationale for loosening control and communicating her vision for educators' participation.

*Discipline expectations*

A teacher's view that professional development occurred with 'like-minded peers' meaning other teachers external to the centre was expressed in the case study educators' survey questionnaire (Centre A). While this teacher's view suggested a limited understanding of a PLC and the value of contextualised team critical reflection about practice, such perceptions could be argued as representative of the rigid historical discourses that separate early education and care as distinct professions. The director's frustration was evident: 'we had two teams in the pre-school and they worked along together but not really together'. By the second round of interviews, this director had addressed the issue by replacing the teachers with two graduate teachers, both of whom had worked at the centre as diploma level educators prior to completing their bachelor degrees. Importantly, these two teachers had learned the culture of the centre and expressed inclusive attitudes, and valued contextualised learning and collaborative professional dialogue with their diploma qualified peers.

*Casually employed staff*

Centres typically managed educator attendance at team meetings and absences by employing casual relief staff. Both centres experienced struggles in involving casually employed staff in professional learning primarily because learning was being consolidated within room meetings that were reliant on the relief staff to work with the children. Many relief staff were older women who favoured outmoded 'common sense' child rearing practices. In Centre B, there was higher reliance on casual staff to fill permanent staff positions and there were many references to younger educators' lack of confidence in articulating new practice when encountering authoritative views of relief staff. Consequently new practice was compromised.

### Linkages between leadership, professional learning and professional identity

Educators' subjective constructions about the value of their work provided insights about their sense of agency and autonomy, and their perceptions

about professional identity. The formation of professional identity has been proposed as complex and changing with circumstances (McGillivray 2008). Within the early childhood centres in this study, conditions were dynamic as educators formed relationships and worked collaboratively in professional learning. Directors and positional leaders influenced educators' understanding about their experience and therefore, the meaning that educators derived from their work.

*Agency and autonomy*

Agency describes an individual's capacity to act with some independence to affect the conditions of their social world (Sibeon 2004). Simpson (2010) referred to Archer's concept of 'internal conversation' whereby people are active and reflexive agents and proactively make sense of their context. More educators in Centre A than in Centre B believed in their power to initiate action and influence others. These educators had a sense of autonomy that was supported by feeling that choices were available to them in their work and that decision-making was shared (Hedges 2007; Thomas 2009), thus indicating a strong link between professional identity and agency derived from the ability to make decisions. Although evident in both centres, more educators in Centre A displayed confidence and reported satisfaction with their achievements, believing they possessed power to influence others. Educators in Centre A viewed autonomy as being able to build their career through pursuing their own professional interests in professional development. Although individualised choices could potentially undermine collaborative work, according to the director their individual choices aligned to the reforms and to the centre goals. Such congruence revealed the director's success in creating the work environment and building shared vision (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007).

Educators' sense of agency was linked to their professional identity (Hard 2006) which was strengthened through participatory and collaborative opportunities (Woodrow 2008) and through professional relationships that included negotiated experience, having responsibility and being respected for their professional judgement (Sachs 1999; Wenger 1998). Being

valued, being recognised as knowledgeable and enjoying peer respect were strong themes in educators' accounts, which were associated with opportunities for collegial work (Lightfoot and Frost 2015). Professional identity was therefore socially constructed within teams or groups of educators who were active in interpreting their experiences (Simpson 2010). According to Wenger (1998), professional relationships occur when educators engage with and acknowledge each other in shared, meaningful activity which was evident in educators' accounts of inclusive and collaborative professional learning (Nuttall 2013). Rather than an individual pursuit, formation of professional identity was a collective process (Miller 2008). Educators' sense of professional identity may be a key factor in whether educator agency is focused towards the overall purpose of an organisation.

*Professional relationships*

In Centre A, interactions and communication among educators were focused on centre purpose and deeply embedded in the context. Professional relationships were forged through reflection and professional dialogue as educators worked collaboratively in groups developing contextual knowledge (Hedges 2007), which contributed to shared meaning and purpose. When combined with participative and shared decision-making it could be argued that a form of 'democratic professionalism' (Oberhuemer 2005) existed that enhanced individual educators' sense of professional identity and contributed to a heightened sense of purpose and professionalism. Nuttall (2013, 203) used the term 'cultural practice' derived from Engeström's activity theory to explain the dynamics of how a group achieves its task, suggesting that in early childhood centres professional learning be considered as 'collective cultural practice rather than groups of educators with independent minds'. Complex reciprocal relationships may exist where agency is involved in the formation of professional identity (Ortlipp et al. 2011) which is also shaped through professional relationships that formed during shared learning.

*Distributed leadership*

Activity theory provides a key theoretical frame in understanding distributed leadership (Aubrey et al. 2013) illuminating a rationale for arguments of a connection between collaborative professional learning and distributed leadership. Distributed leadership cannot be imposed or delegated (Press 2012 cited in Hard et al. 2013) but rather is emergent, orchestrated through a complex combination of collaborative learning opportunities (Aubrey et al. 2013) and dynamic professional relationships.

Although both of the directors in this study had distributed leadership to their room leaders prior to the commencement of this research, both were seeking to further strengthen leadership in their centres. Opportunities for distributed leadership were stronger in Centre A where favourable conditions combined to include robust organisational processes structured for collaborative work, systems that guaranteed scheduled time and inclusive but structured professional conversations. The alignment of favourable conditions in Centre A were attributable to multiple factors including the director's positive influence on educators and positional leaders, her participation in professional development and learning, her positive interpretation of the external reforms and her ability to develop the centre structures and systems. Research has suggested that a director's ability to create distributed leadership was a factor in building an innovative organisation able to respond to change (Press et al. 2010). In this study however, the director of Centre A was not cognisant that distributed leadership extended beyond the positional leaders to include educators that were not in formal positional leader roles. Rather, distributed leadership was supported through the conditions she had created for professional learning (Aubrey et al. 2013).

In distributing leadership, the formal positional leaders in this study played a vital role in extending and consolidating distributed leadership through their ability to build collective and collaborative environments that enabled all educators in a team to benefit from shared reflection and dialogue. Distribution of leadership has been argued a 'disaggregation of leadership'

(Hard et al. 2013, 330) whereby the focus is on the collective rather than individual goals (Woods et al. 2004). Collaborative work strengthened educators' willingness to work together, to be open to new ideas and to take risks (Hard et al. 2013). Importantly, distribution was dependent on a supportive emotional environment (Lehrer 2013; Osgood 2010) achieved through the inclusive beliefs and values of positional leaders (Hard et al. 2013).

*Growth of professionalism*

Professionalism has been argued to be socially constructed (Osgood 2010) emerging where educators were reflective, self-critical and open to responsive growth (Dalli et al. 2012). Collective and collaborative professional work undertaken to explore an externally prescribed framework enhanced educators' sense of professionalism (Miller 2008). Although a sense of professionalism was evident within individual's accounts, it was nurtured collectively within a collaborative context (Dalli et al. 2012) in participatory professional relationships that created shared meaning (Oberhuemer 2005). Furthermore, professionalism was strengthened where educators took responsibility for their own professional learning and supported others' learning (Oberhuemer 2005). Professionalism was therefore a construct of professional practice (Dalli et al. 2012) where social processes among educators mediated professionalism (Simpson 2010).

**Conclusion**

Interdependent relationships existed between collaborative professional learning, the development of professional identity and the growth of leadership. Individual educator's professional identity reflected their perceptions about their situation, their access to professional development and learning, their ability to be influential and their autonomy and agency in decision-making. Educators' agency was influenced by internal, contextual factors, notably through professional relationships which were formed with their peers during collective professional learning.

Collective professional learning enabled educators to work together capitalising on collective knowledge and fostering positive professional relationships among educators. Educator's confidence to interact in professional ways increased which in turn, supported the growth of leadership and the emergence of leadership in educators that were not in formal positional leader roles. Thus, distributed leadership was nurtured through a combination of both system-level and agency-level influences (Aubrey et al. 2013), and professional identity was thereby strengthened throughout the team (Miller 2008). Overall this research supported Miller's (2008) argument that working collaboratively to understand the implications of government reforms can support the development of agency and professional identity.

The research illuminated the complex leadership role of an early childhood centre director and promoted understanding that leadership served to influence others towards participation in a collective goal. Leadership was relational, inclusive and distributed. Professional identity and professionalism grew from professional relationships and shared professional practices that created meaning for educators. Professionalism was localised and contextualised rather than embedded within the broader profession.

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# PART THREE

# Chapter Eight

# Discussion

## Abstract

This chapter synthesises the findings of this research, highlighting the significant interrelationships between key concepts. The discussion links the findings presented in Chapters Four to Seven with the research objectives and questions and the literature analysed in Chapter Two. A relationship was identified between leadership and professional learning during implementation of educational reform. The conditions for professional learning resulted from a complex interplay of a director's pedagogical and organisational leadership. Enabling organisational factors were necessary to promote opportunities for educators' participation in collective professional learning. Positional leaders also played a crucial role in facilitating professional learning. An alignment of leadership factors and favourable conditions for collective professional learning supported the emergence of distributed leadership among educators, and strengthened educator professional identity and professionalism.

**The contribution of a social theory approach in this research**

This research was framed from a social systems perspective, utilising a theoretical model that recognises the influence of different social domains, and acknowledges that human behaviour, such as leadership, is affected by both agency and structure (Layder, 1993, 1998, 2013). Internal and external factors combine to influence individuals' perceptions of their experience. From this perspective, leadership is specific to the social context in which it occurs and can be understood as embedded within a centre's social structure.

Social theory suggests that, within a specific early childhood centre, educators can be influenced by forms of thought that derive from external structural discourses (Dalli et al., 2012; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010; Thomas, 2009) and by internal factors such as organisational history, traditions and unspoken rules (Layder, 1998; Nuttall, 2013) that shape educators' understandings of their roles.

In considering the effect of internal forces, organisational structures are understood to influence the meanings and actions of organisational members, as well as their opportunities to participate in social life (Sibeon, 2004). Localised interpretations of social practices that have developed over time shape the organisational culture (Layder, 1998), while organisational values and beliefs are the culmination of people's actions and responses to internal and external structural forces (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1993; Layder, 1998). Organisational culture develops from the efforts and interpretations of organisational members but organisational culture, in turn, influences how educators participate in activities such as curriculum reform and professional learning. It can be appreciated that there is a relationship between organisational culture and people's actions and meanings.

Sibeon (2004, p. 54) advocated that through exploring the "interactions between agency, structure and social chance", insights can be gained

about complex social phenomena. By adopting an adaptive theory approach in this research (Layder, 1998) it was possible to focus on those social domains of most relevance in understanding the nature of early childhood leadership.

In this study, the primary source of data related to the inter-subjective activity that occurred among educators during face-to-face activities within the centre. Consideration of the organisational setting (or system), and the subjective meanings educators ascribed to particular experiences was useful in understanding and identifying the influences of different social domains on educators' interactions and relationships. The impact of the external structural environment was to some extent a given factor in relation to the mandated application of the NQF but there were also specific examples of societal structures impacting on leaders and educators. The following diagram (Figure 8.1) illustrates the weight afforded to different social domains in exploring the relationships within the case study centres.
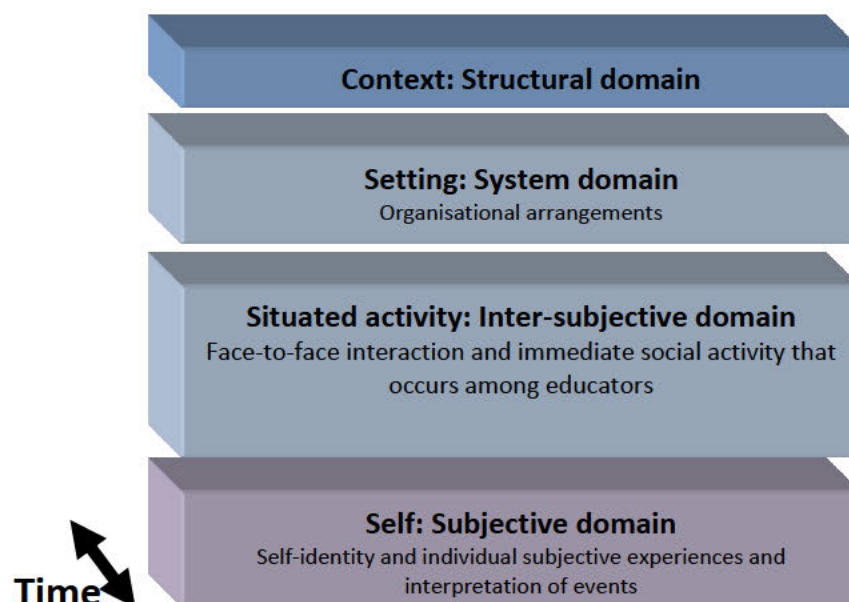


**Figure 8.1: Depiction of the weight afforded analysis of social domains in this study (Field, 2015; Layder, 1993)**

This research has focused predominantly on those social domains relating to the research questions while being mindful of the effects of other domains. For ease of reading, the research questions are reproduced here. The overall research question was to explore the interrelationship between leadership and professional learning during curriculum reform in early childhood centres. The questions were devised to focus attention on the face-to-face or inter-subjective level of activity within early childhood centres. These questions were:

1. How do early childhood centre directors approach curriculum change?

2. What processes and practices are utilised within an early childhood centre to facilitate participation in professional learning about the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)?

3. How can distribution of leadership support professional learning and change?

By exploring educators' meanings, explanations for what occurred in face-to-face interactions offered insights resulting in new explanations of how leadership is enacted within early childhood centres.


**Overview of the key findings from this research**

In examining an early childhood centre as a social system, this research demonstrates the multiple complexities and interdependencies that interact to influence day-to-day centre life. Early childhood centres are impacted by external societal structures; however internal organisational structures also influence educators while being simultaneously shaped by the interactions and actions of educators.

A key finding was that leadership and collective, collaborative professional learning are interconnected and influence all aspects of centre life. Collaborative professional learning provides opportunities for the enactment and growth of leadership in general, and nurtures the

development of distributed leadership in particular (Figure 8.2 depicts this relationship).

Distribution of leadership

Collaborative professional learning

Opportunity for leadership growth

**Figure 8.2: Relationships between collaborative professional learning and the growth of leadership**

Participation in collective and collaborative professional learning was found to contribute to a sense of cohesion among educators, a focus on shared purpose and understanding, and the willingness of educators to learn from others (see discussion in Chapter Five). Professional and respectful relationships among educators were fostered, which nurtured mutually supportive learning where educators were encouraged to take risks in openly sharing their understandings and assumptions about pedagogy and children's learning. This type of professional learning promoted educators' interpretation of the meaning and value of their work, contributing to the development of professional identity, the growth of a sense of professionalism throughout a group and a commitment by educators to explore the implications of their practice (see full discussion in Chapter Seven). In these multiple ways, collective and collaborative professional learning can be understood as collective cultural practice (Nuttall, 2013) which contributes to shaping overall organisational culture.

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An argument outlining and justifying the value of instituting collective and collaborative professional learning throughout an early childhood centre is presented in the first section of this chapter. The findings of this research suggest that professional development and professional learning can be distinguished as different processes with different purposes and outcomes, and can be conceptualised as forming a learning continuum (see Chapter Four). Professional learning involves practices of shared reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking among groups of educators which can be enacted in both formal and informal ways.

The second set of key findings relate to how leadership is enacted to influence all aspects of centre life. Firstly, the director's leadership is critical in leading the pedagogical work of the centre and in creating an operational and emotional environment that is conducive of learning. As the overall pedagogical leader, a director holds primary responsibility, power and authority to create an enabling learning environment within an early childhood centre. Learning is promoted where directors participate as leaders and learners in professional learning with their staff. Further, the development of leadership in others is dependent on the director's capacity to create opportunities for positional leaders and educators to participate as leaders.

While directors have specific leadership responsibilities, this research found that other positional leaders, such as the assistant director and room leaders also have specific and important influence in supporting professional learning and the engagement of educators. The professional knowledge and facilitation skills of positional leaders were identified as a factor in promoting professional dialogue among educators; necessary to support inclusive opportunities for shared reflection and critical thinking about their pedagogy. In this study, the positional leaders possessed variable skills in their abilities to establish safe, collaborative opportunities for professional dialogue. In particular, directive leadership styles were found to inhibit educators from taking risks in their professional learning.

These findings offer new understandings of the power and influence of positional leaders in early childhood centres.

Several principles of early childhood leadership have been identified and are discussed. These principles suggest that through exercising leadership that is relational, contextual and inclusive, positional leaders can be influential in engaging educators and nurturing a professional learning environment that in turn, encourages the emergence of leadership. Where favourable conditions aligned, an enabling professional learning environment could be a dynamic force within a centre, and the director and positional leaders could work together to support educators to engage in professional learning (see discussion in Chapter Five and in Chapter Seven).

This research found that the development of distributed leadership progresses from the director creating limited distribution initially by supporting positional leaders to be authentic decision makers in their own right. The extension of leadership distribution to those educators that do not hold formal positional leadership roles is dependent on a favourable alignment of leadership dispositions and behaviours of both the director and the positional leaders; both agency and internal structural conditions within centres are involved. A detailed explanation of these leadership roles and responsibilities is undertaken and summarised in Table 8.1.

The findings of this research shed new light on the rationale for distributing leadership in early childhood; namely for creating an environment that nurtures all educators' participation in ongoing professional learning, which thereby promotes professional growth, positive professional identity and a sense of professionalism throughout the centre (see discussion in Chapter Seven).

As indicated in Figure 8.2, the relationship is interdependent whereby collective professional learning creates opportunities for leadership growth and the emergence of distributed leadership which in turn, promotes individual and group participation in professional learning. Thus the

relationship can be understood as creating a continual spiral of leadership and learning.

**Argument for creating a professional learning environment in early childhood centres**

The findings of this study underline the benefits of a systematic professional learning environment in early childhood education and highlight the conditions that promote educators' effective participation in learning. In arguing for comprehensive and systematic approaches to professional development and learning, the concept of a "learning system" is helpful in developing a meaningful conceptual representation.

In her account of early childhood educators responding to educational reforms in Belgium, Pirard (2011) referred to a learning system. This concept can also be found in the distribution of leadership literature, associated with concepts of "distributed cognition" and "activity theory" (Harris, 2008). It emphasises the value of combined human activity which is focused on a common goal, and where groups of individuals learn and work together in interdependent ways. Likewise, the comprehensive body of literature associated with "professional learning" reviewed in Chapter Two captures the value of developing systematic approaches to collective learning (Fleet et al., 2009; Groundwater-Smith & Campbell, 2010; Hadley et al., 2015; Owen, 2014; Stoll et al., 2006; Sumsion et al., 2015; Thornton, 2009; Wenger, 1998) and outline the need to achieve systemic change through organisations and the profession (Nuttall et al., 2015; Oberhuemer, 2013; Sumsion et al., 2015).

The critical point depicted in the literature indicates that, to be effective across an organisation, professional learning needs to be organised, systematic, collective and ongoing. The use of the terminology of a "learning system" may be problematic however, and give rise to confusion with the existing use of "systems leadership" (Sharp et al., 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Sum, 2013) as a specific form of leadership in educational leadership literature. In addition, the term "system" has been used

throughout this thesis to explain the effects of both the broader external social structure on an early childhood centre, and in relation to depicting an organisation as a system (Layder, 1998). In seeking clarity, the practical and applied term of a "professional learning environment" will be used to offer a meaningful conceptual representation for a system within a system.

The components supportive of a professional learning environment that have been identified in this research study are depicted diagrammatically in Figure 8.3 to illustrate how processes combine and interact to support professional learning within early childhood centres. The following sections of this chapter will elaborate the nature of the interrelationships among the components.



**Figure 8.3: Components of a professional learning environment for early childhood centres**

*A rationale for distinguishing professional development from professional learning*

An analysis of the literature relating to professional development across educational contexts suggests differentiation in the functions and outcomes of different forms of professional development. Although the importance of ongoing professional development for early childhood centres has been acknowledged (Buysse et al., 2009; Nuttall, 2013; Press et al., 2010; Productivity Commission, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Thornton, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2008), relatively little is known about how professional development and learning influences educators' practice. This situation may be partially explained by the considerable challenges that exist in evaluating the effects of professional development of educators, particularly in attempting to assess the impact of educators' professional learning on children's wellbeing and learning.

As this research developed, it became increasingly apparent that the term "professional development and learning" is problematic because it encompasses a range of different possible combinations of professional activities which were available to centres to support engagement with the reforms. It is argued that this term is overly general, making it impossible to readily perceive the nature of the professional activities being undertaken or to consider the impact of different modes of learning on the organisation or its various stakeholders: the children, parents and educators. These limitations have a negative impact on understanding for both researchers and educators alike.

In Chapter Four, the terms professional development and professional learning were examined in detail to explore how the terms were understood by directors and educators in early childhood centres. As a result, it was suggested that the term "professional development" be used to depict an external event undertaken by an individual where there is no requirement for contextualisation or follow-up work within their centre. In contrast, the term "professional learning" was proposed as useful to denote professional activity involving educators in any contextualised,

collective and active exploration of the linkages between theoretical knowledge and practice (Chapter Four).

In justification of this proposal, a strong evidence base was presented in Chapter Two to argue a definition of professional learning that elaborated the value of educators within a specific context undertaking professional learning collectively and collaboratively. Such site-based learning could embed learning processes that explore theoretical perspectives, examine educators' attitudes and values, and critically assess the impact of pedagogy on children's learning.

As a consequence, it is argued that there may be value in distinguishing between "professional development" and "professional learning" as different processes with different purposes and outcomes, while recognising that at times such a distinction may be somewhat arbitrary because of overlap (see Chapter Four, published as Colmer et al., 2015). Throughout this chapter, the terms "professional development" and "professional learning" have been ascribed specific meanings, and have been differentiated and used deliberately. Likewise, the term "professional development and learning", when used in this chapter, has been used to emphasise a combination of modes.

### *Limitations of transmissive and one-off professional development*

Despite the research literature promoting the value of collective and collaborative approaches, such forms have not been widely adopted by training providers or early childhood centres in Australia. Indeed, the reforms have resulted in a proliferation of professional development providers with variations in quality evident (Sumsion et al., 2015). In planning professional development, many of the directors participating in this study simply invited educators to select from training calendars that offered a vast array of one-off, transmissive professional development events. Thus the selection of professional development sessions is not dissimilar to the use of a shopping catalogue, rather than forming part of an overall centre professional learning strategy.

The inference appears to be that educational change and improvement is perceived as dependent on individuals improving their knowledge, and that simply sending educators to "training" will change their practice. These views are hardly surprising given the historical understandings about continuing professional development (CPD) as skills based (refer to Chapter Four). The current focus within the NQF reforms on training and workforce development has perhaps strengthened views of professional development as having a narrow skills focus for individual educators and their competence to perform a given role (Productivity Commission, 2011, 2014).

The prevalence of one-off professional events may explain why the majority of participants in this research study assumed that going out to training events was synonymous with "professional development", as other researchers have also noted (Keay & Lloyd, 2011). Although directors and educators appreciated the limitations in the effectiveness of external one-off events, assumptions that educators would attend external professional development (or training) were widespread. Despite positive experiences of collective learning, educators continued to believe that attendance at external professional development was a right, and this belief was found to be associated with educators' perceptions of their professional identity (for a fuller discussion of these findings see Chapter Seven, Colmer, in press).

The contradiction between the acknowledgement of the value of collective and collaborative modes of learning and assumptions regarding individualised attendance at external events may be seen as a challenge for directors and educators (see discussion in Chapter Four). Whether directors were fully cognisant of the contradiction is not clear. In the current situation, directors indeed face a dilemma in achieving a balance that satisfies educators' perceptions of their right to attend external professional development and ensuring that such events contribute to a holistic centre approach for achieving curriculum reform goals.

One of the case study directors appeared to have achieved such a balance, fulfilling educators' expectations as well as the learning goals of

the centre. This was evident with educators choosing external professional development events that were congruent with organisational priorities, and with follow-up work being undertaken to process new knowledge within the centre. In this case, a director's success in being influential through her continuing presence and effective leadership of professional development and learning could be seen, indicating the efficacy of her leadership efforts (Robinson, 2009). Many questions remain, however, as to how early childhood leaders understand the inherent contradictions and more importantly how they make selections that complement the centre's goals.

This research has suggested that transmissive approaches alone have limited value; regardless of whether choices were for attendance at one-off events or the use of transmissive methods within centres such as positional leaders disseminating information to educators (see discussion of these findings in Chapter Seven). Simple instruction and transmission of information restricts opportunities for educators to participate in professional dialogue to understand the implications of new knowledge. In Centre B, these approaches were associated with lower educator satisfaction, less engagement and educators' beliefs that leadership was restricted to positional leaders. Further, transmissive approaches within a centre were less effective for building educator professional identity.

### *Conceptualising a continuum of professional development and professional learning*

This research suggests that a representation of professional development and learning as a continuum could assist leaders and educators to understand the interplay of the processes that enhance educators' knowledge and understanding. Rather than concluding professional development after attending one-off events, a continuum emphasises that professional learning within the centre is required to consider new knowledge or theory accessed externally at professional development events (see discussion in Chapter Four). Follow-up professional learning within the centre among a group of educators needs to be understood as a crucial component (Brown & Inglis, 2013). Although many scholars have

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commented on the role of professional development and professional learning as essential for reforming educational practice (Buysse et al., 2009; Hadley et al., 2015; Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Nuttall, 2013; Nuttall et al., 2015; Press et al., 2010; Rinaldi, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Sumsion et al., 2015; Thornton, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2008), this present research study has illustrated the challenges of combining the various modes (see discussion in Chapter Four).

The findings of this study make a contribution to existing knowledge by offering an explanation of the function of different modes of professional development and professional learning as complementary within a centre learning environment. A key finding arising from this research was the importance of professional learning as specifically denoting contextualised action. Collective professional learning that occurs within groups has commonly been described as constituting a community of learners, which is portrayed in the literature as promoting collaboration, inclusion, reflection and professional dialogue (Bleach, 2014; Lehrer, 2013; Thomas, 2009) where educators work together to examine new knowledge, theory and application to practice. The concept recognises the constructivist nature of learning and knowledge creation in education contexts (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Fleet et al., 2009; Nuttall, 2013). Professional learning can be perceived as a form of educator learning that embeds intellectual engagement in the form of critical thinking, whereas passive forms of professional development make no such demands.

Professional learning can be argued to be the desired outcome of educator professional development which is implicitly linked to improving practice and outcomes for children. The findings of this research suggest that one-off professional development provides access to new knowledge, but this has limited value if such knowledge is not shared with other educators, or if new knowledge is not critiqued collectively. Unless new theoretical perspectives are discussed and understood through ongoing dialogue about practice and implications for children's learning, there can be no construction or institutionalisation of new knowledge.

Professional dialogue and critical thinking have been recognised as ongoing processes that utilise developing knowledge in a dynamic way. This type of knowledge construction must at some stage occur within a particular context of educators, if educational reform is to be achieved and sustained. A depiction of a continuum may prove useful in assisting early childhood centre directors and educators to understand the relationship between accessing knowledge and co-constructing contextualised knowledge.

Indeed, this study indicated that professional learning can be undertaken without the stimulation of external professional development. Professional learning occurred in the case study centres during day-to-day work, as educators participated in collective professional dialogue that involved reflection and critical thinking about their practice drawing on their existing theoretical knowledge. In Centre A, this professional work involved a mix of structured processes to guide the assessment of practice against theory and to translate theory into practice, as educators delved into the EYLF. However, many of these interactions appeared to occur among educators in an informal way, which could also be considered a legitimate form of professional learning. Therefore, external professional development was not always a precursor of professional learning.

### Reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking

Processes of professional dialogue are understood in the research literature as involving critical thinking, debate and feedback (Jordan, 2008; Sumsion et al., 2009; Thornton, 2010). Substantial research literature has discussed the critical dimensions of reflection, and its associations with professional learning and the improvement of practice (Cardno, 2008; Ortlipp et al., 2011). Critical reflection is widely considered to be an essential process, whereby theory and practice are explored with the aim of transforming practice (Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; van Keulen, 2010), which is presumably the underlying purpose of educational change.

The Australian NQF frameworks specifically require educators to participate in critical thinking about their practice (ACECQA, 2011; DEEWR, 2009a, 2010) and advocate the need for critically reflective practice. However, the definition and use of critical reflection in the Australian framework is confused and arguably unhelpful in assisting educators to understand the statutory requirements. There is only one reference to "critical reflection" within the EYLF framework which states that "critical reflection involves closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives" (DEEWR, 2009a, p. 13). Yet, in the glossary of terms, critical reflection is defined as focusing "on implications for equity and social justice" (DEEWR, 2009a, p. 45). The processes articulated in relation to critical reflection in the National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Instrument suggests a broader application relating to assessing children's development and learning (ACECQA, 2011, pp. 18, 42–43).

Throughout this research, directors and educators favoured the terminology of "reflection" as predominantly used in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a), rather than "critical reflection" as used in the NQS (ACECQA, 2011). Overall in this research, both terms were used interchangeably by participants in focus groups and case study centres.

A lack of clarity in understanding the processes and purpose of critical reflection and professional dialogue has implications for professional learning. Regardless of the terminology preferred, educators are required to participate in processes that critique both theory and their practice, examining the impact of their work in relation to children's learning and wellbeing, in order to synthesise theory with practice (Fleet & Patterson, 2001; Fleet et al., 2009; Urban et al., 2011).

Although the literature generally advocates that critical reflection and professional conversations need to be robust (Keay & Lloyd, 2011; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Sumsion et al., 2009), such processes could be perceived as confrontational and damaging to professional relationships, particularly where groups are at developing stages of trust. Educators in

Centre A had adopted processes in their professional dialogue that arguably were suited to their context, reflecting the centre's inclusive culture of valuing all educators. In Centre A, the reflection and dialogue appeared to be characterised by care and concern, with educators' accounts emphasising respect, negotiation and compromise among groups of educators.

Respectful interactions and focus on continual exploration of practice supported the formation and sustainment of small communities of learners (see Chapter Seven). These findings are supported in the literature, where collective work involving educators in shared critical thinking is associated with the formation of a contextualised professional learning community (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015). The findings indicated that educators in Centre A were able to take risks in their professional learning, were confident to accept feedback, were able to offer feedback to others and could consider various perspectives and views that differed from their own. Educators were exploring the implications of their practice and developing deeper understandings of theoretical perspectives, processing new knowledge gained from external professional development and making changes to their practice.

This suggests that reflection and professional dialogue may be understood as processes that develop and mature within a group of educators over time, but which also reflect an ethic of care (Noddings, 2012). Further, the findings from this research can be interpreted as identifying the importance of developing habits of participating in collective reflection and dialogue as an essential first step towards becoming genuinely critical and reflective practitioners (see Chapter Seven). Provided there is pedagogical guidance, reflection and professional dialogue can be incrementally deepened over time. Such a position recognises research that the quality of critical thinking develops progressively (Dalli et al., 2012) as educators grow in experience and build trust within their community of learners. The findings highlight however, the role of leadership in scaffolding critical thinking processes.

The extent, to which educators in the case study centres were engaging in critical reflection, rather than simple reflection on practice, was difficult to determine, and indeed this research attempted no such assessment. The findings indicate a relationship between educators' opportunities to participate in inclusive, collective reflection and professional dialogue, and their engagement with professional learning as presented in the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### *Understanding systematic and complementary approaches to educator learning*

Few of the directors that participated in this study were working in a systematic way within an overall organisational development plan that included goals linked to professional development and learning (see discussion Chapter Four). The majority of directors that participated were not assessing how particular professional development and learning activities contributed to building the overall capacity of the centre. Sumsion et al. (2015, p. 423) have advocated the benefits of early childhood leaders adopting an "evaluative stance" to planning professional learning.

Figure 8.4 offers a visual depiction of a possible allocation of time and resources to different modes of professional development and learning, particularly emphasising that external professional development is one aspect only of a holistic approach for centre learning. While this figure is not based on data collected in this research, it illustrates the various components and functions that contributed to educators' learning and educational reform as evidenced in data collected from the case study centres; namely that professional learning involves educators in collectively critiquing new theoretical knowledge in light of their existing practice and ongoing processes of critical reflection and professional dialogue about day-to-day practice.

**Figure 8.4: Professional learning: a combination of external professional development and internal learning processes**

The findings of this research suggest that explicit use of the term "professional learning" may be a powerful way to highlight collective professional activities that engage educators in working collaboratively to explore pedagogical knowledge and the implications for their practice. Such an approach would contribute to building understanding in early childhood education that educational reform is achieved through combinations of professional development and professional learning.

## Directors as pedagogical leaders

The findings of this research suggest that directors, regardless of their qualifications, generally assume overall responsibilities as the pedagogical leader of their centres and that their strategies are highly contextualised (see Chapter Four). This research foregrounds the complex leadership role of an early childhood centre director, indicating that a director's role can be highly influential, encompassing the following responsibilities:

- overall pedagogical leadership and presence as leader and learner in professional learning

- contextual analysis and interpretation of external and internal environments

- establishing an internal collective and collaborative professional learning environment

- developing organisational processes designed to support professional learning

- promoting educator wellbeing and a supportive emotional climate

- creating inclusive environments

- distributing leadership to other positional leaders.

A director's ability to have an impact on educators and to create the learning environment is multi-faceted. The director exerts considerable influence through developing the organisational systems and structures such as staffing arrangements, planning organisational professional development and learning, and allocation of time and resources available for participation in professional learning. As the pedagogical leaders of their centres, directors in this study exercised extensive power to make decisions in relation to educators' professional development and learning.

There are many implications arising from this finding, not least that a director's pedagogical leadership role has been diminished in the National Quality Framework (DEEWR, 2010). This may have unanticipated outcomes as shown in an evaluation report on supporting early childhood teachers working in child care centres (Whitington et al., 2015). In a study of 38 early childhood centres, predominantly child care centres, these researchers found that the requirement under the NQS (ACECQA, 2011) for employment of a degree-qualified early childhood teacher and the appointment of an educational leader had resulted in directors transferring pedagogical leadership responsibilities to the teacher. These researchers noted the challenges experienced in achieving improvements in pedagogy and curriculum for four year old children and their study highlighted the importance of directors leading curriculum and change in their centres.

The findings presented in this thesis offer a perspective that director pedagogical leadership is essential in leading development of pedagogy and curriculum in early childhood centres. In fulfilling the role of pedagogical leader, the centre director focuses on learning for the children and the educators. This finding has support in research that early childhood directors as site leaders have responsibility for overall progress in curriculum development (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) and in guiding educators towards achieving centre outcomes (Aubrey et al., 2013). Where a case study director was highly visible and present in professional learning as occurred in Centre A, numerous benefits were realised (refer to discussion of these findings in Chapters Four, Five and Seven).

This research therefore, repositions early childhood centre directors as not only being responsible for, but also being highly influential in leading pedagogy, emphasising that specific disciplinary knowledge is required to foster educators' learning and professional growth. In addition, directors require an understanding of how to create and nurture collective professional dialogue among groups of educators. A director's views in relation to collective and collaborative work, in exercising positive and inclusive leadership and in genuinely distributing authentic leadership responsibilities to the positional leaders appointed within their centre, had major influences on educators' experience. Likewise, a director's lack of knowledge of systematic and dialogical ways to support educators' learning can be understood as a serious obstacle to educational reform.

Furthermore, this research revealed that a director's intention to create a collaborative learning environment was insufficient to achieve the conditions that promoted educator participation. This was evident in the aspirations expressed by the director of Centre B of wanting to support collaborative professional conversations among educators but the centre's approach of disseminating information to educators appeared to be counterproductive and limited discussions. The complex factors that contributed to this situation included filtering and packaging new knowledge (discussed in Chapter Five) but complexities were also evident

in the room leaders being authoritative and not encouraging educators to exercise initiative (discussed in Chapter Seven).

In contrast, the director of Centre A had created an enabling professional learning environment through her capacity to create supporting operational structures and in shaping the emotional climate of the organisation to build a sense of safety, trust and support for educator vulnerability in professional learning. This director created synergy within the centre through positive interpretations of social phenomena, and in translating supportive communications to educators. Such communication can constitute a powerful force within a centre and have a flow-on effect, particularly where enabling leadership approaches are adopted by positional leaders and educators (for examples of how synergy affects centres see discussion in Chapter Six, published as Colmer, 2015).

### *Leading pedagogy in early childhood education*

Creating and leading collaborative and safe learning environments is complex. An earlier study of early childhood leadership noted the need for "strong" director leadership to create the conditions needed for collaborative work (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). In this study, directors exhibited strong leadership in their attention to all of the components of a learning environment, as outlined in Figure 8.3, namely creating collaborative opportunities, attending to organisational operational structures and distributing leadership to positional leaders.

In addition to these conditions, the findings revealed that the director of Centre A exercised strong leadership by being highly influential, which involved being available to educators and developing conditions that promoted respectful professional relationships among educators. This director had adopted a role in guiding learning throughout the centre, stimulating educators' interests, focusing on nurturing a safe psychological space for educators to participate in professional dialogue, while monitoring each educator's learning and progress in developing their pedagogical knowledge. Within this context, other positional leaders at the

centre replicated the director's leadership approach in their work with their teams. The director's inclusive and encouraging style of engaging educators in collective professional learning was mirrored in room leaders' and educators' language and their explanations, for example the use of inclusive approaches and compromise in taking small steps in facilitating new practice in their room groups (see Chapter Seven).

Although it was not the intention of the director of Centre B for educators' professional learning to be managed but rather that professional conversations were supported, her absence from day-to-day practice resulted in the assistant director and room leaders assuming responsibilities. These positional leaders favoured managerial approaches in their relationships with educators (see discussion in Chapter Seven). An example seen throughout the centre was the room leaders' use of direct questioning, which although intended to act as a provocation to stimulate educators' examination of their practice was not effective. This method was used by the director and the positional leaders were replicating her approach to try to stimulate professional conversations. However, these techniques, when used with directive and authoritative leadership styles, undermined educators' confidence and preparedness to offer their opinions and beliefs about their practice.

These findings suggested that directive and authoritative leadership approaches were less effective in supporting open professional conversations, and potentially could inhibit educators' exploration of the effects of their existing professional practice on children's learning. The negative impact of authoritative approaches has been identified as detrimental for the development of confidence and participation in professional dialogue (Bleach, 2014; Lehrer, 2013). In contrast, respectful interactions among educators have been associated with opportunities for participation in collegial work (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015).

Thus a finding in this research was that leadership styles influenced positional leaders' efficacy in their work as pedagogical leaders. This finding resonates with the work of Aubrey and colleagues (2013), who

noted that leaders adopted a variety of leadership styles dependent on their qualifications and circumstances which they interpreted as the "pragmatic nature of leadership approaches adopted" (p. 24). However, the findings of this current study indicated that leadership behaviours could be learned within a specific context as positional leaders replicated the behaviours of their centre directors.

***The importance of the director's presence as pedagogical leader and participant in learning***

This study suggests that where an early childhood centre director maintains a high level of presence there are more opportunities to be influential as the pedagogical leader. In the case studies, collaborative professional learning in which educators participated in open professional dialogue about theory and practice was somewhat unpredictable, and a supportive leader needed to suspend urges to control such professional conversations. Indeed, such work involved inherent risks, requiring a leader with confidence in their pedagogical knowledge and maturity and trust in the team, as well as confidence in their ability to guide pedagogical outcomes.

An example of this type of pedagogical leadership was evident in a focus group participant's explanation of allowing her positional leaders to explore processes that she considered to be inappropriate (refer to Chapter Four). She had determined that in order for the team to reach the level of understanding required, it was essential for them to discover why their preferred interpretation was flawed. This example offers a powerful illustration of the sophistication and nuanced nature of a director's leadership role and an explanation that simply directing educators to a particular pedagogical position will not lead to understanding or long-term change in practice. This director, like the director of Centre A, held a great deal of trust in her team that they would arrive at the understanding she desired and ensured she was available to offer guidance. As pedagogical leader, judgements were required for when to intervene and when to step back indicating willingness in shifting the power differential.

The findings from case study Centre A highlight the relationships between director presence, pedagogical leadership and professional learning. This director's pedagogical roles included engaging educators in conversations about pedagogy, recommending areas for their professional learning and maintaining strong interest in their professional growth which fostered individual educators' commitment to their professional learning. In developing strong professional relationships with every educator, this director actively encouraged educators' professional aspirations. Educators experienced the relationship as indication that their contribution was valued, demonstrating that a director could affect educators' subjective meanings. As the director of Centre B was not visible within the centre's day-to-day life she had fewer opportunities to influence educators.

These findings offer additional insights to understand the breadth of an early childhood centre director's leadership responsibilities and the interpersonal aspects of their pedagogical leader role. The argument that early childhood centre directors fulfil a critical role as a pedagogical leader is supported by findings from school-based research which advocates that principals are influential when participating as both leader and learner in professional learning (Robinson et al., 2008).

Aubrey et al. (2013, p. 24) also observed that early childhood leaders who held teaching qualifications and master level degrees tended to associate with values and qualities that were categorised as "valuing leaders as guides". Within the current Australian system, many directors hold a diploma-level qualification only, rather than an early childhood teaching degree. Arguments for directors to hold specific early childhood professional knowledge become compelling when recognising their role as a leader of professional learning. Regardless, more research is warranted to understand early childhood centre directors' roles as pedagogical leaders and to understand the implications of professional knowledge and qualifications in leading pedagogy and professional learning. The findings of this research offer additional insights that a director's ability to create the organisational and emotional conditions for learning was a major

factor, but so too was the informal interactions that occurred between positional leaders and educators. These findings indicate that several factors interacted in supporting pedagogical leadership.

## A director's experience influences their provision of collective and collaborative professional learning

Collective and collaborative approaches to professional learning are embedded within the Australian reforms including the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009a), its accompanying support document, the *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2010), and the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011). Indeed, under Quality Area 7, the NQS requires that "Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a learning community" (ACECQA, 2011, p. 38).

Despite these requirements, directors who participated in this research did not refer to the requirements of the NQF frameworks in expressing their attitudes towards collective and collaborative professional learning. Rather, directors' decisions relating to the organisation of professional development and learning reflected their personal and professional understanding of how educator learning was achieved, and these were largely shaped by their previous experience (see Chapter Five). Where directors had prior experience of participation in practitioner research methodologies, collective approaches to professional learning were included in their overall approaches to educator professional development and learning. The findings of this research indicated that directors' choices however, often contradicted their assertions of the value of collective professional learning, with directors lacking knowledge of how to effectively combine external and internal forms of professional development and learning in complementary ways.

### *Approaches to the organisation of collective professional learning*

The present study offers new perspectives into how collective professional learning is organised in Australian early childhood centres. It was found

that collective professional learning within centres involved educators in a range of processes that included various methods of reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking. In both of the case study centres, collaborative professional learning was utilised in considering the requirements of the EYLF, exploring existing practice and planning for improvements.

In addition, findings indicated that professional learning occurred in both formal and informal ways within the case study centres (discussed in Chapter Seven). For example, while the directors and positional leaders had control over how formalised opportunities were scheduled, whether educators' professional dialogue was of value in progressing the organisational goals was dependent on the overall guidance of assistant directors and room leaders throughout the centres.

There was evidence that particular modes of formal professional learning influenced informal learning among educators. For instance, there was evidence of centre-wide professional learning projects generating broader informal networks and offering richer opportunities for professional dialogue among diverse practitioners (see for example Chapter Four and Chapter Five). Such projects are also likely to have assisted educators in Centre A in developing deeper understanding of dialogue and critical thinking with their peers. Although it could be anticipated that informal exchanges occurred throughout the day, this study focused predominantly on organised and formalised forms of collective learning.

In the case study centres formal professional learning opportunities were organised in several ways:

- centre-wide projects involving all educators;

- projects comprising membership of educators from across a centre;

- positional leader groups working on a centre-wide project;

- room teams focused on a project;

- room teams participating in reflection, dialogue and critical thinking during scheduled programming time;

- follow-up work after attendance at external professional development where groups of educators worked together to process new knowledge gained externally; and

- professional dialogue during staff meetings.

The findings of this research indicated that different arrangements in the organisation of learning groups offered different results. Superficially, it appeared that the arrangements in the case study centres were similar. However, a closer examination indicated clearly that the processes were different.

### *The implications of how directors organise professional learning*

Whole-of-centre practitioner learning projects in Centre A offered richness and diversity in knowledge sharing and creation, and enhanced learning opportunities for educators. The findings indicated that centre-wide projects, in which educators with different qualifications worked together participating in reflection and critical thinking, offered opportunities for educators to act as leaders in professional learning (Chapter Four). These project groups enriched opportunities for informal dialogue and extended educator networks. This finding has congruence with other research that has shown that educators' professional learning is enhanced in diverse groups comprising educators with a range of qualifications (Urban et al., 2011).

Educators in Centre A had developed inclusive, respectful and open-ended approaches to professional dialogue which created the conditions of a collaborative professional learning community, generating trust and strengthening professional relationships among educators. Such collegial work in a community of learners can be effective in supporting major change that can be embedded in ongoing practice.

Use of room groups for professional learning was however, favoured in both case study centres, offering ease of scheduling ongoing opportunities for professional dialogue. The approaches in Centre A enabled all educators in a group to contribute to professional dialogue to explore new knowledge and concepts. In Centre B, in contrast, instruction and dissemination of information was prevalent as explained by both the director and the positional leaders.

Potential limitations of room learning include less diversity of group members and hence a smaller pool of knowledge and expertise compared to whole-of-centre groups or mixed groups of educators. In addition, there is dependence on the leadership knowledge and dispositions of one positional leader working alone. For example, where positional leaders adopted authoritative and transmissive approaches, presenting themselves as already possessing the relevant skills and knowledge, and therefore presumably the solutions, educators' participation appeared to be constrained which was likely to have limited their exploration of concepts. In these circumstances, expert leaders assumed power and educators were passive. Such approaches were likely to be implicated in adversely affecting educators' satisfaction and engagement as discussed in Chapter Five.

Where positional leaders were scaffolded by a knowledgeable director as the pedagogical leader, their capacity to facilitate open professional conversations in room groups can be developed. In the absence of such support, however, room leaders may lack the confidence to nurture open-ended, exploratory learning, instead opting to control discussion. The leadership style of the positional leader impacts on the professional dialogue and critical thinking that occurs among a group of educators. Exclusive reliance on room team learning can also increase the risk that professional learning fails to achieve the overall learning goals of the centre.

Further, where directors embed collective professional learning, educators appreciated the need for follow-up professional dialogue after external

events. Such practices were established in Centre A within educators' room meetings where knowledge accessed through one-off events was discussed, and the implications explored with other educators in the team (see Chapter Seven). This ongoing work was supported by room leaders who were inclusive of all educators' contributions, and the majority of educators in this centre supported the inherent value of collaborative professional learning.

It is argued in this study that diversity of internal professional learning opportunities can provide richer opportunities for informal dialogue and the development of professional relationships among educators throughout a centre. Likewise, narrow networks can be expected to limit the depth of informal professional dialogue. Professional networks among educators emerged from particular combinations of professional learning opportunities, with more extensive networks coinciding with director presence and participation, and whole-of-centre opportunities (these networks were presented diagrammatically in Chapter Five).

### *Professional learning as collective cultural practice*

Collective forms of professional learning, in which educators work together in social groups to explore linkages between theory and practice, have foundations in constructivist educational theories (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Hord, 2009) but also in activity theory (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Nuttall, 2013). These theoretical concepts are compatible with the socio-cultural nature of work in early childhood centres and with theories of distribution of leadership.

The findings of this research suggest that collective professional learning could have a profound effect on centre culture, particularly as seen in Centre A, contributing to strong professional relationships among educators and a sense of cohesion, whereby staff work towards common goals. In Centre A, educators shared a common narrative in relation to the centre and their collective work, which was evident in individual's accounts. They were involved in socially mediated professional learning,

as Nuttall (2013) articulated, which was embedded within their everyday practice (Rinaldi, 2012, 2013). This combination of collaborative and contextualised professional learning contributed to the development of a positive centre culture, which, in turn, strengthened educators' participation and willingness to learn.

Whilst the early childhood research literature alludes to the importance of centre culture, research has identified broad linkages only, without identifying the specific detail of the factors and interrelationships that are involved. Studies undertaken by Thornton (2009) and Press et al. (2010) identify that collaborative and collegial interactions contribute to the achievement of shared centre vision. Hard et al., (2013) propose that collaborative work promotes educators' preparedness to work collectively, to be open to new thinking and to take risks. Likewise, shared values and beliefs promote connection among educators within a centre (Nupponen, 2005). Yet, the specific processes involved in professional learning that influence centre culture in the longer term have remained difficult to identify and describe. Nuttall (2013) detailed a study of critical reflection undertaken as practitioner research in early childhood centres, proposing that ongoing shared professional learning that involved educators could be understood as a form of "collective cultural practice" (p. 203).

The directors that participated in this study perceived centre culture as achieved through overt processes where their own influence and expectations can shape educators' behaviours (Chapter Four). However, the findings presented in this dissertation contribute to identifying and understanding the complex interrelationships between factors and components that intersect in professional learning to influence organisational culture. The findings in relation to case study Centre A highlight the benefits of professional learning and show the linkages between collective and collaborative professional dialogue and opportunities for educators to positively influence each other as they work together to achieve centre goals. It is argued that ongoing collective professional dialogue is a critical component in keeping organisational

members focused. Shared professional dialogue assists in supporting the development of shared meaning (Hord, 2009), maintaining a focus on the organisational priorities (Thornton, 2010), and in Centre A could be seen as providing the glue that binds members together.

This study identified multiple factors that are required to come together to sustain a collaborative professional learning environment but illustrates the ongoing benefits that accrue to strengthen individuals' commitment to the organisation, which can be a powerful force in sustaining a positive organisational culture. In adopting an understanding of an early childhood centre as a complex social system, this study recognised from the outset that an organisation is affected by both external and internal forces. From this perspective, external social domains combine with internal setting influences, thereby shaping interactions among organisational members (Layder, 1998, 2013). Simply put, changes in one part of an organisation affect other parts (Jorde-Bloom, 1991; Nupponen, 2005). Furthermore, an understanding of a centre as a social system as conceptualised by Jorde-Bloom (1991), Nivala (2002) and Hujala (2004, 2013) can potentially contribute to centre directors' understanding of the interconnections that influence the organisational culture of a centre.

**Developing principles for leadership practice to promote professional learning in early childhood centres**

This research has identified several enabling factors, some of which are specifically associated with the centre director, while others apply to both the director and the positional leaders. In this section, the leadership principles are elaborated providing a leadership framework for dynamic professional learning in early childhood education. These principles include:

- understanding contextual leadership

- understanding the influential nature of leadership

- fostering educators' wellbeing

- inclusive leadership practices

- leadership as relational work

- nurturing multiple leaders.

In arguing that multiple factors interact in complex ways, this research offers new insights. Some factors combine favourably to produce positive and enabling professional learning environments, while relatively minor differences result in environments that are not supportive of educators' professional learning. For example, the positive results achieved in Centre A may be explained through the positive alignment of director and positional leader behaviours, in which combinations of influence, such as organisational structures and systems, leadership styles, inclusive approaches and professional relationships were enabling and complementary, thereby supporting participation in professional learning. These factors combined to encourage the growth of leaders which, in turn, consolidated positive leadership behaviours and dispositions.

In Centre B, although some of the same factors were in place, there were also inhibiting factors that impeded professional learning. This research identifies and explains leadership understanding and practices that promote collective professional learning, and which ultimately support the distribution of leadership through strengthening opportunities for leadership throughout an early childhood centre.

### *Contextual leadership*

A conceptualisation of leadership as contextual (Hujala, 2002, 2004, 2013; Nivala, 2002) has congruence with theoretical arguments found in organisational and educational theories (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Robinson et al., 2009). Rather than relying solely on leader agency and personal qualities, contextual theories of leadership highlight understanding of the complex interactions between agency and structure, and the impact of different social domains. Such an understanding can enable leaders to appreciate the need to analyse and respond to external

structural factors and to create and manage internal centre structures and systems.

This research found that leadership was socially constructed within groups of educators in the case study centres, was unique to specific circumstances and reflective of external forces and internal organisational conditions. A range of factors interacted in shaping the activity and relationships among educators. A critical insight is that early childhood leaders require awareness of both contextual and structural factors. Such an understanding may support early childhood centre directors to appreciate the value of adopting strategic and systemic approaches to professional learning.

***Understanding the influential nature of leadership***

According to Layder (1998), face-to-face interactions during situated activity can affect organisational members, where people's attitudes and actions can either encourage and enable others or constrain them. Educational leadership has been defined as a "social influence process" (Robinson, 2009, p. 235). Such a conceptualisation of leadership is particularly relevant given the collaborative organisation of early childhood education and the interdependent nature of work, which results in complex networks of relationships. In this study, the leadership dispositions of the director of Centre A positively shaped the development of the professional dispositions of positional leaders and educators, thereby having a ripple effect throughout the centre.

This offers insight that in early childhood centres professional understandings and behaviours relating to leadership are learned within a specific social context. Researchers have advocated that a goal of professional learning is to achieve growth in educators' professional dispositions (Buysse et al., 2009; Oberhuemer, 2005); for example in relation to leadership (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Thornton, 2010; Whalley, 2007b), generalised teaching capabilities (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013) and to practitioner research

approaches (Campbell & McNamara, 2010; Reid, 2004). Researchers have also argued that professional dispositions associated with critical reflection are learned (Miller, 2011) and develop progressively within a socio-cultural context during critical reflection and professional dialogue associated with daily pedagogical work (Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013). Participation in critical reflection is a vital element in educator development as a professional. The occurrence of leadership approaches by positional leaders and educators that mirrored directors' leadership suggests that professional dispositions were indeed being learned within the case study centres.

In both centres, directors and positional leaders were attempting to influence educators, although the effectiveness of their attempts varied; some positional leaders were more influential than others. An explanation offered in this study is that a leader's style affects educators' motivation to become engaged in professional learning. In particular, controlling or directive behaviours during professional dialogue did not facilitate opportunities for educators to participate. Overall, the director and positional leaders in Centre B were unsuccessful in their attempts to influence others. Indeed, the director of Centre B had failed to influence one of the room leader's directive approaches. Despite her explanation of the value of including educators in decision-making, this positional leader persisted in controlling approaches, which perpetuated dependence and lack of initiative among educators (see discussion in Chapter Seven).

An explanation for a lack of success in influencing others can be found in the literature whereby approaches that attempt to utilise persuasion, coercion or direction have been found to be incompatible with influence and distribution (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, 2008). However, it would be reasonable to assume from the findings that contextual factors may also be implicated and influence is not simply a person-to-person interaction but a cultural phenomenon specific to the context.

In this study, influential room leaders emphasised encouragement, support and collective effort, drawing educators into professional dialogue and

deepening their learning. These leadership styles supported influence and distribution. Additional evidence to support this proposition was found in Centre B when, towards the end of the research period, a newly employed room leader who adopted an inclusive style in professional dialogue with the team was perceived by an educator as highly motivating (Chapter Seven). This example is particularly striking as this educator had been described by the previous room leader as disengaged.

A conceptualisation of leadership as influence is less dependent on traditional hierarchical structures because any educator can potentially shape the attitudes and behaviours of others (Gunter, Hall, & Bragg, 2013). Rather than being restricted to formal positions, leadership influence may be distributed among organisational members (Robinson, 2009). Such an understanding of leadership is compatible with the interdependent nature of work arrangements in early childhood education. According to Robinson (2009, p. 11), leadership as influence is dependent on recognition of a leader's expertise, knowledge or authority to lead, which was evident in the consistency of educators' views regarding the leadership credentials of the director in Centre A. There was evidence that educators in this centre who were not in formal positional leader roles were also exercising influence during reflection and professional conversations, encouraging and challenging their colleagues including the room leaders.

This research suggests that several factors were involved in the efficacy of a leader's intentional behaviour to influence others, adding weight to the argument that an alignment of complex factors is required (as outlined in Table 8.1). In this research, some positional leaders were comfortable to step back to allow educators to explore concepts while others were unable to let go of their positional authority (Chapter Seven). Arguably, if positional leaders lack confidence in their pedagogical knowledge or insight about the effects of their leadership, they may be more inclined to use overt power and authority to legitimise their leadership position. These examples no doubt reflect the range of possible responses linked to

experience and confidence but to be influential, leaders also need to understand the impact of their leadership. They need to possess the professional confidence to allow others opportunities to contribute, and thereby adopt a role as learner (Robinson, 2008).

Where positional leaders experience a director who participates as a pedagogical leader and learner, and who offers an accompanying centre narrative that is positive and affirming, positional leaders may be likely to replicate a similar role. The observation or testing of these types of scenarios in everyday practice was beyond the scope of this study but is an area for further research.

### *Fostering a climate for educators' wellbeing*

It would seem reasonable to assume a connection between educators' sense of wellbeing and their capacity to provide responsive and emotionally supportive environments for young children. In this study, the governance body of Centre A subscribed to a philosophical and practical commitment to educator wellbeing, which was articulated by the director. The director of Centre A stated that caring for the staff was an underlying centre philosophy and that wellbeing encompassed physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, communication and harmony among the staff team. This centre's commitment to staff wellbeing was echoed by educators and formed a powerful rhetoric in accounts of centre life. These educators described feeling valued and were aware that their professional worth was recognised by the Management Committee of the centre. These values coincided with a centre culture where educators articulated dispositions of value and respect for their colleagues and support for working collaboratively and cooperatively, suggesting that centre values had an impact on educators' beliefs.

Through her personal concern with each educator's professional growth and emotional wellbeing, which educators were highly attuned to, the director of Centre A was able to exert influence, positively affecting educators' professional aspirations. Further, educators in Centre A

expressed satisfaction with their work, which although linked to several factors may be associated with perceptions of being valued and having professional opportunities for participation in professional development and collaborative learning. These factors contributed to the development of professional relationships amongst educators within the centre. These particular findings offer insights into educator wellbeing, an area that has been acknowledged as requiring more research (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014).

In contrast, in Centre B frustration with individuals perceived as not engaging in professional learning had generated negative attributions towards some individual educators. These responses could be perceived as a lack of respect and valuing of educators, and while not expressed directly, could be expected to have negative impacts and erode trust within the team, contributing to an emotional climate that is not supportive of critical reflection or educators' wellbeing.

Early childhood centre directors' overt attention to staff emotional wellbeing could be interpreted as being embedded in an ethic of care (Murray, 2013; Osgood, 2004, 2010). Noddings (2012) cites this concept as having roots in feminist moral philosophy as argued by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) and specifically associated with the socialisation of women. The concept may also be interpreted as reflecting societal assumptions of appropriately feminine approaches to leadership (Hard, 2005). Whilst it is easy to equate early childhood education with women and caring, complexity arises for women leaders in reconciling care with the challenges of implementing educational change (Hard, 2005; Whalley et al., 2008; Woodrow & Busch, 2008).

It would seem that in exercising care, directors can positively contribute to educators' emotional wellbeing while maintaining focus on the organisational goals. One aspect of such care was a constructive interpretation and explanation to educators of external forces such as the NQF reforms and societal valuing of early education (Chapter Six). Where the director of Centre A held high expectations of educators and encouraged their professional learning, educators valued their own

development. When combined with opportunities for collaborative professional learning, educators were motivated to participate in formal and informal professional dialogue with their peers.

While the director of Centre B was concerned about educators' wellbeing, the centre lacked an overarching commitment to educator wellbeing and her influence was less effective in focusing the team on the centre's goals. Although she was perceived as supportive by some positional leaders, her interactions with educators were sporadic. When combined with the directive leadership styles utilised within the centre, the overall impact was less effective in motivating educators' participation.

This research offers insights into the sources of influence operating within an early childhood organisation, indicating how interrelated factors, both internal and external, contribute to educators' sense of wellbeing. At an organisational level, policy and culture contribute to educators' wellbeing but the interpersonal and leadership capabilities of the director, supported by other positional leaders are key factors. Leader influence offers a powerful enactment of an ethic of care, with individual wellbeing nurtured through opportunities to participate in meaningful, collective professional practices involving intellectual challenges, rather than focusing on individuals' personal needs and interests.

### *Inclusive leadership practices*

The power of inclusive leadership has been a theme throughout the findings of this research. Yet, the concept has limited representation in educational leadership research (examples can be found in Blackmore, 2008; Press et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009; Sharp et al., 2012). Although both of the case study directors expressed views that supported leadership approaches that engaged all educators, inclusion was not always achieved. Within the context of professional learning in early childhood education, inclusion specifically relates to opportunities for all educators to participate in reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking, which requires several interrelated factors to come together.

Participation and engagement was fostered where leaders could facilitate group professional dialogue in which educators valued others' contributions and were able to listen to other perspectives, while taking risks in contributing their own understandings and beliefs.

In addition, where a director's interpersonal and inclusive leadership style was mirrored by the positional leaders and other educators, as occurred in Centre A, educators' participation in professional learning was supported. These findings have resonance with school-based research. For example, Leithwood et al. (2006) in a meta-analysis of leadership studies, proposed that a prerequisite for supportive practices during professional development and learning is a principal who values the collective capacity of teachers. Such belief and trust in educators' capabilities, combined with a director's participation in professional learning supports the development of an enabling learning environment. Such an environment is characterised by respectful professional relationships and systems which ensure opportunities for educators' participation. These conditions offer educators a safe emotional environment for taking risks in their learning. The interactions that occur among educators in the inter-subjective domain are critical in shaping the collective emotional mood within a centre including individuals' interpretation of the meaning and purpose of their work (see Chapter Seven).

### Leadership as relational work

The findings of this research underline the specific, interpersonal professional relationships that a director exercises with different staff, which assist in maintaining a narrative of purpose and high achievement for the centre. This research recognises that social influence is specifically aimed towards achieving organisational priorities and is exercised in relational ways. The existence of professional relationships between director and educators, and among the collective of educators is a key factor in professional learning and educational change.

A depiction of leadership as a "social and relational influence process that occurs within a social system" (Parry, 1998 cited in Kempster & Parry, 2011, p. 107) explains the nature of professional relationships in Centre A. These relationships were epitomised by shared professional interests, respectful interactions and mutual purpose. School-based research has found that a primary focus of leadership is building and sustaining reciprocal professional relationships (Leithwood et al., 2006; Marsh, 2014; MacBeath et al., 2004). The values that are articulated as supporting professional relationships are the same values identified as necessary to sustain professional learning communities (Hord, 2009; Stoll et al., 2006). This overlap highlights the essential connection between professional relationships and professional learning.

Participation in collaborative professional learning in small groups is associated with the formation of positive educator professional relationships. These relationships are characterised by reciprocity in shared and negotiated experiences, having and accepting responsibility, educators' professional judgement being respected, feelings of being valued and having one's knowledge recognised, while in turn valuing others' contribution (Chapter Seven). Professional relationships are significantly different from personal friendships among educators within a centre.

Personal relationships or friendships may result in divided loyalties among a group and create tensions within groups of educators in early childhood centres. Personal friendships rather than professional relationships can arguably impede the achievement of professional goals in educational organisations by encouraging individuals to support each other to feel comfortable, thereby contributing to maintaining the status quo rather than challenging each other. The work of Hard (2005) highlights that centre cultures can stifle innovation and reform by reinforcing acceptance of existing practice. Hard uses a metaphor posited by Duke (1994 cited in Hard, 2005) that the culture of teaching can result in "'crab bucket'

cultures" (p. 148), wherein educators collectively act to restrain their colleagues from challenging existing norms and initiating improvements.

It is argued that a lack of understanding of the nature of professional relationships may contribute to encouraging competitiveness and promote situations of "horizontal violence" (Hard, 2006, p.40) with subtle forms of bullying, marginalisation and exclusion resulting in unsafe emotional environments for children and educators alike. A glimpse of an unsafe emotional environment was evident in the case study interviews where a room leader referred to another educator as "dead wood". Her assessment failed to account for a positional leader's responsibilities to provide accurate feedback to an educator about their performance. To protect the participants, this data was not used in the findings publications but is referred to in the researcher field notes and theoretical memos.

According to Robinson (2009, p. 236), understanding the nature of workplace relationships as professional rather than personal requires a shift from a "'privatised' teacher culture". While early childhood centres do not have a precise parallel with schools as teaching and learning does not occur in isolated classrooms, this research offers justifications for advancing professional relationships among educators rather than personal friendships. Multiple factors combine to create and sustain educator professional relationships which are conducive of educator participation in professional learning and ultimately in leadership. In the absence of respectful relationships, it seems unlikely that educators will gain confidence to share their opinions, knowledge or expertise or to take personal risks in exposing their values and beliefs.

The concept of relational leadership highlights that professional relationships characterised by respectful interactions and participation in professional practices manifest in positive educator professional identities, which are deeply embedded in the professional and collective, rather than the personal realm (Chapter Seven). Relational leadership is a critical aspect of leadership involving the emotional work of the director and other positional leaders within the centre. These arguments are supported by

the literature, where leadership has been identified as a factor in building relationships among educators (Geoghegan et al., 2003; Leeson et al., 2012; Nupponen, 2005) and where professional relationships are described as influential rather than explicitly power-based and hierarchical (Harris, 2007; Robinson, 2009).

### *Nurturing multiple leaders within a centre*

In the case study centres collective learning was dependent on the enactment of leadership, which was most often initiated by a positional leader. Under supportive conditions, leadership was also enacted by educators who were not in formal positional leader roles (see discussion regarding examples of the emergence of educator leadership (Chapter Five and Chapter Seven). To be effective in working towards organisational goals, these leaders require pedagogical guidance, and directors have a dual role of scaffolding the development of pedagogy and curriculum as the pedagogical leader and in nurturing the development of leaders throughout a centre.

The findings of this study offer an explanation that a director has an indirect role in promoting the growth of leadership in educators who are not in positional leader roles. The emergence of leadership occurs in favourable conditions but a director can only work to create these conditions. Where positional leaders have autonomy to lead professional learning among educators in their teams, allowing space for all educators to contribute their knowledge and ideas during collaborative professional dialogue, the emergence of leadership is supported. Thus, the development of multiple leaders throughout a centre is the result of a combination of the influence of the director and the positional leaders, which emphasises the important roles positional leaders play in supporting the face-to-face interactions that occur among educators during professional dialogue and critical thinking.

**Fostering distributed leadership**

This research began from a premise that distributed leadership offers a means of supporting collaborative professional learning in early childhood centres. Several early childhood studies associate distributed leadership with professional learning (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Jordan, 2008; Thornton, 2009, 2010), and the growth of pedagogical leadership (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Of particular interest in this current study, is how conditions promote distributed leadership. The results of this study are significant for early childhood education because substantial benefits were evident where there were multiple leaders in a centre contributing to organisational professional development and learning. In addition, this research offers insight that the achievement of emergence and distribution of leadership in early childhood centres is dependent on many factors that interact in complex ways.

A fundamental aspect of distributed leadership theorising is the emergent nature of such leadership (Gronn, 2002), and therefore appreciation that it is not possible to create distributed leadership directly (Hard et al., 2013; Press, 2012). However, this study illustrated that limited distribution may be required initially, where a director allows the positional leaders genuine leadership power. In doing so, a director can create the conditions that are conducive to leadership distribution throughout a centre. Although a director cannot directly extend leadership distribution beyond the positional leaders, a director can support the emergence of leadership through the provision of social opportunities, which occur in ongoing collective professional learning that provides a context for distribution of leadership to develop.

Distributed leadership theorising refers to activity theory (Aubrey et al., 2013; Engeström, 2008) and distributed cognition (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004) as theoretical frames to understand the mechanisms and contextualised activities that support the emergence of distribution of leadership. The findings of this research study affirm this theoretical position, finding that collective professional learning constitutes

contextualised shared activity that fosters distribution of leadership within an early childhood centre.

Robinson's (2009, p. 225) explanation that distribution has different forms offers additional insight that distribution potentially can encompass different iterations, such as formal leadership positions, specific leadership tasks or interpersonal influence. Robinson's elaboration clarifies understanding of what occurred in the case study centres, where the positional leadership arrangements of room leaders were organised by directors, and where there was real autonomy and responsibility. This could be seen as constituting a limited form of distribution.

The case study directors also distributed the specific leadership tasks of leading professional learning in teams to the positional leaders such as assistant directors or room leaders. Yet, in Centre B distribution had not extended beyond positional roles because these positional leaders had been less successful in exerting interpersonal influence during professional learning. In contrast, in Centre A, positional leader influence had nurtured educators who were not positional leaders, encouraging leadership emergence in situations of professional learning.

The emphasis, although subtle, is that distributed leadership emerged in one of the case study centres in specific conditions during collective professional learning. Specific factors contributed to create supportive conditions for distribution, beginning with a director developing centre structures and systems that supported collective professional learning, their influence in building the emotional environment for safe professional dialogue among educators, and in developing professional relationships among educators.

While directors assumed the overall guidance of pedagogy, social opportunities that were possible in small group work could, under certain conditions, result in educators' enactment of leadership. Rather than a director being influential in small group work, positional leaders held significant roles in nurturing conditions that supported leadership

emergence from educators who were not positional leaders. Leadership that engages educators in collective professional learning is relational in nature and contributes to the growth of leadership, and in turn, creates space for the enactment of distributed leadership. In summarising these relationships, Figure 8.5 depicts the interconnected nature of key factors operationalised within an early childhood organisation. This explanation has support in the literature with scholars arguing that distribution is dependent on a supportive emotional environment (Lehrer, 2013; Osgood, 2010), and is linked to the inclusive behaviours of positional leaders (Hard et al., 2013).
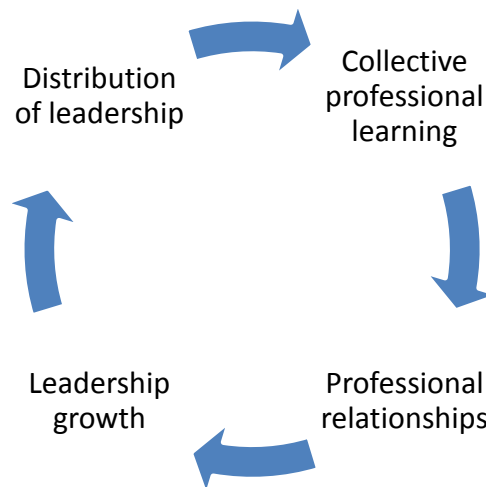


**Figure 8.5: Relationships between collaborative professional learning, professional relationships and leadership**

### *An alignment of leadership behaviours and dispositions*

This research has identified a reciprocal relationship between leadership and professional development and learning. The findings suggest that creating the conditions for an enabling professional learning environment in early childhood centres involves complex interrelationships between factors of agency and structure. A director exerts considerable leadership influence as the overall pedagogical leader and in developing the organisational system to support educators' participation, establishing collaborative professional learning processes and in genuinely distributing leadership to the other positional leaders. Essential factors include a

director's disposition towards working collaboratively and inclusively with educators; organisational skills in ensuring opportunities for all educators to participate in collective and collaborative professional learning; interpersonal skills in promoting educator wellbeing and respectful educator professional relationships; and communicating positive interpretations of the external and internal social worlds. The director's leadership supports participation in professional learning and encourages the enactment of leadership; first by positional leaders and then indirectly, through a flow-on effect, to educators who are not in formal leadership positions.

Distributed leadership is therefore, the result of multiple factors interacting and is dependent on opportunities being available for educators to assume leadership. When enabling factors align and combine favourably, benefits include strengthening educators' sense of professional identity and professionalism. The following figure (Figure 8.6) depicts and summarises the key factors and the outcomes that may be realised within an early childhood organisation engaged in collective professional development and learning.



**Figure 8.6: Outcomes of a professional learning and leadership environment in early childhood education**

The leader behaviours attributable to directors and positional leaders identified in this research as influencing engagement in professional learning are summarised in Table 8.1. These factors interact dynamically within a particular context. Although the case study centre directors held similar aspirations for their centres, their leadership approaches differed, as did the outcomes achieved overall. These differences were subtle and not apparent prior to the analysis of the data. Key differences included whether a director was primarily focused on managerial priorities or on guiding the team in professional learning. This finding is reflected in Aubrey et al. (2013) in which some leaders that lacked administrative support were more highly focused on administration and management functions.

Although the director of Centre B was preoccupied with managerial tasks this may be interpreted as indicating her comfort level, as the centre was well serviced by administrative staff. Her absence in everyday social life within the centre limited her ability to have an impact on educators, whereas participation as a pedagogical leader and learner with educators enhanced the leadership of the director of Centre A throughout the centre and supported the development of professional relationships with educators. Synergy between the director's views and educators' perceptions enhanced the emotional climate within Centre A, supporting positive attitudes towards the reforms and centre goals overall.

The capabilities and dispositions of the positional leaders in Centre A, particularly in being influential through working collaboratively, inclusively and relationally, enhanced their ability to facilitate open exploratory reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking with educators. These leadership behaviours had a profound effect on educators and importantly could be learned within a particular context. This research identified that these leadership behaviours are complementary in positively influencing educators' interactions, supporting the development of professional relationships and ultimately the subjective meaning that educators derived from their work.

This study proposes that a favourable alignment of leadership behaviours is necessary to create a social environment within a centre which motivates educators to work collaboratively with others and to enact leadership. The following table (Table 8.1) summarises the factors that have been discussed throughout this chapter, illustrating the leadership components that can be considered as influencing a learning environment.

**Table 8.1: Factors supportive of professional learning and leadership**

| Source of influence | Leadership factor | Supportive | Not supportive |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Director** | Developing organisational systems to support professional learning | Robust | Weak |
| | Establishing an internal collective and collaborative professional learning environment | Strong | Weak |
| | Distribution of leadership to positional leaders | Yes | No |
| | Director pedagogical leadership and presence in PD&L | High | Low |
| | Concern for educator wellbeing and a supportive emotional climate | Visible | Not visible |
| | Contextual analysis and interpretation of external and internal factors | Confidence | Lack of confidence |
| | Proportion of casual relief staff employed | Low | High |
| **Director and other positional leaders** | Understanding influential nature of leadership | Strong | Weak |
| | Fostering professional relationships (leadership as relational work) | Strong | Weak |
| | Facilitating professional dialogue and critical thinking | Open/ exploratory | Transmissive and disseminating |
| | Collegial valuing and respect (fostering educators' wellbeing) | High | Low |
| | Leadership style (understanding contextual leadership) | Inclusive | Directive/ controlling |
| | Support of professional learning | Guiding | Managing |

### *Professional identity and professionalism*

Internal and external forces affected how individuals within an organisation experience and make sense of their work. Professional relationships among educators were produced through inclusive and ongoing reflection and professional dialogue, as key professional learning activities that occurred in both formal and informal interactions throughout the day. This type of collective professional learning assisted educators to understand the purpose of organisational life. In this research, professional interactions among educators supported educators' sense of satisfaction with their work, contributing to interpretations that their work is meaningful and valued, which coincided with a climate of shared organisational goals.

Shared professional learning supported understanding of organisational purpose serving to positively and continuously influence the centre overall, which progressively strengthens subjective understandings and the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Layder, 1998, 2013). These conditions can strengthen educators' sense of professional identity and contribute to an enhanced sense of professionalism throughout a centre. These findings offer new insights that the formation of professional identity and professionalism is highly contextualised, and is influenced by internal centre systems and relationships, rather than purely by external factors, or extraneous issues such as poor remuneration and conditions. As such, it can be seen that where a team of educators are focused on working collectively to understand, interpret and implement curriculum reform, educators' collective professional learning contributes to building cohesion throughout a team.

This research suggests that complex combinations of social forces affect educators' sense of professional identity and the development of a collective sense of professionalism (Chapter Seven). Of particular importance is recognition that interdependent relationships exist between professional learning, the growth of professional identity and the strengthening of organisational culture.

The effects of collective professional learning provide a powerful example of how organisational culture is shaped over time, to impact on how organisational members think and behave (Layder, 1998), while highlighting that organisational systems and the behaviours of positional leaders can directly influence educators' opportunities to participate (Sibeon, 2004). This research found that organisational values and beliefs are substantially shaped by the collective professional agency of educators. Moreover, the development of professionalism is a contextual phenomenon that occurs within a group of educators working within a specific context, which illustrates the linkages with centre culture.

These findings offer tangible explanations of how centre culture develops in response to complex interactions between educators where there are opportunities to participate in inclusive, collective professional learning in response to external forces such as curriculum reform. This argument can be supported through reference to the literature where scholars have proposed that the formation of both professional identity and professionalism are socially constructed (McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Simpson 2010) and therefore dynamic and changing with circumstances, rather than the product of an individual's agency. Indeed, Dalli et al., (2012) and Miller (2008) have argued that professional identity is the product of professional experience as was evident in Centre A.

**Evaluation of the study**

This research was of a small scale and it is acknowledged that all of the participants in this study were already participating in regular professional development and learning within their centres. The two case study centre directors were committed to supporting the professional learning of their staff teams and had developed processes for professional learning within their centres. In many ways, these centres were typical of centres located in suburban areas throughout Australia, except for the commitment to educators' professional development and learning. The centres were rather ordinary but also extraordinary, particularly in the willingness of

participants to offer candid insights into their experiences, meanings and challenges.

The directors who participated in the focus groups were from a range of different services with varying years of experience as directors in early childhood centres. This group offered broad perspectives, with each of them regularly planning professional development and learning for their centre staff. Therefore, all of the participants who contributed to this study already understood the value of ongoing educator professional development and learning. As such, the participants in this study are not necessarily representative of the broader early childhood sector where appreciation of the role of professional development and learning varies considerably.

As the researcher, I was in a unique position of having over twenty years' experience as a director of a large integrated and multi-function service offering both preschool and child care services to children before school age, as well as having significant experience in government-funded programs offering professional development services to early childhood centres. This experience gave me a deeper understanding of how early childhood centres operate and the challenges in translating new knowledge to practice, as well as the subtleties that affect educators' interactions in daily work. While this knowledge base contributed to the depth of the analysis there was a heightened need to maintain a reflective journal to support the critical examination of researcher assumptions and bias.

Although it had been anticipated that there would be a relationship between leadership and professional development and learning, understanding gained from this study of the impact of both the director and the positional leaders had not been anticipated. This research offers new insights about the complex and nuanced nature of early childhood leadership and how different conditions and combinations of factors within a centre have different outcomes.

Multiple factors were found to combine to create an enabling professional learning environment within an early childhood centre. In identifying that a favourable alignment of leadership behaviours is vital to support professional development and learning, this research offers new understanding of how to operationalise new models of leadership to foster the creation of internal learning environments in early childhood centres. While the findings of this research cannot be generalised to other centres, they offer strategies that could be replicated in early childhood centres more broadly. It is argued that the findings of this study potentially offer valuable knowledge that could assist directors and positional leaders to significantly enhance the meaning of work for educators, improve staff retention and thereby contribute to the lives of children, families and educators.

A further factor which was reported by several participants in this study was the difficulty encountered with casual relief staff who were filling regular positions (refer to Chapter Seven). These staff were less inclined to participate in professional learning but were often authoritative in replicating outmoded practice, rather than being open to learning about the new curriculum framework. Some casual staff are always needed, but many employers view flexibility of the workforce as a priority, with the Productivity Commission report estimating that 72 per cent of the entire early childhood education and care workforce (including child care, preschool, out of school hours care and family day care) is employed on a casual or part-time basis (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 67). The specific number of casual staff rather than permanent part-time educators in child care is either not known or not reported (Productivity Commission, 2011; Social Research Centre, 2014), although historically, researchers have reported high rates of casually employed educators working in child care (Bretherton, 2010). This research suggests that this casualisation has detrimental implications for implementing professional learning and educational reform, particularly where casual staff fill roles designated as primary contact positions, as occurred in Centre B (Chapter Seven). It is argued that the existence of casually employed staff presents particular

challenges in professional learning and the embedding of educational change.

*Limitations*

In advocating for quality in qualitative research, Silverman (2010) recommends that limitations of a research project be considered in the final chapter. An obvious limitation of this study is its small scale in terms of the number of participants. Although this enabled a deeper level of exploration of relevant issues using more than one data collection strategy, it cannot be considered a representative sample of early childhood educators across Australia. Secondly, this research was conducted with participants who were already convinced of the value of professional development and learning. Such a position is not representative of the broader early childhood sector in Australia.

Indeed, as noted in Chapter Three, some difficulties were experienced in attracting sufficient numbers of participants to the initial focus groups, resulting in a pragmatic decision to include three directors who did not meet the desired criteria of size of service or years of experience as a director. A possible explanation for these challenges in recruiting participants may be found in the response of one director who declined the invitation, stating that she was focusing all of her attention on the reforms and could not spare the time to participate in research. Yet another factor may have been that at the time data collection began, few centres were actively promoting professional development and learning for their educators in connection with the implementation of the NQF.

Furthermore, it is also possible that centres may discount the findings of the benefits of collective and collaborative professional development and learning because of the costs involved in making time available for educators to undertake professional development and learning together as a team. It should be noted, however, that both of the case study centres participating in this study had allocated non-contact time for educators to work collaboratively in developing curriculum and pedagogy. The case

study centres had absorbed the ongoing cost of non-contact time for educators into their fee pricing schedule and neither centre had fees that were uncompetitive with their local market. Both centres were fully booked with waiting lists.

The methods utilised for the collection of data could be criticised when considered in isolation. For example, focus groups can be limited by "group think" where individuals are influenced by the flow of the conversation (Gibbs, 1997) with stronger support given to particular concepts because less confident individuals are inclined to agree with dominant voices and are reluctant to disclose dissenting viewpoints. Developing a sense of trust in a focus group can be difficult, as participants feel pressure to appear competent to their peers. It was noteworthy that in each focus group one participant chose to volunteer their experience of professional development that had failed to achieve the desired outcomes. These candid admissions supported the development of trust within each group (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) and contributed to the authenticity in the perspectives shared by those participating in this study.

A strength of using focus groups is that participants have the opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation about important and familiar topics (Macnaghten & Myers, 2007). At the time the initial focus groups were held, responding to the reforms was a highly relevant topic for early childhood centre directors, and this was reflected in the enthusiasm of those participating in this study about the phenomenon being investigated. Participants in both focus groups expressed appreciation and value of the opportunity to share in a meaningful professional conversation with their peers (Researcher field notes).

Two case studies also cannot necessarily represent the entire sector. In this research, both of the case study centres were selected as predominantly similar in organisational arrangements. Both case study centres were community-based which had not been an initial goal of the research but reflected those directors that responded to the invitation to

participate in the research. Thus the absence of centres from the for-profit sector is another limitation. However, for the purpose of this research, two case studies enabled deep exploration of a complex phenomenon and comparative analytical processes facilitated the examination of emerging concepts. From Layder's perspective (2013, p. 160), a case study may offer theory that can be generalised to other cases depending on the underpinning reasons and the linkages created from the original questions through to the findings and by constantly referring to the empirical data and the extant theory.

Finally, another limitation in this research was that the comparison of qualifications across the two centres revealed variations that were not immediately apparent when recruiting the centres. That is, overall Centre A had more qualified educators and more highly qualified educators than Centre B. Yet, in both centres, the positional leaders such as the assistant director and room leaders were diploma-qualified educators. Rather than a cause for rejecting these findings, this variability can be seen as highlighting the possibilities of strong director pedagogical leadership (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) and the potential of diploma-qualified educators to assume leadership roles where there is a strong ethos of collaborative practice within an early childhood centre.

### *Implications of the research*

#### *The significance of the director's leadership*

This research highlights the critical role that directors fulfil as the pedagogical leaders of their centres and their influence in creating conditions conducive of educators' learning. In addition, the emergence of distributed leadership is integrally connected with educators' learning but is dependent on directors initiating distribution of leadership to the formal positional leaders.

These findings have implications for centre management and policy makers. To fulfil the role of pedagogical leader, directors' require theoretical knowledge of early childhood education, yet under the NQS,

there is no requirement for directors to hold early childhood teacher qualifications and there are ambiguities as to who has responsibility for educational leadership. This research has implications for providers of director leadership professional development programs. In future, such programs would be well placed to include organisational perspectives that highlight the interconnections within an institution, and that foreground the broad educational leadership role of early childhood directors.

*Establishing professional learning environments as leadership work*

This research has argued that systematic collective and collaborative professional learning offers specific benefits to an early childhood centre, including improvements to practice, growth of leadership, higher levels of educator satisfaction, positive educator identity and professionalism, and the development of a cohesive centre culture.

Deeper level knowledge of professional learning and how educators learn within an organisation is necessary to support directors to create internal organisational professional learning systems that offer safe emotional learning environments for educators. This research has also highlighted the roles of positional leaders in facilitating inclusive learning opportunities that support reflection, critical thinking and professional dialogue. Furthermore, this research has indicated that professional learning is specifically supported where leaders assume a role of guiding rather than directing or managing learning.

These findings offer considerable challenges to the management groups of early childhood centres and policy makers alike. Currently, the value of collective professional learning is poorly understood and it can be anticipated that many services do not allocate sufficient resources for educators to work collaboratively. In addition, the findings suggest that all positional leaders, because of their role in professional learning, are likely to benefit from deeper understanding of concepts of reflection, professional dialogue and critical thinking.

*Principles of early childhood leadership*

Key principles of leadership identified in this study, namely that leadership is relational, influential, contextual and inclusive could assist all early childhood leaders to understand how to encourage educators to participate in work towards improving practice. This research has identified several factors associated with leadership and argues that a favourable alignment of these factors is necessary to support the development of leadership and professional learning. Where these factors align, centre cultures develop that emphasise an ethic of care specifically focused on educator wellbeing within a professional context. In the current climate of managerial approaches to leadership the principles of leadership identified in this research are likely to be unfamiliar to many leaders.

Overall, the findings of this research and the implications discussed above suggest a need to rethink the way professional development is offered to early childhood centres. Both directors and positional leaders require the knowledge and skills necessary to stimulate professional learning within their sites. In particular, future professional development and learning methodologies to support early childhood leadership may be developed with an aim that the processes can be replicated by leaders within their centres.

**Suggestions for further research**

Governments invest significant funds in generating new early childhood curricula designed to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for young children, yet little is known about the effectiveness of these reform initiatives. Research is needed to understand the impact of reforms and how educators apply new theoretical concepts to their practice.

This research identified links between leadership and collective professional learning. Large-scale research is needed to investigate this relationship and to examine the effects of leadership and professional learning. The Australian child care system suffers from high attrition rates of educators which are an ongoing financial burden that has not been

addressed by governments. Broader and longer term study may shed light on the relationship between a centre-wide professional learning environment and educator retention, particularly through understanding educators' satisfaction levels, wellbeing, professional identity and professionalism associated with collective professional learning. Such a study could include a cost–benefit analysis of the value of investing in educator professional learning.

A key finding of this research was that directors fulfil critical roles as pedagogical leaders and positional leaders contribute to professional learning. Leadership styles were influential in learning and in the emergence of distributed leadership. Broader research is needed to examine how leadership throughout a centre supports professional learning. However, managerial approaches to leadership are widely promoted through professional development offered to early childhood centre directors and are inferred in government rhetoric of business models considered suitable for child care centres. Yet this research has indicated that managerial approaches have limitations for leading educators' professional learning. Research to understand how leadership styles and forms of distribution of leadership support educators would be beneficial. Such a study could explore leader styles, dispositions and behaviours for supporting professional learning.

Under the NQS responsibility for educational leadership is ambiguous and the role of early childhood teachers as curriculum leaders is not well understood. Further research is needed to undertake a broader analysis of the roles of directors, educational leaders, positional leaders and early childhood teachers in supporting professional learning. In addition, an examination of the impact of director qualifications on a range of quality outcomes including professional learning, pedagogy and curriculum is required. One of the key arguments from these research findings could be explored, notably that some combinations of leader behaviours may be more supportive of professional learning than other possible combinations.

Finally, a tentative but controversial suggestion in this research is that the quality of critical thinking may be less relevant initially than building dispositions in educators to participate in open professional dialogue. Research into how educators deepen their critical thinking is needed.

**Concluding comments**

Questions of how to support early childhood centres and educators to improve pedagogy and child learning outcomes have long presented challenges to early childhood centre directors and bureaucracies responsible for government reform initiatives. This research set out to examine what occurs as early childhood centres participate in professional development and learning associated with the requirements of educational reform.

A reciprocal relationship was found to exist between professional learning and leadership. Leadership is essential to support educators' participation in collaborative professional learning, which in turn can stimulate the enactment of leadership both in positional leaders and educators throughout a centre. Thus collective and collaborative professional learning can stimulate the emergence of distributed leadership. These findings have several important implications for early childhood education although further research may be needed for wider acceptance of this claim.

This research provides new insights into the value of early childhood centres creating an internal professional learning environment which offers conditions and opportunities for educators to participate and learn interdependently. This type of learning can be purposeful and meaningful to educators and can contribute to genuine pedagogical change. A collective and collaborative learning environment reflects the ethos and organisation of early childhood education and supports broader principles of learning for adults and children alike that are founded in socio-cultural philosophies and constructivist learning theories.

An early childhood centre director has primary responsibility for creating a collaborative ethos, developing effective organisational systems and structures, and distributing leadership to the positional leaders. A director has an ongoing role as the pedagogical leader of the centre; a role that requires a director to plan professional development and learning for the centre, and to also fulfil a role as a learner and guide in professional learning. In particular, a director is responsible for providing opportunities for collective and collaborative professional learning, for ensuring inclusive professional dialogue that enables all to participate, valuing and overtly promoting educator wellbeing and facilitating positive professional working relationships among educators. A director can set the scene for nurturing multiple leaders and fostering distributed leadership throughout a centre.

Positional leaders are critical to ongoing professional learning as facilitators of critical reflection and professional dialogue within their room teams in day-to-day practice. An important goal of leadership is to influence others to participate. Where the leadership of the director and positional leaders is inclusive, relational and contextual there are possibilities for the growth of both learning and leadership.

This research adopted a perspective that complex connections exist between different social domains which interact to affect organisational life. The establishment of a professional learning environment within an early childhood centre can be understood as collective cultural practice (Nuttall, 2013). Traditional beliefs embedded within the early childhood profession can be understood as cultural practices shared among members of the profession. Localised efforts to change practice have an impact on the internal organisational culture. Although such work can create tensions (Nuttall et al., 2015), this study found there are multiple benefits arising from collective and collaborative modes of professional learning. In adopting a collective approach that is inclusive of all educators, organisational culture can be strengthened. The benefits of learning together have been affirmed by this research with benefits directly linked to building organisational culture through promoting educators'

commitment to a common purpose, the development of a centre narrative, increased cohesion among a team and commitment to ongoing professional learning.

The principles of learning and leadership identified in this research that promote educators' engagement and participation could be replicated in centres more broadly. This is not to say that the findings offer a simple solution for early childhood education and care centres. This study provided compelling insights about the complexity and the nuanced nature of leadership in early childhood education. It also presented a picture of the sophisticated leadership required and recognised the specific influences of the centre director and the other positional leaders.

Distributed leadership is contextualised and associated with pedagogical development as educators participate in professional dialogue and knowledge creation to develop new practice. These findings emphasise the importance of positional leaders having pedagogical knowledge based on early childhood disciplinary knowledge. In the absence of discipline knowledge and expertise, professional learning is rendered meaningless. Furthermore, this research found that positional leaders such as assistant directors and room leaders play a vital role in both supporting professional learning and by association, nurturing distribution of leadership. Within the Australian context, these leaders can be considered as fulfilling roles as educational leaders.

This research has provided insights into how distributed leadership can be beneficial but also offers explanation that the emergence of leadership in educators who held no formal positional leadership role was dependent on the alignment of complex combinations of factors, which has been presented in the findings chapters and throughout this final chapter. Although previous explanations of distributed leadership have identified the influential role of a site leader (Robinson, 2009; Press et al., 2010), the findings of this research study specifically identify the additional significant role of positional leaders in supporting an environment in which distribution can flourish. Further, this study illustrates that achieving leadership

distribution is not a goal in its own right; rather leadership distribution emerges within an interdependent spiral of professional learning and leadership. Thus the rationale for distribution of leadership is for facilitating organisational growth and development.

These findings offer exciting possibilities for justifying collective professional learning approaches in early childhood education, developing contextualised knowledge and new understandings to respond to curriculum reform, but also importantly for contributing to educators' satisfaction with their work. Collective professional learning can positively enhance educator professional identity, professionalism and the organisational culture of a centre. These results could prove to be of value in improving the retention of the early childhood workforce, thereby advancing the interests of young children's learning and wellbeing.

Educators' subjective meanings are attributable to specific factors that interact and nurture educators' professional relationships. This research has identified an image of early childhood leadership as professional practice which is founded in an ethic of care. It moves beyond simplistic ideas of educator relationships as friendships, to considering purposeful, strategic and systematic approaches that can enhance the professionalism of the early childhood education and care sector. This begins with the establishment of sound professional learning environments that enable educators to participate fully within an early childhood organisation.

In offering a detailed account of the components of an early childhood leadership and learning environment, it is argued that certain leadership behaviours align to create conditions that are supportive of both collective professional learning and the growth and emergence of distributed leadership. These behaviours were represented diagrammatically, offering insights for directors and positional leaders.

This research offers new understandings of the interconnected factors that affect early childhood leadership. Some combinations of factors facilitate

educators' participation while other combinations have an inhibiting effect. The findings of this research suggest that centre directors, in particular, require sophisticated skills and disciplinary knowledge grounded in early childhood education to successfully combine these complex factors within their centres to stimulate educators' learning.

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**Appendix 1**

**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER**

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Ethics Secretariat" <ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au>
**Date:** 31 March 2011 1:26:00 PM AEDT
**To:** "A/Prof Manjula Waniganayake" <manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au>
**Cc:** "Ms Kaye Colmer" <kayec@gowriesa.org.au>
**Subject: RE: HS Final Approval - 5201100268D**

```
RE: HS Final Approval - 5201100268D

Dear A/Prof Waniganayake,

Re: "Investigating leadership in professional learning during
curriculum change in early childhood centres"

The above application was reviewed by The Faculty of Human
Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee
wishes to thank you for a thorough and well prepared application.
Approval of the above application is granted and you may now
proceed with your research.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

A/Prof Manjula Waniganayake
Dr Lawrence David Field
Ms Kaye Colmer

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1.    The approval of this project is conditional upon your
continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical
Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2.    Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to
the provision of annual reports. Your first progress report is due
on 1st March 2012.

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must
submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the
project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you
are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following
website:
```
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/
```
human_research_ethics/forms
```

3.       If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4.       All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5.       Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6.       At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

http://www.mq.edu.au/policy

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external
funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of Final Approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have Final Approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Katey De Gioia
Acting Chair
Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Review Sub-Committee
Human Research Ethics Committee

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Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Ethics Secretariat

364

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Research Office
Level 3, Research HUB, Building C5C
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

Ph: +61 2 9850 6848
Fax: +61 2 9850 4465

Email:
For Enquiries: ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/
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**Appendix 2**

**INFORMATION LETTER TO DIRECTORS**

MACQUARIE
UNIVERSITY

Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name:
Manjula Waniganayake

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title:
Associate Professor

**Information – Invitation to participate in research**

Name of Project:

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**
_____

You are invited to participate in a study of how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The research aims to investigate leadership practices utilised by early childhood staff during professional learning initiatives to support curriculum change. The introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) provides an ideal environment for this study as the endorsement of EYLF by state and federal government means work to implement EYLF is now an expectation for early childhood centres

The focus of this research will be to study how individuals' behaviours and interactions support educators throughout the centre to participate in professional learning and curriculum change. This study aims to gain insights about the nature of the interactions and relationships that occur, to develop understanding of how individuals throughout a staff team exercise and experience leadership during curriculum change.

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

If you decide to participate, there are two stages you can potentially be involved in; a focus group discussion and /or as a case study centre. You may elect to participate in the focus group without participating as a case study centre.

**1.      Focus groups (1 hour)**
A group of up to 6 early childhood directors will be invited to discuss their experience and views about the role of leadership during professional learning processes and their experience of what works in staff professional learning. The focus group discussions will be held at the Institute of Early Childhood Studies at Macquarie University during May and June 2011.

**2.      Case studies (12 months)**
Two child care centers will be invited to participate as case study sites to explore how a team of early childhood educators work together over a 12 month period as they engage in professional development to learn about and implement an aspect of the EYLF. Case studies are expected to be undertaken June 2011-June 2012.

Staff in the participating case study centres will have opportunity to participate in the following activities;
•       Up to 5 staff (including the director) will be invited for 1:1 interviews with the researcher on two occasions, at the start of the research and around the 12 month mark;
•       All centre staff will be invited to complete a questionnaire to inquire about their ideas and their experience and understanding of professional learning;
•       Up to 6 staff will be invited to participate in a follow up centre focus group (1 hour) to be held at 18 months.

It is proposed that to ensure accuracy, audio recordings will be made of focus groups and interviews, which will be transcribed into written documents. Tapes and transcripts will be stored securely by the researcher and transferred to Macquarie University for safekeeping once transcribed. Interview participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy. Confidentiality will be maintained and individuals will not be identified in transcripts.

It is not expected that participation in this research pose risks to individuals or centres. The purpose of the research is to investigate the range of practices and ideas of early childhood staff, not to evaluate individual's performance or centre performance or quality. There is no funding to support participation in this research. However, the researcher is aware of financial constraints on centres and will negotiate suitable times for all research activities so that financial impact is minimal.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. It is possible that research participants are enrolled as students in the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University. You can be reassured that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the research without prejudice to academic results.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

This letter has been sent to centres through the Professional Support Co-ordinator NSW (PSC NSW) on behalf of the researchers. Centre details have not been disclosed to the researcher.

An overview of findings will be made available to directors participating in the focus groups and to centres that participate in the case studies.

We hope that you will collaborate with us in documenting the nature and effectiveness of leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres. The results are expected to provide insights into how centre teams work together during implementation of a change process such as the EYLF and as such contribute to future development of professional learning approaches in early childhood centres.

**You may elect to participate as**

☐ a focus group participant and / or

☐ nominate your centre as a case study centre

**If you are interested in participating in this research or would like further information about the research please call or email Kaye Colmer on 0418855830 or** kaye.colmer@students.mq.edu.au **by 4th August 2011.**

You will be asked to complete a brief survey providing information about your centre context and background which will be emailed to you together with a consent form for participation.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee: Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

# Appendix 3

## SURVEY OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

**PART 1.**                    **CENTRE CONTEXT**

1) a) The postcode for my centre location suburb/city/town**: _____**

2) The organisational context of my centre's management can be best described under the following categories (Please tick the appropriate boxes)

    ☐**Not-for-profit centre**
        ☐stand-alone centre
        ☐part of a large (umbrella) organisation
        ☐Local government sponsored centre
        ☐Sponsored by university or TAFE
        ☐Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS)
        ☐Work-based child care centre

    ☐**For-profit centre**
        ☐stand-alone centre
        ☐part of a group of less than 5 centres
        ☐part of a chain or corporation of more than 5 centres
        ☐Work-based child care centre

    ☐                    **Other**                    (Please                    specify)
_____

3) On an average day, the number of children that attend my centre is _____

4) During each week, how many children attending the centre are from **a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)** family background?_____

5) During each week, how many children attending the centre are from **an Aboriginal or Torres Straits Islander (ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER)** family background _____

6) During each week, how many children attending the centre currently receive federal government funding under the **inclusion support program** _____

7) The typical staffing profile (staff in paid positions working with children) at the centre is on average (please adapt to suit your centre):

| Room | No Children | No staff | No qualified staff |
|---|---|---|---|
| Babies | | | |
| Toddlers | | | |
| Preschool | | | |
| | | | |

## PART 2.        DIRECTOR ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

8) The best way to describe my role at this centre is:
☐Owner operator not involved in day-to-day centre management

☐Director /Manager responsible for leadership and management

☐ Director/Teacher: Mixed responsibilities for leadership, management and contact with children

☐Other (Please identify position title and brief description of key functions)

Position:
_____

Key functions:


_____



9) My philosophy of leadership and management could best be described as:

☐       Shared leadership approaches – I expect staff to participate in & have responsibilities in decision making & planning

☐       Authoritative leadership – I expect to be the primary driver of innovation and change & provide a high level of direction

☐       Not sure

10) Post-secondary qualifications in early childhood that I have completed consist of:
☐Graduate Diploma or Post-Graduate Certificate

☐Bachelor Degree (including Honours)

☐Diploma - Advanced or Associate
_____
_____

11) My experience in the early childhood field consists of

&#9633; more than 20 years
&#9633; 10 – 20 years
&#9633; 5 – 10 years
&#9633; less than 4 years

12) The most important area for professional development for me at present is:

_____

13) The most important area for professional development for my centre staff team is:

_____

14) Please describe briefly a professional learning experience that you have undertaken with your staff;

What was the 'project'?



How did you organise, lead and manage professional learning for the team?



How would you rate the experience in terms of success in implementing an innovation?

&#9633;Very successful
&#9633;Moderately successful
&#9633;Disappointing


Please tick the appropriate box in the table

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| At this centre there are clear links between ongoing professional development and quality outcomes for children and their families. | | |
| At this centre, ongoing professional development of staff is fundamental to maintaining service quality. | | |
| I have the knowledge and skills to source suitable training providers for professional development and training for my team | | |
| I am confident to lead and manage a professional learning program for staff | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I utilise external facilitators to lead training | | |
| Our team is excited by opportunities for professional learning | | |

**Thank you for your assistance thus far. We value your participation and perspectives.**

15) Please add any comments you wish to make that explain your answers or give us additional information about professional development activities at your centre.

**Appendix 4**

**CONSENT FORM FOR DIRECTORS**



Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name:
Manjula Waniganayake

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title:
Associate Professor

**Information – Invitation to participate in research**

Name of Project:

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**

_____

You are invited to participate in a study of how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The research aims to investigate leadership practices utilised by early childhood staff during professional learning initiatives to support curriculum change. The introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) provides an ideal environment for this study as the endorsement of EYLF by state and federal government means work to implement EYLF is now an expectation for early childhood centres

The focus of this research will be to study how individuals' behaviours and interactions support educators throughout the centre to participate in professional learning and curriculum change. This study aims to gain insights about the nature of the interactions and relationships that occur, to develop understanding of how individuals throughout a staff team exercise and experience leadership during curriculum change.

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

If you decide to participate, there are two stages you can potentially be involved in; a focus group discussion and /or as a case study centre. You may elect to participate in the focus group without participating as a case study centre.

**1.      Focus groups (1 hour)**
A group of up to 6 early childhood directors will be invited to discuss their experience and views about the role of leadership during professional learning processes and their experience of what works in staff professional learning. The focus group discussions will be held at the Institute of Early Childhood Studies at Macquarie University during May and June 2011.


**2.      Case studies (12 months)**
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Staff in the participating case study centres will have opportunity to participate in the following activities;
•      Up to 5 staff (including the director) will be invited for 1:1 interviews with the researcher on two occasions, at the start of the research and around the 12 month mark;
•      All centre staff will be invited to complete a questionnaire to inquire about their ideas and their experience and understanding of professional learning;
•      Up to 6 staff will be invited to participate in a follow up centre focus group (1 hour) to be held at 18 months.

It is proposed that to ensure accuracy, audio recordings will be made of focus groups and interviews, which will be transcribed into written documents. Tapes and transcripts will be stored securely by the researcher and transferred to Macquarie University for safekeeping once transcribed. Interview participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy. Confidentiality will be maintained and individuals will not be identified in transcripts.

It is not expected that participation in this research pose risks to individuals or centres. The purpose of the research is to investigate the range of practices and ideas of early childhood staff, not to evaluate individual's performance or centre performance or quality. There is no funding to support participation in this research. However, the researcher is aware of financial constraints on centres and will negotiate suitable times for all research activities so that financial impact is minimal.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. It is possible that research participants are enrolled as students in the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University. You can be reassured that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the research without prejudice to academic results.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

This letter has been sent to centres through the Professional Support Co-ordinator NSW (PSC NSW) on behalf of the researchers. Centre details have not been disclosed to the researcher.

An overview of findings will be made available to directors participating in the focus groups and to centres that participate in the case studies.

We hope that you will collaborate with us in documenting the nature and effectiveness of leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres. The results are expected to provide insights into how centre teams work together during implementation of a change process such as the EYLF and as such contribute to future development of professional learning approaches in early childhood centres.

---

I,          *(participant's name)*                          have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.  I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence.  I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Please tick either or both boxes:

☐ I am interested in participating as a focus group participant

☐ I am interested in nominating my centre as a case study centre

Participant's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Investigator's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ ___ Date:_____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee: Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**Appendix 5**

# INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM TO CENTRE MANAGEMENT
# (CASE STUDY CENTRES)



Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name:
Manjula Waniganayake

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title
Associate Professor

**Information and Consent Form for centres to participate as case study centres**

Name of Project:

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**
_____

Your centre is invited to participate in a study of how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The research aims to investigate leadership practices utilised by early childhood staff during professional learning initiatives to support curriculum change. The introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) provides an ideal environment for this study as the endorsement of EYLF by state and federal government means work to implement EYLF is now an expectation for early childhood centres

The focus of this research will be to study how individuals in the team support each other to participate in professional learning and curriculum change. This study aims to gain insights about the nature of interactions and relationships that occur as the team works

together, to develop understanding of how individuals throughout a staff team exercise and experience leadership during complex change. The centre will not be identified in any publications resulting from this research. However the researcher will provide the centre with feedback about processes and overall research findings.

Case study centres will be asked to plan a 12 month professional learning program for the centre team to implement an aspect of the EYLF. Both the selected aspect and the professional learning plan will be entirely the centre's choice.

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

**Case studies (approx. 12 months duration)**
The purpose of the case studies is to investigate how a team of early childhood educators works together over a 12-month period as they learn about and implement an aspect of the EYLF. Case studies are expected to be undertaken from June 2011-June 2012.

Staff in participating case study centres will have opportunity to participate in the following activities;
- Up to 5 staff (including the director) will be invited for two 1:1 interviews with the researcher, at the start of the research and at 12 months. These interviews are expected to provide different perspectives of how staff experiences professional learning and change initiatives and their understandings about how team members are encouraged to participate.
- Questionnaires to all centre staff about their experience and understanding of professional learning. The questionnaire provides an opportunity for all staff to contribute to the research and will enable further exploration of the ideas expressed by staff in the interviews.
- A follow up centre focus group (1 hour) with up to 6 participants to be held at 18 months. This session will involve a group of staff talking about the overall experience after the 12 month professional learning and curriculum implementation is completed.

It is proposed that to ensure accuracy, audio recordings will be made of focus groups and interviews, which will be transcribed into written documents. Tapes and transcripts will be stored securely by the researcher and transferred to Macquarie University for safekeeping once transcribed. Interview participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy. Confidentiality will be maintained and individuals will not be identified in transcripts.

It is not expected that participation in this research pose risks to individuals or centres. The purpose of the research is to investigate a range of practices not to evaluate individuals' performance or centre quality. There is no funding to support participate in this research. The researcher is aware of financial constraints on centres and will negotiate suitable times for all research activities so that financial impact is minimal.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. It is possible that research participants are enrolled as students in the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University. You can be

reassured that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the research without prejudice to their academic results.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

An overview of findings will be made available to directors participating in the focus groups and to centres that participate in the case studies.

We hope that you will collaborate with us in documenting the nature and effectiveness of leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres. The results are expected to provide insights into how centre teams work together during implementation of a change process such as the EYLF and as such contribute to future development of professional learning approaches in early childhood centres.

I, …………………………………. *(Chairperson or Centre owner )* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. On behalf of …………………………….Centre I agree to participate in this research, understanding that the Centre will plan  a professional learning project to implement an aspect of EYLF as part of participating in the research, and knowing that the Centre can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence.  I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Investigator's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ ___ Date:_____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee:Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)**

**Appendix 6**

**CONSENT FORM: FOR CASE STUDY CENTRE STAFF**



Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Name:
Manjula Waniganayake

Chief Investigator's / Supervisor's Title
Associate Professor

**Information and Consent Form for individual staff to participate in the case study**

Name of Project:

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**

_____

Your centre is invited to participate in a study of how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The research aims to investigate leadership practices utilised by early childhood staff during professional learning initiatives to support curriculum change. The introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) provides an ideal environment for this study as the endorsement of EYLF by state and federal government means work to implement EYLF is now an expectation for early childhood centres

The focus of this research will be to study how individuals in the team support each other to participate in professional learning and curriculum change. This study aims to gain insights about the nature of interactions and relationships that occur as the team works together, to develop understanding of how individuals throughout a staff team exercise and experience leadership during complex change. The centre will not be identified in any

publications resulting from this research. However the researcher will provide the centre with feedback about processes and overall research findings.

Case study centres will be asked to plan a 12 month professional learning program for the centre team to implement an aspect of the EYLF. Both the selected aspect and the professional learning plan will be entirely the centre's choice.

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

**Case studies (approx. 12 months duration)**

> The purpose of the case studies is to investigate how a team of early childhood educators works together over a 12-month period as they learn about and implement an aspect of the EYLF. Case studies are expected to be undertaken from June 2011-June 2012.
>
> Staff in participating case study centres will have opportunity to participate in the following activities;

- Up to 5 staff (including the director) will be invited for two 1:1 interviews with the researcher, at the start of the research and at 12 months. These interviews are expected to provide different perspectives of how staff experiences professional learning and change initiatives and their understandings about how team members are encouraged to participate.
- Questionnaires to all centre staff about their experience and understanding of professional learning. The questionnaire provides an opportunity for all staff to contribute to the research and will enable further exploration of the ideas expressed by staff in the interviews.
- A follow up centre focus group (1 hour) with up to 6 participants to be held at 18 months. This session will involve a group of staff talking about the overall experience after the 12 month professional learning and curriculum implementation is completed.

It is proposed that to ensure accuracy, audio recordings will be made of focus groups and interviews, which will be transcribed into written documents. Tapes and transcripts will be stored securely by the researcher and transferred to Macquarie University for safekeeping once transcribed. Interview participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy. Confidentiality will be maintained and individuals will not be identified in transcripts.

It is not expected that participation in this research pose risks to individuals or centres. The purpose of the research is to investigate a range of practices not to evaluate individuals' performance or centre quality. There is no funding to support participate in this research. The researcher is aware of financial constraints on centres and will negotiate suitable times for all research activities so that financial impact is minimal.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. It is possible that research participants are enrolled as students in the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University. You can be reassured that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may refuse

to participate or withdraw from the research without prejudice to their academic results.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

An overview of findings will be made available to directors participating in the focus groups and to centres that participate in the case studies.

We hope that you will collaborate with us in documenting the nature and effectiveness of leadership and professional learning in early childhood centres. The results are expected to provide insights into how centre teams work together during implementation of a change process such as the EYLF and as such contribute to future development of professional learning approaches in early childhood centres.

I, ……………………………………. have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Investigator's Name:_____
  (Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: _____ ___ Date:_____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee: Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)**

**Appendix 7**

**CASE STUDY CENTRE INTERVIEW INFORMATION**



Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850

9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

**Information brief/Letter of invitation to centre staff about participating in a case study interview**

*Dear colleagues*

…………………………………………………………….. (insert name), the Centre Director of …………………………………………………………………… (insert name of centre) has nominated the centre to be a case study in the above research study. The purpose of the study is to explore how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). This study aims to gain insights about the nature of the interactions and relationships that occur, to develop understanding of how individuals throughout a staff team exercise and experience leadership during curriculum change.

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

As a part of this study, we are keen to hear from a wide variety of staff within the centre.

Each interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be conducted by Kaye Colmer. Could you please confirm your availability to participate in this interview by completing the attached Consent Form and returning it to the Centre Director by …… (insert date).

The interview will be audio taped to ensure your views and ideas are heard and acknowledged. The audio tape will only be listened to by the Research Team and will be erased once the information has been transcribed. You will have an opportunity to read over the interview and make any amendments you feel necessary. An overview of findings will be made available to the Centre. You may request to see this information through the Centre Director.

If you are currently enrolled as a student in any study program at Macquarie University, please be assured that your involvement in this study will not be linked with your academic studies at one of our universities. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee; Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 02 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

We hope that you will collaborate with us in documenting the nature and effectiveness of professional development opportunities available to childcare centre staff. The results will be of much importance to all of us concerned with planning and achieving high quality children's services in this country. An information brief about this study is attached and provides more details about what is expected of you and your centre.

Many thanks for your support and assistance with this research.

Yours sincerely

**A/Professor Manjula Waniganayake**
Macquarie University

**Kaye Colmer**
Student, Macquarie University

**Appendix 8**

**CONSENT FORM: CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS**



Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

Name of Project:

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**

I, ……………………………………………………………………..…………………………………………… ……………… have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the **case study** interview, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.


Participant's Name:

_____
(block letters)

Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____


Investigator's Name:

_____
(block letters)


Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee: Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)**

# Appendix 9

## INFORMATION AND CONSENT FOR CASE STUDY SURVEY

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Institute of Early Childhood

Faculty of Human Services

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY  NSW  2109

Phone: +61 (02) 9850 9820

Fax: +61 (02) 9850 9890

**Information brief/Letter of invitation to centre educators to complete survey**

**Investigating leadership in professional learning during curriculum change in early childhood centres**

Dear colleagues

…………………………………………………………….. (insert name), the Centre Director of ………………………………………………………………… (insert name of centre) has nominated the centre to be a case study in the above research study. The purpose of the study is to explore how leadership supports professional learning for early childhood educators as they engage with the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The research is being conducted by Ms Kaye Colmer to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake (Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University) Phone: 02 9850 9825 email: manjula.waniganayake@mq.edu.au.

**You are invited to complete the attached survey.**
It is expected the survey will take between 10-15 minutes to complete.

We are keen to hear from a wide variety of educators within the centre.
The purpose of the survey is to collect your views about professional learning undertaken to support implementation of the EYLF. When you have completed the survey please place in the envelope provided and seal to ensure your confidentiality.

An overview of findings will be made available to the centre in due course. You may request to see this information through the Centre Director.

You can be reassured that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
Any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee: Approval No. 5201100268D. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 02 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Many thanks for your support and assistance with this research.

Yours sincerely

**A/Professor Manjula Waniganayake**
Macquarie University

**Appendix 10**

**FOCUS GROUP QUESTION**

I'm just going to start off by saying, this focus group is an opportunity for us to have a fairly informal discussion about what your understandings are about how curriculum change happens within your centres, and how you understand the process, and what you think are the elements that drive the process.

I want to capture as much information from you as we can in an hour perhaps.

I wanted to start off by asking someone to volunteer to tell a story about a professional learning experience that they have had in their centre that they would share with the group and, just very briefly, without going into every detail of it – but, share an example of a professional learning experience that you think has gone well and why you think that has gone well. Or, if you had a dramatic example of one that didn't go well, because we have all had those, you might want to share that.

So that would just warm us up to a conversation.

# Appendix 11

## ROUND 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Guiding questions

What is it like to be in [position] at this centre?

I'm trying to understand how professional development and learning happens in early childhood centres and I'd like you to talk about professional development and how it happens in this centre. But I'm particularly interested in PD that relates to program development. What has happened in the past year? How would that compare to 5 years ago?

What have you done?
How has that worked?
What are the challenges?
Who are the resistors?

Can you tell me about some PD you have been involved in at the centre where you have worked with other staff to develop your programs or practice?

What did you do?
Who was involved?
How were staff supported to participate in professional learning?
What things do you think were difficult for people?
Do you think that practice changed?
Do you think there were there some people who were not interested in the professional learning?

Perhaps you could tell me about a PD experience that you think wasn't successful?

How are decisions about PD made in this centre?
Who do you think does the leading when staff are learning new ways to program?
What do you think they do to motivate others?

Is there anything else you would like to talk about in relation to how you think things work in the centre?

# Appendix 12

## CASE STUDY SURVEY

## Part 1. Professional Development (PD)

| | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Professional development (PD) is essential for implementing EYLF | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. | I have been able to participate in all the PD I need to enable me to implement EYLF | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. | I am able to choose which EYLF PD I want to attend | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. | The most useful EYLF PD is when the whole staff can participate together | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. | To be effective EYLF PD should involve time to think about and discuss the impact of our practice on children | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. | In our centre we have been able to make changes to our programs to implement EYLF | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. | I am able to attend PD (eg workshops) that are provided outside of the centre | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. | I enjoy opportunities to work with other educators in the centre to find ways to improve our programs and practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. | When educators attend PD outside of the centre there are processes for information to be brought back and shared with other educators in the centre | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. | In our centre staff do presentations of their professional learning to others in the team | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## Part 2. Professional Learning to implement EYLF

| | | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | On-the-job learning was best for me when implementing the EYLF | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. | Our staff team has been effective at putting EYLF professional development into practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. | Professional learning is difficult for me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. | An important part of professional learning is to record and write about what has been learnt | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. | Our team has regular time to work together to talk and improve our programs and practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. | In our centre staff are motivated to improve their practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. | In our centre professional learning creates conversation and debate among educators | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. | In our centre after PD educators help each other to understand what the new learning means | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. | In our centre other educators provide feedback to me about my practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. | Receiving feedback is an important part of my professional learning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

11. Thinking back on your initial work with EYLF can you briefly describe what you found to be the most useful professional learning experience/s and why it worked for you

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12. From your experience of implementing programs based on EYLF can you explain how educators in your centre helped each other in their professional learning?

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13.　　The <u>most</u> important person in our centre who helps me with <u>my</u> professional learning is: (

☐　　Director                                    ☐　　Other educator in my team

☐　　Assistant director                          ☐　　Educator in another room

☐　　Senior staff                                ☐　　The children

☐　　Team leader                                 ☐　　Parents


14.　　What do you think is the difference between professional development and professional learning?

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## Part 3. Organisation of professional development and learning

|   |   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Successfully implementing EYLF changes will take time | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. | In our centre providing time for staff to plan for change was vital for implementing EYLF | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. | Professional learning needs someone to lead it | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | In our centre the Director takes the lead in planning professional development and learning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. | In our centre planning for PD for staff is undertaken in a way that includes my input | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. | In our centre any educators can have a role in leading professional development and learning | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. | In our centre I feel that I can make changes to how our room programs for children | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. | In our centre action research or inquiry type project approaches are helpful in implementing changes to practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. | In our centre teamleaders play a role in helping staff to learn about new practice | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. | Professional learning needs everyone to play an active role | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## About you

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Your Age** <br> ☐ 18-24 years <br> ☐ 25-34 years <br> ☐ 35-44 years <br> ☐ 45+ years <br><br> **Your Position** <br> ☐ Director <br> ☐ Assistant Director (AD3) <br> ☐ Teacher <br> ☐ Team Leader (CSP2) <br> ☐ Children's Services Professional (Level CSP1 or CSA 2.5) <br> ☐ Children's Services Assistant ( Level CSA 1 or 2) <br> ☐ Casual/relief staff member <br> ☐ Other- please specify | **Your sex** <br> ☐ Female <br> ☐ Male | **Your Qualifications** <br> ☐ Cert 111 <br> ☐ Diploma of children's services <br> ☐ Degree in early childhood <br> ☐ Post graduate qualification – please specify <br> ☐ Other – please specify <br><br> **Years at your current service** <br> ☐ Less than 1 year <br> ☐ 1-5 years <br> ☐ 6-10 years <br> ☐ 11-15 years <br> ☐ over 15 years |

**Thank you for completing this survey**

# Appendix 13

## ROUND 2 - FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS IN CASE STUDY CENTRES

**Questions**

1. When I spoke to you last year we talked about how the centre had approached professional development and learning for implementing the EYLF. What have been the main ways the centre has worked to provide learning opportunities for staff since then? What kinds of activities and processes have been undertaken to support staff with the implementation of the EYLF?

2. Can you tell me about learning opportunities that involved groups of staff or the whole staff?
   Have you been to any professional learning that had to do with the implementation of the EYLF, on your own? If yes, can you say something about these? If not, was this not possible/not offered etc. What do you think has been most effective?

3. What kinds of things does the director do to increase the professional knowledge of educators?

4. How does the director motivate educators to participate in PD&L and to make changes to their practice?

5. To what extent do staff at the centre influence each other in PD&L and change?

6. Which educators at this centre have been influential in your PD&L?

7. How successful have others been in motivating you to engage in PD&L? Explain.

8. How do you know if the director or room leaders have been successful in influencing others? What happens? Can you give an example?

9. How do you know if other educators have been successful in influencing others?

10. To what extent do you think educators are engaging in PD&L at this centre??

11. What kind of systems or templates, forms, processes, software or schedules (or 'tools') have you developed and used in the centre to assist educators to participate in PD&L or change?

12. What has been difficult? What kinds of things make new practice difficult to embed within the centre?

13. What factors have influenced whether or not staff has accepted the need to make big changes like implementing the EYLF?

**Appendix 14**

**EXTRACT FROM RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL**

<u>2-10-2013</u>

I have completed the analysis of the second round interviews with Centre A and am undertaking a review of the node structure prior to beginning analysis of second interviews for Centre B.

The first process was to create a Research map utilising Layder's levels of social domains – this highlights the potential factors that could be found within each of the 4 social domains. I did this in a Word document as I couldn't quite work out how to do such a task in NVivo.

I set up a table of the four domains and then recorded codes that had been allocated from the analysis of the second round interviews, making decisions about whether that particular code could be applied to the subjective, inter-subjective, setting or external domains. I then reviewed the coding for the second round interview analysis which involved mainly looking at concepts that were new or consolidated by my thinking thus far – I did this in the document titled "Analysis of second round interviews" – setting up a table for each interviewee in a matrix of the 4 social domains and in categories of concepts and nodes. This process assisted me to see more clearly the connection between the social domains and in particular the links between subjective experiences and other domains.

I then reviewed the NVivo file looking at my coding and the most coded nodes and the least coded nodes for each interview. I then entered these nodes into the "Analysis of second round interviews" for each interviewee looking for codes that may be superseded or for better organisations of the nodes into tree nodes that were more conceptually focused.

These were then mapped in the "New Tree nodes" document where I am undertaking progressively a review of the nodes.

During this process I also made extensive notes about things that I need to do and questions arising from this exercise.

I think I need to print off these initial drafts to work more on the renewed structure before I begin to re-analyse Centre B. This includes reviewing some nodes which I think have become a bit of a dumping ground for a mixture of concepts such as structure which includes broader societal issues/factors as well as centre or system structures. I aim to get this done this week and the analysis of Centre B done by the end of next weekend.

<u>2-10-2013</u>

***Plan to do***

Review each interview for most & least coding

Review each Node category & write memos where needed

Review analysis for all A second round interviews

Refine node structure

Analyse Centre B second round interviews

***Reflections during this process***

<u>7-10-13</u>

Nodes to fix:

Staff value each other – rename this node - professional relationships

Sense of ownership/autonomy – review what I have allocated in here particularly after the research map exercise

***Notes/ponderings***

Centre A

Use of the term "lucky" to describe their circumstances – "We're so lucky …" could have a theme of "lucky"? What does this tell me about educators interpretations and maybe it indicates something about comparisons out there in the broader sector ie if Centre A staff are lucky then they must think other staff in other centres are unlucky???

Lucky - this seems to be in relation to several different things such as their access to PD, their director and her support and encouragement and perhaps the connection with emotional wellbeing, check whether the director uses this terminology as well…

The director collates the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and identifies the consistent strengths and weaknesses throughout the centre which then influences individuals' professional development review (PDR) and eventually the individualised PD that staff attend.

Staff have a strong perception of individual choice to the extent that they claim they can do whatever PD they choose which surprised me a little. I followed this up in the interview with the director who was surprised by this perception as she maintains the staff choices align with the NQF and the overall work of the centre. This was really interesting as it suggests there is something subtle at play here – the educators are subconsciously choosing the things that fit within the director's centre goals - so how does this happen? It's like there is a common narrative that is lived rather than stated strongly. The QIP was not mentioned by any of the staff in relation to their PD choices – it was definitely that they felt they could do what they wanted but what they wanted fitted with the QIP…I am wondering if this is about the directors' connection with the staff in her constant recommendations to staff, talking to them individually about their professional development?

The director is not afraid to bring in new ideas – but she does not try to control everything – ie she gives staff space to make decisions but she does intervene if she doesn't agree with the direction –but how does work with staff – the relationships are strong and positive even though some

staff received opposition for their innovations. What is it that the director does?

The director's attendance at the Association meetings and the Departmental networking meetings provides stimulation for the director as well as the staff (in separate occasions and ways) which helps her to keep up with opportunities for PD and project work. The centre is also active in engaging services from the PSC.

8-10-2013

The mapping process showed that professional identity is associated with having responsibility – is this individual or collective or both – I'm not sure. A connected concept is that staff sense of ownership and autonomy (ie to choose PD, to make decisions about how to implement learning) contributes to their sense of professional Identity – do these concepts go together? Is ownership and autonomy connected or can there be ownership from collaborative work? I'm not really sure – look up research on professional identity to develop these concepts! I'm not sure in my analysis that I have adequately captured sense of ownership and autonomy – when reviewing I noted a few missed occasions. Will check this again.

What constitutes professional identity?

It looks like it could be connected with interactions between different layers of the social world – systems, face-to-face and self?

What makes up professionalism?

This also looks like it could be something that happens within a centre ie the result of interactions between social layers – system, face-to-face interactions? Perhaps professionalism – includes other subsets of layers of individual and collective and maybe this should be a tree node?

What is the nature of the information categorised as "shared leadership" I need to review this node – I have another node of inclusive leadership but

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how do these fit together? Check research literature again for meaning of distributed leadership I am wondering if inclusive leadership might become a subset of DL? I'll review all the data in this node and refine further. Is shared leadership really inclusive leadership – go through it

Collaborative approaches – is a result of system level decisions which are actualised through events at face-to-face level through action/relationships ie dialogue, exploration, mentors, consulting and questioning, team dissemination?

The second round interviews specifically looked at Influences – webs of influences throughout a centre that are the result of (or dependent on) system level organisation but which occur through face-to-face – networks of relationships, interactions

BUT even in Centre A with good conditions in place they still found that external influences such as the historical divide between preschool and child care had a profound & negative effect on the professional attitudes of teachers which had counteracted local attempts to collaborate. This problem was solved through employing new teachers who had worked as (unqualified) child care educators prior to completing their degrees – Evidence in interviews Director (Round 1) Teacher Round 2 interview & surveys.

I didn't manage to ask the director about this as it only came to light after I had interviewed her – I am assuming the previous teachers were on contract and it was simpler to replace them which would have also offered employment for educators that the director would have been able to assess as understanding the centre culture etc

***Importance of Director's leadership – director is pedagogical leader & creates the culture in the centre***

10-10-2013

I need to go through "structures" node – it currently includes broad societal and system level information

I also need to review positional leadership and formal leaders – I think these are the same thing so I think I should collapse these together

Look through leadership styles nodes – can these be rationalised as subsets of other things ie inclusive or authoritative/directive.

"Leading" as a node has become superfluous – what behaviours, actions, attitudes does it convey precisely? Anything in this node needs to be coded on

Review data analysed as DL – some of these are factors or structural arrangements rather than examples of DL per se – perhaps these need to be subsets perhaps of other things?

Professional relationships – valuing each other, interactions dialogue etc – could this be organised better as "professional relations" with specific actions behaviours? Etc

Staff have responsibilities at a personal level and this seems to be highly valued but it is impacted by system level and face-to-face for example people can undermine others' attempts at innovation particularly where there is horizontal violence (Hard) which may have been happening to some extent with the original teachers being elitist and not valuing other educators and not seeing PL as happening with diploma staff

Centre A – there is now a strong sense that they are a team and responsible to each other

Organisational climate – plays a big role – in sense of cohesion (refer to toddler room leader interview)

Director – it is clear director sets direction/vision creates the culture but in Centre A the staff are totally on board – no one has mentioned anything about a strategic plan or such a process – it does seem rather integrated – look for more evidence of how this occurs.

Power – at personal level is choice; at positional is authority or could be influence (interactional)

400

**Appendix 15**

**THEORETICAL MEMO – LEADERSHIP STYLES**

In thinking about where and how behaviours are adopted, Sibeon (2004) says it is important to recognise that "actors' forms of thought … & systems of thought of the kind found in occupations, professions and policy communities are not necessarily internally coherent & highly crystallized" p. 83. Furthermore, it is the organisational mechanisms that produce social behaviour. In social theory, the part played by actors and the actor-actor relations are involved in the creation, reproduction or change of the system in question – so interactions among a group of people within a specific context can be powerful.

I have the dilemma of needing to describe the two different types of leadership observed with the room leaders but need to find a way to do this in a way that is respectful but also useful/clear to the field. One type of leadership style is open, where the individuals express respectful ideas about valuing everyone's contribution and trying to encourage educators to get the best out of everyone. There were some strong examples in Centre A with at least 3 interviewees coming to mind but also the director who talked a lot about staff wellbeing and all interviewees echoed this. I've looked at Goleman's (2002) styles but they're not a good match – maybe ambiguous for this context? ie visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, commanding. There are an awful lot of adjectives used by different scholars ie I checked Rodd's (2006) ethical, democratic, inspirational, authoritarian, moral, – many others but not quite what I need. Then there are transformational, instructional and so on …
The two styles I have noticed in the data are:

> 1. A style that is open, involves others, allows exploration, encouraging and motivates educators, where knowledge can be co-constructed – it is about the professional conversation and how a leader perhaps facilitates participation.
> 2. A style that informs, filters and disseminates information to others, where the leader has the knowledge, is confident, does most of the talking so the effect is the leader manages, controls

what happens, directs others. This behaviour seems to stifle conversation.

These two leadership styles are directly (I think) connected to professional learning and perhaps to the nature of the learners in the relationship? If educators were not qualified perhaps a leader needs to give more direction? There could be a link to personality or disposition ie one of the room leaders retains a high level of control even though there is a leader below her who supposedly has responsibilities – this leader just takes over ie she gets frustrated and does things herself rather than try to engage others - doesn't consult – just does it – an example was changing the whole set up of the room so that when staff arrived everything was completely different.

On the other hand leadership could be learned – in one of the centres where the leader is very open and inclusive of everyone in her language there were more room leaders who were similar to her. I researched the term "inclusive" as a possibility to explain style (1) and found some examples in the literature. In searching through the literature, the earliest use of "inclusive leadership" [with one passing mention that isn't really explained or clarified] comes from the *NSW curriculum framework– the practice of relationships* (Stonehouse, A and Duffie, J, 2002) NSW Department of Community Services. Office of Childcare. I found other uses of the term for example in Blackmore, 2008 in relation to schools. Later I noted it in Press, Sumsion and Wong (2010) and in Sharp, Lord, Handscombe, Macleod, Southcott, George, Jeffes (2012).

I also need to think about the qualifications and experience in a staff team – maybe if staff have low level qualifications so the room leaders in Centre B are responding to staff capabilities? However, I can't ignore the other associations that went with the styles such as educators' perceptions and motivations evident in the staff survey where there were strong views about lack of opportunity, lack of feedback and leadership was restricted to positional leaders. Where there was predominantly inclusive leadership styles staff were satisfied, engaged, motivated etc

Perhaps also there is something about the personalised approach of the director in building a larger vision but in a way that individuals feel that their personal interests are being supported? As in Centre A. So I can start to see the various connections forming between leadership style, vision, focus on wellbeing and focus on pedagogy. It also is timely to think about arguments that pedagogical leadership includes adult learning and leadership style is connected to that as well!

In seeking a descriptor for the second style of leadership used by some of the room leaders – I think to describe this as "controlling" is not quite right as there could be misconceptions as undoubtedly there are times when leaders do need to take charge. Plus it sounds rather negative. In reading through the transcripts, it seems that an external consultant had highlighted to the leadership team the importance of leaders disseminating information to educators (in contrast to exploration and co-construction). One of the words that was used by an interviewee in relation to this is "authoritative" ie where the room leader presents confidently to the staff and is knowledgeable. This concept can be seen in school literature (ie Dinham, 2007). This brings up some very interesting questions about whether an authoritative leader can support team exploration of concepts – on the one hand, a leader needs to have the underpinning pedagogical knowledge but to be able to suspend it in some way to make space for co-construction in order to be able to take the role of "guide". I think what the room leaders are doing here is both being authoritative but also *directing* the application of new knowledge – so I will use the term "directive" together with authoritative as explanatory. Directive leadership styles may be linked to managerial concepts such as understandings of staff supervision, direction and time efficiency which may limit open exploration and participation by educators (Nupponen 2006).

Source NVivo memo 5 August 2013

# Appendix 16

## SAMPLE OF MATRIX OF SOCIAL DOMAINS ANALYSIS

This summary collates the analysis of second round interviews – this type of table was completed for each interviewee first then consolidated. Extract from the summary table is displayed. 2 March 2014 DRAFT

I still need to cross check nodes across Centres A and B in NVivo and compare them across the 2 centres- there doesn't seem to be stark differences in themes but perhaps it is in the degree or intensity of the influences or the combinations of factors?

Exploring linkages between layers of social life – can see the patterns of influences eg the leader's 'narrative' about the NQS is likely to influence everyone's views about the impact of engaging with NQS.

This analysis was used to prepare for the NZEALS conference presentation (April, 2014). I found that in comparing the second round of interview data across the 2 centres I was able to find evidence that allowed me to firm up my thinking about the different leadership styles and how they affected educators.

The first part of this analysis displays the key codes for each centre in the different social domains. Later, I compared these codes and concepts against the 2 centres. I noted that there were subtle differences between the 2 centres and in particular in the educators' subjective meanings and the subtle influences. Extract for the comparison is displayed in the second part of this memo.

# Part A.

Centre A

| Social Domain | Concepts | Nodes | Conceptual node |
|---|---|---|---|
| Structure/social | 1. Access to **new knowledge** - external body - eg (DECD) National conf (ECA) Impact of research<br>2. **Historical** –Tension bw preschool & child care –inequities teachers have more time<br>3. **Societal value** EC –eg under-resourcing of EC (out-of-hours work req'd)<br>4. **Feminised leadership** –( not wanting to be seen as the boss )<br>"people understand and accept that EC is changing"<br>5. **Govt reforms** -Impact of EYLF & NQS –lead to increased use of technology, and NQS – QIP – major influence informing PD | External body influence<br>History<br>Industrial issues<br>Value of EC<br>Structures –EYLF, NQS<br>Opportunities (NQF) | **External influence**<br><br>**Societal -value of EC & women's role in society**<br><br>**Structural impact of govt imposed reforms** |
| System/centre | Centre **culture of professionalism**<br>  - cohesion - *"as a centre we value ..."*<br>  - Centre resources PD<br>  - Supportive environment of PD & staff wellbeing<br>  - Support for higher quals & career paths<br>Director influence & vision (has the big picture)<br>**Director as pedagogical leader** (focused on PD&L) monitors & follows up PD – ie what is centre getting out of PD<br>Centre has organised **systems** for:<br>  - Sub c/tees (engage staff & progress goals)<br>  - Centre PDR / appraisal systems<br>  - High expectations & staff have responsibilities –ie presenting at staff mtgs<br>  - centre-wide focus<br>  - Systems for sharing new knowledge<br>**Leadership structure** –roles of formal leaders (incl ancillary staff)<br>  - Reforms occur at room level<br>Use of **technology** (email & intranet)<br>**Centre Plan** - systematic processes for embedding changes (eval & review) | Organisational culture<br>Director as pedagogical leader<br>Concern for staff wellbeing<br>Strong lship + Shared leadership<br>Collaboration<br>Centre PDL plan<br>PDR | **System (centre) structures**<br><br>**Culture of professionalism**<br><br>**Director influence**<br><br>**Ethos of collaboration**<br><br>**Emotional wellbeing of staff** |
| Face-to-face | Director presence<br>Communication (written & verbal), dialogue & reflection among staff<br>Centre-wide PD leads to understanding & dialogue<br>Collective engagement - staff have collective power to take action<br>Collaborative professional environment<br>  - Mutual influence | Influences & motivation<br>Relationships<br>Shared leadership<br>Staff lead PD (positional & informal leaders)<br>Collaborative | **Professional relationships**<br><br>**Inclusive leadership styles**<br><br>**Collective engagement in PD&L** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | - Director presence/influence<br>- Staff have influence<br>- Higher influences because staff have opportunities to share & are encouraged to have professional conversations<br>- Staff value & respect each other ( professional & personally)<br>- Staff support each other – professional and personal<br>- Staff discuss professional issues & PD<br>- Staff are appreciative of **feedback/guidance**<br>**Inclusive approaches** – consulting, questioning, dialogue & exploration (in team)<br>Dynamic room processes<br>- Rooms have autonomy for analysis & solutions<br>- Shared decision making<br>- Sharing leads to team learning Collective responsibility - deliberately finding ways to engage staff who might be resistant<br>Value of networking with external educators via PD | approaches<br>Dialogue & exploration<br>Mentoring<br>Consulting & questioning<br>Team learning vs<br>dissemination (no node)<br>Room approaches | **Sense of interdependence** |
| **Self** | Professional growth & self development/satisfaction<br>- Staff feel director is interested in them<br>- Higher access to PDL / PD as right<br>- Ongoing learning beyond qualification<br>- Staff able to pursue individual PD interests - professional growth<br>- Engage in own critical reflection<br>\*\*Staff interests coincide with NQS<br>Staff can build their careers<br>Individual sense of ownership & autonomy<br>- Sense of belonging & feeling supported & valued for knowledge, contribution & skills recognised, sense of trust in peers<br>Agency/Autonomy/choice<br>- Staff with individual interests are able to 'run' with things'<br>- Individual staff have power to institute things<br>- Staff judgement is respected | Staff make choices<br>Sense of ownership/autonomy<br>Staff responsibilities<br>Motivation<br>Trust<br>Reflection<br>Staff strengths acknowledged (no node) | **Professional Identity**<br><br>**Staff agency/autonomy** |

Centre B

| Social Domain | Concepts | Nodes | Conceptual node |
|---|---|---|---|
| Structure/social | Societal value EC – demands of workload in child care [work load of directors especially when combined with teaching load is 'horrendous'] [resourcing of EC]<br>Govt reforms – demands of NQS & NQF & EYLF – seen as pressure<br>- Pressure arising from new regulations- concern over possibility of being fined<br>- NQS as imposed change<br>- But also a positive as it "ensures that changes are made"<br>- For NQS to be effective there is a need for educators to work after hours<br>- Demands of paperwork associated with NQS<br>- Staff requirements for achieving quality | Structures –EYLF, NQS<br>Demands of change<br>Industrial issues<br>Wellbeing of educators<br>Fear of NQS | Societal -value of EC<br>Structural impact of govt reform |
| System/centre | Director designs structure of the system<br>Impact of rosters, out-oh-hours meetings<br>- Leadership system is not clear to all staff including the leaders themselves<br>- Time is needed for PD, reflection etc<br>Director influence & vision (has the big picture)<br>Director as pedagogical leader<br>- Director asserts role to build capacity of leaders & staff but spends most of her time in office<br>- Director makes decisions about PD with Assistant Director<br>Director – emotional care of staff - not to 'overburden' leaders<br>Centre has organised systems –but these are weak in places – ie lack of follow up for staff PD goals set at appraisal & staff, appraisals not annual, staff do not understand leadership structures, scheduled non-contact time is often cancelled<br>- Casuals – there are unfilled permanent staff places that are filled by casual relief staff results in higher numbers of casual staff than could otherwise be expected<br>Centre culture supports:<br>- Centre commitment to supporting PDL<br>- Organisation's capacity to provide PD for staff is limited – "funding/resources & cost of relief staff"<br>- Some collective PD "but not much whole of centre PD happening"<br>- closure days & collaborative opportunities (diff from school where PD indiv)<br>- Follow up (from PDL) "doesn't always work"<br>- Whole centre meetings – as information not PDL | Organisational culture<br>Director as pedagogical leader (weak)<br>Systems<br>Emotional wellbeing<br>Strong lship + Shared leadership<br>Collaborative approaches<br>Centre plan<br>PDR<br>Cohesion<br>Conformity – ie consistency throughout the centre [encouraged by interpretation of NQS]<br>Inclusiveness of leadership approaches<br>Resources<br>Change | System structures [influence professionalism]<br>Director influence [influences systems & indirectly professionalism?]<br>Ethos of collaboration<br>Style of leadership – hierarchical and authoritative (room leaders are in charge)<br>Standardisation of centre (vs freedom of rooms to reflect a nuanced culture???)<br>Emotional wellbeing of staff<br>Casual staff implications (?) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **Professional relationships** (but these are not robust – negative attributions) <br><br> **Leadership styles** <br><br> **Collective engagement** |
| | **Leadership structure** –roles of formal leaders (incl ancillary staff) <br> - Leadership group specifically responsible for supporting PD & *dissemination* of info to their staff <br> Assistant leader role in supporting PD&L of staff team - DL to Assistant Director <br> - Room leaders are also educational leaders <br> - Strongly hierarchical where formal leaders are in positions of recognised authority <br> - Section processes support all room staff to attend PD together <br> - Decision making occurs at room level but also systems to achieve consistency throughout the centre <br> - Use of leadership PDL for leadership team – senior leaders <br> - Authority of positional leaders considered & acted on via the structure <br> - Impact of staff attrition – takes change backwards <br> **Positional leaders** need to understand pedagogy- ie staff quals / experience are important <br> - Guidance & direction <br> Difficulty of embedding change –" fades quickly because people are so busy" | |
| Face-to-face | Importance of professional relationships <br> Asking questions etc <br> Collaborative Professional environment "we are working as a team" <br> - **Mentoring** in day-to-day work - On-the-job learning through influencing others <br> - Staff talking & asking each other <br> - Staff learning from each other <br> - Building staff capacity through formal & informal means including mentoring <br> Role of formal leaders in PDL <br> **Leadership styles**- acknowledges detrimental impact of **directive** styles and advocates a more reflective and inclusive style to 'invite' staff to engage & takes risks <br> - Emphasis on guidance & direction <br> - Leadership style directly linked to staff confidence & motivation - Impact of leadership style on the whole team <br> - Leaders not wanting to give up tasks <br> - Leaders can create harmony in a team (or not by implication) <br> Building capacity through PL <br> - Encourages reflection through observation, questions, dialogue, feedback <br> - Group critical reflection needs to develop <br> Staff confidence (or lack of) impacts | Influences & motivation <br> Degree of cohesion within the centre <br> Relationships <br> Shared leadership <br> Staff lead PD (positional leaders) <br> Collaborative approaches <br> Conversations & exploration (but RL do most of the talking) <br> Mentoring <br> Consulting & questioning <br> Emphasis on team dissemination <br> Room approaches <br><br> Room Leader's |

| | | pedagogical knowledge | Professional Identity |
|---|---|---|---|
| | High importance of the emotional climate<br>Room processes<br>- Staff learn in team in group - Importance of the group<br>- encouraging staff participation in professional conversations -include evaluation & decision making<br>- Autonomy of section leader & of the room as a collective (but is this really the case? Moves to consistency or standardisation through NQS) | Note all RL in both centres are dip qual but now centre 2 as a EC teacher as RL | |
| Self | Keeping control ie "Leaders not wanting to give up tasks"<br>Autonomy<br>Awareness of impact of self on others ie Trying to be collaborative rather than working on own (change of culture)<br>Some examples of being inclusive (one RL)<br>- As a leader finding ways to include others<br>- Wanting other leaders to grow<br>Belonging -believes in centre<br>- Importance of the group<br>- Personal beliefs – not imposing on others (awareness of use of power)<br>- Sense of pride<br>Identifies as a learner<br>- Motivation to learn – "No time to continue the leadership course"<br>- Is a learner & learning all the time<br>- Engaged in PD/quals ie leadership course<br>- Time for personal reflection – has begun a journal<br>- Undertakes own research<br>Leading – taking responsibility<br>Professional autonomy<br>Some RL feel motivated<br>- Eg to read & critique at home<br>Confidence<br>- Confident in her own professional position & knowledge ie has a significant role in mentoring other leaders & staff<br>From fearful/disengaged to confident & motivated with a new RL | Staff make choices<br>Sense of ownership/autonomy<br>Staff responsibilities<br>Motivation<br>Reflection<br>Staff strengths acknowledged (no node)<br>Managerial emphasis | **Professional Identity**<br><br>**Staff agency/autonomy** |

**Part B.**

| Comparison of codes | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Centre A** | **Centre B** | **Notes** |
| **Professional relationships** | Professional dialogue<br>Informal feedback<br>Mutual support & respect | Mentoring<br>Asking questions<br>Learning on-the-job<br>Building staff capacity | B emphasis on managerial techniques/language<br>A is more open and exploratory emphasis |
| **Leadership styles** | Consultation<br>Dialogue & exploration in room team<br>Listening to other's ideas<br>Not being the 'boss'<br>Dynamic room processes | Direction of staff<br>Instructional focus – ie 'telling'<br>Questioning<br>Leaders holding on to tasks | B more directive style-instruction<br><br>A more egalitarian – leadership less emphasised |
| **Professional Identity** | Making decisions<br>Professional judgement respected<br>Collegiality-recognition of knowledge & experience<br>Power to influence others & take action<br>Engage in own critical reflection<br>Satisfaction in achievements<br>Access to ongoing PD & L | Sense of pride and belief in centre<br>Sense of belonging<br>Apprehension about NQS<br>Motivation to learn (expressed by some educators) | B noticeable that less educators gave strong impression of their sense of identity – there was a sense of pride in what they are doing<br>A educators feisty and confident about themselves |
| **Agency and autonomy** | Professional choices<br>Able to pursue own professional interests in PD choices<br>Individual sense of ownership & autonomy in decision-making<br>Sense of power to institute actions & influence others<br>Build own career | Positional leaders have autonomy but not educators<br>Dissatisfaction with access to professional development<br>Dissatisfaction with feedback received | B only leaders can lead – others no expectations/possibilities<br><br>A everyone can have a go at leading and make decisions<br>Power & choice |

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