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*Te Pouherenga Kaiako o Aotearoa*

# Conceptualising Leadership in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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NEW ZEALAND TEACHERS COUNCIL  
TE POUHERENGA KAIAKO O AOTEROA

Ū KI TE AKO, TU TANGATA AI APŌPŌ

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## **Preface**

The New Zealand Teachers Council Te Pouherenga Kaiako o Aotearoa is pleased to publish this occasional paper focused on leadership in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project that led to this publication grew out of a desire of the Council's Early Childhood Education Advisory Group to promote some action on leadership development specifically for ECE. Whereas there is a well-developed leadership strategy for the school sector there is no equivalent support for teachers in ECE. Yet it is well established in the literature that an effective professional learning community is most likely to result from leadership that has learning as the central focus. Thus the absence of a cohesive leadership strategy was seen as a significant risk to professional initiatives supporting quality teaching in ECE.

A think tank was convened by the Council in early 2008 and some steps identified which the Council agreed to pursue. The first step was to identify the issues around leadership in ECE and the present provision of leadership development opportunities.

The Council was grateful that this expert group of authors agreed to collaborate on developing this report.

The New Zealand Teachers Council has a mandate to provide professional leadership for the education sector. It is vital that it can call upon professional leaders in educational settings to play a role in ensuring teaching is a respected and viable profession. For early childhood education to assume a rightful place in this vision there must be opportunities for teachers to further develop their leadership capability.

**Dr Peter Lind**

**Director**

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## Abstract

The New Zealand Teachers Council's overarching purpose is to provide professional leadership and the Council has a programme of projects aimed at strengthening teaching as a profession. The Early Childhood Education Advisory group to the Council has initiated a focus on leadership in early childhood education (ECE) and this discussion paper begins the process by exploring the current state of leadership and leadership development in New Zealand, and the issues and dilemmas facing the sector, including the identification of possible future directions.

## Introduction

Much had been done to improve the quality of early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand in recent years. The Ministry of Education's strategic plan for ECE, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, has improving quality as one of the three key goals in the ten-year period beginning 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2002). A factor often identified as contributing to quality in ECE settings is effective leadership (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Grey, 2004; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Rodd, 2006). The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), has suggested that professional leadership is "second only to effective teaching among all education-related factors that contribute to students' learning" (2006, p. 13), and that it accounts for approximately twenty-five percent of total centre or school effects. This suggests that a focus on leadership in ECE is very timely. In fact the ministry has identified an action in the strategic plan to provide "leadership development programmes to strengthen leadership in ECE" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p.15); however, no policy has yet been developed on what these programmes may look like. A possible reason for this lack of policy is that ECE is part of the non-compulsory sector and therefore the ministry has not felt responsible for promoting and supporting leadership development, seeing this as a centre's domain. However, this lack contrasts with the support provided in the compulsory education sectors in New Zealand, in which leaders are more easily identifiable.



## The early childhood education context in Aotearoa New Zealand

Early childhood education in New Zealand (ECE), while non-compulsory, is a partly publicly-funded education sector marked by its diversity. There is a history of organisations providing education and care programmes, sometimes with strong philosophical bases, and with different constituencies.

- Playcentre and Kindergarten services have a distinctive history and well known approaches to providing sessional educational experiences for children, although the latter have changed their delivery options in response to a changing social and policy climate. Some kindergarten associations have expanded, and are also providing all-day education and care services.
- Ngā Kōhanga Reo have grown since 1982 as a response to preserving te reo Māori as New Zealand's indigenous language as well as promoting Māori cultural aspirations for children and families. In addition, there are a small number of Māori-medium or Māori-immersion services that provide early childhood education programmes.
- Education and care services offering a mixture of full- and part-time places for children have been an area of ECE that has grown rapidly in the last few decades, in line with government goals to increase workforce participation. Within this category are a number of services with distinctive philosophies or kaupapa such as Montessori, Steiner, A'oga Amata (Samoan language nests), and community-based childcare. The last two decades have seen an increasing number of ECE services which are privately owned, and more recently corporate chains have entered the sector.
- Home-based education services have grown steadily in recent times and offer small group settings in the educators' private homes. The educators belong to a network overseen by a coordinator and may have up to four children at a time. The coordinator of the network of educators may belong to an organisation with several networks.

The ECE strategic plan of 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2002) instituted a distinction between teacher-led and whānau/parent-led services. Playcentre and ngā Kōhanga Reo are categorised as the latter and have different requirements in terms of supervision of teaching staff, which have been negotiated with the Ministry of Education. An early childhood teaching qualification is required by the coordinator of home-based education services but not for the educators. All other services need to meet the requirements to have a fully qualified teaching staff by 2012. This diversity

of services influences the conception or notion of leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Current conception of leadership in ECE**

There are a number of challenges confronting early childhood leadership in New Zealand presently that derive from both the historical positioning of early childhood education and the recent changes in the social and political context of New Zealand (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). Services such as Playcentre and Kōhanga Reo operate from a collaborative parent/whānau-led provision of ECE. Playcentre has an “emergent leadership” model for its various centre management roles of president, secretary, treasurer, equipment officer etc., which ensures no one person has a long history in the position and therefore expertise is shared around. These roles are held in addition to the “teaching” role with children. At association and federation level roles may be taken by people no longer involved in day to day teaching of children. Kōhanga reo services are overseen by the National Trust which has a range of leadership roles in the head office with whānau and kaiako ensuring the functioning of the centre itself.

Teacher-led services on the other hand, may have a definite hierarchy within their leadership structure. These structures may include an “off-site” management comprising a general manager/CEO and a number of professional leaders or “senior teachers” as in a kindergarten association, and then a team of teachers including a designated head teacher. A large education and care centre is likely to have a management committee or owner/manager as well as a team of teaching staff, including one or more supervisors or “persons responsible” (Ministry of Education, 2008a). The owner/manager may or may not have a teaching qualification, and in some instances could be part of a large offshore corporation.

Within some services’ teaching teams (particularly education and care centres, as opposed to kindergartens), some teachers will be qualified while some are likely to be in training, or untrained. It is also likely that many of those untrained or in-training teachers may have been working in the sector for a number of years and have amassed significant experience. It is therefore possible to think that although traditionally we might assume the leadership to play out according to position in the hierarchy, it is likely that leadership may occur through claims of status, qualifications and/or experience (Aitken, 2005).

While the Teachers Council uses the term “professional leader” to encompass school principals and ECE leaders, it is a term little used in the ECE sector. Those holding positions of responsibility tend to have titles such as: manager, director, supervisor, senior teacher, head teacher or team leader. As the Teachers Council seeks to

professionalise teaching, other leadership roles need to be recognised such as mentor teacher and associate teacher, as well as those being developed by the unions to recognise teaching expertise.

The development of the ten-year strategic plan for early childhood education and subsequent policy implementation since 2002 has largely been welcomed by the sector for its contribution to raising quality and professionalism within early childhood. However, the implementation of policy to support the strategic plan has meant the sector has been faced with considerable change in the last seven years, which has placed pressure on the sector in a number of areas. Benchmarking a qualification for the sector and implementing policies requiring qualified and registered teacher targets for services, have put some strain on initial teacher education provision, teacher supply, mentoring and coaching of newly qualified teachers, and availability of experienced teachers for leadership positions.

## **Learning from leadership in other settings**

Whilst some notions of leadership from other education sectors can be applied to the early childhood sector in New Zealand, the nature and context of ECE makes it unique and worthy of independent examination and support mechanisms. The transfer of ideas about leadership from the other education sectors or drawing of close comparisons must be done with caution because of the multifaceted and diverse nature of ECE.

The similarities and differences between leadership in ECE and in the school sector or corporate world have been discussed by a number of authors. Kagan and Hallmark (2001) suggest that although some characteristics of leadership – such as vision, courage and ethics; consideration of work culture; and productive work style – appear to be universal, there are major differences between leadership in early childhood and in other settings. This view is supported by Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000, p. 9), who, in a discussion of the relevance of generic leadership and management language and practices to childcare, comment that “many ideas provided structure and affirmation to the children’s services leaders’ work; however, an equal number provided contradictions”.

Definitions of leadership used and accepted in other contexts may not be appropriate for early childhood settings because of the more collaborative way early childhood teachers work, and the lack of a hierarchical structure in the profession (Morgan, 1997). Kagan and Hallmark (2001, p. 8) have claimed that “the intimacy, flexibility, diversity and individualization of early childhood programmes create a decidedly different leadership context than the formality, uniformity, rigidity, and bureaucratisation that has been conventionally associated with the corporate setting”.

However, Rodd (as cited in Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003) has minimized the differences between ECE and the wider field of education stating that “being a leader is not at all different from being a leader in any other field. Effective leadership, be it of a large multi-national company or a child-care centre, requires certain attitudes, attributes and skills” (p. 22). Yet Power (2002) takes issue with Rodd’s webs of influence where these skills are exercised saying that Rodd avoids a critique of the socio-political context.

Indeed, the impact of culture is being highlighted in leadership literature, and in particular the need to see leadership as highly contextually bound (Fitzgerald, 2003; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Furthermore, Fitzgerald highlights the monocultural nature of writing on leadership, and in addition, the fact that “considerations of circumstances such as ethnicity/social class/location and beliefs that speak to different dimensions of identity have been discounted” (2003, p. 432). Another key goal of the ECE strategic plan is the promotion of increased participation of groups underrepresented in ECE which has required services to be more responsive and inclusive to these groups, while maintaining the diversity of ECE provision in Aotearoa New Zealand. Fitzgerald’s call to avoid homogeneity in our perspective of leadership (although school-focussed) is a reminder that ECE should acknowledge the diverse leadership needed to promote educational advancement of indigenous and minority groups, which was a feature of Power’s (2002) study.

## **Issues and dilemmas facing leadership in ECE**

### ***1. Low profile of leadership***

The lack of research focusing on leadership in ECE provides a contrast to the abundance of literature relating to leadership in the school sector. Particularly pertinent is the forthcoming publication of a best evidence synthesis focused on school leadership (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, in press). This lack of attention to leadership in ECE is despite the considerable potential for leadership activity in the sector (Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004). Rodd (2006) suggests that the concept of leadership “has received only intermittent attention by early childhood theorists and researchers over the past three decades” (p. 4). Muijs et al., who conducted an extensive international literature review on leadership in the early years’ sector, concludes that research is “limited and dominated by a relatively small number of researchers” (p. 158). They suggest that reasons for this lack of research include reluctance from professionals in the field to engage with the notion of leadership, and a lack of willingness to connect with models of leadership from the school sector and beyond.

Rodd (2006) suggests that leadership is still an enigma for many teachers in the sector. The consequences of this lack of engagement with the concept of leadership are serious. According to Rodd:

unless there is an active and strong identification and recognition of the leadership role and a broader conceptualisation of their professional role and associated skills, members of the early childhood field will not be able to meet increasing demands for competent administrators, supervisors, educators, researchers and advocates (p. 6).

Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000, p. 9) believe there is a need for “further research and dialogue in order to determine what supports and underpins effective leadership in this family-focused, female dominated, and often under-resourced field”. Muijs et al. (2004, p. 160) also highlight the consequences of the lack of engagement with the concept of leadership, suggesting “the relative lack of research activity on leadership in the field and by association the lack of leadership development programmes would seem to be a major oversight given the growth and importance of the EC sector”.

Other studies identify a lack of awareness and a level of discomfort with leadership roles amongst those in leadership positions in ECE settings (Geoghegan, Petriwskyj, Bower & Geoghegan, 2003). Scrivens (2002, p. 52) comments that “there is still confusion in the minds of leaders, particularly at centre level, about how they should construct leadership”. The unwillingness of those in the ECE sector to engage with the concept of leadership may be attributed to a number of factors including a lack of identification with commonly accepted notions of leadership and a lack of support for leadership development. The belief that leadership is about a single person and that leaders are concerned with competitive and product-oriented organisations obviously does not fit the early childhood sector, which has a non-hierarchical structure and is dominated by women (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Hard (2004) suggests that traditional definitions of leadership in male terms may be a significant contributing factor in the unwillingness of the ECE sector to embrace the concept of leadership. The high proportion of women in leadership roles in the sector may be one explanation for the “potential aversion to leadership often found in the sector” (Muijs et al., 2004, p. 159). The importance of developing models of leadership that maximize the leadership strengths of females who numerically dominate the sector has been stressed by Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) who suggest that these strengths include wisdoms related to people, emotions, roles and resources.

## **2. *Lack of an accepted definition or common understanding of leadership***

According to Lambert (2003) identification with leadership is seen to be related to how it is defined. As Hard (2004, p. 127) suggests, “if leadership were to be

considered in terms of more democratic and collaborative models, then ECEC (early childhood education and care) personnel will be more positive about adopting leadership activities". However there appears to be no clearly accepted definition of leadership in ECE (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004). This lack of understanding and consensus on what leadership involves has been attributed to the "complexity of the field and the wide variety of programme types" (Schomburg, 1999, p. 215). Rodd (2001, p. 10) argues that "leadership is a contextual phenomenon, that is, it means different things to different people in different contexts". Scrivens (2003, p. 30), drawing on Southworth's (2002) work, agrees, contending that "there is not just one way to be a leader" and that "leadership will vary from culture to culture and situation to situation". These contextual differences can be viewed positively. Kagan and Hallmark (2001, p. 9) believe that "the diversity with which early care and education approaches leadership is the source of our greatest strength and provides the greatest potential for continuing positive change in the field".

Bloom (2003) also suggests that leadership is an elusive phenomenon and that it is difficult to define and observe. The fact that not all leadership capacities are equally observable and accessible adds to this elusiveness. Morgan (1997, p. 3) cautions against "connecting leadership with a role", as she believes that when defining leadership it is necessary that it be kept open to everyone in the sector. Rodd (1998, p. xv) sees leadership in ECE as being:

about the experiences and environment provided for children, the relationships between adults and adults and children, meeting and protecting the rights of adults and children and working collaboratively, crossing existing artificial boundaries to meet the concerns of all concerned with the care and education of young children.

Although Rodd does not provide a succinct definition of leadership, she describes the key elements of effective leadership as the leader's ability to: "provide vision and communicate it; develop a team culture; set goals and objectives; monitor and communicate achievements; and facilitate and encourage the development of individuals" (p. 3). This description is criticised by Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) as being too narrowly focused on the centre-based aspects of leadership rather than including wider issues such as advocacy. Kagan and Bowman (1997, p. xii) focus on aspects outside the centre context believing that "a deep knowledge of the field, a willingness to take risks, and a breadth of vision and thinking that transcends individual programmes, services, or orientations" are at the core of leadership in the early childhood sector. They note that the lack of a clear definition of leadership in the ECE sector impedes the move forward to understanding what leadership actually does. They suggest that leadership needs to be broken down into its component parts in order to be better understood.

A study exploring notions of leadership in the New Zealand Centres of Innovation programme found that leadership in these centres was characterised by courage, commitment and collaboration (Thornton, 2005). The Centres of Innovation programme was a government-funded initiative designed to “help improve quality in early childhood education services by demonstrating competent practice and innovation” (Meade, 2003, p. 1). Centres that were able to demonstrate innovative practices could apply for centre of innovation status which allowed them to work in partnership with research associates over a three-year period to develop, document and share their learning and teaching practices. A definition of leadership developed as a result of this study is “working collaboratively in a learning community towards a shared vision” (Thornton, 2005, p. 93). This model of leadership fits with the literature on distributed leadership. The research highlighted a lack of clarity about educators’ understandings of leadership, and a lack of support available for their leadership development.

The limited literature on notions of leadership in ECE reveals a lack of agreement about what leadership means or looks like. The existence of many different leadership contexts may have contributed to this lack of consensus. Several authors promote the importance of developing a clear definition of leadership (Bowman & Kagan, 1997; Hard, 2004; Scrivens, 2002), but one that encompasses the breadth of the sector does not seem to have yet emerged. Engagement with the sector in debating an appropriate definition of leadership for ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand would raise the profile of leadership action and contribute to finding an agreed definition.

### ***3. Confusion between leadership and management/terminology used in the sector which emphasises management over leadership***

Much of the difficulty in understanding leadership in ECE, and its low profile in early childhood discourse and scholarship, has been attributed to confusion between leadership and management (Rodd, 1998). Rodd views efficient management skills as being necessary but not sufficient for effective leadership. Scrivens (2002, p. 44) suggests that those in leadership positions in New Zealand centres may have “become preoccupied with management, and thus relatively unaware of, or confused about, their obligations for leadership”. According to Humphries and Senden (2000, p. 26), “managers attend to the details of efficiently running a programme; leaders are oriented to broader issues and future development”. Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000), in an Australian study of women’s models of leadership, suggest that leadership took second place to management towards the end of the twentieth century. This emphasis on management resulted in a stronger focus on maintaining the status quo than on developing new approaches and thinking long term (Bloom, 2003). Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) believe this is now changing with new

pressures requiring early childhood services to cope with rapid change. Bloom asserts that the difficulty in separating leadership and management in ECE is largely a function of the flat organisational structure. She believes that both roles are complementary and essential for the optimum functioning of a centre. Scrivens (2002) sees leadership as including management responsibilities, but also being about working collaboratively with colleagues and families towards developing and improving services.

Aitken and Kennedy's (2007) analysis of critical issues facing the early childhood profession in New Zealand and Australia currently, suggests that the growing existence of "business models" and managerialism in the education sector has changed the traditional position and responsibilities of early childhood educators. This has implications for leaders and leadership. For example, decisions about curriculum implementation and the operational nature of a service may be decided by centre management/owners independently, rather than by the teachers collegially or collectively. This is a reminder that the organisational structure and culture of an ECE service either afford or discourage aspects of leadership discussed in the literature: distributed leadership, shared decision making, and pedagogical leadership.

#### **4. Newly qualified, less experienced teachers taking on leadership positions**

Whilst there is a general commitment by the ECE sector in New Zealand to the goals outlined in *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), the regulatory requirements resulting from this have placed increased pressure on both services and teachers. One of those groups most affected has been newly qualified teachers (NQTs), who assume (and in many cases are pressured to assume) positions of responsibility and leadership because of their qualified status. Research involving the experiences of a group of NQTs in ECE reported on their multiple and conflicting roles and responsibilities, including increased time supporting other adults and increasingly limited time spent working alongside young children, particularly those NQTs who were employed in services other than state kindergartens (Aitken, 2005, 2006). This raises the question about how space and time is created for novice, newly qualified teachers to be able to learn and practice leadership. Although distributed notions of leadership do not necessarily prevent NQTs exercising leadership or being regarded as leaders in their field and context, this practice may be repelling teachers from leadership roles rather than fostering them in these roles.

#### **5. Lack of emphasis on leadership in the early childhood sector by the Ministry of Education**

At present there is little support for leadership in the ECE sector, however reports from both the Ministry of Education and NZEI have mentioned professional leadership



development for early childhood centres alongside that for schools. In 2002 NZEI published the *Professional Leadership and Management Kit* in an attempt to provide practical support and guidelines for those in leadership positions in ECE. It has been the sector rather than the ministry that has endeavoured to fill professional development gaps. The 2006 annual report from the Ministry of Education listed strong professional leadership as a priority for policy development in both the ECE and schooling sectors. An NZEI position paper, *Quality Education for the 21st Century* (NZEI, 2006), discussed the importance of professional leadership in both sectors and suggested that the notion of shared leadership should be further explored. Although there are some similarities between leadership in the school and ECE sectors, it would not be appropriate for leadership development initiatives to be transferred directly to the ECE sector because of the different leadership structures and organisational cultures present in early childhood settings.

The low priority given to leadership development in the ECE sector contrasts with the support provided for leadership development in the school sector. Leadership in the school sector was not initially well supported after the inception of Tomorrow's Schools in 1989. In an attempt to address some of the gaps in professional development for school leaders, NZEI published the *Principals Kit* in 1993 as a resource to be used in primary schools, and this has been updated and reissued at regular intervals since then. However the last five years has seen an increase in support for leadership in response to pressure from the sector. Ministry initiatives have included an induction programme for first-time principals, a series of workshops for aspiring principals, a development centre programme for more experienced principals, an electronic principals' network and a guiding framework for professional development. Support for leadership development in the school sector also includes the use of ICT. The LeadSpace website, for example, provides a "one-stop-shop for the information needs of principals" (Feltham, 2005, p. 4) and electronic networks have been set up to promote the transfer of knowledge and information. The *Education Gazette* has a regular section aimed solely at school principals and specific positions exist in the Ministry of Education relating to leadership in schools. All of these initiatives are encompassed by the *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* programmes (Ministry of Education, 2008b) and the professional leadership plan which were based on the extensive research gathered for the best evidence synthesis on educational leadership (Robinson et al., in press).

This cohesive strategy provides a marked contrast with the support for leadership in the New Zealand ECE sector, and the lack of activity has been remarked on. According to Anne Meade (2008), this is significant gap in the New Zealand research relating to educational leadership in the early childhood sector:

Educational leadership is a gap—it hasn't been addressed in the strategic plan implementation yet, and it's something that people

comment on informally as a gap. In the early childhood sector, you can't always assume that the manager is the person responsible for the educational leadership, especially with clusters of centres. Sometimes there will be someone responsible for the management, and team leaders who are supposedly the educational leaders (Meade, 2008, p. 2).

## **6. Lack of leadership development programmes in ECE**

The recognition of the importance of leadership development in the school sector and the associated research and literature contrasts with the lack of research and practice related to leadership development in ECE. This lack has been identified as a key issue in the ECE sector internationally (Muijs et al., 2004). Studies in a number of different countries reported a lack of preparation for ECE leadership roles and a lack of training opportunities particularly at national levels (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Nupponen, 2006; Rodd, 1998). The lack of support for leadership training and professional development has also been suggested as a contributing factor to the low profile leadership has in the sector (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Initial teacher training is aimed at developing capable and competent teachers and although there are many similarities between good teaching and good leading, there is general agreement that those in leadership roles need to be further supported through the provision of appropriate training and professional development opportunities (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Geoghegan et al., 2003; Hard, 2004; Rodd, 2001; Schomburg, 1999; Smith, 2005). Muijs et al. (2004) suggest that the consequences of a lack of leadership training programmes will be that those in leadership positions are unprepared for their leadership and management responsibilities. They state that there is a compelling reason for “investing substantially in leadership research and development” (p. 167) and suggest that this is long overdue.

The New Zealand study on notions of leadership in the Centres of Innovation (COI) programme referred to earlier revealed a lack of opportunities for leadership development in the ECE sector (Thornton, 2005). None of the participants in the COI study mentioned any formal leadership development and support opportunities, and several commented that they felt unprepared for some of the leadership roles they were expected to take. Study participants made a variety of suggestions for future leadership development programmes. These included leadership development for all teachers, particularly as professional leadership is one of the criteria for teacher registration in New Zealand. They also wanted support from mentors, experienced and knowledgeable guides, as they navigated new responsibilities.

Mentor teachers as part of the induction process are a focus of the Teachers Council's current research, as theirs is a leadership role that many teachers assume with little preparation (Aitken, Bruce Ferguson, McGrath, Piggot-Irvine, & Ritchie 2008;

Cameron, 2007; Cameron, Dingle & Brooking, 2008). While in a slightly different sort of mentor role to that which the COI participants were advocating, nevertheless these mentor teachers are additional evidence of the need for leadership development for more than just the nominal leaders of a centre/service. The findings of the Teachers Council's third *Learning to Teach* research report (Aitken, et al., 2008) were very similar to Thornton's (2005). The study included six early childhood sector case studies (including one case study of a Kōhanga Reo within the Māori-medium sector) and examined those mentor teachers who were identified as providing "successful" induction and support to provisionally registered teachers (PRTs). The findings revealed the important role of the mentor teacher in providing support and guidance to the PRT, including the wider support that they received from others in the setting (including designated leaders). However, despite the importance of the mentoring, the study revealed that mentor teachers across all sectors (and including the ECE sector) reported receiving little or no formal professional learning and support for their role as mentor teachers. Thus, being a "successful" mentor was more a matter of personal and collective commitment to the teacher, than as a result of support or recognition from government agencies. The recommendations of the study included the need to invest more resources and time into the professional development of mentor teachers.

## **Lessons from leadership development programmes**

Traditional approaches to leadership development have involved removing individuals from their work contexts and training them in the skills deemed to be necessary for effective leadership. Marquardt (2004) suggests that many leadership programmes are ineffective because experts rather than practitioners are seen as the source of knowledge and "little, if any, of the knowledge ever gets transferred to the workplace" (p. 31). The lack of opportunities for reflection and self-questioning in many leadership development programmes has also been noted (Dotlich, Noel & Walker, 2004). Raelin (2004) cautions against detaching leadership learning from leadership practice. He suggests that typical approaches to leadership development such as the "list approach", where training is designed to teach people a set list of leadership attributes, or the "position approach", where leadership development is targeted only at people in certain positions in an organisation, are unlikely to have long-term benefits for either the individual or the organisation. This is because these approaches remove people from real-life situations so that learning is not contextualised, and promote singular rather than collective approaches to leadership. Other authors such as Southworth (2005), and Walker and Dimmock (2005) also emphasise the importance of context in leadership development, suggesting that much leadership development is too generic and may lack relevance for individuals.

A range of strategies necessary for leadership learning to occur are identified by West–Burnham (2003). These include:

- learning activities that are based on problem–solving in real–life situations;
- reflection on actual experiences based on appropriate feedback;
- challenge derived from new ideas, confronting performance etc.;
- coaching to help mediate the perceived gap between actual and desired performance;
- the creation of a community of practice to support the above (p. 58).

Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, and Beresford (2000) also emphasise the importance of problem solving and reflective practice in leadership development programmes, and promote the analysis of professional and personal values and an emphasis on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Stoll and Bolam (2005) discuss the importance of embedding teachers’ professional development in practical activities in order that they are able to keep up with and adapt to the rapid change occurring in their daily work. These authors support leadership development that occurs at all levels in educational institutions and which supports the building of collaborative relationships with others both within and outside of schools.

Paterson and West–Burnham (2005) describe a leadership programme for new head teachers called New Visions that has been operating successfully in England since November 2000. This programme, which has been extensively evaluated, uses a mixture of “active, collaborative and dialogic approaches” (p. 108). A number of features of this programme offer useful models for leadership development. These include: the value put on the personal knowledge and experience of these leaders and the opportunities for them to articulate this and develop shared knowledge; the focus on deep and profound learning which is achieved principally through reflective practice and approaches such as action learning; and the development of communities of practice that offer opportunities for supporting both individual and collaborative learning. Paterson and West–Burnham also report on other studies highlighting the importance of interacting with peers in leadership programmes with the most beneficial types of support shown to be networking, and personal discussions with other leaders and critical friendships.

Many of these features have been recognised in the research interrogated for the best evidence synthesis on educational leadership in the school context (Robinson et al., in press) and then incorporated into the Kiwi Leadership programmes being offered to principals in schools (Ministry of Education, 2008b).

## **ECE leadership development examples in Aotearoa New Zealand**

A number of leadership development opportunities exist at the present time. These are often part of professional development programmes offered by a number of providers or may be an outcome of research projects such as the Centres of Innovation.

### ***1. Educational Leadership Project***

The Education Leadership project (ELP) is a professional development project that aims to nurture curriculum and pedagogical leadership in centres through a research project that has an in-centre lead teacher-facilitator who is mentored by an outside experienced facilitator. While the lead teacher is involved in workshops that explore the theory and practice of leadership, the focus is on the centre's teaching practice and establishing innovative education. The leadership skills that are developed in this programme have led many of the teachers to take up a further leadership position as the outside facilitator to other centres (Hatherly & Lee, 2003). Careful building of relationships and a credit view of teachers' teaching and leadership capabilities are central to the programme. Other features include "workshops; visits; retreats; presentations; research; ICT innovation; transition projects; inspiration days; and national and international conferences" (p. 5).

A study by Clarkin-Phillips (2007) of the ELP professional development programme, found the most valuable and influential aspects that motivated sustained changes to practice was the encouragement to implement a model of distributed leadership. As they developed distributed leadership practices, such as utilising and being valued for their strengths and skills, sharing decision-making and distributing roles and responsibilities to lighten workloads, teachers in this study were empowered to be involved in further leadership opportunities.

There is evidence that this collaborative style of leadership where teachers have a shared vision and work together to achieve this vision is influenced by the support and encouragement provided by those in designated leadership positions (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007). Exploring notions of distributed leadership can provide a challenge as such a model requires willingness on the part of the designated leader to engage in collaboration and shared roles. These factors need to be taken into account in planning leadership development. Mentoring, and formal opportunities for reflecting on models of leadership and emotional intelligence, were both mentioned as important aspects of leadership development.

## **2. *Kaupapa Māori model of leadership***

Te Kōpae Piripono is a Māori immersion ECE COI in the Ministry of Education programme, focusing on the role of whānau and leadership in fostering children's learning. The members of the centre shun the view of leadership being attached to formal positions, instead they see it involving all in the centre community including children. In this way leadership is both an individual and a collective responsibility (Te Kōpae Piripono, 2006) and they have defined it as a model of four responsibilities: having responsibility; being responsible; taking responsibility; and sharing responsibility. "What people do, sincerely, genuinely and passionately, for their own and for others' ongoing learning, is both the essence and the evidence of leadership" (p. 7). This is consistent with Māori kaupapa which seeks to position learning in a whānau context with all being involved in learning.

## **3. *Teachers Refresher Course Committee (TRCC)***

The TRCC courses are Ministry of Education-funded professional development for teachers that are available to all sectors. A committee of teacher representatives decides on the nature of the courses on offer each year. Increasingly there have been leadership courses for early childhood teachers. These courses are held in different locations, with travel support to enable teachers from afar to attend. They tend to be residential and over a period of days, with a selection of keynote speakers and workshop and group tasks.

## **4. *Leadership development through blended action learning***

Thornton's (2009) recently completed doctoral research investigating the use of information communication technology ICT to support leadership development in the New Zealand ECE sector involved small groups of leaders meeting both face-to-face, and interacting online while back at their respective workplaces. Leadership learning occurred through ongoing reflection, discussion and the sharing of knowledge and resources. The ICTs used included email, online reflective journals, forum discussions and chat sessions. The research groups used an action learning process to learn about themselves as leaders, and to work collaboratively on issues and challenges related to their leadership roles. Data from this study suggest that blended action learning groups are a very effective model for use in leadership development. Some of the benefits of this model are that it: allowed for an intensive professional learning experience while not requiring a large amount of scheduled meeting time; encouraged both individual and shared reflection; supported participants to identify and take action on issues that they faced in their everyday work; and built communities of practice through the sharing of knowledge and the building of strong networks (Thornton, 2009).

## Other leadership development models for ECE

Most teachers who have experienced leadership training report that it has taken the form of disparate workshops with no follow up support (Muijs et al, 2004). A number of longer-term programmes do however exist in some countries.

### **1. *National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership***

The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) in Britain provides opportunities for study towards a professional qualification in leadership and management equivalent to the programmes available to senior staff in schools. The NPQICL is a programme of study and research that involves participants working collaboratively with others and emphasises the importance of reflective practice (Pen Green Research, 2004). Three fields of knowledge guide the learning in this programme: the knowledge of individual head teachers; the knowledge informed by research and theory; and the knowledge created within the community of head teachers. Several areas that are not usually provided for in leadership development are addressed in the programme including time for analysis and reflection, opportunities for interacting with peers, and advice and support from more experienced leaders.

### **2. *Leadership training in the USA***

Several one- or two-year-long programmes are offered in different parts of the United States that involve leadership training and mentoring (Bloom & Bella, 2005; Smith, 2005). Bloom and Bella, in a discussion of the impact of leadership training initiatives in the State of Illinois, report that the participants experienced a sense of empowerment, an increase in their advocacy roles, and a shift in priorities from day-to-day management tasks to broader leadership challenges. From studying these programmes Bloom and Bella identified a number of key elements that serve as a framework for planning effective leadership development programmes. These were: basing the programme on participants' assessed needs; making the training problem focused and specific to the workplace context; focusing on the role of the leader as change agent; ensuring the needs of busy working professionals were met; providing opportunities for collegiality and networking across different ECE services; promoting active learning; and ensuring follow-up support was available.

The elements highlighted in these two programmes are supported by Clarkin-Phillips (2007) who argues that professional development for leadership needs to take place over time, involve whole teams, ensure teams choose their own direction and goals, and that mentoring and networking are a strong component of the professional development. Clarkin-Phillips also found that when teaching teams focussed on issues that arose from their everyday learning and teaching this enabled them to

more easily set goals together and choose their own direction, rather than this being prescribed by programme facilitators. When teachers were able to envision how their working together would empower and enable enhanced teaching and learning without unduly adding to their workloads there was ownership and enthusiasm from the team.

## **Implications for leadership development in the Aotearoa New Zealand context**

Currently, there are no national leadership development programmes available for the New Zealand ECE sector. This is despite the ECE strategic plan stating under the goal of improving the quality of ECE services, that leadership development programmes will be provided to strengthen leadership in ECE services (Ministry of Education, 2002). Some small scale programmes do exist as part of the general professional contracts funded by the Ministry of Education. Many of the contractors offer a cluster model approach that consists of workshops and in-centre follow-up where the person(s) attending the workshops become the key facilitator(s) of a focus for improvement back in the centre supported by the contract facilitator. Some of these clusters have a specific leadership focus, such as the ELP described above, and others do not, but all position the teacher as leader. Increasingly, presenting one's professional development journey to others at the year's end is forming part of the professional development experience and is indicative of leadership skill development. While these developments are important steps to developing leadership capability, the contracts only cover some areas of the country and are not on a scale that allows widespread participation.

Another avenue for educational leaders' development has been postgraduate study in diplomas or masters of educational management. As universities restructure and reposition their postgraduate programmes, it is possible that such specialities will not be offered. Access to these programmes has been restricted geographically and they have not necessarily had an early childhood component or elements identified above as important to developing leadership practices.



## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to shed some light on the current situation with regard to leadership and leadership development in the New Zealand early childhood education sector. It is clear that whilst some of the current ideas and thinking about educational leadership are useful and can be attributed to the ECE sector generally, contextual differences around teaching and learning require an additional and unique focus. A lack of connection between the literature on school leadership and leadership in ECE has been noted. The ECE sector has experienced significant political and regulatory shifts since 2002 and these may be changing the face of traditional early childhood approaches and ECE. For example, very little is known about how leadership practices may occur differently within a range of early childhood services such as Playcentre, Kindergarten, Kōhanga Reo, Education and Care services and Home-based education organisations. Recent literature also reveals the importance of distinguishing between managerial practices and leadership, and also the lack of significant Ministry research and support regarding leadership in ECE.

Educational leadership has been defined as "informed actions that influence continuous improvement of learning and teaching" (Robertson, 2005, p. 41). The vision for improving the quality of ECE for young children in New Zealand as outlined in the ten-year strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002) is well supported in the ECE community. Alongside this push for improved quality must be an emphasis on the need to expand the capacity and the capabilities of teachers and leaders working with young children.

In summary, there is great potential for leadership development in the sector and some of the New Zealand research described above (Clarkin-Phillips, 2007; Te Kōpae Piripono, 2006; Thornton, 2009) offers direction on possible approaches. Opportunities to engage in reflective practice and to work on real-life issues in collaboration with others, are all important aspects of effective leadership development that could be incorporated into future programmes, and are encapsulated in the recommendations that conclude this paper.

## **Recommendations: Key attributes of models to lead the way forward**

The following aspects of models discussed in this paper should be considered when formulating a leadership development policy for ECE:

Models should include:

- encouragement of distributed leadership approaches;
- support and mentoring provided by other leaders;
- opportunities for reflection on real-life experiences and scenarios;
- follow up support over a sustained period of time;
- a programme based on the particular assessed needs of individual leaders;
- a programme which is problem focused and specific to workplace context;
- collegiality and networking opportunities;
- inclusion of the wider team in aspects of the programme;
- ongoing leadership development programmes.

These attributes for leadership development models have the potential to contribute to a higher profile for ECE leadership, significantly more purposeful and reflective leaders, and improved learning environments and experiences for children as the final stages of the ECE strategic plan unfold.

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