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Navigating the changing landscape of early education within a preschool setting

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Navigating the changing landscape of early education within a preschool setting

Heather L. Beaudin

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Abstract

Currently, early education in Ontario is rapidly transforming to meet the diverse needs and demands of children, educators, and families. With each change that the sector experiences leaders in early childhood education are called to guide their team through the change process. One recent change that leaders have been faced with is the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten across the province and its impact on child care programs. Considering the wide range of child care programs that have been affected by Full-Day Kindergarten, this Organizational Improvement Plan explores a significant problem of practice: how can key stakeholders within a child care organization successfully navigate this changing landscape and implement a long-term plan for continued sustainability. This problem of practice is explored through a distributed leadership lens, with an emphasis on building on the most powerful resources within our setting, the educators themselves. Within the context of this Organizational Improvement Plan, distributed leadership refers to the collaboration of several educators' knowledge and skillsets as a key resource for guiding the change process. In working through each stage of the change process Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols's (2016) four-step Change Model is presented as a key application tool. As leadership is distributed, organizational change readiness is assessed, the need for change is communicated, possible solutions to the problem of low enrolment are explored, and a change process communication plan is presented. This problem of practice is of significance as the sustainability of a high quality preschool program in our community is critical for society at large.

Keywords:

Early child education, leadership, distributed leadership, early years, change plan

Executive Summary

Early education and care in Ontario is currently undergoing rapid change. Consequently, navigating this sector as a leader is an increasingly complex task. With each level of change it is necessary to draw on internal knowledge and skillset, growing our leadership capacity within (Talan, 2010). This OIP suggests that increased leadership capacity is important as problems of practice are confronted, such as the issue of low enrolment. One specific way to increase leadership capacity is through a distributed leadership framework, which within the context of this OIP refers to, the collaboration of several educators' knowledge and skillsets as a key resource for guiding the change process.

Addressing the problem of low enrolment, using a distributed leadership framework, begins with identifying key leadership functions (Rodd, 2015). Within our organization this would mean articulating our vision for change, setting our goals for achieving this vision, working through challenges that arise, and identifying how individuals align with this leadership approach. Each leadership function must be determined within our setting because in order to sustain change each member must understand why it is necessary, and contribute to the process through active participation and contribution (Rodd, 2015).

In alignment with a distributed leadership approach, in order to determine change readiness, communicate the need for change, lead the change process, and monitor the transition to desired future state, Cawsey, Deszca and Ingols's (2016) Change Path Model should be implemented in collaboration between informal and formal leaders. As the Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016) and a distributed leadership framework guide

the progression towards the desired future state, tools such as storytelling, change teams, and professional learning communities are recommended as systemized support.

Drawing to a close, our formal leader has a sizeable task ahead, attempting to address our organization's critical problem of low enrolment, and transform organizational leadership to align more with a distributed leadership model. Although as this Organizational Improvement Plan makes clear, the formal leader does not have to carry this responsibility or workload alone. Beginning to engage and empower educators will take thoughtful consideration and effort, though if done effectively can have sizeable benefits (Harris, 2013). Regardless of how intimidating, exhausting, or difficult change can be, it is an essential component of our organizational life and serves to challenge, motivate, inspire, involve, and fulfill our members (Rodd, 2015). Not only is change required because of our declining enrolment numbers; it is necessary for a healthy and meaningful organization that members authentically and wholeheartedly want to invest in.

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Chapter One Introduction and Problem

Introduction

Our preschool program is situated within an urban University, and has a longstanding history and culture with many seasoned employees. Over the years the preschool has served a rather narrow population; however, there has been a shift in demographic. Not only are families coming from increasingly diverse backgrounds, but children are also starting at an earlier age. Staff members feel this change is largely an effect of Ontario's implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK). Aside from a changing population, FDK has impacted the enrolment rate of our preschool. Each year fewer children are enrolled in the program, resulting in concern around the programs viability and future.

Responding to the organizational problem of low enrolment, the first chapter of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) frames the problem of practice and presents a tangible plan and vision for change. The second chapter suggests a distributed leadership framework be implemented to guide the change process, with the latter part of the chapter recommending solutions to the problem of low enrolment. The third chapter presents points for consideration such as ethical responsibilities, and change plan limitations, concluding by outlining a clear, concise change process communication plan. Throughout the development of this OIP my position within the organization has remained constant. Currently, my role within the organization is Registered Early Childhood Educator, working directly with children. Consequently, I am an informal leader with the ability to advocate from an applied perspective.

Organizational Context

Political Context. Considering the political context of my organization, two dominant ideological approaches are prevalent, conservatism and neo-liberalism. First, tenets of conservatism are present including: valuing the past as a source of knowledge and identity, as well as a belief that a properly run organization follows a hierarchical systems model (Guttek, 1997). In our organization, conservatism frames the decision-making process, as our leader's work is formal, hierarchical, and heavily influenced by regulations and policies. Accordingly, most often decisions of significance are made and then followers are informed.

In addition, a neoliberal approach is evident as a large portion of program funding is derived from parent customers, placing value on an economic rather than democratic system. As a result competition is present at all levels within our school, even social levels that were once considered untouchable by market forces (Garrett, 2010, p.341) and this competition means a business model influences our program. Serving parents in a business partnership rather than an educational partnership impacts areas such as curriculum design and delivery, behaviour management approaches, and communication. As Brown (2015) suggests, a concern for early childhood educators working within a neoliberal context is the pressure felt by many to ensure children receive a strong 'academic foundation', which can limit the amount of time spent on other areas of development. Consequently, as educators aim to provide a high quality program, they are obligated to consider how their educational philosophy can be integrated within the neoliberal context.

Economic Context. With early education in Ontario not being funded to the same degree as our formal education system, our budget is comprised of parental fees, organization capital, and provincial investment. Beginning in 2013 the Liberal government introduced a new funding formula as part of their efforts to modernize early education. This new approach aims to be more transparent, equitable and respond to the demand for child care, the need to stabilize parent fees, improve the reliability of services, and better meet the requirements for child care operators (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2012). These modernization efforts were advanced in fall of 2016, as the provincial government invested \$65.5 million to help create additional licensed child care spaces. This commitment to increasing space was recently expanded on as Ontario's 2017 budget indicated that through 2017-2018 an additional 24,000 children would gain access to child care through new fee subsidy spaces (Ontario, Ministry of Finance, 2017). Despite this provincial progression, with various economic stakeholders and an immature policy framework for the early years in Ontario, we remain market based. As Friendly (2015a) an advocate and guru in early education states, "In 2015, it's dreadfully evident that our patchwork, marketized child care situation fails just about everyone and that young Canadian families live in one of the few wealthy countries that fails to support them well" (p.1).

Although full-government funding has yet to be relinquished to the early education sector, the widespread benefits of quality early care are prominent throughout the research (Heckman, 2000; Chandler, 2016; Friendly, 2017b; Rubin, 2013; Rolnick, 2017). Children who are provided with opportunities to attend early education programs generally grow to be more productive, healthy members of society. Udenigwe (2013)

presents an array of benefits gained later in life by children who attend high quality infant and toddler programs. Specifically, long term educational benefits such as higher reading and mathematical scores, IQ scores, and graduation rates. Moreover, our system benefits economically, as intervention and investment in the early years typically results in greater fiscal rates of return (Heckman, 2000; Rolnick, 2017).

Social Context. Aside from economic benefits on a broad social scale, our preschool provides some families with social support by facilitating their participation in the job market or an educational pursuit (Udenigwe, 2013). This support is especially important for gender equality in the workforce. “ Today most young children in Canada have working mothers while the historic male breadwinner model hasn't been the reality for most families for almost 40 years” (Friendly, 2017a, p.1). Thus, with a majority of mothers employed out of the home, child care must be accessible.

For other families, our program's primary focus is to serve as a foundational first step in their child's educational journey. Regardless of the reason behind children's participation in our program, our main approach is child centred teaching. Through this approach children are integral partners in their learning, the development of the environment, and the creation of curriculum content. As educators our work is guided by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which places a strong emphasis on the image of the child (Fraser, 2006; Edwards, 2012). This approach is characterized by beliefs such as: children are born with countless resources and extraordinary potential, children are a social responsibility, learning is built on experiences that are significant to learners, collaboration is valuable on all levels, the environment is a foundational teacher, children have many languages for representing thinking, and pedagogical documentation is a key

tool for making learning visible (Fraser, 2006; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). The Reggio Emilia philosophy shapes our context as we aim to meet the needs of each individual student, and respect the life experiences and diversity of learners. This philosophical approach has been gaining momentum in Canada, and globally, as educators strive to incorporate the inner workings of Reggio in to their daily practice (Fraser, 2006). Therefore, considering the influence of this philosophical lens on our organizational vision is essential.

Vision for Change

Building on a Reggio philosophy, our current vision is focused on providing high quality early learning experiences, with an emphasis on viewing children as capable, competent, and complex thinkers. A key word from our vision, which deserves further discussion, is *quality*. From influencing daily working conditions for educators to having an impact on children's development, quality is central to our work as early childhood educators. As Rolnick (2017) indicates, programs must be of high quality in order to make an impact that is worth investing in.

While our organizational vision is well constructed, it is focused on our current state. It does not address our problem of low enrolment or provide guidance on how to move forward with a change plan related to viability. Developing a vision for change is crucial, as this vision can connect with human need to be involved in something transformational, provide motivation for change (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016), and set the direction for change (Bloom, 2005). "A vision for change clarifies the road ahead. It specifies the purpose of the change and provides guidance and direction for action"

(Cawsey et al., 2016, p.120). Therefore, when developing a vision for change our organization should aim to build on the current vision but ensure there is clear separation between the two.

With our staff being comprised of many knowledgeable educators, the development of the vision for change can be done using a bottom-up approach. Although time-consuming and trying, this approach has great value as it aims to align employees and the organization (Cawsey et al., 2016). With a small group of educators that are loyal and committed to the preschool, this alignment is essential for long-term employee motivation and change success. One framework that could guide this bottom-up approach to vision development is the symbolic frame, which focuses on the ways in which organizational members construct meaning (Bolman & Beal, 2008). From a symbolic lens then, educators could use storytelling as a tool for discovering their organizational passion and purpose. Though, a hypothetical vision for change could be: “Our hope is for an empowered team of knowledgeable early childhood educators working collaboratively to create a successfully viable preschool program, that offers high quality early learning experiences for young children”.

Organizational Structure and Leadership Practice. Although early education in North America has received heightened attention over the years (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013) it is still in many ways growing as a profession and does not receive the appreciation or respect it deserves (Wise & Wright, 2012). Limited resources, lack of connection to the larger school system, and underpaid employees all contribute to the state of the profession (Larkin, 1999). Thus, a sizable gap in available research related to early educational leadership exists (Heikka & Hujala, 2013; Wise & Wright, 2012). As a

result leaders in the early education are left with few models and little guidance, which is problematic as research reports that high quality programming is directly related to strong leadership (Ang, 2011; Chandler, 2016; Wise & Wright, 2012).

Working within this absence, in a large multifaceted organization, our leader has adopted a rather traditional style of leadership. This leadership style is characterized by individual performance of power and influence over followers to reach organizational goals and operations (Burke, 2010), and is evident through the leader's emphasis on rules, regulations, and policies. Although this leadership approach is often successful in managing the daily operations of the preschool, it is a hindrance when addressing larger systemic challenges and advancing with large-scale change. In fact, Sullivan (2009) suggests that 'hoarding' leadership can be detrimental to programs, as it is unlikely that one individual possesses all of the skills necessary to operate a successful program. Though this traditional structure appears to be common in the profession, as a supervisor shared during a leadership network in 2017 that, "The structure is already made for us: ministry, supervisor, teachers, and kids". Specifically for our preschool, this traditional structure has been influenced by our lengthy organizational history.

Organizational History. Opening in the mid 1970's our preschool was originally designed as a teaching school for early childhood educators. Over the years the school transitioned to a full-time, half-day preschool program, for 2.5 to four year-olds, whose parents were university associates or community members. Employees consist of teachers who have been part of the school for more than two decades, as well as some newer teaching staff and a longstanding formal leader. Over time the philosophy guiding the preschool has transitioned alongside the sector, experiencing the complex journey from a

thematic based approach to teaching to collective program planning between educators and children.

With our longstanding history, our program has grown to serve as a role model for other preschools in the community. However, we have experienced ups-and-downs over the years, with our recent low being the number of children enrolled in our program.

Leadership Problem of Practice (POP)

Investing in early education has economic benefits as studies have shown that every dollar invested in children before the age of six saves up to seventeen dollars in future social service costs (Grieve, 2012, p.46). According to Grieve (2012),

There is a large and growing body of research that substantiates the positive effect of early learning on children's overall academic attainment, their financial stability and well-being as adults, and their abilities to make meaningful contributions to their community (p.47).

This high rate of return was echoed by economist Art Rolnick (2017), who indicated that the best public investment society could make is in the early years and now is the time to capitalize. Accordingly, high quality early education programs are an essential element to every community. However, with the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) in Ontario, preschool programs continue to experience declining enrolment (Blizzard, 2014). Thus, my problem of practice (PoP) aims at exploring how the leadership within a preschool organization can effectively navigate this changing landscape and implement a long-term plan for continued success. This problem of practice addresses an issue of significant concern as high parental fees, lack of spaces, and questionable quality plague

many Canadian families when it comes to early education for their children (Mills, 2016), and according to Friendly (2017b), these challenges leave young families with immense hardship. More over, the first 1000 days of a child's life lay the foundation for the next 80 years of their life, thus all children in our community deserve access to high quality programs.

For the purpose of this organizational improvement plan (OIP), a preschool program falls under the child care umbrella and can be defined as an early learning experience for young children before they reach the required age for kindergarten; for our preschool this is two and a half to four years of age. Our current program structure is full-time or part-time, half-day sessions for children. Each program slot can accommodate twenty-four children and this capacity is ideal for achieving maximum profitability and employed workforce. Although the twenty-four morning spots are typically occupied, the afternoon numbers continue to decline, with only eight out of the twenty-four spots filled at the start of the 2016 school year.

Perspectives on the PoP. Within our organization numerous stakeholders carry a range of valuable perspectives that must be considered throughout the change process. For the purpose of this OIP, internal stakeholders consist of children attending the program, teachers, our current director, and parents. External stakeholders consist of the dean, department chair, administrative officer, preschool volunteers, professors, researchers, student teachers, master's interns, provost, and community members.

Historical Overview of the PoP. Historically our program was intended to primarily meet the needs of children ages four and five, so the environment was designed, materials purchased, and staff trained with this demographic in mind. Prior to FDK

implementation, our preschool tended to have an extensive waitlist for both morning and afternoon program spots. Older children filled spots quickly as they were seemingly more prepared to separate from parents for a block of time, be part of a school-like community, and give up afternoon naps. With most of these children now in FDK, these spots are left to younger children, however, based on informal conversations with parents of toddlers, they typically are less ready to separate, unconcerned with school preparation, and feel that afternoon naps are mandatory. Thus, enrolment for the toddler population is not as in demand, especially for the afternoon program.

For younger children that do register in the program (32 months), staff members have been reporting concerns on two accounts. First, the environment is not conducive to younger learners. Materials and the physical make-up of our environment cause an array of challenges for children, families, and educators. Second, certain staff are not as well trained or experienced when it comes to working with children under the age of three, making programming and interacting with this younger population intimidating for some.

Framing of the PoP. Considering varying organizational PoP perspectives and history provides a necessary foundation for the change process. To expand this foundation, our organizational PoP can be viewed through different frameworks as a way of enhancing understanding around the problem we are facing and what can be done about it (Bolman & Deal, 2008). With our organization not coming with a guide on how to manage change, Bolman and Deal's (2013) clear, concise four-part framework can be used to situate our problem of low enrolment.

First, analyzing our PoP from a structural lens, elements such as setting goals, rationality, and appropriate division of labour are on the forefront (Bolman & Deal,

2013). Using this frame, teacher roles and policies need to be altered to attract new children and families to the program as well as embrace a new leadership approach. For example, we may ask ourselves what short term and long term goals should be set in order to stay viable and how can we design a structure that works (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Moving to consider a human resource perspective, human needs are valued and there is recognition around the need for employees and organizations to compliment each other well (Bolman & Deal, 2013). From this frame, educators need to feel supported through the change process and that any trepidations are heard and addressed. As we tackle the issue of low enrolment, educators should be empowered to generate a vision for change that aligns their hopes and dreams with the direction of our organization.

Third, from the political frame it is thought that employees have enduring differences, allocation of resources is most important, power is central, and stakeholders are most concerned with their own interests (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Therefore, each educator at our preschool will bring different experiences, values, and interests that will influence their readiness, involvement, and acceptance for change. Such differences may lead to difficult conversations around the program's future, resulting in conflict or division within the organization. Contemplating how we can compete with other preschool programs for scarce funding and customers (families) would also be a key consideration from the political frame. Ultimately educators and leaders daily decisions, actions, and directions are heavily influenced by policies (Friendly, 2017a).

Finally, from a symbolic perspective the value is in the meaning of events, symbols can guide you through uncertainty, culture is at the heart of the organization, and

process should be valued over product (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As longstanding educators share stories about the past we are presented with the challenge of preserving and respecting our culture as we undergo change. Through this lens, educators may discuss their teaching philosophy and how it can blend with the changing culture of the preschool.

Upon reflection of all four frames presented by Bolman and Deal (2013) it is evident that each one provides a valuable perspective on the PoP and is foundational to leadership practice in some form. In describing leadership on a micro level in early education, Hujala (2004) states “The nature of leadership is characterised by the comprehensiveness of the task, which is seen to range from taking care of and educating children to financial administration and supporting human relations” (p.59). However, in order to focus this OIP in a practical way, the symbolic frame is the overarching lens that is used to view the problem of low enrolment and develop a change plan. This frame has been selected based on the belief that educators’ knowledge and organizational history will be indispensable as we navigate the change process (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Further, this frame is thought to be most applicable given the direct relation to the Reggio Emilia philosophy that our school is guided by. In Reggio it is believed that children grow intellectually by focusing on symbolic representation and children are thought to make meaning about the world around them, based on symbols in many forms (Edwards et al., 2012). Considering our problem of low enrolment through various frames provides a more comprehensive understanding of our current state, and reviewing related literature widens this understanding.

Related Literature Review. With Ontario experiencing change related to family structure and social conditions there is an increase in the need for early learning (Rubin, 2013). This increasing need has resulted in Ontario moving forward with legislation and initiatives that support early education as a profession. After more than twenty years of local organizations advocating for the profession, the Ontario government developed the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007. This law established a definition of the profession, required that persons practicing become members, provided title protection to help ensure that those working in the early education were adequately trained, and outlined roles and responsibilities for the regulating body (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2007). The development of a regulating body was the first step in advancing the profession; however, resilient and dynamic leaders, further research, and greater understanding of ECE leadership are now required (Murray, J., McDowall Clark, R., 2013; Wa Ho, 2011; Heikka & Hujala, 2013). With high demands and few models, ECE leadership is often categorized within the larger context of educational leadership (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2012; Bush, 2012). This categorization is concerning as the school sector does not parallel the ECE sector (Krieg, Smith & Davis, 2014), and leadership in early education is, according to Wise and Wright (2012) “fundamentally different” (p.4). With distinctive training requirements, varying philosophical approaches, vast differences in funding, and diverse societal views on the roles and importance of each sector, there is a clear divide between school and child care.

Who Are the ECE Leaders? Although some aspects between school and ECE leadership may be interchangeable, ECE leaders have a much more diverse and complex terrain to navigate with often less preparation than their principal counterparts,

specifically around administration tasks (Carter & Curtis, 2010). In fact, supervisors in child care can move directly from a teaching position to a leadership position (Wise & Wright, 2012). As a community colleague indicated during a leadership related discussion in April of 2017, “I have gone from a teacher to a supervisor in a very short time”. Once in these positions there is often little support available (Larkin, 1999), and consequently ECE leaders require different training as they lead change. For example, ECE leaders may benefit from internal and external supports such as: mentor relationships, assistant supervisors, and/or leadership networks where those facing similar problems come together for discussion (Larkin, 1999).

The FDK Model One unknown area that ECE leaders have been called to steer is the changing landscape in the profession as a result of the implementation of FDK. Beginning in 2010, as the five-year FDK program unfolded, the goal was to respond to the need for high quality and accessible early learning opportunities for Ontario’s children. FDK was developed with the guidance of research literature, pilot programs, and recommendations from Dr. Charles Pascal’s, Early Years Advisor to the Liberal government and was not intended to replace child care systems. In fact, part of the larger plan was to ensure a seamless transition from child care to FDK and work collaboratively with child cares to provide before and after school care. However, child care and FDK systems are vastly different and therefore, considering our organization’s environment is a necessary initial step to determining how our organization fits within this new framework.

PESTE ANALYSIS. Aside from related literature, another way to gather insight around our problem of low enrolment is through a PESTE analysis. The purpose of a

PESTE analysis is to raise awareness around the organizational environment, as well as consider what external forces will shape the change. PESTE factors include political, economic, sociological, technological, and environmental aspects of an organization's context (Cawsey et al., 2016).

From a political angle, in 2010 the Ontario government announced that child care would transition from the Ministry of Child and Youth to the Ministry of Education. This transition was the beginning of larger government changes and the modernization of child care unfolded. Based on a discussion paper published by the Ministry of Education in 2012, entitled *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together*, the intention was to provide high quality early learning experiences through new funding formulas, supportive legislation, and evidence-based decision-making. Reviewing legislation under this modern approach led to the development of the Child Care and Early Years Act in 2014, which dictates and guides practice. This new piece of legislation replaced The Day Nurseries Act, which had been guiding child care in Ontario since 1946 with little alteration (Grieve, 2012).

Moving to analyze the economic factors, with child care in Ontario still primarily funded through parent fees (Grieve, 2012), our program depends on high enrolment numbers to continue operating. When parents are faced with the decision between FDK and child care there are an array of factors that influence their choice such as proximity to program, hours of operation and perhaps most significant for some families, the cost associated with each program. There is no direct parent cost associated with FDK, however, child care can cost parents as much as \$37.00 a day (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2012). Kozička (2016) states that “In Vancouver and Toronto, a year of

daycare for your baby costs more than a year of university tuition fees to study law, engineering, pharmacy, nursing, business, education, arts, humanities, architecture, math or veterinary medicine” (p.1). Recognizing this, once FDK was fully implemented transition funding of \$51 million annually was provided to child care centres. This funding was intended to help programs adjust to FDK. Moreover, funding of \$12 million dollars was provided to non-profit child care centres to support the necessary retrofits and renovations needed to provide care for younger children (Grieve, 2012).

Aside from economic factors weighing on the problem of low enrolment, social factors also influence our current and desired future state. Over the course of several years our preschool population has noticeably shifted. This shift challenges educators’ assumptions, values, and beliefs about the families we work with. In the past, families that attended our preschool were predominantly Caucasian, middle to upper class, nuclear, English speaking families. Children entered the program with a wealth of experience and generally stayed until they were five years of age. However now, our program increasingly serves diverse families. Currently children come from varying social classes, with different family structures, and a variety of first-languages. Moreover, children enter the program at a younger age and are leaving when they are eligible for FDK.

In addition to analyzing the factors above, technological advancements have required us to rethink our structure and design. Specifically, in our region families are now required to register for our preschool program online using a central database. Although this database is efficient and effective for tracking enrolment interest, it can also be a deterrent for families. With the requirement of online registration families that

have limited access, experience and/or time with the Internet may face increased barriers and forgo registration. Having to register online means the days of dropping in and connecting with families personally are quickly depleting.

The final factor to be considered under the PESTE analysis is environmental. More recently, our preschool has dedicated increased time to understanding how our environment impacts learning. Given our physical space, we are limited in the type of program we can offer. With many closed off rooms, observation booths that are used for a variety of purposes, researchers located in close proximity, and bathrooms far from play spaces there are several environmental elements to be considered as we plan for change.

Relevant Internal Data. Though the PESTE analysis offers conceptual clarity around the problem of low enrolment, reviewing internal data will provide leaders with enriched understanding. In selecting internal data to review, with technological advancement, there is a sizable amount available (Cawsey et al., 2016), though for the purpose of this OIP four forms have been selected. First, one document we may review that has already been developed and distributed is parent surveys. Annually parents are invited to complete a survey and share their experiences and opinions around the program. Using this already developed tool has several benefits such as the opportunity for anonymity and our ability to capture the experiences of our whole school population (Cawsey et al., 2016) in an effective and efficient way (Bloom, 2005). With surveys being archived each year, reviewing responses can provide us with rich insight. If surveys are distributed in the spring, then educators can spend summer months analyzing data sets, and be prepared to share findings with stakeholders in time for the new school year (Bloom, 2005). While surveys offer rich data to draw inferences, challenges around

survey design, administration, and analysis would need to be considered (Cawsey et al., 2016). As Cawsey et al. (2016) note, surveys can be of great value to change agents but should be developed with assistance and skill. Therefore, it would be beneficial to consider tools such as SurveyMonkey.com and EmployeeSurveys.com.

Second, past enrolment numbers can be reviewed using attendance records. Graphing trends over several years will allow staff to better understand declining enrolment. Using a control chart (Cawsey et al., 2016), data sets can be plotted in a time order and conclusions can be drawn about whether enrolment over the years has been consistently declining or fluctuating. Also, including demographic information in this visual representation of enrolment will provide more tangible information around how the population has shifted.

Third, another way enrolment numbers are logged is through an online registration system that families use to search licensed early learning centres in our region, apply for child care programs, and access related information. Data can then be compared to and/or added to the already developed control chart as a form of triangulation. In order for data to be fully understood by educators, the database would need to be accessible.

Finally, staff reviews can be studied to gain insight around where educators fall on the change continuum. Specifically, answering questions around educators' professional goals and development needs, current understanding of the school's vision, and ways they suggest the program may be sustained.

Although reviewing readily available data collections is valuable, because of the longstanding history of our program the sheer amount of data would be overly time

consuming and difficult to organize. Reviewing the entire history of the program would not be practical, but drawing on data over the course of five-year intervals, would provide a well-rounded, complete picture that captures the most current framework and policy.

Relevant External Data. Building on the information gathered through internal data, analyzing relevant external data will help our organization avoid blind spots and develop a more comprehensive picture, as well as understand the related long term risks and opportunities (Cawsey et al., 2016). Gaining this understanding is of particular importance as our organizational goal is long-term sustainability. Therefore, two types of external data should be considered, a less tangible and a concrete form (Cawsey et al., 2016). First, the less tangible type, informal conversations with other supervisors in the community can provide direction, potential solutions to the problem of low enrolment, and support around change. Each month in our community, formal leaders have the opportunity to come together and discuss current problems and happenings. These conversations may be translated and shared with organizational stakeholders, specifically reporting on how other programs have designed, communicated, and implemented change. With this data being qualitative in nature, it would be important for the leader to produce written summaries capturing relevant information.

Second, more concrete external data are available both regionally and provincially. Considering the Regions Early Learning and Child Care Profile, published in 2015 several important indicators for the state of child care locally between 2012-2015 are outlined. Through this recent document community trends and changes are available. Data around cost associated with child care, accessibility, availability, and wages and working conditions for educators are presented. Using a straightforward comparative

chart, this data can be broken down and compared with our internal data as a way to understand our current state and how we may reach our desired future state. The comparative chart would plot out: how much our program cost parents, how accessible our program is, whether we have spots available for the needed age demographic, and if we provide competitive wages and working conditions. Furthermore, gaining a broader understanding of where child care is situated provincially will support our organizations attempt to stay viable. Reviewing the Ministry of Education's 2012 online questionnaire (that was issued to all licensed child care centres and private home daycares in Ontario), will provide information around fees, hours of operation, wages, and finances. Adding this data to the comparative chart, outlined above, will serve as a way for our organization to situate ourselves locally and provincially. Based on Bloom's (2005) goal of data collection, to provide a valid picture of the needs and problems as a basis for action (p.58), considering personal perspectives adds an important piece to the puzzle. Capitalizing on already developed and available forms of internal and external data allows for time to be used more effectively, as well as triangulation of results. Comparing two or more sets of data around child care in our community, from different time frames and places will allow us to see if results are consistent and credible (McMillan, 2012).

Personal Research Perspective

As a registered early childhood educator within our organization, I bring my own biases based on educational and life experiences. As a student, in a rural part of southern Ontario, I experienced a hierarchical system for most of my educational life. This structure was further supported by working-class family views that suggested teachers

were above students and the holders of knowledge and power. With this educational underpinning, and a discovered passion for working with young learners, I have held formal and informal ECE leadership positions. Throughout my time in the profession I have grown to view leadership as a social construct. As a society, I think we have particular characteristics that we value in leaders. I do not believe people are born leaders, but instead are born with traits that fit well with our interpretation of leadership. In certain contexts, these characteristics are then supported, strengthened and accordingly, flourish. With this understanding, I am left to think one can grow to be an effective leader, which is in contrast to what I believed before this OIP journey began. Not only has my leadership perspective changed over time; the philosophical lens in which I view the world has also transformed, growing to align more with liberal ideology. As an informal leader, I feel connected to the idea that power should be distributed between leaders, and we should advocate for social equity and freedom across sectors. From a liberal lens then, it is my organizational obligation to supportively challenge others for change purposes, advocate for practical learning for students and educators, and be driven by moral belief in education for all (Gary, 2006). Leveraging this liberal lens within a neoliberal organizational context is not without challenge; however, growing to recognize and articulate this difference has been a significant first step. Within the context of this OIP it is important, as both researcher and leader of organizational change, to think critically about our problem of low enrolment. What other lines of inquiry will develop out of the PoP? What opportunities and challenges may emerge?

Guiding Questions Emerging from the POP

Potential Lines of Inquiry. With educational leadership there is no direct guide and a multitude of positions surround the topic (Gunter, 2001). Considering an organizational problem is not a clear-cut process and three main lines of inquiry surface. First, as educators think about how to address the problem, different teaching philosophies and pedagogical beliefs are likely to be brought forward. With educators that have been at the school for many years, there is undeniably a wealth of early years knowledge. Though educators are brilliantly open-minded, deeply rooted history can still lead to the development of the ‘This is how we have always done it’ or ‘We have already tried that’ mentality. However, open conversations around different beliefs and experiences can help our team navigate this line of inquiry. Keeping in mind that we are more likely to learn something from those who disagree with us and challenge our thinking (Fullan, 2001).

Second, from a symbolic frame, the culture holds the organization together and unites people (Bolman & Deal, 2013); therefore, as we develop a plan for change, respecting and archiving history will be fundamental. Knowing that an effective organization is full of good stories (Bolman & Deal, 2013) means that as stories are shared, we are challenged with the task of capturing them for the next organizational generation. In addition to capturing organizational stories, there is value in identifying our communal and individual rituals. Since these rituals anchor us to our school, we want to be cautious against losing them (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Finally, addressing the main problem of low enrolment is likely to lead to the discussion of early learning on a broader scale. As the importance of ECE leadership

continues to gain momentum (Coughlin & Biard, 2013), examining critical bodies of research around the state of our early learning in our community will enable us to become better advocates for early educators and families.

Factors Contributing to the Problem of Practice. Addressing our problem of low enrolment requires us to reflect on several program elements. Fullan (2001) suggests that leading a culture of change means creating a culture of change, not just addressing structural issues. However, structure is noted to make a difference and therefore it is necessary to think about how our structure impacts enrolment. One structural element for consideration is our hours of operation, and how they may impact families' child care decisions. Only offering a half-day program does not prove, based on a 2015 community report, to be entirely conducive with community needs; with 66% of families (that receive subsidy for child care) needing care because they are working and 19% of families (that receive subsidy for child care) needing care because they are in school.

Just as our program hours are set based on approval from the Ministry of Education, the ages of the children within our program is also fixed. Although our preschool license does meet the suggested need for preschool care, with 9,305 preschoolers in our community and only 2,883 licensed spaces, there is far greater need for infant and toddler care. Currently, there are 9,505 infants and only 218 licensed spaces and 6,280 toddlers with only 1,303 licensed spaces. If families in our community are fortunate enough to locate child care space, the cost associated with care is outrageous. With a preschool program, based on a 2015 community report, costing families as much as \$8,250 to \$15,173 annually, parents are forced to make difficult decisions about where to send their children. Having to choose between affordable care

(FDK) and what setting is actually best for each child and family leaves parents in a quandary. In order to rectify this, Friendly (2017a) suggests ways to improve, noting that this is not about increased knowledge around the benefits of early learning or what Canada can do better, but is rather about government committing to change. When families are forced to make decisions based on accessibility or program fees, child care is an inequitable market not a system (Friendly, 2017a).

What Challenges Emerge? As noted, financial challenges directly emerge from the organization's main problem. Although different types of funding are available from our region and province, our larger governing body (the University) can create a barrier when it comes to eligibility. Although there is retrofitting funding available to support operators as they re-purpose their existing space as well as transitional funding to support operators as they adapt to the implementation of FDK (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2013), our program is not always entitled to such supports. As we consider possible solutions to our problem, challenges around our environments design continually surface.

Apart from funding, extensive change within a larger institution can be challenging, as formal approval is required for essentially any level of change. Consequently, the leader and educators must be knowledgeable on the rules, regulations, and how to navigate the process. Working through several institutional layers will take time, thus it is best to introduce change initiatives early (Cawsey et al., 2016). Furthermore, approval will be required from additional governing bodies such as the Ministry of Education, Public Health and the Region's Quality Assurance department; and aiming to meet all of the different requirements from each level will be challenging. As a result the change leader must initially strive to align the formal structure with the

preschool environment (Cawsey et al., 2016), and this may be done through increased communication between the larger department and preschool.

Leadership-Focused Vision for Change

Present and Envisioned Future State. Currently our preschool, like many others in the province, is feeling an impact from the FDK rollout (Blizzard, 2014) in the form of lower enrolment. As our organization attempts to navigate this problem, a clear desired future state must be articulated. Based on research (Rodd, 2015; Sykes, 2014 & Rubin, 2013), in order to successfully guide change in the early years part of the envisioned future state must include leadership that is distributed. Moving forward from a hierarchical design is essential, as it takes more than a single driver to build and maintain a vision over the long run (Fullan, 2001). A more distributed approach would mean recognizing informal and formal leaders as valuable and the intricacy of working relationships. Although models such as transformational and servant leadership were considered for this OIP, a distributed approach is believed to be most appropriate for the early years sector based on: the guiding principles of the approach, Ontario's direction for the profession, our expertise within our setting, and related literature reviews.

Moreover, as our preschool transitions from present to desired state the environment increases in complexity (Rodd, 2015), which ultimately requires more than an egalitarian culture of leadership. In order to situate this suggested leadership approach for all stakeholders, a clear definition of distributed leadership is necessary. According to Harris (2005), "Distributed leadership in theoretical terms means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made

coherent through a common culture” (p.81). Framed by this definition, our desired future state is a program supported by distributed leadership with increased enrolment through either an altered or new program design.

Priorities for Change and Stakeholder/Organizational Balance. Gathering evidence and communicating the need for change is of the utmost importance as our organization has numerous internal and external stakeholders. One way to balance stakeholder’s interests is to develop a change team. Aligning with a distributed leadership model, a change team can increase motivation and move employees out of a recipient role (Cawsey et al., 2016). Using a change team, allows leaders in early education settings to draw on one of their greatest resources, collegiality (Rodd, 2015). With followership being an essential ingredient of the change plan, teams can support educators in understanding, accepting, and embracing the new way of operating (Rodd, 2015). Several benefits of teams for the early years are outlined by Rodd (2015) and include educators that are: increasingly likely to view the change as positive, show greater levels of adaptability, moral, and motivation, and take ownership over the organizational successes. Once change teams are established, in order to determine priorities for change, the team would review internal and external data. Further, the change team would have the ability to be involved in the assessment of organizational change readiness. However, if the change team does not have a clear direction, the ability to self-manage, access to resources, and goals, teams may be counterproductive. In order to move forward despite these challenges, leadership will need to provide adequate training, support, and resources. For example, as educators engage in leadership through

change team involvement, they will need access to professional learning opportunities specific to leadership (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013).

Organizational Change Readiness

Change readiness is dependent on several factors but perhaps most importantly on employees’ readiness for change. The extent to which they believe the change is needed and how confident they are in the organization to successfully implement the change are indicators of this readiness (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). Cawsey et al.’s (2016) Change Path Model is one way to frame the change process, which begins with assessing change readiness as a means of diagnosing organizational problems. The Change Path Model (2016) provides a clear framework for working through the change process, with an acceptable amount of prescription. In this model, four stages guide the change agent: Awakening, Mobilization, Acceleration, and Institutionalization (Cawsey et al., 2016). For the purpose of identifying change readiness, the first stage, Awakening, is the focus. There are four key components to this stage:

1. Identify the need for change, what is the main problem and what does the data tell us
2. Make the gap between present and desired state known within the organization, distribute data to support claims
3. Develop a vision for change
4. Circulate the vision for change through a multitude of communication methods

First, within this stage of the model, considering what is going on within the organization is crucial. Analyzing data related to enrolment numbers for the past five years can provide insight as to how rapidly enrolment is declining. Addressing the question, *why change* is the foundation of the change process and should be considered

prior to articulating the desired future state or crafting of the change vision (Cawsey et al., 2016). One tool that may be used within this initial stage of the Change Path Model is, *Assessing a Centre's Readiness for Change* created by Bloom (2005). As a way to determine an organizations readiness for change, specific to the early years, Bloom (2005) outlines four criteria to consider: how accessible are resources and support, what are the internal pressures for change, how will staff react to the change, and what is the culture of risk-taking within the centre. In order to determine change readiness, time will be needed to meet with educators collectively and individually. As shown in Table 1.1, the steps for determining change are summarized.

Table 1.1 *Bloom's (2005) Assessing a Center's Readiness for Change*

Accessibility of Resources and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the knowledge within our centre • What external expertise can we draw on and what external support do we have • What financial resources are available
Internal Press for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many teachers are dissatisfied with the low enrolment • Who values the suggested change • How many teachers have confidence that a new model could work better
Stability of the Staff Undergoing Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portion of staff turnover • Commitment throughout the change process • Are individuals involved in other elements of organizational change
Spirit of Risk-Taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is willing to take the risk of new program design and a distributed leadership model • Who is willing to participate in professional learning related to the change • Who will experience stress as a result of the change

External and Internal Forces Shaping Change. The first stage, Awakening, involves our director gathering evidence to demonstrate the need for change. Presenting evidence as the first step in the change plan can cement the intent of the change, clear up

misconceptions, and motivate followers. Once the *why change* question has been addressed the second part of the Awakening stage involves determining where the organization is currently, and the desired future state. In conducting a gap analysis, external and internal forces would need to be considered. With our preschool being its own organization, as well as part of a larger organization, there is a need to balance and comprehend two sets of operating systems, visions, and policies. Blending large-scale external stakeholders with internal early education stakeholders means that there is a requirement for clear communication. Although both parties have aligning end goals, to see the program continue to operate, there are different guiding priorities. External stakeholders are generally concerned with how the change impacts funding, policy development and implementation, and the retrofitting of space to meet ministry expectations. Whereas internal stakeholders are more focused on program design and philosophy, educators' working conditions and professional development, and maintaining the school's culture and history. One tool the leader may consider using to address these competing forces is the development of different reporting structures. Initially, the whole department (including external and internal parties) may generate ideas collaboratively, followed by the development of a smaller change team. The goal of smaller team would be to concentrate on how to move forward with some suggestions and obtain the needed approval (Cawsey et al., 2016). With the development of a smaller change team leadership would be distributed and educators would have the opportunity to engage with and directly influence the change process.

Plan to Communicate the Need for Change

As external and internal forces shape the change process, communicating the need for change is an initial and ongoing priority. One way to communicate this need for change and create organizational momentum is through the development of a change vision (Cawsey et al., 2016), the last element of the Awakening stage. As previously noted, the vision for change is most effective if collaboratively developed using a bottom-up approach. How the change is communicated will influence how stakeholders perceive it. With early childhood settings involving multiple interactions with different stakeholders each day, there are many opportunities for miscommunication (Bloom, 2005). Therefore, creating a system that is ready for change begins with the message that there is a need for change based on where the organization is, the desired future state, and how parties are individually and collectively affected by the change process (Armenakis et al., 1993). Communicating the need for change can be done directly and indirectly by the leader, however, direct, in-person communication is most effective as it sends the message that the change is of significance and establishes a personal connection (Armenakis et al., 2016; McNutly, 2014; & Rodd, 2015). Given the busy nature of ECE leaders in order to communicate the change plan in a clear and succinct manner, a communication plan, as shown in Table 1.2 adapted from Queensland University, should be utilized.

Table 1.2 *Queensland Communication Plan*

Stakeholder	Communication	Channel	When	Who
Educators	Individual face-to-face meetings Followed by group meetings	Office time and staff meetings	As soon as possible	Formal leader
Parents	Individual face-to-face meetings Followed by group updates	Parent teacher interview Update at annual fall family event Updates by email and informal conversations	Fall and spring As needed	Educators
University staff members	Presentation to staff presenting data, and need for change Followed by email updates	Quarterly staff meetings	Beginning in fall	Change team
Department executives (dean and chair, manager)	Individual face-to-face meetings Followed by individual update	Meeting	As soon as possible	Formal leader
Community members	Face-to-face discussion Presentation to other educators in the community	Monthly supervisors network Community of practice meetings (two per year)	Beginning in fall Fall and winter	Formal leader Change team

Key Message: “Our hope is for an empowered team of knowledgeable early educators working collaboratively to create a successfully viable preschool program, that offers high quality early learning experiences for young children.”

Regardless of how clearly the change plan communicates the need for a new direction, some level of cultural resistance is bound to surface. Though this resistance may threaten the success of reform (Mulford et al., 2004), gaining followership is believed to be an essential component of leadership and necessary for success. Once leaders have gained an authentic perspective around the organization's readiness for change and gathered evidence, moving forward towards framing the change process is the next step along the change path and is discussed in Chapter Two of this OIP.

Concluding Remarks

Chapter One of this OIP framed the organizational culture and context of our preschool as well as presented the problem of practice, our declining enrolment. Given the fact that change is more likely to be successful when others authentically feel it is necessary (Bloom, 2005), this chapter has stressed the importance of assessing organizational readiness and effectively communicating the need for change as part of the first stage in Caswsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model. As outlined, our organization has a longstanding culture and history that must be considered throughout the change process. Further, there is an array of environmental factors, a wealth of data, and various stakeholders that must also be reflected on. With the problem of practice framed, moving forward Chapter Two of this OIP builds on distributed leadership as a framework for leading the change process. The next two stages of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model are worked through, and possible solutions to the problem of low enrolment are explored.

Chapter Two Planning and Development

Framework for Leading the Change Process

Literature on organizational leadership is divergent and complex. With an array of definitions of the concept itself (Northouse, 2016) to differing views and understanding around what makes a ‘good’ leader (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Northouse, 2016), the wealth of information can be daunting. Despite the abundance of leadership research and information available, there is a concerning gap when it comes to leadership within the early years sector that requires attention (Taba, Castle, Vermeer, Hanchett, Flores, Caulfield, 1999). Wise and Wright (2012) recognize this gap indicating: “Despite the fact that the importance of leadership has been established in the field of education in general, research on leadership in early childhood settings has been lacking” (p.2).

Thus, this OIP addresses the need for additional research on leadership in early education, specifically by focusing on one framework that leaders may use to guide change, distributed leadership.

Within the education sector, distributed leadership has gained widespread recognition by practitioners, policy makers, and researchers (Spillane, Harris, Jones & Mertz, 2015; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2007) and for numerous reasons, which will be presented in the following chapter, a distributed leadership approach has been selected for this OIP as an ideal framework for guiding change. As noted in Chapter One, distributed leadership can be described as: “Distributed leadership in theoretical terms means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture” (Harris, 2005, p.81). More specifically, within the context of this OIP distributed

leadership refers to the collaboration of several educators' knowledge and skillsets as a key resource for guiding the change process. With these definitions in mind the following sections will expand on why distributed leadership is recommended for our organization, the power in using distributed leadership with early educators, and necessary elements to consider.

Why Distributed Leadership? Literature suggests that the singular leader is no longer representative of the most effective leadership approach (Harris, 2008; Gronn, 2002; Timperley, 2005). Leaders in education, specifically the early years, are often pulled daily in a multitude of directions (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). According to Jones and Pound (2008), "The responsibilities and demands of early childhood care and education are such that they cannot be adequately met by one person working alone" (p. 25). Current educational environments are so intricate that a one individual cannot handle all facets alone (Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2015; Spillane et al., 2015; Harris 2008), especially when it comes to large-scale change. As Bolman and Deal (2013) state, "The turbulent world of the twenty-first century pushes organizations to be fast, flexible, and decentralized, which requires leadership from many quarters" (p.346). From an early education lens, the concept of a traditional leader functioning within a hierarchical system and working in solidarity is simply not thought to be effective as a means of pedagogical leadership (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Despite this evidence, Colmer, Waniganayake and Field (2014) claim that many early educational settings are characterized by hierarchical leadership where directors are seen to hold the responsibility and power based on their formal positions. Granted, it is still possible

within this hierarchical structure to distribute leadership on some level by empowering educators (Colmer et al., 2014).

With the topic of early educational leadership being underrepresented in the literature (McDowall Clark & Murray 2012; Gravey & Lancaster 2010; Wise & Wright, 2012; Sims, Forrest, Semann & Slattery, 2015) discussions around specific leadership models, such as distributed leadership, are just beginning to unfold (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). As a result, there is limited research on distributed leadership from an early education perspective (Kangas et al., 2015). Particularly, there is little research on how this model actually looks in practice or the extent to which it has even been fully implemented (Lindon, Lindon & Beckley, 2016). Within the context of this OIP, and the research literature review, distributed leadership was determined to be the most effective framework for guiding change for three reasons.

First, as educators deliberate on a plan to increase our school's enrolment, our organization will most likely be required to undergo change in multiple layers. Given distributed leadership's positive link to organizational change and transformation within the education sector (Harris, 2013) this approach is ideal. With literature in early education still emerging, although not directly translatable, Jones and Pound (2008) suggest that to some extent primary educational leadership can serve as a guide for developing ideas and understanding leadership in early education. Turning to school wide literature then, Harris et al. (2007) indicate that many schools are in fact swapping out alternative methods of leadership in favour of a more distributed approach. Implementing this leadership model requires leaders to ensure that relationships within the organization are cemented in relational trust (Harris, 2013). Colmer et al. (2014) suggest that these

characteristics of distributed leadership connect with the profession of early education.

“Distributed leadership may be particularly suited to early childhood contexts because of the emphasis on relationships and interdependence among people within a centre”

(p.105).

Second, distributed leadership is thought to be appropriate for the early years sector based on the nature of the profession. According to Lindon et al. (2016) educators are thought to be more comfortable with a democratic style of leadership rather than an autocratic style of leadership, and distributed leadership leans more on the democratic side. “The rethinking of leadership as a shared enterprise has been a positive for early childhood services, because it is seen as compatible with the nature of the service and the reported inclinations of the workforce” (Lindon et al., 2016, p.133). Specifically, one characteristic of distributed leadership that relates well to our organizational vision, is the belief that every member of the school team is a holder of knowledge and that no one individual holds all of the expertise (Kangas et al., 2015; Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, 2014). As our vision gives tribute to, educators in our organization view the children we work with as capable knowledge holders. As early educators we believe that our role is to be a co-constructor of knowledge and this belief should be upheld and weaved throughout our organization. Further, this belief stretches beyond our organization, as the province of Ontario also expects early childhood educators to grasp the concept of collective knowledge building, stating in their pedagogical document for the early years, *How Does Learning Happen (2014)*, that an expectation for programs is to: “help educators become researchers and co-learners with children, parents, caregivers, and

colleagues – learning about children, with children, and from children” (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2014, p.13).

Finally, the early years sector demands strong leadership to move it forward in the 21st century and to strengthen the sector as a whole (Rubin, 2013). This leadership must not be restricted to those in formal positions as this can inevitably slow the momentum of the change process. According to Jones and Pound (2008), “There is no doubt that working in early years settings is becoming increasingly complex and demanding in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by practitioners and leaders” (p. 1). The need for leadership across the early years sector is required to raise the entire profile of the profession, address issues such as low wages for early educators, advocate for better services for families and children, and guide the development and sustainability of programs that illuminate best practice (Lindon et al., 2016). As Fichtman, Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2005) indicate, children need educators who are active agents in the change process (p.191). This involves being part of the assessment of the organizational problem and planning and implementing of the change vision and process.

The Power in Distributed Leadership. As policy makers, researchers, and practitioners consider moving beyond the individual concept of a leader, evidence for the value of a distributed approach is highly sought after. Aside from the noted reasons for using this approach, Harris and Spillane (2008) indicate three overarching reasons why distributed leadership has been gaining recognition and thus, the value behind this framework is further defined.

First, distributed leadership has *normative power*. A distributed model represents changes in leadership practice in schools, where the transition from a heroic leader to a

focus on teams is unfolding (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Although our organization generally utilizes a singular model of leadership, one goal of this OIP is to provide support and motive for the transition away from the heroic approach. In order for this to authentically occur a deep level of commitment and involvement from all educators is necessary (Taba et al., 1999).

Second, distributed leadership has *representational power*. That is, it represents an alternative approach to leadership that reflects increasing external demands on schools (Harris & Spillane, 2008). As outlined in Chapter One, the market-based state of our organization in combination with the FDK roll-out means that greater external pressure is being experienced, calling for a review of the leadership framework being employed. Distributed leadership acknowledges that as 21st century learning models are forever changing and adapting to our complex world, old organizational structures simply do not meet the needs of this new educational state (Lumby, 2013). Just as this changing landscape requires responsive early educators, it also requires responsive early educational leaders. In Ontario over the last decade there has been a dramatic shift in the early education to inquiry-based learning (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016). This pendulum swing demands leaders that can handle the external pressure of this shift in a pedagogically responsive manner.

Third, distributed leadership has *empirical power*. Through growing research it is clear that distributed leadership has the potential to positively impact organizational outcomes and student learning (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Consequently, this makes distributed leadership appropriate for our organization as we strive for an improved model of service delivery while simultaneously upholding our commitment to providing

high quality learning experiences. “Leadership is sorely needed in order for early childhood practitioners to provide high quality early childhood experiences and build the foundation for every child's healthy growth and development” (Taba et al., 1999, p.173). Therefore, the quality of our program is directly linked to the leadership within the organization (Wise & Wright, 2012).

The Need-to-Knows of Distributed Leadership. When examining distributed leadership as a framework for change, there are some key pieces to be aware of. First, distributed leadership is described as an analytical frame for understanding leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2007) and therefore, from this lens leadership is viewed as practice, and the emphasis is on interaction. Considering the types and quality of our organizational interactions is of critical importance to this process (Harris & Spillane, 2008). As an analytical framework, distributed leadership presses organizations to go beyond the individual notion of leadership. It demands recognition for the realities of multiple individuals in both formal and informal leadership positions that work to lead and manage schools (Spillane et al., 2015). As Lindon et al. (2016) state: “Distributed leadership is a feature of how an organisation works: that leadership can develop anywhere in the organisation, not just from the person in overall charge” (p. 136). As leaders consider this framework for the early years sector, it is critical to understand that moving to a distributed model is not solely about adjusting the workload but about democracy and structural changes (Kangas et al., 2015). Effectively creating a democratic work environment is thought to lead to employees feeling at ease (Lindon et al., 2016). However, adopting a distributed leadership approach means we must recognize structural challenges as well as challenges that the leader may encounter as a more collective

approach is adopted (Spillane et al., 2015). Therefore, a critical organizational analysis is a key part of the change plan.

Critical Organizational Analysis and Diagnosis

Mobilization. With the development of a tangible change plan for our organization, understanding inner workings of our preschool and what needs to be achieved is essential (Cawsey et al., 2016). Within the context of this OIP, organizational analysis refers to the reviewing of organizational life to understand how the system operates, better understand our problem of low enrolment, and generate possible PoP solutions. In order to guide this analysis, the second stage of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model, Mobilization, is the focus. There are four key components to this stage:

1. Understand our formal structure, how does this formal structure operate and how will it influence our change process
2. Recognize power dynamics and organizational culture
3. Communicate the need for change and assess how different stakeholders will react to the change
4. Leverage skills and knowledge of all change agents

In order to advance change on any level there must be an understanding of how the current organizational structure can be leveraged (Cawsey et al., 2016). For example, what existing resources or systems are in place that could support our change plan? As noted, despite the fact that the organizational system is currently hierarchical in nature, distributed leadership is still a possibility (Colmer et al., 2014). From a distributed leadership lens, team learning rather than individual learning is key and therefore, not only should the formal leader understand the larger organizational structure, others should as well. So, our leader plus additional followers may be part of the process when

positioning for formal approval, applying for grants and funding, or coalition building (Cawsey et al., 2016). However, it is important to consider the power that the formal leader holds in determining who has access to the opportunity to interact with and gain knowledge of, the larger structure.

Recognizing the power dynamics within the preschool is vital as they underlie perceptions and experiences for all members. Moreover, one cannot distributed power without first recognizing they hold it (Lindon et al., 2016). Operating from a hierarchical model for many years means our organization understands the director to be in a leadership position and educators to be in a follower position (Colmer et al., 2014). Considering these already embedded roles of leader and follower, the leader is responsible for ensuring power becomes distributed. If educators are to impact the change process, there must be a shift in mindset, as well as organizational culture.

Moving towards the middle of the Mobilization stage of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model requires an understanding of our current culture. With culture being a life, not a stagnant process (Burnes, 2004) it has the power to greatly influence daily operations, believe systems, and the change process. Though prior to a cultural assessment unfolding, Shein (2010) suggests that a clear understanding of the organization's problem by all educators must be established, and new behaviour goals need to have been identified. Therefore, initially the formal leader would want to ensure that evidence around the problem of practice has been communicated effectively through the first stage of the Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016). Organizational change requires intent and communicating this intent is necessary if followers are to authentically buy-in to the change process. Presenting evidence to followers can help clear up

misconceptions and rumours as well as motivate and encourage others. Gaining followership is an essential component of leadership and necessary for transformation to be successful. Although cultural change is not the primary goal, it may be something the formal leader is called to navigate (Schein, 2010).

Organizational culture can be defined as a pattern of basic assumptions, which are shared among members of a group (Bolman & Deal, 2013). From another perspective, Vanhoutte (2005) suggests that culture is related to an organization's character and focused on values, meanings, and beliefs. When examining the culture of our school it is critical we keep in mind that our culture may support or challenge the change process, as well as recognize different existing sub-cultures. After performing a cultural assessment there will be an increased understanding of the level of learning and/or unlearning that will be involved in the change process (Schein, 2010). When considering how to better understand the culture, Vanhotte (2005) provides a straightforward measurement model. This model aims to understand the beliefs and assumptions of individual group members on three different levels of abstraction. First, the least abstract, *expressive symbols* look at elements such as the building's architecture in which the organization is housed, clothing of educators or school artifacts. The second, slightly abstract, *orientated standards*, looks to understand the deeply held assumptions and beliefs of organizational members. It considers what members want not necessarily organizational reality. Finally, the most abstract, *the essence of a culture*, looks from a wider lens, aiming to understand the norms and beliefs that drive the behaviour within the larger system.

Deliberating on our culture from different levels of abstraction is necessary to proceed with an alternative approach to leadership as well as to guide the change process.

One approach the leader may employ to understand the values that our organization is bounded to is story telling. Exploring expressive symbols to understand our culture is likely to lead to pedagogical storytelling. Through this process all teachers can be encouraged to become storytellers of educational events that stimulate the change process (Berger, 2015). The power in storytelling lies in helping us identify what our organization values and assumptions it holds. From studying our traditions, to helping us map out our direction (Bolman & Deal, 2013), storytelling can be a powerful tool to aid in the development of a deeper cultural understanding. Further, as we travel the road towards change, storytelling will provide some level of comfort and reassurance for members. With many years of history to consider, storytelling is one way to ensure that traditions are valued and upheld (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Storytelling is a natural part of organizational life but in order to use stories as a change tool, strategies such as determining a set time for storytelling, considering what makes a good story, and using story-starters would be useful.

From a symbolic frame, the process of storytelling may include artifacts such as actual photos or objects to aid in the development of a more descriptive story (Carter & Curtis, 2010). Although storytelling is a powerful tool for building community, Carter and Curtis (2010) remind us that these stories may not always be easy to digest for the teller and/or audience. So, prior to storytelling charting out expectations such as being respectful by having an open mindset and maintaining confidentiality when necessary, would help educators feel more confident and comfortable with the process.

As shown in Table 2.1, our preschool's culture must initially be considered using a culture assessment.

Table 2.1 *Culture Assessment: Our Preschool’s Culture*

Expressive Symbols	Orientated Standards	Essence of Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our building has seen some change in terms of how rooms are used and designed • There is a large play room in the centre of the school and this is surrounded by many smaller rooms • Educators look similar physically, dress similar, and all speak English as their first language • Documentation from other children’s learning has been kept on file but is not on display • Photos of children and staff cover the walls in the hallways of the school • Certificates indicating we are a high ranking program with local quality standard assessment and Ministry Licensing rating • Our current license hangs in the school’s lobby • Each year follows a similar format in terms of program start up, yearly events, topics covered with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality program that is accessible for families and children in our community • For all children to have the resources and support they need to succeed in the program • Relationships with families that are open and authentic • Children enrolled each year that meet the population in terms of age • Learning experiences for children that are representative of a strong, collective pedagogy of teaching • Opportunity to openly voice thoughts and needs • Learning and leadership opportunities as desired • Open communication at all levels of the organization • A reciprocal relationship of giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Education and Care is too expensive, society cannot afford it • Learning begins when children start in the formal school system • Early educators are babysitters and not teachers (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016) • Parents are responsible for their own child care (Friendly, 2017b) • Mothers would prefer to stay home with their children • A market-based system, where parents are consumers • Early education leaders do not require any formal training • It is expected that families will have a difficult time accessing quality child care • Investing in FDK replaces the need to invest in early education

Considering Organizational Culture. Leading with culture on the forefront is necessary because of our organizational history and the unique nature of our program. Since the mid 1970’s our organization has been developing a set of shared assumptions, values, teaching practices, and an identity within our community. Despite these roots, over time our program has been challenged given the lack of enrolment, ultimately

leading to what Schein (2010) describes as survival anxiety. Meaning, it is my belief that most educators at our school understand that unless we change in some manner there are sure to be negative repercussions. However, this understanding is not enough to directly generate change as some educators still deny the reality of how detrimental low enrolment is. For educators that do recognize the need for change and start to navigate new terrain, learning anxiety is a possibility (Schein, 2010). Consequently, once the complexities of change unfold, resistance to change may develop. Granted, using a distributed approach, with an emphasis on empowerment and collegiality, will aid in the creation of an environment that can reassure educators who are experiencing anxiety or resistance. As we consider our school's culture, Schein's (2010) Five Principles provide a base for reflection:

Principle 1: Survival anxiety or guilt must be greater than learning anxiety.

Principle 2: Learning anxiety must be reduced rather than increasing survival anxiety.

Principle 3: The change goal must be defined concretely in terms of the specific problem you are trying to fix, not as "culture change".

Principle 4: Old cultural elements can be destroyed by eliminating the people who "carry" those elements, but new cultural elements can only be learned if the new behaviour leads to success and satisfaction.

Principle 5: Culture change is always transformative change that requires a period of unlearning that is psychologically painful. Many kinds of changes that leaders impose on their organizations require only new learning and therefore will not be resisted. But we need to prepare for this.

Schein's (2010) principles may vary in applicability depending on each educator's

understanding of the problem of low enrolment, the cultural assessment, and distributed leadership. Ultimately, connecting to principle number four, cultural change will not actually occur unless a distributed approach does in fact work better and the solution that we commit to does produce higher enrolment. Once insight around how educators may react to the change process has been considered, the final part of Mobilization involves leveraging change agent's knowledge, skill-sets, experiences, and assets to move the vision of a highly populated, quality program forward. As educators are empowered to take on new roles through the distribution of power, sharing of resources, and increased professional development opportunities, the third stage, Acceleration, will begin to unfold.

Engagement and Empowerment

Acceleration. As the power dynamics begin to shift within our centre and change starts unfolding, stories are one way to build a new collective sense of identity and root our organizational history. Storytelling will also serve as one avenue to advance the implementation of our desired changes (Cawsey et al., 2016), the first step in the third stage of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model, Acceleration. There are three key components to this stage:

1. Engage and empower others in the change plan process as well as with the development of new knowledge and skills
2. Use appropriate tools to build and sustain momentum
3. Manage the transition through the celebration of small and large milestones

First, in order to empower and engage educators and gain a wider perspective, Beer, Eisenstat and Spector's (1990) Six Step Model is recommended. This model has been selected as most applicable for our organization because of the focus on

collaboration, de-emphasis of top down leadership, emphasis on empowerment, and the importance of staying competitive in the early sector marketplace. According to both distributed leadership framework and Cawsey et al. (2016) it is critical that others are engaged in action planning. “In general, though, the active involvement of others and information sharing enhances the quality of action planning for most change strategies” (Cawsey, et al., p.307). In order for change in the early years to occur, engaged organizational members is a necessary foundation (Bloom, Hentschel & Bella, 2013). As shown in Table 2.2, Beer et al. (1990) provide six steps for change.

Table 2.2 *Beer et al. 's (1990) Change Model*

Beer et al. 's six steps	In Action at Our Organization
Mobilize commitment to change through joint diagnosis of problems	Bring educators to a common place of understanding by sharing stories of challenges with low enrolment
Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness	Through formal meetings map out a clear organizational vision for staying competitive with other community preschools
Foster consensus for the new vision, competence to enact it, and cohesion to move it along	Make time for smaller meetings to ensure buy-in for the new vision has developed, provide PD training related to the solution if needed, develop a safe space for sharing and reflecting on the change path
Spread revitalization to all departments without pushing it from the top	Encourage educators to share with external stakeholders in a variety of formats
Institutionalize revitalization through formal policies, systems, and structures	Collectively review and if necessary re-write policies and procedures that negatively impede on a distributed approach and the selected solution to the problem
Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the revitalization process	Empower educators to self-monitor and monitor each others progress

Considering the above table, there are three action-planning tools that emphasize collaboration, which our organization could implement. First, *responsibility charting* may

be used as part of our change team, with the intent of mapping out who should take on what role and when. Spillane et al. 2015 suggest that new principals often encounter sharp realities, including sizeable workloads. Which, from my observations, is similar to the experiences held by early education leaders. Thus, responsibility charting may be beneficial in keeping the project on track but should not be used as an opportunity to pass off mundane tasks.

Aside from responsibility charting, *surveys* may be used by the formal leader to build momentum around the distributed model and illuminate people's thinking about what elements of the program need changing. Through surveys, with open and close-ended questions, educators' attitudes and opinions can efficiently be gathered (Cawsey et al., 2016). Gaining insight from educators is particularly important as our team members have many years of experience working directly with families and children. Thus within the context of my OIP, this means educators will have an in-depth understanding of what currently works well, what needs changing, and how practical some of the possible solutions to the problem of low enrolment are.

The last action-planning tool that our formal leader may find useful is to *project plan* collectively with staff. This would involve deciding when we need to have addressed the issue of low enrolment by, and then working backwards to create a plan that ensures we meet this timeline. Once our team has a more comprehensive understanding of our organization's culture and how it will impact the change process, as well as works through the Acceleration stage, of the Change Path Model, the final step in the change journey will involve the fourth stage, Institutionalization. This will encompass

tracking the change process. However, in order to progress forward to this final stage, possible solutions will need to be extensively explored.

Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

Change is seldom a straightforward path; one must be open-minded, flexible and prepare for some element of compromise (Cawsey et al., 2016), which begins with collectively considering possible solutions to the problem of low enrolment. Contemplating a new direction for the program through a distributed lens does not necessarily mean that everyone needs to take on a leadership role (Harris, 2013), but rather structural changes result in an increased opportunity for participation in leadership activity. This increased involvement is central and can be systematized through the implementation of a change team, as already suggested in this OIP. Arranging a change team would effectively support our preschool in deciding on the best solution as collective expertise and skill sets would be utilized to their fullest. With an organization that has a deeply rooted culture, a change team would also give people space and time to digest the change process, as well as move them from the role of recipient to an active and engaged participant (Cawsey et al., 2016). As shown in Table 2.3, in order for teams to be effective, clear guiding rules should be established. This set of rules is suggested as a guide for the development of a successful change team within our organizational setting and has been adapted from the Change Institutes Design Rules for Top Teams.

Table 2.3 *Design Rules for a Top Preschool Team*

1. Keep it small: 10 or fewer members
2. Dedicate time from our weekly staff meetings to the team meeting to support the development of full cooperation and involvement
3. Everyone has a right to know. The formal leader is no longer the ‘keeper of knowledge’
4. Everyone is an accountable member of the team
5. All members sharing insight is critical
6. Direct conversation is encouraged, modeled by the formal leader
7. Decisions are made collectively by the team
8. Everyone reaps the benefits of a sustainable program

Although a change team is suggested as a tool for guiding the development and selection of possible solutions, the following section of this OIP suggests four positions the team may consider. Each solution would require the team to further investigate the strengths and weakness of the solution, which would be more feasible with the knowledge of all stakeholders, specially the formal leader. Though each solution differs, the recommendation of this OIP would be to employ one solution through a distributed leadership framework.

Maintaining Status Quo. First, the preschool does have the option of maintaining status quo for a short period of time. With our longstanding staff members, this approach may be acceptable to those that are not ready for large-scale change or those who do not fully grasp the urgency of change. However, continuing with the same number of children could negatively impact educators. Specifically, teachers are not used to their full potential, resulting in a workforce that is not challenged. Moreover, educators are hard pressed to offer the same quality of programming that the centre was built on because the limited amount of children impacts curriculum development and delivery. Now, if we are to consider status quo with the enrolment numbers steadily declining each year, eventually operating the program will no longer be feasible. Less and less children

could mean the elimination of job roles such as educational assistants or the number of teachers employed at the school. Through informal discussion with educators, even more daunting is the fear of the school having to close indefinitely.

From a wider lens, maintaining status quo would mean we endure our provincial funding model and overall approach to child care. Sarlo (2016) from the Fraser Institute, recently examined status quo in 2015 as it relates to child care in Canada. Outlined in the report is the funding available to Ontario families for early care. Currently in Ontario families that are eligible may receive, The Ontario Child Benefit, which affords a maximum amount of \$1,356 per child per year, as well as the Ontario Child Care Subsidy, a support system designed to help low-income families cover the cost of day care. With such diminutive support for Ontario families in place, accepting provincial status quo means our preschool remains market-based, and thus, will struggle to stay viable without enrolment. Alas, this market-based system leaves Ontario families with obscenely high fees, topping the list of the highest in the country, and limited access to quality child care (Friendly, 2015c). Therefore, part of a solution to our problem of practice is looking beyond our organizational context. For example, how can we advocate and partner with agencies to push for a long-term sustained funding agreement province wide? According to the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) (2015) such a plan would consist of direct funding to support affordable and high quality care. This plan would aim to support current services as well as expand services, and funding and resources to continue the development of infrastructure, research, the workforce and ongoing services. Adhering to a plan like the one proposed by the CCAAC would be a positive step forward not only for our preschool community but society as a whole. The

development of such a plan as part of the solution would result in publicly funded child care, which would serve as a critical support for the profession in terms of respectable wages for educators as well as ensure affordable care for families (Halfon & Langford, 2015). As a local parent and child care advocate recently reported in the Toronto Star newspaper, “If the government is serious about bettering the well-being of Canadian families and children, then spaces are not enough. We need high quality care environments” (Monsebraaten, 2016, p.1). Considering status quo on a larger scale is an imperative component to this OIP as the livelihood of our program (as a service and investment) has a direct influence on not only children’s future well-being but society’s as well (McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012).

Redesigning Program Elements. On a smaller, perhaps less intimidating scale, there are several other possible solutions to our school’s problem that our team may contemplate. First, in respect to our low enrolment, we may consider a change in our centres design. Redesigning, with the goal of community collaboration, may mean that we adopt a program model that blends preschool teaching with teaching prospective early childhood educators. With a direct link between well-educated professionals and high quality early education and care being outlined by Kangas et al. (2016) there is a need for training programs in our community that can support the development of pre-service early educators. Examining this solution from a human resource perspective, our organization should be concerned with ensuring a positive connection exists between individuals and the larger system. For this solution to be successful it would be imperative that individual’s skill sets and interests connect with their new roles (Bolman & Deal, 2013). We would not want educators to be placed in a teaching position that

created a personal level of discomfort or disinterest. Along the lines of community collaboration we may also contemplate amalgamation with another local preschool program, which may begin with informal networking. In Finland since the 1990's, the merging of smaller day care units with larger ones to create distributed organizations has unfolded (Kangas et al., 2016), this may be one model our preschool looks in to further as a way of increasing enrolment.

Redesigning Structure. Another possible solution to address the problem of low enrolment would be to increase our hours of service. In altering the hours of our program (lengthening them) we would be meeting a community need for increased preschool spots. In order to implement this model an extensive review of ministry expectations would be required. Under the Child Care and Early Years Act (2014), which was created to foster the learning, development, health and well-being of children and to enhance their safety (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2016), our centre would have to meet certain requirements if we were to consider lengthening our program. Furthermore, a new license would need to be applied for and obtained to proceed with this solution (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2016), as well as financial implications considered.

Furthermore, with a team of highly effective, expert educators our organization may consider revamping our target population to provide a program for a specific group of learners such as children with special rights, English Language Learners, or toddlers. Evaluating our community's demographic would lead to an understanding of where the greatest need for care lies. For instance, an increase in immigration in our region means that children have limited exposure to English or instruction in English (Brewer & McCabe, 2014). Prior to entering the formal school system, our centre would be able to

develop a program with the specific intent of bridging home language with new language acquisition. Moreover, our program could also consider building on the movement towards a more outdoor, nature-inspired program. With the evidence mounting around the vast benefits for children when they connect with nature (Louv, 2008), parents are beginning to seek out programs that support this connection.

Similar to the solution of program redesign, altering our schools targeted demographic would require an extensive review of the Child Care and Early Years Act (2014). For example, the ratio of educator to child differs between preschool aged children and toddlers. Providing a toddler program would in-fact result in the need for more educators, however, with only 21% of toddlers in our community having access to early learning and care there is a demand for accessible toddler programs. Though in reviewing Friendly's (2015c) research on child care in Canada, there is a widespread need for affordable spaces in high quality settings for niche populations (p.10).

Redesigning Population. Along the lines of a new target population, we may turn to our larger organizational body, the University. With a population of over 30,000 students we could build on the need for child care for both Canadian and international student parents. One may be under the impression that student parents are a declining group, however, research from Eckerson, Talbourdet, Reichlin, Sykes, Noll and Gault (2016) suggests that there has in-fact been an increase from 3.2 million American student parents in the 1990s to 4.8 million in 2012. Unfortunately, a mere one-third of student parents obtain their degrees within six years of enrolment (Eckerson et al., 2016) thus, targeting this population could have dual benefits. More accessible child care could help student parents avoid having to take a break from their studies or withdrawal all together

(Eckerson et al., 2016). Freeman (2016) claims that when student parents have child care readily available on campus they are more likely to stay enrolled and consequently graduate. What's more, targeting student parents would ultimately increase our enrolment numbers and could prove to make the University more attractive on the whole in a competitive marketplace (Freeman, 2016).

Addressing our school's challenges internally would also serve as a foundation for tackling larger systematic issues, such as the 'patchwork' child care system that characterizes our country (Friendly, 2015b). Developing a plan collectively will indisputably empower and motivate the educators that are already deeply committed to the organization. Optimistically then, the formal leader will be well supported as they approach the change process.

Overall, when generating the most appropriate solution to the problem of low enrolment, the 'Seeing First' strategy outlined in Cawsey et al. (2016) is recommended. Using this strategy would mean implementing a solution in the form of a pilot program, so that external and internal stakeholders may experience the solution and then provide feedback and commitment based on more concrete evidence. This strategy is thought to be most applicable because of the multitude of elements that need to be interwoven in order for the solution to be effective. For long-term success, a high level of commitment and communication is needed from key stakeholders (Cawsey et al., 2016), mainly the formal leader. Therefore, how the leader approaches the change is a significant part of the overall process.

Leadership Approaches to Change

Those in formal leadership positions have a large responsibility and perhaps even larger influence when it comes to the change process. The way formal leaders view and understand their organization ultimately influences the ways in which they behave (Gravey & Lancaster, 2010). Hence, reflecting on their approach to the change process is critical if improvement is to be made. Considering the tenants of a leader and manager and understanding the power of interactions will support the leader in preparing for change.

Leader as a Reflective Practitioner. Strong leaders are typically always engaged in a continuous cycle of reflection, striving to better understand their practice in a variety of ways (Gravey & Lancaster, 2010). Turning back to Ontario's pedagogical document, *How Does Learning Happen (2014)*, the importance of reflective practice is weaved throughout the pages. The essence of the province's research is that reflective practice is foundational for professionals in early education. The document reports that reflective practice is: part of one's role as an ECE, how the profession will be strengthened as a whole, an avenue for educators to challenge their own values and beliefs about practice, a way to nurture learning and development of children, and perhaps most significantly, the base of high quality programming (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2014). Jones and Pound (2008) remind us that if leaders are learners, and part of the educational team then they too are called to engage in reflective practice.

One reflective tool leaders may use to understand the organization on a deeper level is Morgan's (2006) concept of a metaphor. Granted this may seem like a vast undertaking for some leaders, it ultimately can provide a glimpse of the organization

through different lenses. Seeing the organization in a multitude of ways is suggested to positively impact the development of solutions to organizational problems. Using metaphors has dual benefit; they can help the leader identify strengths and weakness in how they view their organization. And moreover, they highlight the multiple ways to view an organization and problem of practice, expanding the leader's ability to develop new approaches to practice (Morgan, 2006). To illustrate this point, our organization may be viewed as a hot cup of tea. Just as a cup of tea is influenced by the elements of the environment such as air temperature, our organization is heavily influenced by external elements such as provincial programs, funding, and policy. As the taste of tea becomes stronger with the length of time the tea bag seeps, our organization's lengthy history has resulted in a strong team, with a powerful culture. Further, for some people, a cup of tea is better when everything works together, steaming hot water, sugar, and milk but is ultimately influenced by the quality of the tea. Similarly, I concede that our organization is better when everyone works together but is ultimately influenced by the quality of our leader. Lastly, if left over time a cup of tea is likely to become cold and discarded. Without addressing our problem of practice, it is apparent that our organization will cease to exist. Thus, through the use of this metaphor, for example, our organization can be seen as having a variety of voices and factors to consider, a powerful culture, and in need of immediate revitalization.

Leadership Alongside Management. Aside from reflecting on the organization as a whole, the leader must engage in critical personal reflection on their understanding of their role as a leader and their view of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Identifying times that call for managing and times that call for leadership is a starting point, as well

as recognizing that in early childhood education there are times for leading and managing (Bloom & Abel, 2015). Contrary to popular belief, that one must be a manager or a leader, Kotter (2001) suggests that there is value in both functions and although managing and leading are defined by a unique set of characteristics, they serve to balance the other. “Management is about coping with complexity. Leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change” (Kotter, 2001, p.4). As change is directly identified as complex, strong leadership without elements of management or the reverse is problematic (Kotter, 2001). Therefore, informal and formal leaders in our setting will need to balance the dichotomy of leadership and management, rather than attempt to advance one over the other. Kreig et al. (2014) support this need for balance, as they indicate that in child care centres separating leadership from management is challenging and rarely observed. Identifying the value in leading and managing from a distributed lens will require a central shift in the way formal leaders understand and view their role within the organization (Harris, 2013). This shift is necessary for true change to unfold as leaders hold great influence over the organization. Harris (2013) makes reference to this view, suggesting that formal leaders have the ability to directly encourage or prevent others from becoming change agents within the organization. This view is further supported by Lindon et al.’s (2016) assertion that distributed leadership will not authentically develop if the leader is reluctant to alter their position of power. When the leader demonstrates openness for distributed power they will need to reflect upon the most applicable approach to organizational change for their setting. Lindon et al. (2016) provide three models for leading organizational change, as shown in Table 2.4, and suggest that given the nature of the early years, in most cases, the heart approach is called for. The least

likely to be acceptable is the force approach, with its top-down focus, which gives little recognition to educators' desires.

Table 2.4 *Lindon et al.'s (2016) Approaches to Organizational Change*

The Mind	Force	The Heart
Changes are thought to be logically and rationally the best solution	Uses coercion to meet needs, no choice involved	Developing relationships between people
Uses intellect to convince others on objective and logical grounds	Forces and moves change through resistance, often from people in power	Primary attention on values and beliefs
Generally uses expert and information power sources to meet goals	Uses mainly legitimate power to succeed	Emphasizes social and emotional aspects and uses reward, connection and referent power

Interactions Rather than Actions. The heart approach to change, explained by Lindon et al. (2016), connects with a distributed approach to leading as there is a definite focus on work with others. Distributed leadership calls us to recognize the work of all individuals regardless of their position within the organization (Spillane et al., 2015). Considering all perspectives enables the organization to capitalize on the power of the group, rather than entrusting one individual to solve momentous educational problems (Fullan, 2016). A key component of the distributed approach is the focus on interactions rather than actions (Harris & Spillane, 2008). As discussed previously, distributed leadership is not simply about dividing up tasks or sharing workload. Distributed leadership tenants run much deeper and ultimately this approach is about lively interactions between various formal and informal leaders and followers (Timperley, 2005). Understanding leadership as encompassing a range of interactions between individuals gives credit to the notion that leadership is a journey not a stagnant position (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If our director focuses on leadership from this angle then it is

obvious that active participation from experts is a large part of the framework for change (Jones et al., 2014). With a team of educators that has endured many tribulations and triumphs together, social interaction for our organization is a fundamental characteristic of leadership practice (Harris, 2013).

Accordingly, the use of team meetings could be one strategy for empowering individuals to help generate solutions to the problem of practice, followed by the creation of a change plan. The first step though, must be to align people rather than organize them; an aligned team is developed by communication and vision comprehension between members of the school team. Kotter (2001) indicates that alignment leads to the development of empowerment in at least two ways: once a direction has clearly been established all levels of staff can initiate action without feeling a sense of vulnerability and with everyone looking in the same direction, it less likely that individuals work will be stalled when encountering conflict. Once alignment is strengthened, focusing on interactions between educators and the formal leader will expectantly result in responsive and responsible action in the form of empowerment (McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012).

Empowerment is thought to be an important tool for supporting the change plan based on the idea that if educators are empowered they will be more motivated to see the change plan succeed (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Specifically, educators that are intrinsically motivated care to achieve not because of control from upper management but based on an innate need to belong, feel in control, build self-esteem, meet one's full potential, and receive recognition (Kotter, 2001). Interacting with an empowered and motivated team further contributes systematically to the profession of early education. With challenges surrounding professionalism within the sector (Wise & Wright, 2012), there is a profound

need for early educators that can become advocates who think critically and are continuously engaged in self-reflection. Therefore, it is important that leaders establish a culture that supports the development of such characteristics (Hardwood & Tukonic, 2016). Gathering input on how we can address our school's problem of low enrolment is one way of establishing an environment that values collegiality, communication, problem solving, interactions and working relationships... all characteristics of distributed leadership (Lindon et al., 2016).

As the leader focuses energy on interactions rather than actions, the concept of trust as part of the interaction process must be considered. Several scholars have recently alluded to the importance of trust between leaders and followers. Fullan (2016) relates the culture of trust to motivated development and similarly, Gravey and Lancaster (2010) suggest that trust will directly influence the successfulness of the distributed approach. Lindon et al. 2016 acknowledge the importance of reciprocal trust as organizations undergo change. Further, when trust is lacking between the person initiating the change and the recipients of the change movement, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the intent behind the change can develop, leading to resistance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

Drawing to a close, discussions around leadership approaches to change in the literature point to the value of developing leadership in followers (Kotter, 2001) and creating a culture of change (Fullan, 2001). Within the context of this OIP, it is suggested that our leader engage in a cultural assessment, critical self-reflection, consider the roles of a leader and manager, and understand the power of interactions versus actions. From Leithwood et al.'s (2007) perspective, leadership should serve as a catalyst for unleashing

the potential capacities that already exist within the organization (p.5). Thus, a distributed approach must manifest from within the leader and still requires strong leadership along the way.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlined distributed leadership as a practical way of thinking profoundly about the change process as well as our problem of low enrolment. The distributed approach that is suggested here is not a detailed perspiration or direct answer to our problem, but rather a potential framework for consideration (Lindon et al., 2016). In reflecting on Bush's (2013) thoughts around distributed leadership, the notion that leadership does not need to be confined to those with formal designations is central. In fact, directly connecting to Ontario's governing body, the College of Early Childhood Educators (2007), "All registered early childhood educators, regardless of position or title, are leaders" (p.9).

Despite mounds of support for distributing leadership in early education (Rodd, 2015; Rubin, 2013; Bloom et al., 2013; Chandler, 2016 & McNutley, 2014) there are valid opinions from critics and genuine limitations to the framework. Therefore, Chapter Three of this OIP will address distributed leadership limitations, as well as discuss the plan for implanting change, monitoring and measurement tools, ethical considerations, and outline the change process communication plan. In closing, the early education sector requires the development of new leaders and styles of leadership to navigate the intricate, unique profession (Kreig et al., 2014; Wise & Wright, 2012). This OIP is of present importance not only for our preschool program, but also on a more global level.

Considering how leaders can withstand the effects of FDK on preschool programs contributes to a sizeable gap in the literature around ECE leadership and to the growing interest in the topic (O’Gorman & Hard, 2013).

Chapter Three Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

Managing the Transition

As outlined in Chapter Two, the leadership approach that is recommended as most appropriate to guide our preschool through the change process is a distributed leadership model. The responsibility of working with children is so vast that it requires leadership from many individuals (Sullivan, 2010). From a wider leadership lens, our ever-changing world means not only do organizations need to draw on the talent of every team member but also that members are interested in having influence over the direction of their organization. Consequently, 21st century leadership means building on this talent and interest for every organizational member (Fisher, 2016). Similarly, a changing landscape in early education calls for the transgression from individual leadership to the development of a community of leaders (Rodd, 2015). Figure 3.1 represents the new strategic organizational chart, visually demonstrating how distributed leadership would look within the context of our organization.

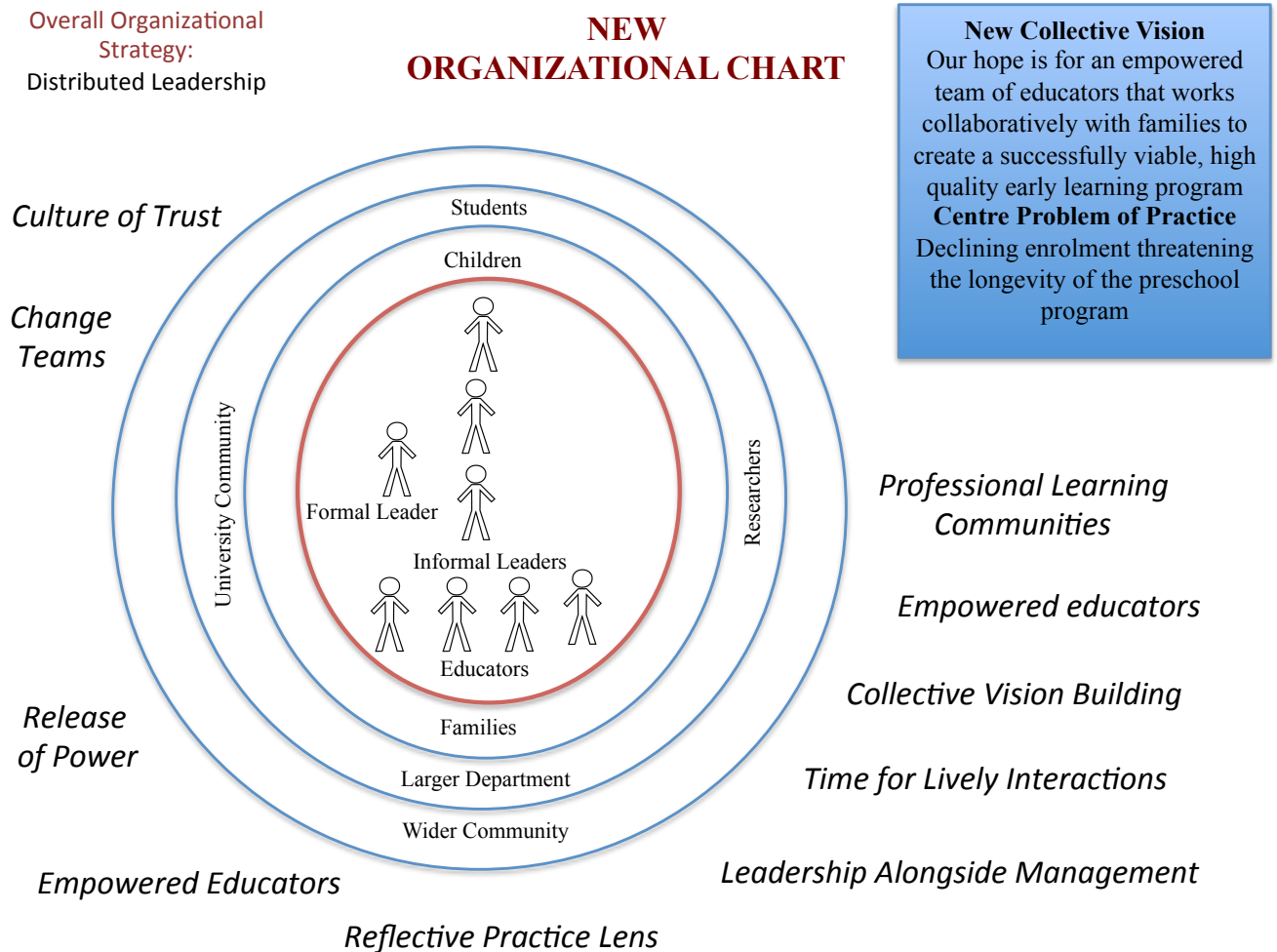


Figure 3.1 New Strategic Organizational Chart

As the profession experiences shifts on many levels, managing larger changes will result in a greater workload and skills required. Perhaps the largest part of this new workload will revolve around managing the change transition, which will involve:

1. Creating a culture of collaboration
2. Understanding stakeholder reactions
3. Engaging and empowering educators through professional learning communities
4. Additional resources needed throughout the transition
5. Building momentum to sustain change
6. Change plan limitations

Culture of Collaboration. Viewing our organizational transition from a distributed lens means that a culture of collaboration must be established initially. In the early years sector collaboration can be defined as “creating relationships in which influence is mutually shared” (Chandler, 2016, p.104). In order to establish a culture of collaboration, one tool that may be utilized is team building (Sullivan, 2010). The concept of team building is fundamental if everyone in the organization is going to have the opportunity to engage in leadership roles at some point (Sullivan, 2010). To move team building forward, our director must first established systems that support educators in becoming a cohesive group (Sullivan, 2010).

In previous chapters of this OIP, the construction of change teams was suggested as a way of collaboratively developing a solution to the problem of low enrolment. Over time these change teams may vary depending on which stage the change is in, and the advancement pace of team members’ skillsets (Cawsey et al., 2016). However, the design rules for creating effective teams in early years settings (outlined in Chapter Two) are still pertinent to creating effective teams for managing the transition. Developing the right change team will directly impact how successful change implementation is (Cawsey et al., 2016), as well as serve to link individual change to organizational change (Chandler, 2016).

In order to connect individual change and organizational change, the culture should be one of continuous collective learning. In this type of culture, the leader works with team members to move them towards a deeper level of thinking, ultimately transforming practice. To foster deeper levels of reflective practice educators must feel as

though they are part of a powerful community that is built upon authentic collaboration, which involves as Chandler (2016) suggests, moving beyond friendly work relationships.

As the culture embraces this sense of team learning, organizing into specific roles and outlining responsibilities is a key part of the development of the change team. As previously noted in this OIP, not all staff members may be interested or ready to take on leadership or team roles. However, at least three roles should be filled: *champion*, the individual that is fighting for the change, representing the vision, and building momentum among others; *Project manager*, the individual that tracks the change, keeps the team organized, and helps manage the adjustments; and *sponsor*, ideally our director, the person who shows support for the transition by providing needed resources and knowledge (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Understanding Stakeholder Reactions. As the team manages the change transition, understanding stakeholder reactions through various avenues is critical for smooth and successful change implementation. Internal and external reactions to the change can be best understood through existing organizational tools such as change teams, storytelling, and stakeholder maps. As Cawsey et al. (2016) indicate, through the development of well-crafted change teams internal and external perspectives can be gained. With change teams opening the floor for increased dialogue and shared expertise, understanding different reactions to the change process will be part of this process. Further, incorporating storytelling in to the change process will allow for an increased understanding of where individuals reside on the change continuum. With storytelling providing stakeholders with the opportunity to connect prior experiences to new learning (Bolman & Deal, 2008), negative and positive reactions are likely to surface. Finally,

continuously reviewing the stakeholder map, a visual representation of individual positions, will allow for the understanding of groupings and influence patterns. When the stakeholder map contains information around: individual's wants and needs, possible responses to change, levels of influence, effects of status quo, and potential gains and restrictions of the change (Cawsey et al., 2016), leaders are able to heighten their understanding of various stakeholder reactions.

As reactions are made visible and/or verbalized change plans may need to be adjusted to reflect any legitimate concerns. As Cawsey et al. (2016) note reactions are influenced by both experience and personality. Thus, there may be a multitude of reasons for concerns such as: the way the message was communicated, a lack of evidence presented for the change initiative, limited or negative experience with change, organizational mistrust, or a believe that the change is unjust (Cawsey et al., 2016).

If change plans are deemed in need of adjustment this may be done without undermining the overall change process, through timeliness and communication. When concerns are presented, it is vital that leaders address them promptly in order to ensure stakeholders feel their opinions were recognized and respected. Second, creating a culture that truly embraces effective two-way communication is important for the adjustment process. Educators should feel as though the director holds a deep desire to understand their concern as well as encourages honest conversation and embraces the change in a sensitive and informed manner (Cawsey et al., 2016). If the organization comes to view formal and informal leaders as both on the leadership continuum, complementing rather than competing forces (Harris, 2013), then two-way communication will be a more natural occurrence.

Moving Educators Forward. Chapter Two of this OIP indicated the need to replace individual leaders with teams. The first step in moving towards this future state is the development of a professional learning community (PLC). With the development of a PLC it will be made clear who is needed to move the change forward, and more specifically, who can be relied on to empower and engage other educators (Bloom et al., 2013). In order to develop a strong PLC for our organization we must consider the following: what is a PLC, how do we develop a PLC, and why should we invest our time here?

What is a Professional Learning Community? In a straightforward definition, Bloom et al. (2013) describe PLC's in the early years as "...an ongoing process in which teachers and administrators work collaboratively in an intentional and systematic way to improve educational experiences for young children" (p.2). As Hattie (2015) indicates, in order for this PLC to result in better practice, it must involve more than just the coming together of educators. Strong research, development of evaluation systems, and reliable evidence must be at the base of the learning community structure. Often, with the unfolding of learning communities the focus is on sharing stories and resources specific to one's context, rather than sharing evidence and identifying successes (Hattie, 2015). With the development of our learning community we want to strive for a focus on the latter to ensure the change is progressing smoothly and continuously

How Do We Develop a Professional Learning Community? Initially, the leader will need to reflect on their role within the PLC (Bloom et al., 2013), as well as consider roles that should be identified as the PLC is created. For example, having a group facilitator is important, as this person can help keep the conversation focused and ensure

a variety of voices are heard. Moreover, a critical friend can bring alternative views forward and challenge thinking. Once learning communities are established, Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest building relationships to ensure others are available for you as support. Given our organization's longevity, strong internal connections between educators are present. Thus, the second step would be to build on these well-established relationships to get people on board, interested in the change plan, and excited about what is to come. It is important to note that a PLC differs from the change team, as the change team's role encompasses broad levels of the change, whereas the learning community is comprised of a smaller group who are dedicated to ensuring the change effectively unfolds and that organizational culture transforms as needed.

Why Use Professional Learning Communities? PLC's are thought to be the most appropriate form of organizational coalition because of how well they align with a distributed framework. As PLC's have great potential to build capacity among organizational members (Coughlin & Baird, 2013), they would serve as a strong foundation for empowerment. As educators grow their knowledge base, competency levels and confidence, it is thought they will then be more apt and prepared to embrace distributed leadership. "Talking about a program as a professional learning community requires a shift from regarding leadership as solely the director's responsibility to considering a model of distributed leadership in which many at the program share responsibility (Chandler, 2016, p. 73). Growing to see our culture as one that empowers and engages others through collaboration, as Chandler (2016) summarizes, requires an adjustment in our understanding of leadership specifically in our context.

Additional Resources Needed. In Chapter One of this OIP a PESTE analysis was used to provide further insight around our problem of low enrolment. As noted, PESTE factors include political, economic, sociological, technological, and environmental aspects of an organization's context (Cawsey et al., 2016). Turning back to this evaluation of our organization is a suitable way to consider what additional resources are needed for change implementation. First, from a political perspective federal policies and legislation related to child care resources is central to the future of our program. With Canada having no national-level child care program and significantly low government spending for an OECD country, the expansion of high quality care is absent (Pasolli, 2015). This low level of government spending, means economic factors are centred around the need for investment provincially and/or federally in order to see our program succeed long-term. Turning to Australia for a model example, it is clear that in order to see change within the larger child care system-funding levels must be increased. And furthermore, made readily available in order to allow local organizations to access government resources so they may continue to provide high quality early learning programs (Pasolli, 2015). Aside from economic factors, social factors, including our changing student population, will result in the need for a shift in cultural landscape. If educators are to adjust to a new population of students, pedagogical beliefs and value systems will need to be considered and this may be done through avenues that are already established such as organizational storytelling and cultural assessment.

As the landscape of the organization transitions to a distributed leadership framework technological resources, such as the organization's online registration database, will need to be more accessible. Allowing educators to access this database will

empower them to gain knowledge around the status of enrolment, as this directly impacts the change process. Opening access to this database will send a clear message of the organization's embracement of a distributed leadership framework. Finally, environmental resources would revolve around the need for physical space in order to redesign our program. With provincial licensing regulations requiring certain amounts of space, light and outdoor time (CCEYA, 2014), aspects of our environment would need to be adjusted. Regardless of whether all mentioned resources are received, issues around change implementation are unavoidable. Specifically, as shown in Table 3.1, three potential implementation issues and how they may be addressed is presented. Time, resistance from educators, and a lack of clarity around the change plan may all serve as change plan barriers.

Table 3.1 *Potential Implementations and Plans*

Potential Implementation Issue	Potential Plan for Addressing Issue
Time to unfold the change plan is greatly needed, but challenging to provide in early years settings (Chandler, 2015)	Currently our program is often overstaffed with support from additional early childhood educators. For the interim reducing the number of staff, while still meeting required teacher: child ratios would provide teams the opportunity to meet frequently throughout the day
Resistance from educators	Identify reasons for resistance Select most appropriate approaches for redirecting opposition into commitment (Rodd, 2015)
Lack of understanding around the change plan	Ensure vision and problem of practice have been clearly communicated through a variety of mediums Collaborate with learning community to build momentum around change Identify points of contention or confusion by listening actively and frequently Enlist the support of the champion team leader

Building Momentum. Although there are some noted limitations, creating and sustaining momentum throughout the change process is one way to off set barriers.

Turning back to the third stage of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model,

Acceleration, building and sustaining momentum is the second part of this stage. As

Kotter (2012b) explains sufficient energy is needed to carry the change to the end. Although initially momentum may be high, it can easily dwindle if we do not understand where stakeholders lie on the change continuum. In order to carry the change through to the final stages and keep momentum high, educators need to have their heart committed to the process (Kotter, 2012b). Moreover, educators need to be intrinsically motivated in order to take risk, embrace the change, and commit to a new approach. Within the context of this OIP, intrinsic motivational strategies are the focus because of the positive connection to deep satisfaction, which ultimately results in prolonged energy and commitment levels (Fisher, 2016). Given our educators' high levels of loyalty to the organization, from my perspective, many already feel passionate about ensuring the program has a viable future. However, connecting employees back to the organizational vision will be the primary tool for promoting intrinsic motivation, as Fisher (2016) indicates that the leader who can build intrinsic motivation from people's belief in the vision has the greatest chance of succeeding. Once educators are intrinsically motivated they will strive to do their best (Fisher, 2016), but this does not negate the fact that change can be exhausting on many levels. In an effort to keep momentum high wins should be communicated from the start (Kotter, 2012a). Therefore, goals should be matched to wins at different stages of the change process and in order to continue building buy-in and success, wins should be communicated in a clear, obvious manner and relate to our vision (Kotter, 2012a). Although celebrating wins is indicated as part of the third stage of Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model, Acceleration, within the context of this OIP celebrating small and large milestones is thought to be most effective if done throughout the final two stages of the model in order to maintain commitment.

Aside from articulating goals and celebrating wins, in order to build momentum our director should review the drivers for change that offer the best chance of moving us forward (Fullan, 2012). Particularly, reflecting on whether our policies are in alignment with a distributed leadership approach and our change vision. In order to determine if a policy is going to build up or discourage momentum a review of our policies is recommended. One tool our director may use for measuring policies is the four criteria for positive drivers as developed by Fullan (2012), which includes considering whether a policy: fosters intrinsic motivation, engages teachers in continuous improvement, inspires teamwork, and affects all teachers and children.

Change Plan Limitations. Having a team of educators who understand the goals of each stage of the change process is ideal, but does not remove limitations. The following section outlines four potential change plan limitations: the shortage of time, our overall organizational structure, the suggested development of teams, and challenges associated with distributed leadership. The first, and perhaps largest limitation to this change plan is the precious commodity, time. Within early years settings time for educators to engage in deep dialogue, distributed leadership, and critical reflection is difficult to provide. Ultimately, the formal leader has substantial control over how much time out of program educators are allotted (Colmer et al., 2014). In order to develop a long-term plan for sustainability, educators will need time to collaborate, reflect, and think critically about change (Coughlin & Baird, 2013).

Second, aside from time, the change may be limited given the larger organizational structure that the preschool resides within. The university setting will limit how much autonomy the change team has on all levels and within this setting, change can

feel like a long, slow, and not always viable process. This bureaucratic environment may lead to educators feeling frustrated, overpowered or unenthusiastic (Rodd, 2015). This larger setting not only means there are many powerful stakeholder perspectives that can limit the change, it also makes our preschool relatively unique in nature. This uniqueness adds to the complexity of the change process and means that locating directly relatable research is difficult (Wise & Wright, 2012). Within this larger structure the formal leader's role is to advocate to external stakeholders around the importance of our program's future. This advocacy role would involve directly communicating the change vision and relating it to the need for, and value of high quality early learning experiences.

Third, the team approach to managing implementation, although beneficial in many ways, may also serve as a limitation. As previously stated, involving others in the change process can result in commitment but does not ensure compliance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Without adequate leadership for the team, this approach may end up being immensely time consuming and consequently counterproductive. Collaboration and team skills will need to be practiced, as it is easy to talk about teams but harder to successfully implement them (Harris, 2016).

Fourth, although distributed leadership surfaces in much of the literature as an effective framework for leading in the early years sector (Chandler, 2016; Bloom et al., 2013; Sykes, 2014 & McNulty, 2014) there are limitations with leading change from this angle, although there are also limitations to any other style of leadership (Harris, 2016). First, there may be a misconception held by some that this distributed leadership requires everyone to lead, when in fact only those skilled for informal leadership positions are invested in, this means building the capacity in some but not necessarily all educators

(Harris & Defaminis, 2016). Further, as Harris (2013) outlines, there are a variety of scholars that caution against distributed leadership, worried it is simply a way of passing off work to educators, without addressing levels of leadership. In addition to the concern around workload, other dark sides of distributed leadership that Harris (2016) identifies include misused power, barriers in accessing resources such as time, and overturning formal leadership. However, such barriers do not mean that this approach should not be considered as most appropriate for the early years sector. Recognizing that distributed leadership is not about giving away power, but rather has to do with creating an environment in which others are able to demonstrate and build on their expertise (Harris, 2016) is critical. As we move towards this new leadership approach, implementing PLC's, change teams, and providing adequate resources such as time and professional development opportunities are a requirement not an choice. With the right tools and conditions in place, distributed leadership can support change in a significant way (Harris & Defaminis, 2016).

To sum up, as Rodd (2015) states, one of the greatest limitations when it comes to implementing change in early years settings is the availability and accessibility of adequate resources; and as our preschool undergoes change, we are certainly no expectation to this statement. Though in building up a powerful team rather than an individual, we are better prepared to address limitations and challenges.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

Throughout this OIP, Cawsey et al.'s (2016) Change Path Model was used to guide the overall change process. Each stage of this four-step model, Awakening,

Mobilization, Acceleration and Institutionalization, was applied to our problem of low enrolment. The final stage, Institutionalization, marks the point in which the change is tracked and measured. There are two key components to this stage:

1. Track the stage at determined intervals to assess progress and monitor risk
2. Develop and implement new systems of operation as needed to sustain change and authentically transform the organization

During this final stage our team will be able to determine what additional resources are needed, progress towards the goal of a high quality, sustainable program and make any modifications needed. After a great deal of work on the change plan, the team must take the time to monitor and evaluate the process in order to provide clarity of change outcomes an enhance accountability of the process (Cawsey et al., 2016). With little noted empirical evidence behind change in the early years sector, (Rodd, 2015) enhancing accountability is imperative for the profession at large.

This larger responsibility can add to the already complicated evaluation system of knowing which tools to select and when to use them (Cawsey et al., 2016). To rectify this complexity, four key tenants to consider, adapted from Cawsey et al. (2016), when determining measurement tools are: first, measures must be considered fair by educators; meaning they must believe the tools represent collective rather than directive work. Moreover, measurement tools selected and used should reflect educators' efforts in a positive manner. For example, focusing on the process rather than the product will likely encourage educators to take risks, which ultimately supports the development of organizational trust (Rodd, 2015), another key characteristic of distributed leadership (Adiguzelli, 2016). Second, signals sent, in all forms of communication, should be clear to recipients. That is, our leadership approach must align with the measurement tool and

our reward process. Third, data sets being collected and reviewed must be accurate. If educators are asked to contribute data through research or informal conversations with stakeholders, they must have faith in the ways in which this data will be measured. Finally, the measurement tools selected must coincide with the environment of our preschool. There must be consideration for how quickly we need information, how accurate this information needs to be, and the resources required to obtain this information. Considering our hectic early educator schedules, tools should also be straightforward and understood by everyone.

Given the elements for consideration, there are a variety of measurement tools that our organization may select to track the change. Each stage of the change may require a different measurement tool, and further tools may be adapted, added or eliminated throughout the process. As shown, Table 3.2 outlines measurement tools to be used during the planning, initial, and middle stage of the change process.

Table 3.2 *Measurement Tools at Different Stages of the Change Process*

	Planning Stage	Initial Stage	Middle Stage
<i>Environmental Elements to Consider</i>	Assess the need for change using relevant internal data of attendance records	Confirm that the change plan is aligned with community trends by informal and formal conversations with community partners and other preschool leaders Consider how these larger community trends may contribute to the success of the change plan	Continue to reflect on the enrolment numbers using the online database system; is the change still needed to reach higher numbers?
<i>Boundaries to Consider (measuring behaviour)</i>	Propose change ideas to stakeholders to determine what will be acceptable and most likely to gain followership	Present research findings to external stakeholders to determine appropriateness of change plan	Consider the risks associated with the change and implementation of distributed leadership, monitor how educators are taking on leadership roles through observation
<i>Belief System (measuring perspectives and values)</i>	Determine how the current vision is aligned with the vision for change (outlined in chapter one) communicate the connection between current and desired state	Use face-to-face meetings to determine the acceptance level of the new vision and proposed change plan	Reaffirm organizational values and using tools such as checklists to assess how values are being upheld throughout the change process
<i>Diagnostic (allotting resources to measuring progress and adjustments made)</i>	Review enrolment numbers over a five-year period	Share enrolment data with internal and external stakeholders using a visual method such as a strategy map Aside from current enrolment data, a strategy map can indicate how the organization can move forward	Chart increased enrolment based on efforts to expand program Refer to the initial strategy map to measure how the preschool is moving towards a successful future state

As the importance of selecting an appropriate measurement tool for each stage of the change process has been outlined, it is also critical that leadership has an idea of how implementation plans can be refined if necessary. Specifically, turning to an example from the healthcare sector and one that is widely used in education, the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle may be referred to. Turning to the PDSA model is a natural connection for early education as this sector is characterized by a complex social system that is fluid in nature (Taylor, McNicholas, Nicolay, Darzi, Bell & Reed, 2017). The PDSA is a four-stage cyclic method for the purpose of adapting organizational change improvement plans.

In the first stage of this cycle, PLAN, a solution to the problem of practice is generated by: considering what we are trying to achieve, what the problem is and possible solutions, and what evidence tells us that a problem exists. Part of this stage will also be to make predications about what we may experience with each possible solution (Donnelly & Kirk, 2015). The second stage, DO, involves testing out a solution to the problem of low enrolment. Examining a potential solution will involve many steps and will undoubtedly take time and flexibility from all stakeholders. (Donnelly & Kirk, 2015). Throughout the third stage of the cycle, STUDY, the success of our new approach is examined. During this time, educators may refer to the enrolment-tracking chart and engage in dialogue about what elements of the new approach are successful. Some questions to guide this stage may be: are the outcomes close to predictions, is the change unfolding as planned, is there room for improvement (Donnelly & Kirk, 2015). In the final stage of this cycle, ACT, conversations will transgress from successes to what needs to be adapted to ensure continued growth and the start of a new cycle (Taylor et al.,

2017). During this critical stage, questions that may be considered are: what needs to be modified so we can progress, is there a clear way to move forward, is the organization ready for sequential change (Donnelly & Kirk, 2015). Figure 3.2, adapted from Donnelly and Kirk's (2015) model, outlines what each stage of the PDSA cycle may involve within our organization as we address the problem of low enrolment.

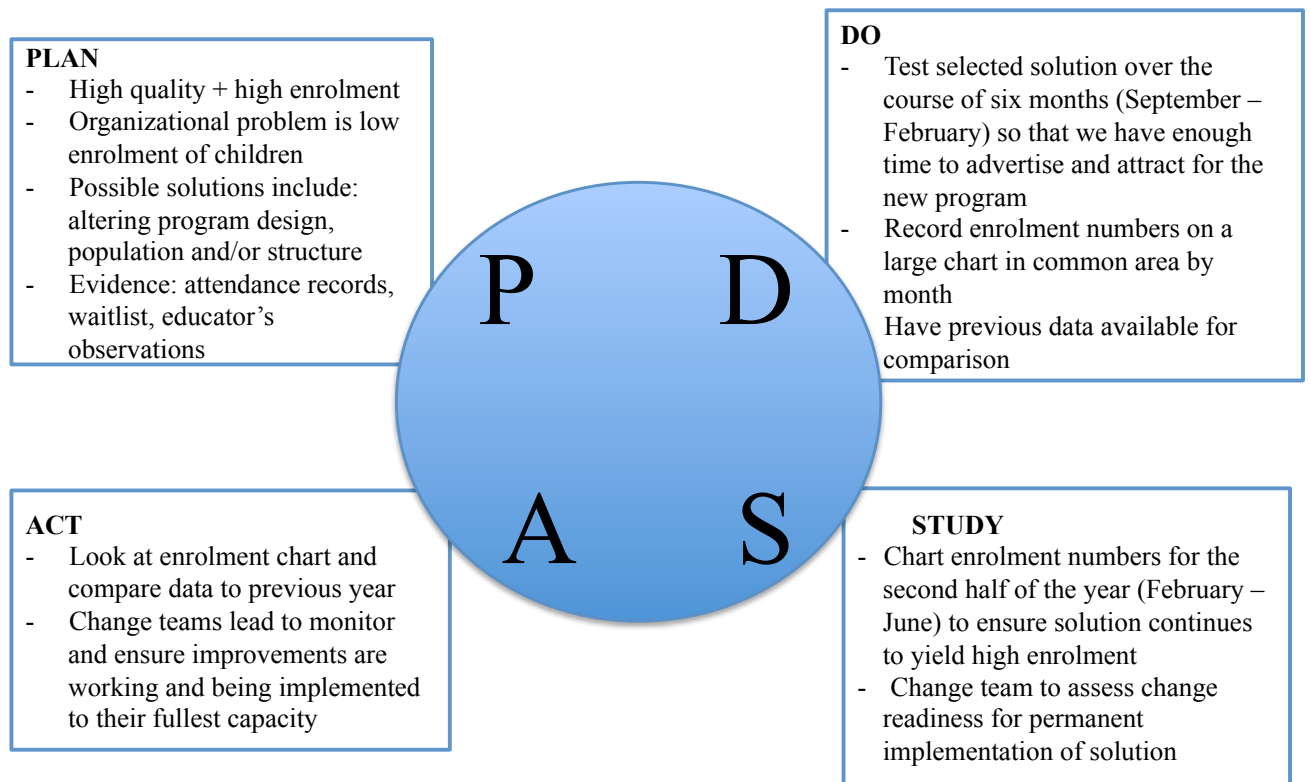


Figure 3.2. PDSA Cycle

In order to ensure the PDSA cycle is effectively implemented and highly beneficial to the change process, our director should refer to the cycle's key features. First, the interactive method of PDSA means that more than one cycle must occur. Second, before moving forward, prediction-based testing should lead to in-depth examination of results. Third, a few possible solutions to the problem of low enrolment can be piloted on a small scale prior to implementation. Fourth, reviewing data over time,

as part of this cycle should be done to give a complete organizational picture, meaning previous enrolment numbers and tracking enrolment over future years should occur. Finally, documentation is critical to making learning visible to stakeholders, the larger community, and profession (Taylor et al., 2017).

In conclusion, thoughtfully selecting and applying measurement tools is one way to channel energy and reinforce alignment (Cawsey et al., 2016). Additionally, it may result in leaders being proactive in identifying any ethical concerns related to the change process.

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change

As change plans are researched, refined and implemented, considering the ethical responsibilities of the whole organization and specific organizational actors is of critical importance. From an early educational perspective, ethics can be defined as “The study of right and wrong, duties and obligations. It involves critical reflection on morality, and the ability to make choices between values and to examine the moral dimensions of relationships” (Feeney, 2010, p. 73). With this guiding definition in mind, two main ethical tenants as they relate to this OIP should be considered, the ethical responsibility to our community and profession, as well as reflecting on how the change plan upholds our organizational values. Although the ethical challenges may present as difficult to navigate given the use of secondary data and qualitative insider research, there are ways to address these issues.

Community and Professional Responsibility. As Chandler (2016) indicates, part of being an early childhood educator is the development of a strong foundation in professional ethics. In order to develop this foundation, reflection on the level of our professional responsibility is mandatory. Our organization has an ethical responsibility to our community (Chandler, 2016), and thus, it is imperative to consider how change will impact the community. The pace in which the change unfolds, the structure of the change, how the change is communicated, and how the process impacts key community stakeholders will all need to be considered. Furthermore, our province's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, a document that guides our profession and maps out our responsibilities to society (Feeney, 2010), indicates that as early educators we are expected to value and engage in collaboration with community agencies. This means that consideration must be given to the level of influence our program has over other programs in our community. Not only is our director challenged with the task of keeping our preschool program operating, managing the intricate inner environment and balancing stakeholder relations; the leader is also inundated with external pressure, as our preschool serves as a community model. Considering the culture outside of one's own school environment means that our director faces an increased responsibility and requirement for skilful leadership ability, reinforcing the high need and clear benefits of a distributed leadership framework.

The Match Between Change Plan and Values. Throughout the entire change process, the leader has an ethical responsibility to ensure all stakeholder voices are heard. Once the leader identifies the need for change, they are responsible for communicating and raising awareness around this need (Cawsey et al., 2016). In addition, the leader's

role includes supporting the development of a vision for change, as this identifies the purpose of the change and lays the groundwork for the process (Cawsey et al., 2016). Guiding the change requires that the leader gain an understanding of different stakeholder perspectives and create buy-in among followers (Cho et al., 2015). Thus, from an ethical lens, as input is sought the leader must consider her positional power and be comfortable discussing the power dynamic that exists between leaders and educators (Bloom et al., 2013).

As the leader seeks to encourage others to contribute ideas, there must be an attempt to defuse their positional power. One way to do this is through a distributed leadership model, as educators are given the opportunity to share organizational power, over time it is defused from the formal leader. However, as power is distributed and educators gain greater organizational influence their ethical responsibility heightens. “In the field of early childhood, our every word and action as well as our values and perspectives provide children with a model of the kind of person then can become. This big responsibility requires leadership from many people” (Chandler, 2016, p. 72). As educators grapple with this responsibility, the way data are collected and interpreted becomes an ethical point for consideration. Whether data are compiled from annual parent surveys, archives or informal interviews with families, the distinctive nature of this OIP requires all organizational actors to use the data in an ethically sound manner.

Owning Our Ethical Responsibilities. Reflecting on the ethical considerations related to the problem of low enrolment, two suggestions organizational members can consider are, reflecting on challenges collectively and a consideration of organizational power relations. First, through collective reflection educators can provide collegial

support for ethical challenges that surface as the change process unfolds. As Feeney (2010) states, work on the practice of ethics provides opportunities for people in different roles and with different perspectives to focus on shared values. Paying attention to professional ethics can strengthen the community of early childhood educators and remind us to keep our moral compasses pointed in the direction of achieving what is best for young children and families (Feeney, 2010, pg. 77). Second, as our director attempts to create a culture of fair assessment to ethically support the change Heifetz's (1994) ethical perspective, as cited in Northouse (2016), may provide some guidance. Heifetz (1994) suggests that leaders use their position of authority to create an environment that enables followers to openly face tough issues and identify conflicting values.

Despite the ethical considerations presented, our change plan can effectively be implemented in a justly manner. Using collective reflection, guides for evaluating our work and considering our environment, organizational members can lead the change plan to ensure that children's best interests are central. Although there are ethical points for consideration, the risk or impact to stakeholders is minimal, and does not outweigh the vital importance of addressing the problem of low enrolment.

Change Process Communication Plan

Aside from navigating ethical challenges as the change plan is put into action, educators and leaders are also tasked with successfully navigating the development of a change communication plan. In order to send a strong and comprehensible message to organizational actors, leaders need to thoughtfully consider their method of communication. Specifically reflecting on what the goal is, determining the most

appropriate medium for delivery, hypothesizing how the message may be received, and how they will determine the level of reception (Rodd, 2015). Consequently, a change process communication plan is a necessary tool in order to ensure successful transmission of content and for addressing the problem of low enrolment.

Effective communication is not only related to effective leadership (Rodd, 2015; Westersund, 2017), it is also tied to the creation of a supportive work environment (Chandler, 2016). However, as leaders strive to implement effective communication, they may encounter several barriers. Particularly in the early years setting, roadblocks as outlined by Rodd (2015) may include, poor choice of delivery method, psychological (attitudes and relationships) and physical (time and atmosphere) barriers. Time for instance is of concern in early years settings, where daily educators encounter an array of laborious tasks making it difficult to find time for communication and capacity building (Hujala, Eskelinen, Keskinen, Chen, Inoue, Matsumoto & Kawase, 2016). Given the noted potential barriers to change communication, and the suggestion by Klein (1996) that successful and smooth organizational change is related to good communication, the recommendation of this OIP is to utilize Klein's (1996) Key Principles in Communicating Change.

Klein's Key Principles in Communicating Change. According to Klein (1996), "there are several empirically founded communications principles that taken together can constitute a communications strategy" (p.15). These are as follows:

1. Message redundancy is related to message retention;
2. The use of several media is more effective than the use of just one;
3. Face-to-face communication is a preferred medium;
4. The line hierarchy is the most effective organizationally sanctioned communication channel;

5. Direct supervision is the expected and most effective source of organizationally sanctioned information;
6. Opinion leaders are effective changers of attitudes and opinions; and
7. Personally relevant information is better retained than abstract, unfamiliar or general information.

Message Redundancy and Many Forms of Media. Using multiple avenues to communicate the change over many months will increase the chance of people obtaining and retaining the message. Newsletters, department meetings, and emailing are only a few ways that the message can be delivered. Furthermore, given the overly busy nature of stakeholders, as well as the differing levels of educators change readiness, in order to be effective, the change process must be presented in a clear and straightforward manner. This means semantics, the use of jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations must all be reviewed (Rodd, 2015).

Face-to-Face Meetings. Though there are multiple ways to communicate the change plan face-to-face delivery is suggested to be most effective (McNulty, 2014). With meetings potentially being the glue that holds organizations together (Chandler, 2015), a lack of face-to-face time between members can lead to increased miscommunication, negatively impacting the change process. In early years setting there tends to be an overemphasis on electronic communication (Rodd, 2015), perhaps due to the multitude of directions that leaders are pulled in daily (Bruno, 2012). Using electronic methods of communication may be more time efficient; however, Rodd (2015) suggests that face-to-face meetings have sizable benefits and for teams going through transition, face-to-face time can strengthen important relationships (McNulty, 2014). When team members meet in person, social bonding, commitment to the vision, an increased motivation to act, deeper levels of trust, and reduced conflict, are all possible outcomes.

Educators may find time to meet in person through: staff meetings, roundtable discussions, in conferences, and in smaller team meetings (Rodd, 2015), and with a well-constructed agenda the commodity of time is respected (Chandler, 2016). Unfortunately, Chandler (2016) indicates that often staff members view meetings as a waste of their time, though this problem could be combated through the use of distributed leadership. From a distributed framework, meetings would become less about the transmission of knowledge from the director and more about the development of two-way dialogue. Furthermore, face-to-face meetings encourage involvement in the process (Klein, 1996), ultimately reinforcing the concept of distributed leadership through engagement.

Line Hierarchy. In order to deliver a message effectively, there must be a clear understanding of the audience (Rodd, 2015). When communicating the change plan, a message of such magnitude, the credibility and impact of the message is influenced by who delivers it (Klein, 1996). With those in greater organizational positions of power delivering the change plan, there is still opportunity for member participation. In fact, Klein (1996) indicates that this means of delivery enhances the distribution of influence, as each member is accurately informed. Considering the line of hierarchy within our setting, our director may deliver the change plan to the larger organization, the university, and longstanding teachers may deliver the message to stakeholders such as families. Looking outwards to the community at large, communication from our director around our low enrolment and how we are tackling this issue to ensure the operation of a high-quality preschool is fundamental. Ho, Lee and Teng (2016) recently alluded to this notion stating “Due to the increasing level of interdependencies that exist in ECE settings, coordination and communication between groups/within hierarchical structures are more

important for local preschools to face external and internal challenges for quality improvement” (p. 13). Thus, as we work within the four walls of our own school each day, we must make a conscious effort to communicate our change beyond our centre.

Direct Supervision. As noted above, the communicator of the message is of great importance. “People expect to hear important, officially sanctioned information from their immediate supervisor or boss” (Klein, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, directly communicating the change plan with each individual educator will ensure that there is time for clarification as well as questions and for thorough understanding to develop. One-on-one meetings between educators and the director about the process and team member roles can further lead to the creation of a trusting organizational culture, which as previously indicated is a foundational element of distributed leadership (Adiguzelli, 2016). These deeply rooted relationships are crucial to leadership effectiveness because they encourage educators to contribute to the change process. This foundational relationship between director and individual educators, with solid communication as the base, is integral to the development of a motivated and empowered team (Stamopoulos, 2012).

Opinion Leaders. Although Klein (1996) highlights the importance of formal leaders communicating the change message he recognizes the power and influence that informal leaders possess. Thus, as we construct change teams within the organization, considering who is comfortable talking publicly and to large groups is key. This team member, responsible for informal communication to various stakeholders, must also hold a deep level of change and organizational knowledge. Communication from a distributed

lens requires transformative knowledge in order to cultivate strong interactions and levels of communication between members (Gomez et al., 2010).

Making it Personal. Based on Klein's (1996) research of communication in a factory setting, it was concluded that information concerning the larger organization is more quickly forgotten or initially dismissed than information that personally impacts one's position. Therefore, communicating how the change will impact each educators' role within the organization is key. One avenue that may be used to make the change process personal, as stated in previous parts of this OIP, is storytelling. From a symbolic lens (Bolman & Deal, 2008) stories are an effective way to communicate information. As educators share stories about how they are implementing the change plan and vision, learning is increasingly likely to be cemented in to thought process and practice.

Celebrating Along the Way. With increased learning, leaders must consider how small and large milestones will be celebrated along the way. Celebrating even small accomplishments can solidify educators' commitment to the goal (Chandler, 2016) or change plan. Part of the celebration process must include different measurements, so that educators efforts are authentically made visible. For example, tracking increased child enrolment in a place that is visible to all staff members will allow everyone to cheer on the process. Educators can collectively decide when and how to celebrate, perhaps with every ten students enrolled educators host a small celebration to welcome and connect new families, as well as applaud the growing community. Furthermore, in order to increase commitment and satisfaction levels, educators' efforts should be praised informally and frequently (Lindon et al., 2016). Larger milestones may be celebrated by the formal leader submitting the team's stories of success for awards, publication in

professional resources, or sharing at professional learning seminars within the larger community (Rodd, 2015). Tying back to the concept of intrinsic motivation to build and sustain momentum, and the distributed leadership framework, when educators have a worthwhile investment in the preschool they will truly want to know about and celebrate any progress being made (Fisher, 2016).

Overall, clear communication can support the development of organizational trust, ultimately fostering a distributed leadership approach within our setting. As Adiguzelli (2016) indicates high levels of trust results in individuals that are willing to take risks, a key piece of the change process. Inadequate communication and a lack of trust may threaten the solidarity of organizational change. Though, as Klein (1996) suggests, a plan for change that involves strategic thinking about what and how to communicate can defuse many of the difficulties connected to the process.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

Next Steps. Even with a clear plan for implementing change, a system in place for monitoring change, thoughtful ethical reflection, and a concise plan for communicating the change, there is evidently, according to Rodd (2015) no *right* way to lead the change process. However, given the complexity of our preschool context, this plan for improving our organization is as precise as possible. Drawing on connections developed by Rodd (2015) between leadership style and successful change implementation, four potential next steps have been outlined.

First, continued and clear communication is vital even as the change is complete. As Bloom (2005) indicates, “Clear, understandable, unambiguous, communication with

teachers, families, and community representatives is at the heart of effective leadership in early care and education” (p. 85). Considering this statement, the importance of clear communication has been highlighted throughout this OIP as foundational for assessing change readiness, articulating the need for change, and implementing a distributed leadership framework.

Second, through the sustained use of learning communities the culture of ongoing learning is embraced. Part of this culture of continued learning is the opportunity for risk taking and acceptance for mistakes (Sullivan, 2009), thus moving forward educators must be encouraged to participate in some form of *safe* leadership activity (Sullivan, 2009). Continuous learning for educators as a next step is of vital importance because of the connection to increased critical reflection and thinking skills. As our profession strives to develop the next generation of ECE leaders, critical reflection and thinking skills are a necessary foundation. Sullivan (2010) further adds that in order to strengthen and develop leadership within the early years sector, supporting informal and formal leadership activity is a necessary initial step. This OIP has provided a wide range of reasoning for building capacity in educators, primarily focusing on the need to build on communal skillsets and knowledge in order to be able to navigate the change process.

Third, another element of our culture that should be upheld is that of collaboration, which was initially developed through a distributed leadership framework and change teams. Continued leadership through collaboration between all stakeholders will ultimately prove to advance the whole system (Sullivan, 2010). Though educators will need time to practice and strengthen leadership skills (Sullivan, 2009) and therefore, as indicated in this OIP, our director should continue to provide time for educators to

work in tandem outside of the program. This dedicated time is crucial in order to support the change plan long-term as well as embed new approaches in to daily work (Coughlin & Biard, 2013). As educators explore this new culture of collaboration, Chandler (2016) reminds us that it begins on a small scale, “Distributed leadership begins with small steps: encouraging staff to take on small acts of leadership like mentoring others, facilitating team meetings, or contributing to the program’s newsletter” (p.74). As distributed leadership unfolds patience for the process and the need for ongoing practice will be necessary.

Fourth, all suggested next steps should continue to focus on the vision of providing a high quality early years program for young children in our community. Maintaining the vision of high quality will inspire educators to continue to act and move forward towards the desired future state (Chandler, 2016). As this OIP brought forward, the need for quality programs within our community is essential. Although children have the opportunity to attend FDK, this is in-fact too late to be making our investment (Rolnick, 2017). Though growing our program through increased enrolment of children is only one part of the equation, with emerging evidence linking the connection between leadership and high quality programming (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Wise & Wright, 2012) there must also be a focus on quality if we are to benefit children and society (Murphy, 2015).

Future Considerations. As indicated throughout this OIP, research in early education is growing but has been slower to develop than literature in the business and education world (Lindon et al., 2016; Wise & Wright, 2012) and there are vast obstacles related to leading in this unique sector (Sullivan, 2010). Particularly, greater empirical

evidence is required for determining effective leadership approaches in early education. In contrast to most of the current literature dominating the discourse, which is based primarily on opinions or assumptions of what is likely to work. With a lack of understanding around the actual daily work of early education leaders, future considerations around how to guide the change process must aim to understand leadership culture in this niche sector. As Lindon et al. (2016) state, “There are a lot of opinions, yet limited observational evidence to show what kinds of leadership behaviour actually work best against appropriate criteria” (p.18). Therefore, continued research is needed on two accounts. Greater insight is required in early educational leadership research in general. Specifically, around the power of distributed leadership in early years settings and how to transition from a hierarchical to distributed model. With organizational improvement only occurring with some form of change in leadership (Harris, 2016), the need to further understand the inner workings of early education leadership is emphasized. Second, to navigate this multifaceted sector continued development of a variety of tools, evidence, and theory to better support the understanding of change in early years is called for. Rodd (2015) and Bloom (2005) provide foundational work specific to planning and implementing change (Wise & Wright, 2012), but building on this work is necessary for the advancement of the profession.

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