

# 1

## CONCEPTUALISING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP



### CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you will understand that:

- Leadership is complex and contextual, and can change over time and place.
- Leadership is a professional responsibility of educators working in early childhood (EC) settings.
- Much is known about the work of leaders, and EC leadership theorising is progressing well.
- Leadership implementation brings together the three elements of the person, the place and the position.
- Demonstrating intentional leadership takes courage, learning and collaboration with others.
- EC leaders play a pivotal role in implementing quality programs for young children.
- EC leadership is underpinned by ethical practice.

#### Key concepts

intentional leaders  
professional growth

spheres of influence

### Overview

Leadership is a professional responsibility of educators implementing quality early childhood (EC) programs. In Australia, reinforced by government policy reform, there is an increasing sense of purpose and excitement in taking up leadership responsibilities in the sector. Being an EC leader is challenging as well as rewarding. The necessity to act purposefully and ethically becomes evident as leaders recognise the importance of strategic planning from a long-term perspective. This book introduces the notion of 'intentional leadership' as a way of conceptualising or imagining contemporary leadership practice in EC settings. The discussion is situated within an increasingly regulated EC sector and includes a consideration of EC settings as enterprises imbued with social responsibilities and as sites for advocacy and activism. We will show that intentional leaders are courageous, and can demonstrate leadership through considered and deliberate actions and effective interpersonal and workplace communication. Using research on the conceptualisation and application of a variety of leadership approaches, we will discuss the complexities of implementing intentional leadership in everyday practice.

## Contexts of EC leadership

Leadership is a socio-cultural construct (Coleman & Earley, 2005; Hujala & Puroila, 1998; Hujala et al., 2013) that is underpinned by the beliefs and values of a society, community and organisation. This means that there are differences in the way that educators in Australia, Finland, China or Russia, for example, would define early childhood leadership and explain its significance. How leadership is practised can also vary between organisations in the same country and over time. These differences may arise because of, for example, the EC organisation's philosophical approach to EC education and leadership; the number of university-qualified teachers they employed; or the diverse mix of children and families using the setting at a particular time, in a particular community. For example, a preschool in a small rural community may be seen as an important place for community gatherings. Educators could actively demonstrate leadership by initiating conversations with families about matters that concern young children's education such as integrating technology into children's learning. As there may be lots of centres in neighbouring suburbs, it can be more challenging to create a unique community focus within a single centre located in a large city.

Awareness of the local community, as well as the needs and interests of children and families at their centres, can enhance the way leaders work within their settings. Major events within a country and/or developments overseas can also influence the performance of leadership responsibilities locally. For example, natural disasters such as bushfires and floods can have a dramatic effect on communities, including the destruction of children's homes and childcare centres. Likewise, the impact of the resources mining boom in Australia, for instance, can be felt across the country, including increasing employment in remote rural regions in Queensland and Western Australia. The extent to which such developments are temporary or long term must be considered in the provision of EC programs in these regions. Some situations, such as a sudden outbreak of a contagious disease in a centre or a runaway car hitting a childcare centre and damaging sections of the building, are unpredictable. When dealing with an unexpected crisis or changing community needs, educators can demonstrate leadership by adopting a planned approach.

It is not a new understanding and there is an abundance of literature affirming 'the critical responsibility of a leader's role and functions' in leading change (Rodd, 2013, p. 182). Consistently, this literature has emphasised the importance of understanding three aspects comprising first, the contexts of leadership activities; second, the people involved in each situation; and third, the interconnectivities between them. As stated by Ladkin (2010, p. x), such an awareness reinforces leadership as 'a collective process, in many ways not reducible to "the leader"' or one individual. Importantly, this approach indicates the changing focus of leadership theorising from looking at the individual with a designated leadership position to focusing on a more collective approach where leadership is distributed within an organisation, and relies on relationships (Mujis et al., 2004; Rodd, 2013; Thomas & Nuttall, 2014; Waniganayake et al., 2015). This discussion on examining EC leadership from the perspective of people, places and positions is developed further in this chapter and throughout this book.

Arriving at an appropriate definition of the words 'leader' and 'leadership' that can be applied to EC contexts has proved difficult (Rodd, 2013; Thornton et al., 2009; Waniganayake,

2011). Widespread use of these terms across a range of media, from the popular press to scholarly publications, adds to the confusion. Everyone has an opinion about 'good' and 'bad' leaders and what constitutes successful or unsuccessful leadership. Moreover, failure or the lack of leadership is presented as an explanation when things do not work out according to plans. This begs the question posed by Hogan (2015): 'Are we expecting too much from our leaders?' Within this context, emerging interests in focusing on teacher leadership in Finland (Heikka et al., 2016) and Norway (Hognestad & Boe, 2015) present diverse approaches to enacting leadership in distributed ways.

### Pause–reflect–act 1.1

- Write your definition of leadership by reflecting on your experiences and understandings before you read this book.
- Collect three to five definitions of leadership from popular media using both print and online sources. Critically reflect on what is similar and different about these definitions.
- If you can read publications written in a language other than English, include these in your analysis and share the learning with peers. Explore the question: to what extent can cultural beliefs and values influence leadership definitions?
- Are we expecting too much from our EC leaders today? What evidence do you have to support your response one way or the other?
- Consider to what extent your personal perspectives of leadership align with public perceptions about leadership reflected in the media accounts.

An individual leader's personality—including their dispositions and style of leadership—can also influence the way their behaviour is perceived and assessed by others. Various typologies of characteristics of EC leaders began appearing in the 1990s (see Rodd, 2013), but these models are yet to be verified through longitudinal research. Some believe that 'leaders are born and not made' and others feel that attending a leadership course is sufficient to acquire leadership skills. These discussions are sometimes aligned with leadership enjoyed by kings and queens by virtue of being born into a royal family. Notions of royalty and its associated leadership responsibilities do not, however, fit with professional leadership functions performed by those such as educators working in EC settings.

About ten years ago, Thornton et al. (2009, p. 5) stated that 'the monocultural nature of writing on leadership' published in English reflects the culture-bound nature of leadership. Today, however, although written in English, research by scholars from Scandinavia (see Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013; Waniganayake, Rodd & Gibbs, 2015) and Hong Kong (Ho, 2011), for example, is extending the EC leadership knowledge base by taking into account the cultural contexts of their homelands. Research based on the employment of educators and leaders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, however, remains unexplored and

**intentional leaders**

are educators who demonstrate courage in implementing leadership responsibilities in ethical ways. They act purposefully, learning and finding ways to collaborate with others to achieve collective goals.



for further discussion on educational leaders in Australia, refer to chapters 2 and 6.

requires addressing particularly within multicultural societies such as Australia. Importantly, **intentional leaders** are expected to bring together the differing beliefs, values and attitudes of everyone involved in an EC setting with the aim of creating a harmonious organisational culture built on respect for diversity.

National and international policy reforms reflect government interests in EC leadership as a workforce improvement strategy (see, for example, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012; Productivity Commission, 2011b). Governments across the world have responded to an increasing evidence base about the importance of the early years by actively engaging in EC policy reform (OECD, 2006, 2012, 2015). It is widely accepted that if Australia is to realise its reform aspirations for the EC sector, attention must be given to up-skilling the EC workforce and, in particular, it is necessary to upgrade its leadership capabilities (COAG, 2009b). In responding to this challenge, the Australian government is uniquely positioned in the OECD countries in mandating the appointment of educational leaders in EC settings in this country.

### Pause–reflect–act 1.2

Make a list of people whom you consider to be leaders in EC.

- Reflect on your reasons for identifying these individuals as leaders. In your opinion, to what extent have their personal characteristics (personality, age, sex, ethnicity, and so on) and their professional backgrounds, including their EC qualifications, skills and experience in the sector, influenced their leadership capabilities?
- Make the time to have a conversation with these leaders, to ask them about their own perceptions and experiences of leadership. These conversations can provide insights on alternative ways of working as leaders in EC.

## Intentional leadership

The notion of ‘intentional leadership’ frames the discussion of leadership matters in this book. This builds on the definition of ‘intentional teaching’ that is described in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45), which ‘involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have “always” been done that way’. Likewise, intentional leaders are educators who engage in ethical practice by implementing leadership responsibilities in positive, purposeful ways with respect, care and compassion. Such leaders demonstrate courage in their decision-making and find ways to collaborate with others to achieve collective goals in moving the organisation forward. That is, in a rapidly changing policy environment, the frequency of making decisions impacting on the lives of young children and their families requires leaders to appreciate the complexities


of their working environments and demonstrate a willingness to learn and inform others within their organisation so that everyone is abreast of evolving developments. Accordingly, Semann (2011, np) calls on educators to ‘reimagine, dream and visualise a future landscape of hope and success’. This view is based on the belief that intentional leaders can demonstrate authenticity because they are ‘deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge and strengths’ (Avolio & Luthans, 2006, as cited in Semann, 2011).


Reflecting on contemporary research evidence on EC leadership, it is possible to identify three enduring relational constructs that underpin intentional leadership in practice:


- *Leadership and vision*: Leadership literature has consistently affirmed the link between leadership and vision. In outlining their vision, intentional leaders demonstrate a capacity to think clearly and strategically about future possibilities and foster optimism and hope for the imagined future.
- *Leadership and learning*: Leaders epitomise a love of learning by actively and continuously engaging in self-development. By proactively facilitating and strategically investing in professional learning and development, intentional leaders promote thinking, questioning and critical reflection within their own organisations and beyond.
- *Leadership and connectedness*: Intentional leaders articulate their ideas in ways that others can understand and seek collaboration to make a difference by working together. They ‘adopt a cognitive approach to organisational culture, making explicit the “rules” and ways of working, and *deliberately* [emphasis in the original] adopting them, rather than leaving it to chance and hoping that these will be learnt through practice’ (Coleman & Earley, 2005, p. 33). This is particularly important in multi-ethnic societies such as Australia, as leadership can assist in bringing together people with diverse beliefs, values and attitudes by placing the emphasis on the best interests of children.


These relational constructs signify the essence of intentional leadership activity. That is, intentional leaders have the capacity to address these relational constructs in an integrated way. This means having a vision that others can easily see in the way the leader works every day. It also requires leaders to demonstrate their philosophical approach to achieving high-quality EC education for all children. In a broader sense, the leader’s beliefs and values can reflect their thirst for learning and interest in actively engaging with others for the purposes of advocating for children’s interests.


In promoting intentional leadership it is also necessary to draw attention to the ‘dark side’ of leadership, which consists of destructive and harmful elements achieved ‘through the abuse of power and self-interests of the leader’ (Slattery, 2009b). Discussion or publication of difficulties encountered by those experiencing workplace bullying, racism and discrimination are rare within this sector (Waniganayake, 2011). However, based on research carried out in EC settings in Australia and Iceland, Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013, p. 321), respectively, found evidence that EC educators avoided conflict and in some cases there are actions that silence debate. The strong expectations of conformity required through the discourse of niceness and the ethic of care can demand that staff seek agreement and adherence to these expectations rather than engage in open and robust debates for fear of conflict.

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 see chapters 4, 5, 13 and 14 for a wider discussion on leadership as it relates to strategic planning.

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 chapters 2, 3, 6 and 15 look at broad policy concerns including staff qualifications and staff:child ratios.

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 look at chapters 4, 5, 9, 12, 13 and 14 for more on the importance of organisational philosophies and strategic plans.

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 see chapter 8 for the exercise of effective communication and an ethical use of power.

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 collaboration between all stakeholders in the EC setting is explored in chapters 4, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15.

These findings may surprise some, while others may disagree or deny the existence of conflict or discord within EC settings run by ‘nice ladies’. If leadership is about creating positive change, then acting with courage and compassion by being proactive in enabling everyone to feel a sense of security and belonging is a priority for intentional leaders.

Effective leadership can be found in organisations that uphold children’s rights and interests as a priority. The work of intentional leaders within these organisations may be framed along six foundational principles as follows, and these are developed in subsequent chapters of this book:

- using diverse resources, beyond the basic minimum standards required by government regulations, especially in the pursuit of advancing staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratios
- having a well-developed organisational philosophy and strategic and operational plans that are embedded in the everyday practices of all staff at the setting
- upholding a commitment to creating a socially just environment for children and adults at the setting, regardless of class, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, marital status or any other individual and community variables
- having a vested interest and commitment to collaborating with others—children, colleagues, parents and the community—in respectful ways using effective communication
- practising ethical entrepreneurship, where the organisation pursues financial viability with the express intention of delivering high-quality programs for children and their families
- advocating for high-quality EC education policies and practices that aim to foster the potential of every child.

These six principles underpin the contents of this book, as can be seen in the discussion of various ideas and issues examined in subsequent chapters. The next sections in this chapter comprise a discussion based on some key considerations regarding the practice of EC leadership within contemporary contexts.

## What do we know about EC leadership?

When tracking the history of EC leadership research, evolving developments over time have been documented in texts by Rodd (2006a; 2013) as well as Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2004). Publications written by Mujis et al. (2004), Nupponen (2006b) and Dunlop (2008) also provide a quick summary of previous research from a global perspective. Reflecting on developments that have taken place over the past three decades, six key themes that denote current understandings about EC leadership are as follows:

- *Definition of leadership:* There is no definitive way of describing or explaining leadership. While EC scholars have often lamented this absence of an agreed authoritative definition (see Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Rodd, 2006a; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), the extent to which a single standard definition of leadership is appropriate is highly contestable because of the diversity of organisational settings where EC leaders

work. If you believe in diversity, standardised definitions lack purpose and can also limit creativity and innovation in leadership practice, and as such, the search for a universally accepted definition has little or no value.

- *Separation of the relative constructs of administration, management and leadership:* The discussions on the extent to which these three concepts are similar and different is both historical and contextual. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2004) developed a typology aimed at unpacking these concepts in relation to the roles and responsibilities, skills and dispositions of leaders. It is also possible to see cultural nuances of privileging one concept over another in different countries. Administration work, for example, is highly valued in the USA whereas in the UK it is often regarded as routine tasks (Coleman & Earley, 2005, pp. 6–7). While there continues to be tension between management and leadership functions, the focus on administration appears to have been subsumed as a function that everyone, including leaders, must do.
- *Leadership functions:* The nature of work performed by leaders in terms of functions or tasks as well as roles and responsibilities received a lot of attention in early research conducted in the 1990s. The increasing demands and complexities of the workplace within EC settings today require a deeper level of exploration of leadership functions. The potential for duplication of roles and responsibilities can be minimised by adopting clear job descriptions and a better understanding of each other's functions within the same organisation. New research on teacher leadership (Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2016; Ho & Tikly, 2012) is of interest as this acknowledges teacher agency more explicitly.
- *Leadership qualities:* The notion of leadership dispositions or personal attributes of EC leaders was first studied by Rodd (1994). There are numerous leadership typologies that include lists of preferred personal characteristics of EC leaders (see, for example, Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004; Rodd, 2006a). There is a general perception articulated by Rodd (2013, p. 33) that 'the leader's personal qualities have a significant impact on followers because they affect a leader's general approach to people and goals'. However, recent research exploring the qualities of EC leaders is difficult to locate.
- *Leadership growth:* The nature versus nurture debate on leadership suggests that some believe leaders are born while others favour the belief that with training and experience anyone can become a leader. These beliefs are not mutually exclusive. Research in the 1990s (Hayden, 1996; Rodd, 1997) shows clearly that those appointed as centre directors in the past had little or no specific training in management and leadership. Today, leadership and management units are mandated in initial EC teacher education degree courses, and there are lots of professional development programs available on leadership skill preparation. The impact of these training opportunities on leadership practice has not yet been fully explored by contemporary research.
- *Leadership silences on matters of culture, class, gender and sexual identities of EC educators:* Although more women than men are employed in the EC sector, the implications of women leading women (or men) has not been researched to date. There is also little or no research on the extent to which staffing arrangements in EC workplaces reflect the



ethnically diverse communities they are located in and what impact this could have on organisational leadership. Similarly, variability of leadership according to an employee's socio-economic status, relative to education and income, also requires investigation. Anecdotal evidence indicates that there are informal divisions among educators working in a single centre on the basis of who has university or vocational education qualifications. Absence of a recognised career path with adequate financial remuneration matching the level of qualifications achieved can also exacerbate tensions within a staff team.

### Pause–reflect–act 1.3

Read the story of Leela and her family and reflect on the questions below.

Leela's mum came to your long day care centre through a government initiative aimed at helping single parents to find paid employment. Leela is nine months old. She has two older siblings at school. It has been two years since the family escaped from the political unrest and violence in their homeland. Leela's mum wanted to find a job so that she could provide for her children. She had not used centre-based EC programs with her older children and was finding it difficult to be separated from Leela, her new baby. When you explained Leela's family context to the staff in the baby room at your centre, they were also anxious about their responsibilities in caring for Leela.

- As a leader, how will you use your leadership skills and understandings to respond to Leela and her family, and to the concerns of the centre staff?
- Which leadership qualities can you use to demonstrate empathy towards families with complex challenges?
- Write a profile of your ideal leader, identifying their key roles and responsibilities. Which of these will you use when working with your colleagues?
- You can revisit these reflections after finishing this book or on completion of your studies to see how this profile might be revised in light of your new understandings about intentional leaders.

## Theorising EC leadership

Rodd (2013, pp. 45–60) provides a potted history of the grand theories influencing the development of theorising EC leadership. More specifically, those such as Bloom (2003), Hayden (1996) and Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2004) have used business studies and school



leadership literature by Sergiovanni (1984) and Harris (2009) respectively, to explore the nature of leadership within the EC sector. Despite the contextual differences between these disciplines, Mujis et al. (2004) concur that there is much to be gained from active collaboration in researching and theorising across discipline boundaries. More than a decade ago, these authors also claimed that theorising about EC leadership ‘is limited’ (p.159). There is, however, a growing body of literature showing a healthy progression in theorising EC leadership, aligned closely with the changing nature of EC practice. In appraising the conceptual landscape to date, Nicholson and Maniates (2016) identified four shifts in theorising EC leadership as follows:

- *Leadership as positional authority*: those employed as centre directors have traditionally followed a ‘command-and-lead’ approach based on job title and position within the organisation. As such, decision-making was hierarchically driven with the final authority vested at the top levels. Effectively, this approach ‘positioned leaders as managers’ (Nicholson & Maniates, 2016, p. 70) and the resulting confusion between leadership and management responsibilities continue to present problems today.
- *Leadership as specialist knowledge*: Kagan and Bowman (1997) introduced the notion of specialisation in their five faces of leadership by focusing on a specific area such as pedagogy, community, and advocacy, as explained in chapter 15. Others have expanded these specialisations, and Nicholson and Maniates (2016, p. 71) assert that expanding ‘the boundaries of what is recognised as leadership in our field’ has enabled the development of leadership as ‘a more inclusive construct’.
- *Leadership as distributed and relational*: conceptualisations of distributed ways of leading EC settings emerged in the 2000s and were perceived as being reflective of the collaborative ethos of EC settings. According to Rodd (2013, p. 48) ‘distributed leadership theory falls broadly under the category of transformational leadership’, and given its popularity today, this discussion is expanded below.
- *Leadership as continual negotiation of uncertainties*: expanding responsibilities and increasing complexities of contemporary leadership work, does not always fit within linear logical ways of enacting leadership. Calls by those such as Davis, Krieg and Smith (2015), and Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) for alternative perspectives that can deal with ambiguities, tensions and uncertainties are pushing the theorisation of EC leadership through poststructuralist lenses.

This brief overview reflects how EC leadership theorising has moved from the privileged positioning of one individual as a leader to a more inclusive socially constructed phenomenon, embedded within the practice of leadership. Opportunities for collaboration are emerging in the examination of distributed leadership approaches and are beginning to attract the interest of diverse EC scholars. Within a distributed frame of reference, leadership activity is dispersed over different aspects of a particular organisation, system or situation (Harris, 2009). The process of leadership decision-making thereby moves beyond a single leader to a group, conceptualised in a way that is meaningful at the local context of each setting. The way in which individuals implement distributed leadership may be described along **spheres of influence** reflective of the professional boundaries based on an area of expertise or authority

#### **spheres of influence**

reflect how leadership enactment can inspire and impact others. Within an organisation, leadership responsibilities may be formally defined in individual staff job descriptions. Individuals may also influence others through inspiration, encouragement and/or by demonstrating leadership informally in everyday work.

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.

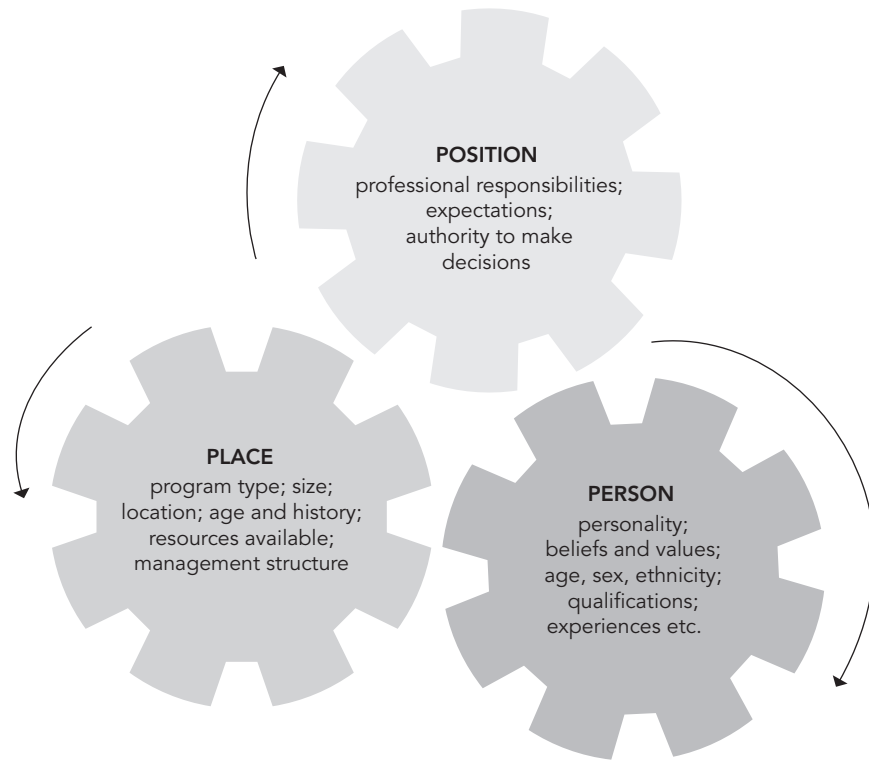
In your reflections consider possible prerequisites for distributing leadership within an EC setting.

## 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.