

and control the leader may have, and therefore be able to inspire and impact the work of other educators within the same organisation. Within distributed leadership theorising there are, however, no set limits about the 'openness of the boundaries of leadership' (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 7) and in any one setting there could be any number of leaders. Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala (2013) also discuss how distributed leadership approaches placed emphasis on leadership practice rather than on leadership roles being performed by various individuals. Accordingly, when reflecting on staff interactions, as stated by Harris and Spillane (2008, p. 33) 'it is the nature and quality of leadership practice that matters'. As can be seen, this reinforces the shift in focusing leadership analysis away from the individual, to the structures and processes of enacting leadership.

Discussions about distributed leadership began appearing in EC literature in the 2000s (Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Fasoli et al., 2007; Muji et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006a). The conceptual model of distributed leadership initially developed by Waniganayake (2000, cited in Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004) advocated the centrality of knowledge-based leadership. The underlying aim of this model was to facilitate leadership in areas in which the leader is knowledgeable and competent and therefore able to guide decision-making in an informed manner. Essentially, distributed leadership 'reflects a participatory and decentralized approach to leadership' and it 'relies on building relationships' as well as 'team work' (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004, p. 35). As such, it represents a flatter organisational structure where leadership responsibilities are shared among multiple stakeholders located at different levels of the organisation. Within this framework, the effectiveness of leadership is reliant on the nature of interactivity between people, places and positions, and the creation of interdependency within the organisation. Thus, Harris (2013, p. 12) explains this as 'leadership that is shared within, between and across organisations'.

Due to misconceptions arising from the popularity of this approach, Harris and De Flaminis (2016, p. 144) were moved to declare that 'distributed leadership does not imply that everyone is a leader or that everyone leads'. They also assert that there is no blueprint or roadmap on distributed leadership that could be applied universally. In addition, they caution against the naivety of presuming that 'any form of distributed leadership practice is inherently good or automatically associated with positive outcomes' (p. 143). In declaring that 'distributed leadership is not automatically democratic', Woods and Woods (2013, p. 3) also call for a deeper level of exploration to 'address issues of purpose and power' (p. 16) in the application of distributed leadership. As in every case of leadership enactment, the demonstration of ethical practice must be assessed locally where the impact is felt deeply. Overall, the potential value of distributed leadership approaches rests on developing a collaborative organisational culture where there is a sense of trust and organisational cohesion.

Much of the evidence on distributed leadership, however, draws on research conducted in schools (Harris, 2008; 2009; Spillane, 2006; Tian et al., 2015; Torrance, 2013). Therefore, it is difficult to know the extent to which these findings can be applied to EC settings which are more likely to be driven by a play-based pedagogy and curriculum. In contextualising distributed leadership within EC education, Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala (2013, p. 39)

highlighted the need ‘to ensure that the difficulties encountered by school leadership scholars are minimized or eliminated’ in seeking conceptual clarity. Research on distributed approaches applied within EC settings, however, demonstrate the complexities of this task (Colmer, 2016a; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2015). This work is also expanding as hybrid models such as the conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership by Heikka (2014) through its application in Finnish EC settings. Likewise, in exploring pedagogical leadership in EC settings in New Zealand, participants ‘found sense in third generation activity theory as a tool for understanding the centre as a system collectively focused on the achievement of shared objects (or tasks), rather than as a collection of individuals’. (Ord et al., 2013, p. xi). This section by no means provides a comprehensive review of relevant research on distributed leadership, but is sufficient to illustrate emerging research focusing exclusively on the work of leaders in the EC sector.

Pause–reflect–act 1.4

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Give two or three reasons to support your view.

- Not everyone can teach or lead.
- You can be an excellent teacher and be a poor leader.
- There can be more than one leader in an EC centre.

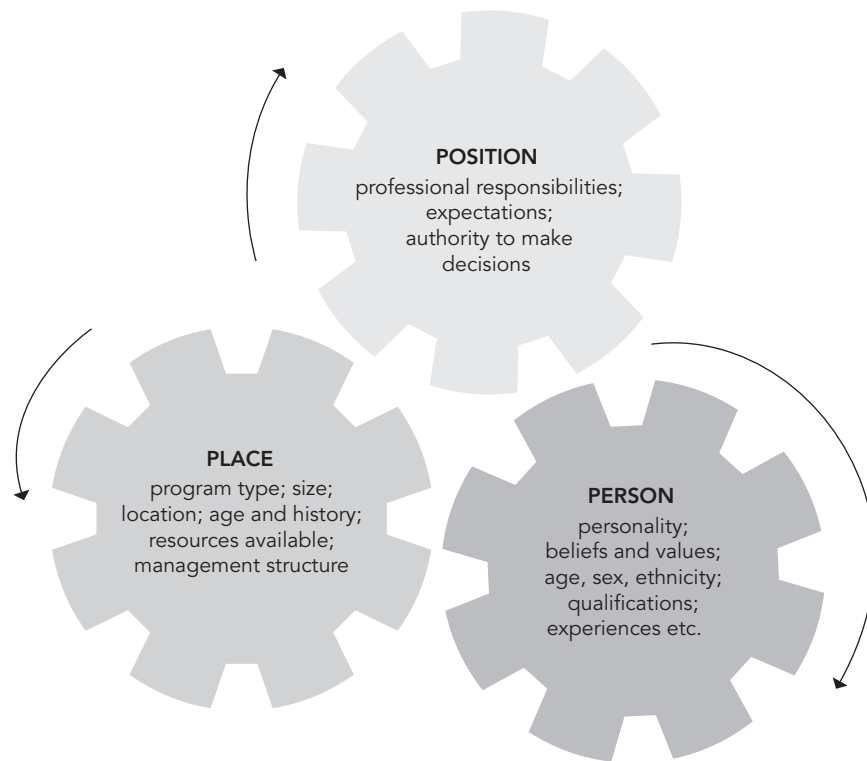
In your reflections consider possible prerequisites for distributing leadership within an EC setting.

Elements of leadership activity

There is a large body of research evidence (see, for example, Aubrey, 2011; McCrea, 2015; Rodd, 2013) to support the notion that leadership is multifaceted and can evolve over time. Based on this knowledge base, the implementation of leadership in professional work can be examined by looking at how three basic elements, comprising the *person*, the *place* and the *position*, come together, as shown in Figure 1.1.

- *The person*: People involved in leadership work are shaped by their personality as well as their beliefs, values and attitudes about leadership. Likewise, an individual’s demographic features such as their age, sex, ethnicity and family background—as well as their professional qualifications, skills and experience in the sector—can also influence their demonstration of leadership. By being aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and by taking steps to purposefully engage in learning continuously, intentional leaders strengthen their leadership capabilities from a long-term perspective.
- *The place*: This is the professional setting where leadership is being implemented. Organisational characteristics such as its size, the number of staff employed, the children and families attending the centre, its age and history of establishment, its

Figure 1.1 Leadership elements



location (for example, being one of three centres at a university campus), the resources available and its ownership or management can all contribute to how leadership is practised in a particular setting. These organisational elements impede or advance the nature of relationships among the people at the setting, both children and adults, and thereby impact on the organisational culture that is being created and the quality of programs being implemented.

- *The position:* This refers to the formal authority and responsibilities allocated to a leader within an organisational setting. Sometimes described as the span of influence, the extent of leadership authority an individual may have in making professional decisions can be built into their job description. In this way, expectations of leaders may be defined either broadly or specifically and used to assess their effectiveness in carrying out their job. In Australia, under the National Quality Standard within Quality Area 7, for example, there is an expectation that staff performance will be regularly evaluated using an individual development plan (ACECQA, 2017, np).

When implementing leadership, consider the integration of the three elements of the person, the place and the position. It is, however, difficult to predict whether a particular one

chapter 4 looks at connections between governance and leadership within EC settings.

or two of these elements will be more important when enacting leadership. For example, it is possible that anyone can demonstrate leadership informally or without an official position, such as when an unexpected situation arises where someone needs to step into the role of a leader. In these circumstances, the individual's personal characteristics, as well as the setting, timing and other people involved in the situation requiring leadership, can influence what actually happens and what decisions are made by the leader. Overall, the extent to which both formal and informal leadership is recognised, valued and fostered is dependent on both the individuals and the characteristics of the organisation.

Pause–reflect–act 1.5

Thinking about your own experiences of leadership, apply the three elements of the person, the place and the position to analyse what happened during a particular situation where leadership was demonstrated.

- Draw a diagram identifying the particular characteristics of each of the three elements that applied in this situation.
- Reflect on how these three elements came together (or not) in demonstrating leadership.
- Reflect on the factors that contribute to how leadership is understood and practised in EC settings.

Pivotal role of leadership in EC settings

It has long been argued that EC leaders play a pivotal role in EC settings (Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Nupponen, 2006b; Rodd, 1994). An accumulating body of empirical evidence has continued to support this view, demonstrating the value-added benefit of having effective leaders in EC settings (Lower & Cassidy, 2007; OECD, 2015; Rodd, 2013; Sylva et al., 2004b). Collectively, these studies show that leadership can positively impact on the quality of the centre as a workplace, the quality of education provided and the developmental outcomes achieved by children over time.

To date, there has been no specific longitudinal research on studying the impact of effective leadership in EC settings. However, the renowned 'Effective Provision of Preschool Education' (EPPE) study in the UK (Sylva et al., 2004b) is a longitudinal study that investigated the impact of participation in formal EC settings on the development of children aged three to seven years. Its findings suggest that strong leadership was a key characteristic of EC centres providing effective programs. In this study, centre quality correlated with the leader's EC qualifications: the higher the qualification the more effective the leader and the higher the quality of education provided. As such, this research affirmed that educators with a university degree in EC can be effective leaders.

as discussed in chapters 5 and 8, ethical entrepreneurship is an essential component in today's EC settings.

turn to chapters 7, 8, 11 and 12 for a discussion of the importance of advocacy in EC education.

Pause–reflect–act 1.6

From your observations and professional experiences as a student and/or educator in EC settings, identify examples that show:

- connections between effective leadership and program quality
- how educators in leadership positions demonstrate effective leadership
- how respect for diversity is being reflected in leadership work.

Consider the extent to which your observations and experiences reflect the research findings on leadership. Refer to the references cited in this book for some appropriate readings. Identify potential gaps in the research, and develop questions that you may want to pursue as a researcher.

A focused discussion on professional growth is also presented in chapter 15.

professional growth

educators can continue to develop their capacity to lead through participation in a range of professional activities and support, as discussed throughout this book.

There is now sufficient research (Aubrey, 2011; Bretherton, 2010; Colmer, 2016a; Rodd, 2013; Sylva et al., 2004b) conducted in various countries to show that leadership manifests in a clear vision and philosophy that is shared by all staff; curriculum development with a strong educational focus; opportunities for continuous **professional growth**; clear policies and procedures; and program innovation. These aspects can influence quality provision directly, as well as indirectly, as reflected in staff retention and enhanced job satisfaction. In Australia, in the *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2011c), for instance, leadership is one of seven quality areas used to accredit EC settings for quality purposes. In this way, leadership is endorsed as a professional responsibility of educators, demonstrating a clear alignment between research, policy and practice.

In the *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2011c, p. 171), the pivotal role of leadership is defined in the following manner:

- creation of a positive organisational culture
- having an in-depth understanding and knowledge of EC learning and development
- empowerment of others
- adaptability to change and fostering continuous improvement
- establishment of a skilled and engaged workforce.

In keeping with this approach of linking leadership with professional responsibilities, this book also embraces the challenges of reframing EC leadership ‘as sustainable professionalism’ as discussed by Fasoli et al. (2007, p. 244). This means adopting a long-term perspective whereby intentional leaders demonstrate how they

carefully seek out and allow key common issues to come into focus. Often what then becomes important is not an immediate fix to solve the problems, but a new way of thinking about the problem. This approach tends to generate new kinds of questions which lead to new kinds of actions never before imagined within bounded communities. (Fasoli et al., 2007, p. 244)

Accordingly, the content covered in this book aims to contribute to the process of generating new leaders in EC who will embrace the challenges of the twenty-first century with confidence, courage, optimism, compassion and resiliency.

In the absence of a prescribed list of agreed leadership functions, key roles and responsibilities of leaders in EC settings are defined locally, and this is considered appropriate given the contextual nature of leadership enactment. Importantly, responsibility for pedagogical planning and development—as well as program or curriculum implementation—are the core functions that require specialist expertise in EC education. Managing and supporting staff is only one aspect of the overall centre administration and requires oversight by leaders on a day-to-day basis. This work also includes budgeting and business plans, as well as broader strategic planning for the future. Inclusion of support for staff professional learning and development is a critical component of these plans. The placement of advocacy and activism functions that relate to external relationships has been an integral component of the work of EC professionals over time (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004). These functions involve external stakeholders such as educators working at other centres, health professionals who work with young children and people in the wider community. Advocacy and activism, however, are at risk because of the lack of time due to the increasing demands on EC leaders to focus more on accountability, quality assurance and the internal operational matters of their EC settings.

Within Australia, concerned about the potential loss of professional autonomy through compliance based practices, Sims and Waniganayake (2015) call on EC educators and leaders to resist by rethinking the purpose of education, by asking critical questions and by facilitating dialogue that can transform leadership practice. In cultivating new ways of leading in EC, it is also no longer a matter of needing ‘more’ leaders because we must also seek ‘more kinds of leadership’ (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001) that reflect the diverse challenges encountered within our communities.

Leadership and ethics

Being an intentional leader is more than just performing the responsibilities specified in a job statement. A manager may be expected to focus on the staff and the regulatory responsibilities that impact on the day-to-day activities of the centre. A leader, on the other hand, is a visionary, and is therefore expected to be future oriented. Typically, these characteristics may be reflected in the philosophy and strategic directions of the centre. Adoption of ethical practices that align with research showing strong links between quality outcomes for children by employing well-qualified educators, for example, sits well with an intentional leader who believes in prioritising their work in the best interests of the children.

Focusing on leadership within schools, Duignan (2006) argues that ‘educational leaders have an ethical responsibility to optimise learning opportunities and outcomes for their students by helping create organisational learning environments that are visionary, authentic, ethical, strategic, people-centred and motivational’ (p. 7). This notion of ethical leadership has

been explored more widely by researchers such as Schminke, Ambrose and Neubaum (2005), who suggest that leaders influence the ethical culture of the organisation. More specifically, their research found that this influence is related to the leader's ability to transfer moral reasoning into actions. In organisations where the moral perspectives of the leader and other staff did not match, there were higher levels of employee dissatisfaction and higher staff turnover. Leaders who express ideas in relation to morality reflect deep engagement with community values, beliefs and ideals which may manifest as leadership duties and obligations (Sergiovanni, 1992). In this way, consciously and deliberately, intentional leaders create and reinforce an organisational culture centred on learning and collaboration with children and their families.

Being an ethical leader means taking a stand and explaining the reasons that underpin your decisions, based on a consideration of prevailing community values and beliefs about a particular issue. This is not always easy, as seen in Pause–reflect–act 1.7.

Pause–reflect–act 1.7

Almost daily, you will receive pamphlets and brochures from businesses interested in securing a market for their products through the staff and families at your centre. Some advertisements offer a percentage of income from the sales generated through your centre. Over time, these sales can provide a steady income for your centre to pay for support staff and additional resources. Some parents are critical that selling chocolates, for example, contradicts the nutritious food policy of the centre. Other parents have commented that it is not appropriate to support certain companies they deem unethical; and others felt that staff were spending too much time administering these promotions. In response to community criticism, you have at least four options to consider as a way forward:

- Option 1: Stop all advertising—no longer allow business promotion as a revenue raiser.
- Option 2: Allow some advertising by carefully selecting the businesses on a case-by-case basis.
- Option 3: Allow some advertising by creating an annual list of preferred businesses.
- Option 4: Allow all advertising without any limits.

Define the ethical issues and underlying values that are presented in each option.

As an intentional leader, consider the consequences of each option for the centre and select the option you will adopt. Give your reasons.

In an increasingly market-oriented workplace, leaders are expected to deliver productivity through efficiency, assessed typically through financial measures. Intentional leaders, however, seek to

strike a proper balance between performance management and creating conditions for efficacy in the workplace. Inspiring the commitment of people at all levels of education to the core task of learning is a high moral purpose that distinguishes leadership and management in education from that in other fields. (Oldroyd, 2005, p. 206)

There have been significant advances in the knowledge base of EC education, and the professional status of educators has moved on from being merely ‘nice ladies who love children’ (Stonehouse, 1989) to becoming dynamic and vibrant leaders (Rodd, 2013). Moreover, as Fasoli et al. (2007, p. 244) have noted, consideration of distributed approaches to leadership in EC is enabling a shift in thinking ‘about what it means to be a professional away from being an expert and towards being an agent or facilitator of change’. As such, it is important that intentional leaders take the time to reflect and understand existing approaches to EC practice, theories, research and policy so that they may move forward with wisdom and courage, as will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013, p. 321) have also noted that a culture of teamwork or collaboration does not guarantee or reflect equity or fair play, and instead could reinforce an institutionalised pattern of negative behaviour where some educators were ‘being marginalised by one’s peers’ (ibid.) for standing out from the crowd. There is also no point denying either the power of those who hold a position of leadership or the potential danger of abusing positional power or esteem within the sector or within individual EC settings. Solutions to these challenges can be found, both as individuals and collectively, by taking action to demonstrate one’s commitment to inclusion, equity and justice in EC settings. More research is also urgently needed to better understand relationships between staff, leaders and management, and the use of power, privilege and authority within EC settings. Importantly, it is anticipated that an intentional leader ‘[will] be inclusive; [will] learn from others; doesn’t always have the answers and solutions; listens to and with others; [and] places ethics at the core of their work’ (Davis, Krieg & Smith, 2015, p. 144).

In this way, intentional leaders demonstrate their capacity to contribute to community building by remaining focused on nurturing the best interests of the next generation of citizens. There is, however, much to learn yet about EC leadership in theory and in practice. The main aim of this book is to engage readers in a continuing dialogue, through active reflection, to seek better ways of conceptualising and advancing leadership in EC as appropriate for the twenty-first century.

Pause–reflect–act 1.8

- While reading this chapter, what questions about EC leadership emerged for you? When reading the subsequent chapters in this book, consider whether we have addressed these questions.
- Using the ‘Key references’ list at the end of this chapter and networking with other leaders from diverse contexts, including other professional backgrounds, may also assist you to engage more deeply in the content we have covered in this book.

Chapter summary

This chapter introduced leadership contexts through an examination of contemporary understandings found in scholarly publications based on leadership in schools and EC settings. It also provided an orientation to the notion of intentional leadership that frames the content covered in this book. It explained how leadership as a professional responsibility of educators has been endorsed by government policy in Australia. By providing an orientation to existing theory and research-based knowledge on EC leadership, this book aims to contribute new understandings of EC leadership relevant for new leaders in the twenty-first century.

Key references

Aubrey, C. (2011). *Leading and managing in the early years*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

This book explores EC leadership concepts and characteristics based on a study involving early years leaders in the UK. It contains research instruments that may be of assistance to those interested in designing leadership studies in the future.

Harris, A. (2009). *Distributed school leadership: Evidence, issues and future directions*. Sydney: Australian Council of Educational Leaders.

In this brief monograph, Harris synthesises evidence on distributed leadership as applied within school settings. It provides a useful introduction to the concept of distributed leadership and introduces some of the key scholars who write about distributed leadership.

Nicholson, J. & Maniates, H. (2016). Recognising postmodern intersectional identities in leadership for early childhood. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*. 36(1), 66–80. doi:10.1080/09575146.2015.1080667.

In scoping the conceptual landscape of theorising EC leadership, these authors make a strong case for developing postmodern theorising by linking professional identity and leadership development.

Rodd, J. (2013). *Leadership in early childhood* (4th ed.). Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

First published in 1994, this fourth edition includes research on contemporary concerns such as working in multidisciplinary teams, mentoring and coaching. This is an essential text, written by a key pioneer in EC research on leadership, providing a comprehensive coverage of pertinent content.