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Democratic leadership – A local story

A thesis

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Abstract

Leadership is traditionally viewed as an individual property and researched from the perspective of behaviours, traits or characteristics that these individuals possess. Notions of democratic leadership can offer early childhood centres a more expansive conception of leadership to include children, teachers and families.

This study explores the possibility of positioning all stakeholders in an early childhood centre as leaders by repositioning leadership as a jointly constructed, emergent process. Drawing on an existing feature of the kindergarten programme, that of regular excursions within the local community, connections are interwoven between children's inquires, democratic principles and elements of place based education. Using narratives from five excursions in the local community the study experiments with Leadership-as-practice to analyse how these excursions fostered democratic and inclusive participation of children and adults. Inquiry as a form of participatory democracy is a key feature of decision-making and provides a common purpose for community excursions while encouraging leadership opportunities.

The study reveals the potential of leadership-as-practice, underpinned by democratic values as an approach to leadership in early childhood organisations, enabling leader/follower roles to be blurred and learning to be co constructed during dialogue. The local community holds enormous capacity as a system to facilitate democratic leadership and promote place based learning and citizenship education. This study recognises that democratic leadership exists in tension with current neo liberal beliefs and therefore positions itself as a counter to the current market driven early childhood environment.

The underlying belief of this study is that leadership can occur as a collaborative practice, emerging through day to day experiences and seeks to contribute to the slowly emerging body of research concerned with early childhood leadership.

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Chapter One – Introduction

Researcher interest in this topic

Twenty years ago I began a career as an early childhood educator. Like so many others in this profession I was motivated by an intense interest in my own children's early childhood years and enjoyed many happy hours as a parent in my children's early childhood settings. As an initial teacher I entertained no notions of leadership, though witnessed and reflected on leadership in a variety of early childhood settings. Later in my career, when the opportunity arose, I started out as an early childhood leader forging my own way of leadership based on previous observations of leadership practices, learning by doing, reflecting and finding what felt right. As a lead teacher I shared conversations with others in leadership positions. I was frequently in admiration of the way in which some questioned the status quo, challenged thinking and revealed their values. Often however, I was bothered by the unconscious use of domineering language; 'my staff' 'my teachers' 'my centre'. It just didn't sit well, implying leadership involved a sense of control and hierarchy. During this time I couldn't help but be aware of the changes occurring in the wider early childhood sector moving the profession from one of a social, community provision towards a competitive, business focused, profit driven industry. Colleagues frequently spoke of leadership as being associated with stress, particularly in relation to a seemingly never ending series of performative changes that needed to be understood and accomplished.

In a bid to better understand and make sense of these changes and how they impacted on educational leadership I embarked upon a course of study in the Master of Educational Leadership programme. During this experience I began to formulate and clarify understandings around educational leadership in my own context. As part of this study I wanted to embark upon research that was grounded in everyday teaching and therefore chose to situate my research within an existing component of our centre's programme; the exploration of our local community. I had always felt that these regular excursions in our local neighbourhood held the promise of yet to be discovered possibilities as children made connections with people, places and things that encompassed their local neighbourhood. My study is the story of our early childhood centre's rejection of leadership as the domain of

a sole person. It explores aspects of our journey moving towards the possibility of a collaborative, unregimented form of leadership; one that embodies the principles of democracy, embraces diversity, is inclusive of all and hopefully sustainable in the long term.

Research question and aim of research

The research question is;

How can collaborative exploration of the local community afford leadership opportunities for children, families and teachers and expand our concept of leadership?

This study aims to introduce the notion of early childhood leadership as a complex construct that can be interpreted as an emerging social process, not necessarily always associated with a person in a designated role of authority. The leitmotif of democracy threads throughout this work; as a guiding value for leadership, as a mode of organisational life, as a mode of experimentalism and as a form of utopia to be continually strived towards. My aim is to provoke and encourage early childhood practitioners to investigate leadership arrangements within their own unique contexts and adds to the emerging body of research associated with early childhood leadership in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This study seeks to make a shift in thinking away from associating leadership with an individual towards an emergent, jointly accomplished process occurring as a practice. Drawing extensively on work by Joseph Raelin and Philip Woods I illustrate a rather unconventional approach to leadership within an early childhood setting that may provoke practitioners to consider leadership as a fluid, ever evolving activity rather than a fixed and entirely tangible position. Leadership in this instance occurs in day to day experiences and is embedded in social interactions and material artifacts, underpinned by democratic values. I acknowledge that reconfiguring leadership as an emergent process is challenging, the mind keeps creeping back to the concrete, permanent individual. This, after all has been the dominant position, reinforced through literature, professional development and our overall habitus. Individual examples of remarkable leadership are widely celebrated; we need look no further than sporting heroes or

political figures to see such examples. It is my intention, however to interrupt this leadership image.

By rejecting the taken-for-granted heroic, single strong leadership model, I am freed up to investigate alternative possibilities, deconstruct traditional notions and set a future direction that works for the community in which this centre is situated. It is essentially a story of exploring alternatives. It is not my intention to posit this study as a model of leadership to be duplicated but rather it may serve as a provocation to consider leadership possibilities and encourage conversations.

Conversations about leadership are not commonly heard in early childhood centres. It is just a given that teams will work cooperatively with the guidance of a head or lead teacher to bring about high quality learning programmes for the children who attend. Varying degrees of participation in leadership are afforded to teachers by leaders usually through the delegation of tasks or opinions sought for tricky problems. By engaging in this project I sought to explore leadership situated in terms of being a space that could be occupied by different people, singularly or concurrently depending upon the situation at hand. Alternatively it could be thought of as a practice that occurs during the interactions of all members of the early learning centre. Leadership in this instance would never fully be defined, constantly changing and becoming. By evoking a more expansive view of leadership possibilities are created, affording opportunities not only for formal leaders and teachers but also parents, children and even the wider community.

Thesis structure

Chapter one introduces the research by outlining my interest in the topic of early childhood leadership. The question under investigation and the broad aims of the study are discussed.

Chapter two reviews literature and research relating to educational leadership. The central theme of democracy is introduced together with two dominant models of leadership. Leadership-as-practice is proposed as a democratic form of leadership.

Chapter three focuses on three major influences currently impacting the context of early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand and weaves the theme of democracy

into this context. Place based and citizenship education are major influences of this research and are explored in relation to democracy and leadership.

Chapter four explains the methodology of this research and outlines the design and theoretical framework, data collection methods and ethical considerations applicable to this study. I introduce my intention to analysis data by overlapping Woods & Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework with Raelin's (2011) four C's of leadership practice.

Chapter five focuses on analysing the findings of the study which are presented as narratives from five excursions in the local community. Findings are interpreted by utilising concepts from leadership-as-practice and holistic democracy.

Chapter six extends on my findings by discussing how explorations of the local community contributed towards an expanded notion of early childhood leadership and examines major themes indicated in the findings.

Chapter seven concludes by discussing some limitations and implications presented by this study along with future considerations for research in the area of early childhood leadership.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Overview

This chapter has two main elements. The central theme of democracy is introduced through the thinking of John Dewey and Philip Woods. Literature pertaining to educational leadership in general and early childhood leadership research is reviewed. Two prominent leadership models are considered: transformational leadership and distributed leadership. Leadership-as-practice is presented as a form of democratic leadership.

Setting out – Exploring leadership

In 1916, American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey advocated for the positioning of democracy to be the central purpose of education.

Democracy was not to be seen in just the limited interpretation of collective decision making, instead in the broader expression of “inclusive participation in the workings of society” (Jenlink, 2009, p.23). Inspired by Dewey’s visions of educational democracy, I set about entertaining notions of educational leadership embodied in the spirit of Dewey’s vision of democracy as a subject to be “continually explored afresh, constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized” (Jenlink, 2009, p.293).

We live in a time of rapid change; complex global issues such as climate change and global warming, technological advancements that allow anyone to access information at any time: an unpredictable world in which the only certainty is uncertainty (Bell, 2002). Internationally education is dominated by policies that promote standardised national testing, a strong focus on literacy and numeracy and consequential accountability (Harris & Jones, 2015). Not surprisingly effective leadership is seen as an essential element for any organisation to successfully navigate these turbulent waters. Interest in educational leadership has emerged as a field of study gaining considerable attention, yet despite this high level of interest leadership remains a highly contested notion, with no universal agreement of how it should be understood (Niesche, 2013; Waniganayake, 2014). Literature and research examining contemporary educational leadership theory has largely been dominated by the compulsory sector of education (Harris, 2003,

2004; Spillane et al., 2004; Ritchie & Woods, 2007; Woods, 2005), in particular the secondary school perspective.

In an overview of research articles written in the *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership Journal*, 15 papers considered primary school leadership compared to 41 focusing on secondary schools. No figures were cited for early childhood, though it was reported as being greatly under represented (Bush, 2012). By and large the majority of research into educational leadership has focused on the role of the principal with considerably less attention being paid to teachers, pupils or the community. Over the decades, differing paradigms have shifted their focus of inquiry from descriptions of leader's traits, styles, behaviour and tasks towards the effects and impacts of leadership in the school setting (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Moving from positivist orientations towards diverse postmodernist frameworks, methodologies, perspectives and topics of investigation, has resulted in alternative ways of situating leadership with a greater focus on experimentation and possibilities.

Understandably diversity has led to a proliferation of definitions associated with educational leadership. Despite receiving considerable research attention no one single definition of leadership has been agreed upon. Yukl (2002) writes that 'the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective' (cited in Bush, 2011, p.5). The origins of educational management began in the scientific management movement known as 'Taylorism' incorporating Max Weber's work on bureaucracy (Bush 2011). Although both management theories developed outside education, elements of their legacy can still be seen today. The language of Fredrick Taylor's early 1900's management theory emphasising efficiency, order and control is noticeable in the dialogue of neo liberalism. Weber's bureaucratic model is most commonly seen today in education where a hierarchical structure is present with a principal at the apex. The distinction between leadership and management has been described by Bush (2008, citing Cuban, 1998) as one of overlapping notions whereby leadership is linked with change and influence while management is seen primarily as a maintenance activity attending to efficiency and organisational arrangements, both being necessary elements of organisational activity.

Reviewing recent research into educational leadership I find the landscape littered with a proliferation of competing theories and models of enactment. Language referring to leaders and followers is commonly spoken in these works. This dualism can evoke impressions of power and authority, hierarchy and the need for compliance by subordinates. Leaders are superior; followers are dependent on followers (Gronn, 2000). Two theories which have gained prominence in recent times are transformational/transactional leadership and distributed leadership. I will consider these models in light of the leader/follower binary and their potential for collaboration, a central concept in my research. It is these theories I discuss next.

Transformational Leadership

Tourish (2013) states that transformational leadership is the “single most studied and debated idea within the field of leadership studies” (p.20), it is therefore a useful place to begin. Transformational leadership followed hot on the heels of transactional leadership, which as the title suggests involves followers receiving rewards contingent on achieving desired outcomes, or conversely punishments to followers for non-compliance (Antonakis & House, 2015). Transformational leadership stresses an arrangement for the leader/follower binary that places emphasis on leader agency with the leader in a position to transform followers values, attitudes and aspirations in the pursuit of ensuring that organisational performance, as defined by the managerial elite, is improved (Tourish, 2013). Antonakis and House (2015) explain that transactional leadership is most often associated with management as it is concerned with monitoring goals and outcomes whereas transformational leadership moved beyond goal attainment to a higher meaning and purpose. Proposed by James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass both models of leadership gained popularity during the late 1970’s, but whereas transactional leadership lacked a focus on the collective, transformational leadership promised attention to joint action and a representation of the interests of both leaders and followers. Influenced by new psychological understandings of motivation (Allix, 2000), transformational leadership offered a form of leadership that attended to moral and democratic dimensions of leadership by motivating followers to rally around building visions, establishing goals, providing intellectual stimulus, modelling best practices and organisational values (Bush,

2011). Notions of charisma are fundamental to transformational leadership, the central premise is “leaders have charisma, followers don’t” (Niesche, 2013, p.90). Transformational leadership remains popular in the educational arena. Burrell (1992, cited in Gunter, 2001) suggests a reason for this could be the seductive nature of this model of leadership; it “is seen as a reservoir of potential energy to be channelled, shaped and directed in the service of corporate goals” (p.98).

Critics of transformational leadership highlight the one directional movement of influence; little attention appears to be paid to how followers might challenge leader’s visions. Gunter (2001) writes that transformational leadership isn’t really about transformation at all instead it is primarily concerned with a ‘top dog theory’ that meets the need of management (p.98). Transformational leadership represents an example of the heroic, trait based, individualistic leader model that reinforces hierarchal structures and relegates followers to positions of subordination. In acknowledgement of the limitations of viewing leadership as the sole domain of a single individual, particularly as a mechanism to inhibit growth and recognising the power of mobilising the strengths of many, distributed leadership gained favour.

Distributed Leadership

Proponents of distributed leadership suggest its origins draw upon the principles of transformational leadership, distributed cognition, activity theory (Spillane et al. 2004, Gronn, 2000) and the work of the Australian psychologist Cecil Gibb (Gronn, 2000). Gibb presented emerging ideas that signalled a shift away from the traditional single heroic leader figure, towards a more collective vision of leadership as early as 1954 with direct inference to distributed leadership arguing that “leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions that must be carried out by the group” (Gibb, 1954, as cited in Gronn, 2000, p. 324). Gronn (2000) provides a detailed interpretation of distributed leadership and suggests that the time is ripe to consider an alternative to viewing leadership as the exclusive action of one heroic individual and contemplate the possibilities arising from leadership as that of being distributed among many. Rather than calling for the complete abandonment of leadership, Gronn proposed a new form of leadership based on conjoint activity. Similarly Spillane (2005) favoured the

retention of the formal leader and offers the perspective that distributed leadership is “first and foremost about leadership practice” (p.144). Leadership should be seen as an action rather than a series of tasks. Spillane believes that the interactions and interrelationships that occur between individuals in organisations are critical to the concept of leadership practice (p. 145). Spillane portrays the concept of leadership practice as being stretched over the work of a number of individuals and tasks completed by interaction between multiple leaders (Spillane et al. 2001, as cited in Harris 2008, p.176). Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) do, however, explicitly make reference to the leaders/ follower binary stating “leadership practice is distributed over leaders, followers and the school’s situation” (p.11). Niesche (2013) believes that Gronn simply ignores the leader/follower binary, but believes the dualism still exists, albeit in a discretely entangled manner.

Harris (2013) outlines challenges to the implementation of distributed leadership and considers the correlation between distributed leadership and improved student outcomes. Harris discusses the recent shift away from traditional individualised leadership within schools, particularly in England, towards creating conditions that allow distributed leadership to flourish. Formal leadership in these effective schools still exists, however distributed leadership requires a “fundamental change in the way formal leaders understand their practice and the way they view their leadership role” (p.546). Similarly Gronn (2000) and Hatcher (2005) support Harris’ opinion that distributed leadership does not represent an opposing model to formal leadership, instead these formal leaders are now charged with facilitating and supporting leadership in others. Harris focuses on studies and evidence that highlight the potential relationship between distributed leadership and improved school performance citing that high performing organisations were seen to be utilising all available talent, gave greater responsibility to individuals for their work and invested a high degree of trust in teachers.

Woods et al. (2004) contemplate distributed leadership from the perspective of leadership becoming the property of a group of interacting individuals, giving little prominence to the formal leader. Despite the commonly held assumption that distributed leadership is difficult to define, Woods et al. have put forward three elements that make distributed leadership distinctive. First it is “an emergent

property of a group or network of interacting individuals” (p. 441), secondly it requires openness to boundaries, and finally leadership according to expertise, whereby all and everyone can offer leadership within the group context (p. 442). Recent work from Woods (2015) looking at research out of Finland, advises that the notion of distributed leadership as a “resource which exists and has to be used at all levels” (p.177) could be strengthened through the addition of including the values and learning that guide distributed leadership (p.178). Holistic democracy, embodying concepts of democracy and social justice is one such suggestion. Woods describes holistic democracy as involving the personal growth of individuals and facilitates mutual empowerment together with fair participation in social and organisational environments (Woods & Woods, 2013).

Both transformational leadership and distributed leadership continue to draw advocates and critics as they are enacted in their varying forms throughout educational settings. However as the 21st century moves forward a growing body of research is paying attention to the explicit leader follower/binary outlined in the transformational theory model and the subtle leader follower/binary represented with the distributed leadership model. Notions of democracy, ethics and social justice emerge on the horizon. Niesche (2013) asserts that we need to challenge the narrow paradigmic knowledge base that has resulted in a ‘sameness’ of leadership standards across the world and ask ourselves is it fitting to expect that educational leaders are the same everywhere in the world and in every institution? (p.33). A call to recognise ‘other’ in the leadership discussion and challenge conventions surrounding leader/follower binaries could generate new thinking with an increased prominence to alternative viewpoints. Aspects of democratic leadership and leaderful practice may serve as a guide in this conversation.

A case for democracy

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, thinking that connects education and democracy is by no means new. One hundred years ago Dewey posited the creating of democratic citizens as a fundamental purpose of education. In recent times scholars have attended to the provocation provided by Dewey by researching the incorporation of democratic values in leadership discussions (Woods, 2004, 2005, 2015; West-Burnham, 2009; Raelin, 2016a, 2016b).

Democracy enjoys a privileged position in Western society. Most commonly perceived as a political concept, it represents a system of governance that seeks to represent the people and counter unchecked power. Democracy not only includes the right to vote for a government, it also includes the right to criticise (West-Burnham, 2009). Principles such as personal choice, the right to participate, openness of information, protection and personal growth are most commonly associated with democracy. It is viewed as something to protect at all costs, so much so people have given their lives to protect democracy. Woods (2004) contends that the Western view of democracy, when applied to educational leadership, needs to go beyond representational democracy, to take a wider interpretation. Starrat (2001) provides some insights that could guide thinking around democracy in educational settings by emphasising leadership as ‘cultivation’ whereby “democratic leadership is primarily concerned with cultivating an environment that supports participation, sharing ideas and the virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility and compassion” (p.338). In adopting this richer view of democracy society is open to the possibilities of everyone being able to contribute to decision making, freedom to initiate change, engage in transforming dialogue and participate in ethical rationalities concerned with truth seeking, simply by virtue of their human status (Woods, 2004). Woods reminds us that the dominant structures which frame schooling can be seen to influence assumptions about truths. This concept is of particular interest to the New Zealand context where dominant discourses that position neo-colonial western constructs of truth as ‘normal’ conversely position Māori (the indigenous population) as ‘other’.

Introducing Leadership-as-Practice

Joseph Raelin’s (2002, 2005, 2011, 2015, 2016a,2016b) studies of work-based learning offer insights into reframing leadership as ‘leaderful practice’ emphasising an approach to leadership called ‘Leadership-as-Practice’(L-A-P). Leaderful practice challenges conventional views of leading out front by proposing that anyone can exert leadership and redefines leadership as a collective practice, incorporating the four C’s of leadership; concurrent, collective, collaborative and compassionate (Raelin, 2005). Thinking of leadership as being concurrent suggests that leadership can involve multiple members of a community

at any given time. As a collective endeavour, leadership is a plural phenomenon, not stemming from the influence of one individual but rather from the people coming together for a common purpose. By incorporating a collaborative perspective leadership emerges from the flow of interactions and ideas of all members of a community. The final tenet, viewing leadership as compassionate, means that all stakeholders are important and that values such as democracy are fundamentally interconnected with leadership (Raelin, 2005). Leaderful practice connects leadership with practices which Raelin (2011) describes as “a cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome” (p.4).

In the spirit of democracy this form of leadership is concerned with what people can accomplish together and how leadership emerges through day to day experience. Raelin (2016a), like Dewey, places dialogue at the heart of leadership. Dewey believed strongly in dialogue as a means of negotiation and renegotiation between people in order to arrive at agreements, create mutual learning, mitigate against the effects of hierarchy and dominant values (Jenlink, 2009). Raelin states that through the dialogic process we listen, reflect and entertain the prospect of being changed by what we hear in an open-ended process in which neither party truly knows the end result. We shape what we know; we derive a form of truth with others as we search for it (Raelin, 2016b). L-A-P is consistent with democratic principles through “its commitment to the dignity of involved persons who are given the right and voice to participate in decisions that affect them” (p.127). Raelin’s L-A-P pays attention to the social interactions, reflections and adjustments of those involved rather than focusing on the leader/follower relationship, positioning leadership as a consequence of collaborative meaning making in practice, “evolving from partners in work and in community settings creating their own useful and sustainable future”(p.149).

Central to L-A-P is the practice perspective which “affords primacy to a world that is continuously on the move” (Simpson, 2016, p.3) and looks at leadership as a socially emerging process. Simpson (2016) proposes that leadership practice emerges during socially engaged talk as the human and material agencies intertwine. Simpson further advises that the processual approaches to studying

leadership are lacking in contemporary literature and therefore opportunities for innovative research methods exist.

It cannot be denied that the underpinnings of leadership situated in democratic principles exist in tension with free market economy values of individualism, self-regulating markets and competition which currently saturate the educational landscape.

Early Childhood Leadership Research

It would be fair to say that early childhood leadership (ECL) is an area of study still in its infancy. A search of journals dating prior to 21st century offers little in the way of specific reference to ECL. Today, despite the huge potential for leadership to impact positively on the provision of services, the landscape remains relatively unexplored. Models of ECL have evolved mainly from school research that is characterised by hierarchical and masculine notions of leadership. To date the vast amount of research has focused on the ‘micro concept’ of leadership, investigating traits, environments, styles, roles and behaviours of the leaders themselves (Dunlop, 2008). Internationally investigations have considered the distinction between leadership and management, the role gender plays in early childhood leadership together with a growing interest in the importance of context (Hujala, 2013; Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, 2012; Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002; Waniganayake, 2014). Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken & Tamati, (2009) emphasise the importance of context saying that there is a need to recognise leadership as being “highly contextually bound” (p 5) and that in the past “considerations of circumstances such as ethnicity/social class/location and beliefs that speak to different dimensions of identity have been discounted” (Fitzgerald, 2003, as cited Thornton et al., 2009, p 5).

Comparative studies have investigated leadership from the perspective of various countries, providing a widening outlook as to how leadership can be understood in terms of context and culture (Hujala et.al, 2016). Effectiveness of leadership is a theme explored by Aubrey (2011) in a comprehensive study of ECL in England. In this study researchers endeavoured to capture the relationship between the dynamic contexts of change, leadership work itself and the interaction between staff in a diverse range of settings (p.5). Results from the study identified a need

for leadership to manage change effectively, particularly as change can be a source of tension when those involved feel disempowered. Effective mentoring of leaders in the realm of practical knowledge, allowing leaders to reflect on experiences could be useful if handled sensitively. Opportunities to be involved in research allowed participants to grow their personal knowledge base examining and questioning 'truths' that underpin teaching and leading practice. At the time of the study new forms of interprofessional leadership added a further layer of complexity to the concept of leadership. Siraj and Hallet (2013) have also investigated the theme of effectiveness in their work pairing effectiveness with caring leadership. Acknowledging that ECL is a distinct and complex phenomenon these authors align effective leadership, advocating that an ethic of care should be a social principle in all relationships with teachers, children, families and multi-agency professionals (p.1). Care, they say, should guide professional action. Sustaining relationships is therefore key to effective leadership (p.1).

Pedagogical and teacher leadership are emerging fields of study associated with effective leadership. Clarkin-Phillips (2009) writes that "pedagogical leadership commands particular interest because it is pedagogy that impacts most immediately on children"(p.22). Male & Palaiologou (2015) offer a slant on pedagogical leadership that maintains that pedagogy is an ambiguous term when attached to the concept of leadership.

Disputing earlier simplistic views that teachers act as pedagogical leaders by virtue of their being in direct contact with children, these authors concur with Osberg (2010), that leadership should be understood as an emergent process, orientated towards invention of the new, rather than control and closure. Furthermore leadership could be considered in terms of engagement of actions and issues that are situation related rather than about its purpose. Pedagogy is redefined to incorporate the "creation of learning environments in which the centrality of interactions and relationships among learners, teachers, family and community interact with external elements in order to jointly construct knowledge" (Male & Palaiologou, 2015, p.219). This research suggests that rather than searching for a singular suitable model of leadership, leaders should treat each situation, each encounter as unique and therefore realise that there is never

going to be one universal 'right' way. In a similar manner Cooper (2014) expands the pedagogical leadership story with the notion of teacher leadership that encompasses not only pedagogy and curriculum but also the empowerment of children, teachers and families.

Cooper (2014), supporting Raelin's (2005) leaderful practice concept, suggests that leadership can be viewed as an everyday practice embedded in teacher practices. Cooper expresses problems with the prevailing leader/follower binary which ignore the complexity of human relations and identity formation and maintenance (Woodrow & Busch, 2008, p.86). Cooper shares the view espoused in literature that the dominant business model of leadership of tight regulations and top-down decision making is at odds with the community focus of early childhood centres and calls for leadership concepts specific to early childhood (Thornton et.al., 2009; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). This includes diverse cultural perspectives and conceptions of leadership.

Once such research study relays the leadership stories from Te Kōpae Piripono, a Māori immersion early childhood centre, which provides insights into how children and families may be viewed and celebrated as leaders. This centre recognises that "every member of the community can be viewed as a leader" (Tamati, 2011, p.69). The whānau context of Te Kōpae Piripono values the skills, abilities and contributions of everyone. Leadership at this centre is constructed through the lens of four responsibilities;

- Te Mouri Takohanga ('Being Responsible')
- Te Whai Takohanga ('Having Responsibility')
- Te Kawe Takohanga ('Taking Responsibility')
- Te Tuku Takohanga ('Sharing Responsibility')

Powerful stories of leadership talk of children's ability to take charge of play scenarios, change roles and responsibilities. Whānau take responsibility for the education, health and well-being of their children and children show courage to get involved through trusting relationships. The valuing of caring whānau relationships is the key to this leadership construct.

I have attempted to give an impression that leadership can and should be researched, examined and expressed in a myriad of ways. Each researcher brings their own reflexivity which in turn will shape the slant of their research. Each context brings a unique environment. Reviewing these studies I am overwhelmed by the lack of attention given to the voices of children in the pursuit of effective leadership. It is, after all, the learners for whom leadership will have the greatest impact. Waniganayake (2014) concurs with this observation writing that in Australia no publications incorporate children's perceptions of adults demonstrating leadership. Waniganayake advises that educational leadership is an abstract phenomenon so any study involving child participants would require a range of techniques to capture children's perspectives along with openness to unexpected possibilities.

The New Zealand context of ECL research mirrors the international situation; a limited number studies are available to draw upon by a small number of researchers. The field therefore remains a rich ground for inquiry with many pathways yet to be travelled. Recognising the lack of a cohesive leadership strategy for early childhood and in a desire to promote action in leadership development, the New Zealand Teacher's Council carried out an investigation into the situation. The report (Thornton et.al, 2009) revealed a number of issues facing New Zealand ECL, suggesting unwillingness by many teachers to connect with the notion of leadership maybe due to a consequence of the lack of research available or the lack of professional development programmes to support professional leadership growth. By and large most early childhood leaders come to their position under prepared with little or no professional knowledge of leadership. Relying on past experiences of leadership, learning on the job and the support of managers, often off site, ECL build their notions of leadership through on the job learning, shaping their perceptions of what it means to be a leader, muddling along over time. Mitchell (1997, cited in Clarkin-Phillips, 2007) supports this view expressing that no clear pathway to leadership exists in New Zealand early childhood, as seen in other areas of education (p.19). Similarly, Thornton (2005) revealed a lack of clarity in educator's understandings of leadership together with a lack of support for leadership development.

Leadership development

Professional development offered for ECL tends to focus on the individual supervisor or head teacher rather than opportunities for teams to engage and reflect on notions of leadership. Raelin (2004) contends that most leadership training adopts the 'list' approach, focusing on skills and attributes of individual candidates deemed to be suitable leaders. The assumption is that these individuals, once trained, will then return to their workplace to implement their newly acquired knowledge of how to be a good leader, only to find that no one else in the workplace has an understanding of this new knowledge. Hence the phrase "You should never send a changed person back to an unchanged environment" (Raelin, 2004, p.131). It is further argued that investing in individual leadership training perpetuates the notion that leadership is something to be built into positions, some people are eligible for leadership and other deemed to be followers.

An alternative is to situate leadership development in the context it occurs and orientate it towards collective leadership learning. This theme was taken up by Clarkin-Phillips (2007) in a comprehensive investigation into how professional development can provide motivation and engagement towards shifting leadership practices. Using a case study approach three early learning centres working with the Educational Leadership project (ELP) identified gateways that enabled teachers to make changes to their practice utilising distributed leadership as a foundation of encouragement towards taking risks with professional development. A culture of shared responsibility was created as each teacher's emerging strengths and expertise were recognised, encouraged and supported. Clarkin-Phillips (2007) reported that increased teacher agency correlates with increased opportunities for teachers to develop leadership learning. The study concluded that distributed leadership encouraged teachers to be risk takers; to be comfortable with not always being right and importantly is a powerful mechanism for generating pedagogical change (p.26). Distributed leadership sits well with the collegial working environments of New Zealand early learning centres where teachers work in close proximity to one another, in environments that require high levels of trust and communication between team members to operate optimally.

Few studies can be found documenting the implementation of distributed leadership in early learning settings. One example is the Massey Child Care Inc study, Palmerston North, whereby as part of their involvement in the Centres of Innovation programme, the centre's infant and toddler section investigated innovative approaches to educational leadership (Bary et al., 2008, p.1). Utilising a community of practice framework, underpinned by distributed leadership the centre set out to examine how educational leadership, within a community of practice impacted on infant and toddlers disposition to enquire? (p.2). Of particular interest to my research was the adoption of an inquiry focused approach which required power sharing between all teachers and learners to create an enabling environment to support learning. In order for this to occur a culture of self sustaining teams replaced hierarchical leadership, with teachers working cohesively in the best interests of children, families and one another (p.160). Ideas around distributed leadership were shaped by a commitment to investigate leadership as a collective endeavour that utilised the skills, strengths and knowledge of all teachers within the centre.

Through the introduction of the concept of democracy, as it pertains to education and by reviewing literature, together with a sample of early childhood leadership research a platform has been provided from which I explore leadership within the early childhood context of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Chapter 3 – A New Zealand Perspective

Overview

This chapter brings the study to a specific Aotearoa New Zealand context examining three major influences currently impacting early childhood in New Zealand. The central theme of democracy is woven into the New Zealand context and concepts of place based and citizenship education are positioned as major influences on this study.

New Zealand early childhood context

The context of Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education is lived out against a backdrop of neoliberal realities, neo-colonial practices and the enactment of *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996, [hereafter *Te Whāriki*]). This context is not always harmonious as practitioners navigate tensions that arise from the interplay of these three prominent influences. A diverse range of services provide care and education for children aged 0-6 years. This array of services includes kindergartens, nga Kōhanga¹ Reo, playcentres², home-based services and community and private education and care centres. Each service varies in their philosophical approach, age groupings and historical origins. Kindergarten for example can trace its roots in Aotearoa, New Zealand beginning in the late 19th century, with philanthropist intentions to “rescue children of poor parents and prepare them for public schooling” (May, p.32, 2015). The Kōhanga Reo movement grew out of a recognised need to counter the decline of Māori language and address issues associated with loss of identity in Māori communities (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2014). Playcentre evolved during the years of the Second World War with a philosophy to support families and promote developments in early childhood education focusing on child initiated play and parents as educators. Typically most children leave the early childhood setting to attend compulsory schooling aged 5 years. The sector is regulated by a number of national frameworks; the Education Act (1989), the 2008 regulations for ECE

¹ Kōhanga Reo or language nests, where the structures, processes and language of the organisation are based in Māori world view.

² Playcentre is a parent cooperative with a holistic approach to education, valuing the education of parents to lead session as highly as it values the education of young children.

services and playgroups and the Vulnerable Children's Act (2014) to ensure a safe workforce for those engaged in educational organisations. Other agencies involved to ensure quality is maintained are the Education Review Office, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Education Council (Tesar, 2015). All families are eligible for 20 free hours resulting in high early childhood participation rates for children aged 3 and 4; 96.2% (Ministry of Education, 2015). The push to have children participate in early childhood education can be viewed as part of a wider political agenda impacted by the global influence of neoliberalism.

Neo Liberalism

Writers have labelled neo-liberalism the grand narrative of our time (Moss, 2014; Skerrett, 2013). It is now a firmly entrenched approach to policy that shapes and permeates all facets of life and in particular has reconfigured early childhood education to become what Moss (2014) refers to as “a story of markets and high returns” (p.17).

The road to radically reforming the New Zealand education system can trace its origins to the ideological shift to the right implemented by the 1984 Labour government. Almost overnight New Zealand moved from being a welfare state to a market driven, user pays economy. This reorganisation meant pursuing reforms to restructure education based on recommendations proposed in *The Picot Report* and translated into a published policy response entitled *Tomorrow's Schools*. Neo liberal policy approach emphasised devolution, efficiency and choice (Codd, 2005). Where once it was unimaginable to commercialise a public service such as education, there now prevailed the notion that education could be viewed as a commercial enterprise; parents were positioned as buyers of a product, educational services, to be consumed by their children. Codd (2005) writes that education could now be viewed as a *product* and schools were seen as being similar to small businesses. Early childhood education has been strongly impacted by the neo liberal policies of the past decades. Competition, privatisation and corporatisation are all features currently entrenched in the contemporary early year's educational setting. A focus on participation over quality provision, compulsory early childhood for beneficiaries of state welfare, a drive towards

‘schoolification’ along with a narrowing of how quality is perceived are just some impacts. Most obvious though is the explosive growth in the number of private, for profit childcare centres in the market place. True to neo liberal principles, this escalation in the number of private centres exists in order to provide parental choice. With no regulations on the number of centres in any given region it is up to the laws of supply and demand to operate as indicators of under-and over-supply as well as being an incentive to produce high-quality, competitively priced goods for which there is an established demand (Olssen & Matthews 1997). Figures for children attending private childcare centres stood at 63% in 2014, an increase of 50% compared to 2004. In contrast the number of children attending kindergartens, playcentres and ngā kōhanga reo fell (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Neo liberal policy reforms are served and maintained through the mechanisms of the market, which in itself has to be ‘marketed’ to those who exist within. This requires comparative data in order to create competitive conditions and a platform of choice. Within the market, professionals are managed to produce this data and controlled through performativity systems to ensure the ongoing production of measureable outcomes. Managerialism has become the language of ordinary communication within the early childhood workplace. Requests to improve efficiency, consider ways to cut costs, increase income, make tough strategic decisions, be sustainable, centralise tasks or remain viable are received on a regular basis. This has become the environment of every day, business as usual. Moss (2014) urges educators to regard neo-liberalism as just one story or way of making sense of the world. It strives to be the dominant discourse through what Foucault calls an imposing of a ‘regime of truth’, directing what we see as truth, deciding somethings are practical and somethings dubious. In this way alternative ways of interpreting the world are marginalised. Giroux, speaking of Edward Said (2012, cited in Ritchie & Skerrett, p.65) offers advice in this age of consumerism, urging educators to “reject the notion of markets driven pedagogy, one that has created cheerful robots”. An alternative is to engage with critical educational issues and explore possibilities grounded in democracy and an equitable society.

Neo Colonialism

We cannot escape our history; Aotearoa New Zealand is a colonial settler country, whose legacy is still being felt today most keenly in negative impacts for Māori as generations continue to struggle with the burden of loss of land and language. Rather than recognising this struggle, I would offer that colonization has largely been relegated to the past, a chapter in history to move on from. The Treaty of Waitangi provided the basis for a bicultural New Zealand, forged on the principles of participation, partnership and protection. However the impacts of British colonialism didn't quite keep up with this vision. Generations of Māori children were discouraged from speaking their language at school. Health issues such as smoking related diseases, diabetes and obesity are prevalent, high unemployment and crime statistics are reported (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). Most alarming is the high percentage of Māori children living in severe poverty in New Zealand; 13 percent as reported by the Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty, 2013. In recent times educational discourse has positioned Māori in a deficit model categorising Māori as vulnerable.

Pākehā on the other hand have been beneficiaries of colonialism with higher incomes and better health and educational outcomes. The historical circumstances in which colonialization played out are slowly gaining recognition in New Zealand, with the government only recently acknowledging that the Land Wars are a neglected part of New Zealand's history. Writing from the perspective of a Pākehā educator Warren (2013) speaks of how colonisation has positioned Pākehā culture as normal and Māori culture as 'other'. She explains that Pākehā perceive culture as something other people have.

Our colonial legacy raises and necessitates uncomfortable and confronting conversations forcing educators to examine dominant discourses that shape our notions of truth. Warren (2013) writes that truth is linked to systems of power which in turn shape what we consider to be normal. It is these assumed truths that we must challenge if we are to move away from positioning Māori as 'other'. Tesar (2015) maintains that both neo-liberal and neo-colonial practices are embedded in early childhood, Aotearoa, New Zealand, implicitly entangled with one another. Optimistically, Tesar (2015) remarks that *Te Whāriki*, (MoE, 1996)

New Zealand early childhood curriculum, is uniquely positioned. As the official early childhood curriculum document it represents the dominant discourse in early childhood while simultaneously promoting the knowledge of Māori (Tesar, 2015).

***Te Whāriki* – New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum**

The early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* provides the basis for implementation of early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996). Responding to the diverse services that represent ECE, *Te Whāriki* can be seen as providing a framework for multiple curricula. The metaphor of a woven mat does not so much prescribe curricula content, instead it allows for the distinct nature of individual educational settings, allowing practitioners to weave their own ways of interpretation. *Te Whāriki* reflects the bicultural context of New Zealand ECE, highlighting the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi and signalling both nationally and internationally that a dominant Western discourse would not be placed centre stage but would sit alongside other cultural perspectives (Nuttall, 2003, p.249). Two world views are offered, Western and Māori. *Te Whāriki* offers a vision of cultural equity through the words “all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (MoE, 1996, p.9) though it is acknowledged that challenges exist for this to be realised as teachers grapple with how to incorporate te ao Māori, te reo, create opportunities for Māori to voice their perceptions and foster climates of collaboration and power sharing. The four principles of *Te Whāriki*; empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships, position learning to be underpinned by sociocultural theory, emphasising an empowering, relational, interconnected, holistic account of learning (Lee, Carr & Soutaer, 2013). Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological contextual model provides an explanation of the context of the early childhood curriculum, highlighting the connections and interactions between different levels of influence on the child in the early childhood setting. *Te Whāriki* acknowledges the uniqueness of context by stating “each community that children belong to makes specific curriculum demands” (MoE, p.19). *Te Whāriki* attracts considerable interest and is viewed as an exemplar that has had a significant impact on the formulation of curriculum development throughout the world. Given that *Te*

Whāriki was conceived twenty years ago in a climate of growing neo liberal educational policies, the fact that it remains relevant and applicable today is a testament to the far sightedness of the authors. The durability of *Te Whāriki* lies perhaps in its principles, non-prescriptive open-endedness, and as a counter to neo liberalism through the language of “opportunity, respect and relationships” as opposed to “risk, vulnerability and competition” (Nuttall, 2013). The language of *Te Whāriki* aligns with themes of democracy; promoting diversity and understanding learning as a holistic, open-ended activity.

Returning to democracy

I wish to return to democracy, as outlined by Dewey and reinforce the view that democracy in its fullest form could serve as an underpinning value in early childhood leadership. With this as a guiding principle a course can be set to counter the negative narrow rationality of neo-liberalism, elevate the voices of others, question our ‘truths’ and embrace complexity and messy possibilities.

Democracy is no stranger to early childhood. Looking to Northern Italy and the region of Reggio Emilia where the municipal school movement began in the aftermath of the Second World War, an early childhood system that celebrates diversity, difference and pluralism can be found (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). Scared by earlier fascist experiences and rebelling against the idea that learning concerns the transmission of existing knowledge, Reggio Emilia placed participatory democracy as a central value. Within the New Zealand context Mitchell (2014) supports the democratic provision of early childhood education, advocating a shift from the market approach to a partnership model within communities. Mitchell (2010) calls for young children to be recognised as citizens within a social group and wider community, offering support and connectedness for families. This vision opposes the narrow market framing of young children as dependents within families where the main purpose of early childhood education is educational achievement (Mitchell, 2010). As a champion of democratic participation, Moss (2014) writes that we need more stories about early childhood education, multiple stories, none of which claim monopoly. Moss (2014) proposes that the story of democracy provides an alternative to the story of neoliberalism with its markets and high returns. Neoliberalism, Moss declares, is “at best

suspicious and at worst dismissive” of democracy (p.118), except of course where it pertains to individual consumer choice. Instead of using words such as ‘business’, ‘investments’, ‘evidence-based’, ‘returns’ or ‘consumers’, Moss’s story uses words like ‘possibilities’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘wonder’, ‘interpretations’ and ‘experimentation’. Of these words ‘experimentation’ is held to be most closely aligned to democracy, as “democracy provokes a desire to experiment” (p.114) and it is through experimentation there exists the possibility for undecidability, a condition Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) inform us, that democracy may exist (p.111). A call to undertake ‘democratic experimentalism’ is advocated by Fielding and Moss (2011) as a possible means of encouraging innovative developments by ordinary people trying out alternative arrangements among themselves (p.145). Experimentalism associates closely with pragmatist philosophy and refers to a process of learning from the experience of others (Ansell, 2013). Democratic experimentalism emphasises local variation, is enacted in real worlds and is embedded in the wider notion of inquiry that is social and collaborative. Dewey is frequently associated with experimentalism, stressing the need for democratic experimentalism to extend into everyday practice (Ansell, 2013, p.168).

Te Whāriki and democracy

New Zealand’s bicultural early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*, was conceived in democratic values. Developed through a democratic, consultative process, it sought to include diverse voices and represent a holistic, relational perspective for children’s learning. Children’s individual rights to be recognised as active participants in their own learning, together with children’s citizenship rights are articulated in the opening aspirational statement of *Te Whāriki*;

to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.9)

This view supports Dewey’s philosophy that a fundamental purpose of education is to prepare students for democratic citizenship (Jenlink, 2009, p.4). As a holistic curriculum *Te Whāriki* rejects traditional notions of curriculum as prescribed aims and outcomes (Nuttall, 2003), instead each early childhood service is expected to

weave their own notions of curriculum in collaboration with teachers, children and families. This emphasis on collaboration enables communities to craft new and unique forms of knowledge rather than reproducing what Dewey referred to as ready-made knowledge. Although not explicitly stated, democratic values are embedded in *Te Whāriki* through the principles and strands of the curriculum document. Farquhar (2015) writes that “curriculum is a site of democratic debate and contest, requiring particular ways of thinking about knowledge and learners” (p.58). Closely linked to control, curriculum can be understood as a way in which governments seek to regulate knowledge and assert expectations. This view is supported by Duhn (2006) who expresses that in order to see *Te Whāriki* as a democratic tool there needs to be a willingness to explore how curriculum is “an effect and instrument of power and politics” (p.200). Participation and collaboration are not about universal truths and understandings, they can also evoke conflict and tension, something Farquhar (2015) describes as being necessary to create respect for diversity. As a bicultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki* invites alternatives to dominate discourses; its commitment to young children and families is counter to typical norms of power in Western democracies (Nuttall, 2003, p.9). Farquhar (2015) reminds educators that curriculum exists in the everyday micro-practices when teachers are working with children; it is here that there is “still room for curiosity, for linguistic hospitality and for plurality of subjectivities” (p.68). Dewey proposed that democracy can be expressed “primarily as a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Jenlink, 2009, p.5). If teachers intentionally interpret *Te Whāriki* as a democratic curriculum it can become a way of life, or mode of living, within each early childhood service.

The concept of democracy in early childhood education can be expressed in the complex relationships, interactions and encounters, negotiated in our everyday activity. Democracy is mobilized through dialogue, not entrenched in grand narratives, or absolute truths. Multiple stories can be told as a collective sense of agency creates an excited buzz of creative activity. Taking first steps on this path predicates a participatory environment where any person or persons can set the direction for learning and be viewed as leaders.

Place based and citizenship education

In order to expand a view of leadership to encompass Dewey's vision of democracy, incorporating dialogue, interconnectivity, relationships and diversity, an emphasis on inquiry within the local community is proposed. Drawing on the skills, knowledge and expertise within and beyond the centre gives rise to leadership as a collaborative venture, devoid of hierarchy or a discernible leader/follower relationship. As a practice leadership becomes focused on the social interactions of all concerned. From a democratic perspective leadership becomes a creative social process inviting participation.

Situating the study within the local community integrates notions of place as a major influence. Traditionally place has been seen primarily as a geographical expression linked to physical locations. Considering place in terms of educational leadership requires a more cognizant conception, one that includes much more than the physical. This broadening image incorporates a conception of place to be seen as having "a fundamental impact upon an individuals' identity, value set and life experience and is critical in defining experiences of social exclusion, poverty and socio-economic outcomes" (Trickett & Lee, 2010, p. 430). Place can be seen in terms of people, their daily experiences in relation to one another, incorporating the culture, history and stories of people past, present and in the future.

McInerney, Smyth and Down (2011) offer a view of place as a lens through which young people begin to make sense of themselves and their surroundings, form relationships, develop a sense of community and learn to live with others (p.5).

Place based education connects explicitly with Dewey's notion that education needs to link individuals to each other and their communities (Roberts, 2012). Noting the disconnection between children's lived experiences and school learning in the 19th century, Dewey promoted the concept of experiential learning contending that experience should be a key educator, whereby the school world and real world blend. Exploration of the local community breaks down boundaries between the early childhood centre and the wider world addressing Dewey's notion of disconnection. The centre can embed itself in community rather than isolate itself. Children are viewed as citizens actively engaged within a community. Place based education has been promoted as a means of drawing

attention to environmental, sustainability and ecological issues (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2004,) and brings together a diverse range of labels; outdoor education, contextual education, indigenous education, community-based education and environmental education. I believe that place based education holds the potential to provide a platform to expand the view of leadership to include children and adults alike and function with the three previously outlined influences currently dominating early childhood Aotearoa, New Zealand; neo liberalism, neo colonialism and *Te Whāriki*.

As inhabitants of a community everyone can offer valid knowledge and perspectives about communities that in turn shape and influence how participants think and connect with place. Through the implementation of an inquiry approach the quest for information and the production of new thinking can begin. It is through these quests opportunities for leadership will be afforded.

Taking a broad perspective, this sense of community links with children's early notions of citizenship. Within the early childhood domain citizenship education introduces children to critical thinking and identity formation regarding who they are in relation to a community, a country and the wider world. Developing a collective group identity fosters a sense of common humanity, respecting difference and diversity. Basic inquiry skills can develop as young children gather information from a variety of sources, make decisions, listen, communicate and take action. Local histories can be explored and legacies of colonialism unearthed.

The principles of *Te Whāriki* offer multiple entry points for place based and citizenship education in New Zealand (Manning, 2012).

- *Whakamana/Empowerment*; focuses on children's developing self-worth and identity and the discussion of bicultural issues (p.40). Furthermore assessment as a two-way process means that children can inform adults of learning, development and the environment by providing insights that adults may not have identified (p.40).
- *Kotahitangi/Holistic development*; within this principle the child's whole context, the physical surroundings, the emotional context and relationships with others contribute to the child's development. Tasks,

stories, events and activities should have meaning and make connections with Māori children's lives and be enriching for all (p.41).

- *Whānau Tangata/Family and community*; local communities and neighbourhoods are specifically noted as influencing children's well-being (p.42).
- *Ngā Hononga/Relationships*; learning through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things is emphasised in this principle. Social interactions, opportunities to interact with the environment along with the inclusion of Māori people, places and artifacts should be provided.

Te Whāriki asks educators to be creators of curriculum, weaving their own flavour in response to community influence and educators are expected to develop programmes to meet the needs of its children, families, setting and local community (p.27).

Manning (2012) offers that place based education is consistent with the Ministry of Education's (2011) *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners*, as it affirms Māori learners as Māori by providing authentic contexts for learning language, identity and culture, though he laments the fact that very few teachers understand the ideas underpinning place based learning. Penetito (2009) writes that Māori have always had a tradition of place based education, for indigenous peoples a sense of place is fundamental to human need. In New Zealand indigenous people formalise relationships between themselves and their environments through *pepeha* (the way in which you introduce yourself in Māori) which asks the questions; who am I? Where do I come from? Davies (1993) supports this view suggesting that for indigenous peoples "the land is a substance endowed with sacred meanings, embedded in social relations and fundamental to the definition of a people's existence and identity" (p. 5). This view contrasts sharply with the Western perspective of land as a commodity to be bought and sold, containing resources to be exploited and profited.

Place base education counters neo liberal notions of efficiency, predictability and control through offering a curriculum that emerges from unique communities where learning is rooted in local, 'our place' thinking that is relevant and real for

children, teachers and whānau. Wide and messy possibilities abound. Places contain complex local histories; discussions considering how places were inhabited in the past and how historical events have transformed people and land, enables young children to engage in beginning concepts of decolonisation. Place based inquiry education offers an approach to becoming increasingly familiar with local narratives assisting teachers, children and whānau (the extended family) to be part of the community rather than passive observers (Manning, 2012).

Place based education offers an assemblage of thinkings that can influence leadership discussions and enrich aspirations to connect leadership with democratic principles. Literature linking place and leadership is almost non-existent, yet the idea of place is influential for leadership. Place provides the unique context in which leadership is enacted. Each place is different and it is in this difference opportunity to experiment with leadership occurs. Learning to be a citizen in any given community requires connecting children to places and to issues that affect them. As place becomes the focus of the investigation opportunities abound to create meaningful connections and interconnections, no one central director is discernible. Place based education links closely with indigenous leadership thinking as it expresses the principle of “all things being related”. It stands for what really matters – people and relationships. This includes not only relationships between humans but humans and non-human life.

Influenced by Well’s (1999) assertion that inquiry learning is most effective when it engages with children’s authentic questions, this research proposes using place based inquiry education, utilising children’s questions relating to their place as a platform to broaden our concept of leadership and afford leadership opportunities for children, teachers and families. The next chapter will outline the research methodology.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

Overview

This chapter describes the design and theoretical framework used in this interpretist research. Sociocultural theory underpins the study, acknowledging children as competent, capable research participants. A case study approach is utilised and the various data collection methods are discussed. Ethical considerations, specific for this study, are outlined. Woods and Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework and Raelin's (2011) four C's of leaderful practice will be overlapped as a method data analysis.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate early childhood leadership in an everyday teaching context that offers alternative possibilities to the individualised, role focused traditional model. By adopting a more expansive conception of leadership, space opens up affording opportunities for children, teachers and families to engage in leadership. Using the lens of leadership-as-practice a democratic, collaborative possibility may emerge whereby the lines between leader/follower are blurred and dialogue takes centre stage. This research seeks to make connections between the collaborative nature of learning that involves connecting with others through acts of inquiry (Hedges & Cooper, 2014) and the notion of leadership as a collaborative, everyday practice.

The question under investigation is;

How can collaborative exploration of the local community afford leadership opportunities for children, families and teachers and expand our concept of leadership?

Menter, Elliot and Hulme (2011) propose that the research question serves four important purposes; to crystallise the focus of the research, to set parameters, inform the design and methods for gathering evidence and finally to steer the course of the investigation. By investigating this question the study will contribute to the small but growing amount of research exploring early childhood leadership as a unique practice, differing from other sectors of education.

As the researcher I bring my own worldview to this enquiry; I acknowledge that there are multiple interpretations of reality and that objectivity is not sought in this study. As I will be researching from a social constructivist theoretical approach I will be interested in how the truth or any agreements regarding knowledge arise through a dialogue of negotiation.

Design and theoretical framework

Research requires structure and design. This ensures that all aspects of the research are in tune with one another and importantly that the research question can be answered by the data collected.

Acknowledging the messy, complex, multi-layered learning nature of early childhood environments a qualitative, interpretivist case study approach was adopted. For this study Merriam (2009) offers that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds and the meanings they attribute to experiences (p.6). As a paradigm for investigating a social issue, qualitative research stresses understanding over knowing and therefore fitted with my aim to explore and understand leadership within the context of one early childhood setting. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) suggest that research design in a qualitative study is an iterative and circular process “as different elements come into focus and interact with each other in different ways at different times” (p.223). Therefore it was envisaged that my research design would be flexible and open to a degree of tweaking along the journey. By involving young children as research participants I was expecting and looking forward to the unexpected.

Interpretivism opposes the positivist ontological view that there can only be one reality, proposing instead that the world holds multiple realities. Furthermore interpretivism replaces positivist notions of explanation, predication and control emphasising instead understanding, meaning and action (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Interpretive approaches have frequently been used by researchers in the field of early childhood education (Hedges, 2007) and are most commonly associated with education in the Reggio Emilia region of Italy. Adopting an interpretivist approach positions the researcher as a passionate participant, forming close relationships with other participants.

Sociocultural theory has significantly influenced early childhood practice, prioritising not only learning with and from others but also situating children as learners within communities. *Te Whāriki*, draws on several theories, however sociocultural theory can be seen as the primary perspective from which this curriculum document can be interpreted. A sociocultural approach to learning positions young children as being “competently proactive in applying learning dispositions of inquiry and collaboration” (Ritchie, 2010, p.3) supported by people and cultural tools. Edwards (2006) advises that sociocultural theory research should focus on two significant factors; communities of practice and the forms of knowledge relevant to that community (p.242). Communities of practice can be viewed as places where knowledge is used and shaped into forms that are acceptable within the community. These communities have shared histories and values that allow common meanings to be ascribed to objects or events (Edwards, 2006, p.242). Knowledge in communities of practice is expressed by Edwards (2006) as being “mediated by more expert members through the ways that the tools and artifacts of the community are used and most particularly through the meanings ascribed to the tools” (p.242). By adopting a sociocultural perspective my study took into consideration the social, historical and cultural dimensions of everyday activities (Fleer, Anning & Cullen, 2004). In recognition of these ideas the study promoted conjoint learning within the context of the wider local community, valued language as a principal cultural tool and utilised methods of documentation that invited participation. As a lens to explore and inform leadership sociocultural theory offered a notion of leadership as being a web of possibilities, constructed through dialogue and social interaction.

Social constructivist theory, positioning young children as powerful, competent research participants and viewing learning as a social interactive process is evident in this study. Lincoln and Guba (2016) propose that the term ‘constructivist’ should be thought of as simply a metaphor, not for something real but as a way of making sense of something (p.29). Social constructivism, as a branch of sociocultural theory, emphasises language as an important cultural tool in the construction of knowledge and is strongly influenced by the work of Vygotsky (Dolya, 2009).

For Vygotsky cultural tools are the core element through which human interaction and meaning making takes place. Cultural tools exist in two forms; psychological tools which comprise of language and thought and physical tools such as books, maps, photographs or computers (Conkbayir & Pascal, 2014). Vygotsky promoted the idea that children construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and emphasised the role of social interaction and social experiences in the context of learning. Collaborative cognitive activity is highlighted by Vygotsky as contributing to knowledge construction. Importantly for this study Vygotsky, like Dewey, endorsed the view that learning should occur in the context of authentic activities that are relevant to children's lives, communities and cultures (Hedges & Cullen, 2005).

The case study

Case studies are appropriate for gathering rich amounts of data, in-depth understandings and new insights. In case studies the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. As an approach case studies are relevant when looking to search for meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2014). A case study focuses on a bounded system, concentrating on a phenomenon of some sort, in a small geographic space. This could be represented by a single person, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2014, p.40). The bounded system in this study is represented by a single early childhood centre. Restricting the object of study is, according to Merriam (2014) the most defining characteristic of a case study. A case study is useful in providing detailed empirical data allowing for the development of relevant, valid theory in an area that has been little researched (Hedges, 2007). As I have been able to discover very few examples of how early childhood centres have actively promoted an expansive notion of leadership, incorporating teachers, children and whānau, I consider this an area that has been to date under researched and therefore a case study approach appropriate. Atkins (2012) offers that a case study is applicable as a means of conducting a flexible, small scale investigation and can be useful to explore a variety of situations and contexts (p.108). This study deals with central abstract concepts of leadership as practice and democracy and illustrates these in a real-life, dynamic situations and a variety of contexts. Case studies are described

as being heuristic, meaning that they “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Merriam, 2009, p.44).

All research designs have strengths and limitations. Case studies have been criticised due to their concentration on one unit of study thus contributing to the issue of generalisability. Generalisability is a determinate in reliability and relates to transferability. As a case study is context specific it is up to the reader to take from the research that which they find most applicable to their own situation. Merriam (2009) cautions however that it is the responsibility of the researcher to “provide enough detailed description of the study’s context to enable readers to compare and “fit” with their situations” (p.226). It is for this reason that the term ‘thick description’ is applied to case studies. A case study must provide highly descriptive, detailed information regarding the setting and findings of the study. Cohen et.al (2013) affirm this by offering that the case study should strive to portray the lived experiences, thoughts and feelings for a situation (p.290). True to case study principles the study will utilise multiple data collection methods and sources of evidence.

Purposive sampling

Research involves the selecting of who, where and what to observe in order to answer the question under investigation. This study used purposive sampling as a means of selecting participants. Purposive sampling refers to the hand picking of participants by a researcher to be included in their study. The group is chosen to fulfil a specific purpose and in order to access knowledgeable participants (Cohen et.al, 2013). As I required multiple perspectives for this research my participants were chosen to cover the groups outlined in the research question; namely teachers, children and families. A further group was also considered as participants: community members.

All three teachers at the centre were invited to participate. The criteria for selecting teacher participants, was interest and willingness to be involved. Teachers were given an information outline of the research and able to ask questions regarding their involvement. If teachers were interested in the topic under investigation they filled out the teacher participant consent form.

As the research emphasises language as an important cultural tool in the construction of the knowledge children were selected as participants using the criteria that they were able to communicate and share ideas in a group learning situation. Children needed to be attending kindergarten during the data collection period and at times when exploration of the wider community occurred. Because some of the explorations of the community involved a degree of physical fitness, older children, those aged 3-4 years, attending the centre were invited to participate. Between six to eight child participants were involved with the study. The last group of participants, families, were difficult to pre select. Families can opt in or out of excursions within the community and participate at any level they wish. Methods to encourage families to contribute knowledge or expertise in regard to children's questions about their local community involved written contributions, casual conversations and semi structured interviews. It was hoped that one or two families would be able to contribute to this investigation on formal rather than casual basis. Overall my aim was to involve the greatest number of participants possible in order to gain a thick description of the case study.

Merriam (2009), informs us that purposive sampling in case studies requires two levels of sampling; the participants and the 'case' to be studied. This case study took place at one kindergarten in a small Waikato town. The population of the town in 2013 stood at 5127 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), of these 60% identified as Maori and 53% as European, a similar picture of cultural diversity is mirrored at the kindergarten. The sense of community at kindergarten expands beyond the physical boundary of the kindergarten to absorb the entire town and natural setting. A significant sense of place is evident in people's quest to make links and connections, to identify either through past relationships, kinship or geographically.

Data collection

With any research enquiry data must be actively collected, constructed and analysed by the researcher in order to answer the research questions. A feature of using an interpretive case study approach is gathering thick descriptions. A number of techniques were used in order to gather robust data from multiple sources of evidence.

Interviews

Interviews constitute one of the commonest forms of information gathering in social science research, largely due to their flexibility (Menter et.al, 2011). The prevalence and popularity of interviewing as a research method resides in its flexibility and powerfulness, allowing the researcher to gain deeper understandings by searching beneath layers of conversation. On a continuum semi structured interviews sit between structured and unstructured interviews and are extremely popular in the field of qualitative research (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The semi structured interview can draw parallels to everyday human conversations, though as Cohen, et.al (2013) point out, rather than occurring naturally it is a conversation that is planned and has a specific purpose. That purpose is to gain a subjective reply concerning a situation, issue or experience and is most commonly used when there is sufficient objective knowledge about an experience or phenomenon, but the subjective knowledge is lacking (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The semi structured interview provides a window to analyse the space between what is known by the researcher and the lived actual experience of the respondent. McIntosh and Morse (2015) write that this type of interview privileges both the knower and the known as both the researcher and the participant collaborate to produce knowledge that has potential to generate change. The popularity of semi structured interviews resides in the degree of flexibility afforded to both the interviewer and interviewee. Semi structured interviews were used to gather data from any family or community members involved with the study.

A focus group interview was conducted with teachers. Merriam (2009) describes the focus group interview as an interview on a topic with a group of people who are knowledgeable about the topic (p.93). Cohen et.al (2013) expand on this by explaining that the participants interact with each other more so than with the interviewer to construct a group rather than individual view. The data collected in this manner is socially constructed through group interaction and therefore fits well with a social constructivist research approach.

Conversational Interviews with children

Accepting Einarsdóttir's (2007) belief that "children are different from adults and to gain understanding of their lives and views, it is important to use methods that suit their competence, knowledge, interest and context" (p.199). Conversational interviews served as one form of data collection to elicit children's perspectives. Studies carried out in New Zealand by early childhood researchers show examples of including young children as participants in interviews but they are not as plentiful as I had imagined indicating that there is room for researchers to consider young children as co constructors in an interview context. Te One (2007) supports this opinion advocating the need for "research in early childhood education to consider how to support children's participation in actual research" (p.21). Research involving children is increasingly positioning children as citizens or agents within the early learning setting (Peters & Kelly, 2015). This paradigm shift from researching children as objects to be studied towards respecting children as social actors can be attributed to several influences. Peters and Kelly (2015) identify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promoting children's rights, a better understanding of socio-cultural theories an increasing appreciation of Reggio Emilia's education approach and work investigating power relations between adults and children, contributing to this. Te One (2007), recommends that an effective method of interviewing children is to participate alongside them. Conversations rather than formal interviews were found to be more an effective strategy. Conversational interviews with child participants' occurred after excursions and during the day as opportunities arose. I was interested in children's reflections of exploring the local community and any emerging ideas they had concerning leadership.

Children's Questions

Recordings of shared discussions loosely centred on children's questions focused data collection on dialogue, a central tenet of social constructivism. As I was seeking evidence of children socially constructing knowledge and meaning about their local community, conversations pertaining to questions about the environment, natural features, people, history, local culture or wildlife were of particular use for this study. These discussions provided evidence of children

taking leading roles in group discussions, leading the direction of the inquiry and contributing towards a view of leadership as a socially constructed practice.

Documentation

This study required experimenting with a visual methodology as a starting point to generate discussion around people, places and things in the local community.

From this visual starting point children's questions could be generated and their thinking mapped in a method similar to a mind map. Documentation was displayed for families to read and contribute to. Any knowledge or answers to children's questions was jotted down by family members or talked over with teachers, who could then write information down. In this way a visual, inclusive, participatory mind map grew as contributions were regularly added.

Documentation can be viewed as means of making learning visible and mapping as a research method that can be used for capturing what is socially and culturally valued. Dockett and Perry (2014) write that mapping can be viewed as a form of communication that tells a story, "not necessarily the full or only story" (p.33).

Learning stories are a form of narrative, credit-based assessment written by educators documenting children engaged in learning. Learning stories focus on key learning dispositions and relate to the strands of *Te Whāriki* (MacArthur, Purdue & Ballard, 2003). Commonly learning stories include the voice of the child and the educator and highlight the significance of learning in relation to past learning experiences, children's thinking and depict how educators support and extend the child's learning. Learning stories from participant children that were relevant to the topic under investigation were collected as data.

Photographs

Photographs can be a useful source of data. Photographs taken during visits around the local community provided conversational opportunities with children, acting as visual memory prompts particularly when children engage in reflection. Amos (2013) supports the use of photographs in data collection, writing that "for children photographs hold tangible memories of activities in which they have been engaged" (p.101).

Additionally photographs of trips to places of significance within the community were displayed within the centre. This enabled children to revisit experiences,

reflect and engaged in informal discussions with one another, contributing to children socially constructing and negotiating thinkings around their local place.

Ethics

This research project is underpinned by a strong duty of care for all participants and the wider local community. This caring relationship precedes the study and emphasises listening, hearing, feelings and respect. A stance to research *with* rather than *on* participants is evident by the fact that this study built on an existing component of the kindergarten's regular programme, focusing on interactions that occurred in every day experiences and interactions. Ethics are generally thought about as perceptions of right and wrong. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest that a useful way of considering ethics is to distinguish between two different dimensions of ethics in research; procedural ethics and ethics in practice (p.262). Procedural ethics are concerned with adhering to ethical guidelines as stated by educational institutes, which this study does. Ethics in practice refer to the ethical issues or dilemmas that may arise while doing research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Cohen et. al, (2013) suggest that all educational research is fraught with ethical dilemmas and challenges. The principal ethical considerations for this study concerned informed consent and assent, possible harm, relationships and power relations and role identity. This is by no means an exhaustive list but rather just those of primary concern.

Informed Consent and Assent

A founding principle of ethical research is to gain informed consent from all participants involved. Howe and Moses (1999, cited in Cohen et.al, 2011, p.77) offer that informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical behaviour "as it respects the right of individuals to exert control over their lives and to take decisions for themselves". Adult participants in this study were able to choose to participate on a voluntary basis, free from coercion, after reading the information letter, written in accessible language and asking any questions about the proposed research. Whereas adult participants can understand concepts of voluntarism and weigh up any potential risks pertaining to the nature of the research being undertaken, this is not so with young children. Therefore extra consideration must be taken when engaging in research that involves young children as participants.

In an early childhood setting it is common practice for consent to be given for a young child to be involved in research by a parent. The issue of informed consent becomes a challenge when assent and dissent are considered. After seeking informed consent from the parents of prospective young children I needed to approach the children themselves involved with my study. This was a high consideration as I wanted to be as open and transparent as possible and not exploit my position as a person that young children had an existing, trusting relationship with. Assent refers to the participant's willingness to be involved in the research. In order to assess this with young children I initially used an assent form which was read to the children by their parents and then by myself. Children placed ticks where they agreed to participate in the research and a colleague acted as a witness and support to the children during this process. Gaining assent should be thought of as an ongoing process (Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2009), whereby the researcher must continually assess children's willingness to remain in the study. If a child indicates that they no longer wish to be involved this is referred to as dissent. Signs of dissent will include talking off the topic being discussed, asking to play instead of being involved in discussions and non-engagement in the inquiry being undertaken. A long standing pre-existing relationship with the young children in this study meant that I was able to ascertain through verbal and nonverbal cues children's preferred involvement. Informed consent is therefore not a straightforward process while researching with young children, requiring ongoing monitoring and alertness.

Possible harm to participants

I include the principle of 'do no harm' as it must be considered as the guiding rule of research. This involves not only physical or emotional harm but also moral harm (Cohen et al, 2013). Being a small scale research study I did not anticipate any harm but as it is such an important principle it needs to be acknowledged as such. Maintaining the anonymity of participants is one method I utilised to avoid harm. Participants were able to choose pseudonyms to avoid recognition and the centre was not named. The flip side of harm is benefit. For the early learning centre in which I am involved this study extended an existing facet of the learning programme and recognised the potential for multiple people to contribute to the process of leadership.

Relationships and power relationships

Ethics around power need to be addressed, as do data collection techniques in order that children have multiple ways in which to express themselves. Te One (2007) writes that research in early childhood needs to consider how to support children's participation in the actual research process (p. 21). Socio cultural research positions children as capable participants in research and links with important principles of this research: democracy and participation. As a teacher researcher with existing relationships with the children involved, co construction of teaching and learning is a pre-established feature at the centre.

Role identity – insider research

It is fairly common for post graduate research to take place in the researchers own educational setting. This case study positions the researcher as an insider. Mercer (2007) describes 'insiders' as members of a specified group who have a lived familiarity within the group being researched. This position affords the advantages of ease of access, access to participants and having a pre-established relationship with most participants. In turn this can lead to the potential to generate thick descriptive data in an environment with a shared culture and language. Despite this tensions and issues may still arise from an insider perspective. These come predominantly in the form of role identity; am I a 'researching professional' or a 'professional researcher'? Atkins and Wallace (2012) write that the insider researcher faces the additional problem of needing to step back and look at the familiar as being different. Mercer agrees with this stating "conducting insider research is like wielding a double-edged sword" (p.7). Therefore it is possible that gains made through familiarity can be lost by the difficulty in making the familiar strange. True to the interpretive approach of this research I needed to be constantly vigilant to recognise that my own view of any situation was not the only or right interpretation. Rather than taking the lead role in many discussions I stood back and took on an observer role. In this way I was prevented from steering the discussions in a predetermined direction.

Power relations

Issues of power relations are inevitable in educational research that includes colleagues, children and families. Occupying the formal position of 'head teacher' implies that I hold a degree of power within the organisation; therefore

participants may decide to be involved in my study, not because they want to but to please me. In order to mitigate issues of power relations participants agreeing to be involved were able to contribute at a level of commitment that they felt comfortable. No pressure was put on participants to be involved or to offer more than they wanted to. Positioning children as key participants opened the research up to being led in unexpected directions. Children's contributions were often playful and humorous. Their dialogue contributed significantly to the research data. As this research was an exploration of a collaborative activity, empowerment is a major theme necessitating the voices of all participants to be heard as valid influences in the research. Learning to be reflexive and consider my own position and affect on this research was challenging.

Reflexivity

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) stress the connection between reflexivity and ethics. If reflexivity is viewed as a tool for scrutinising all aspects of the research process then this must include the interpersonal aspects of the research. Within the interpersonal space lurks the possibility to respect and uphold ethical principles. As an authentic researcher ethical considerations must always be at the forefront of my research endeavours. As the participants in this study include young children a high regard for ethics must be implicit throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Cohen et al. (2013) inform us that data analysis involves "making sense of data in terms of participant's definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (p.537). There is no one way in which to carry out data analysis, researchers are advised to be guided by the issue of fitness of purpose. Data from this qualitative research was largely textual and through the analysis process was transformed into findings. A robust system of analysing data is required in order to contribute towards the quality and validity of the research. After the time consuming process of transcribing interviews coding and categorising can begin. Analysing qualitative data is an iterative activity. Data needs to be gone over many times and a systematic exploration of what the data is saying is analysed in order to generate further questions and lines of inquiry to expand the study.

Guided by the social constructivist view that realities are produced from interactions between social agents, the processes and outcomes of these interactions were of significant interest to this study (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). This epistemological approach assisted in answering the question of what counts as leadership activity? As collaboration is a central belief in this study I needed to focus on group interactions. Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff (2010) offer two concepts to describe leadership activity, which are used to delimit and identify leadership processes, practices and interactions; co-orientation and action-spacing. Co-orientation focuses attention on the enhanced understandings of possibly diverging arguments, interpretations and decisions of all involved parties. Action-spacing concerns the construction of possibilities, potentials, opportunities and limitations for individual and collective action within the local organisational context (p.81).

To interpret the data Woods and Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework is interconnected with Raelin's (2011) four leadership tenets positioning leadership as; collective, concurrent, collaborative and compassionate.

Woods and Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework

Woods and Woods (2013) describe their degrees of democracy framework as a resource to examine ways in which an organisation is nearer to either a hierarchical model or holistic democratic model of leadership by investigating four variables; purpose and knowledge, power, communication and people (p.38). Represented as a continuum it was designed as an analytical research tool to be used by those concerned with education and democratic leadership in any organisation (p.4) and allows for reflection as to where an organisation lies on the continuum. It is assumed that organisations utilising this framework are aspiring towards operating according to the ideal features of a holistic democracy. Holistic democracy, as touched on earlier, encompasses four ways of being and acting; holistic meaning, power sharing, transforming dialogue and holistic well-being (p.4). The tool acknowledges the complexity around analysing educational leadership and allows for researchers to bring their own interpretations and meanings of democracy.

Raelin's four C's of leaderful practice

My analysis overlapped Woods & Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework with activities and notions associated with Raelin's (2011) L-A-P approach viewing leadership emerging from social practices rather than individual minds. In order for L-A-P to have an affinity with democratic participation and become a leaderful practice Raelin advises that the co-creation of community incorporating free expression and shared engagement must be privileged (Raelin, 2011). Leaderful practice is characterised by four tenets which I have aligned with Woods and Woods (2013) degrees of democracy in the following table (figure 1).

Table 1: Aligning degrees of democracy framework with leaderful practice

Holistic democracy variables (Woods&Woods, 2013)	Ways of acting and being (Woods&Woods, 2013)	Four C's of leaderful practice (Raelin, 2011)
purpose and knowledge	holistic meaning	Collective
Power	power sharing	Concurrent
communication	transforming dialogue	Collaboration
People	holistic well being	Compassion

Validity and Reliability

By conducting my research in an ethical manner I was able to contribute to the overall validity and reliability of my work. This ensures that readers have confidence in the manner in which my research has been conducted and in the results from the study (Merriam, 2009).The origins of validity are located in quantitative research; however the subjective nature of qualitative research together with researcher bias mean validity becomes more a matter of measuring degrees rather than an absolute (Cohen et al.,2013). Merriam (2009) suggests several approaches to address validity in qualitative research; internal validity, triangulation and respondent validation.

Qualitative interpretist studies do not set out to discover an objective truth or reality; rather they focus on interpretations of realities. Cohen et.al, (2013) inform us that internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event can actually be sustained by the data. It asks the questions are these claims

credible or plausible? And how congruent are the findings with reality? (Merriam, 2009, p.213). As a method of addressing validity my study used multiple sources of data to substantiate any results. This method of validity is referred to as triangulation and can also involve researchers using multiple theories, methods or investigators to confirm findings (Merriam, 2009). Respondent validation was achieved in my study by taking my research back to participants for feedback and as suggested by Cohen et.al, (2013) the feedback was recorded as participants may have suggested a better way of expressing an issue (p.299).

Within the context of a case study reliability or replicability can be difficult to obtain due to the uniqueness of each case under investigation. Unlike positivist research designs interpretative studies can never replicate the same results simply because human behaviour is never static.(Merriam, 2009). Rather than expecting to get the same results through replication researchers need to aim for results that are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Issues of validity, reliability and ethics are closely entwined and have a tendency to blur as the researcher seeks to gain the perspectives and insights of participants. Stake (2005, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 231), writes that “qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world”. It is with this regard to respect and care a credible, trustworthy study can be produced.

Chapter 5 – Findings

Overview

Understandings around the construct of leadership and narratives from five excursions in the local community form the basis of this chapter. Each excursion is presented as a question asked by a child involved in the study. The narratives are interpreted by utilising concepts from L-A-P and holistic democracy. This interpretation takes the form of a discussion that highlights leadership as a practice emerging from collaborative engagement.

Introduction

As this study is primarily an exploration of alternative approaches to leadership that signal an intentional move away from investing in a single hero approach, any perception of leadership being associated with a pre-designated role is clearly absent within these findings. I begin this section with some notions of leadership from the teachers and children of the kindergarten. This is followed by an overview which explains the sequence of excursions. Using Raelin's (2011) suggestion that in order "to find leadership we must look to the practice within which it is occurring" (p.196) I have focused findings on narrative excerpts from semi structured interviews, conversational interviews and group discussions. Typical of case studies large amounts of data have been generated during this research. The findings presented are excerpts that best illustrate examples of democratic leadership as practice and address the research question; "*how can collaborative exploration of the local community afford leadership opportunities for children, families and teachers and expand our concept of leadership?*" Excursions together with children's questions provided a platform to create a broad capacity for participation and to shape and give form to the ensuing dialogue. I conclude the findings with some reflective comments from teachers involved with the study.

Teacher's notions of leadership

Teacher's notions of leadership were gathered during a semi structured interview;

Jeri- There's two types of leaders, one that sits there above everyone else and one that sits with everyone...I notice when you lead from all together or amongst the

people you get more respect that way. Its lonely at the top, no one wants to be at the top by themselves. It's more productive when you're altogether; you've got people to bounce bits and pieces off.

Melanie- Yeah, being cooperative with one another someone might do one step and then someone else can build on that adding their knowledge.

AB- I think it's essential to notice in the rest of the team the strengths in the team and focus on those instead of just thinking ok this is the 10 jobs we need to do you do this and you do this. You need a lot of personal knowledge to know the team, the people, before you know the strengths. You need to know the people cos it's the relationships that will take a while.

My initial impressions of teacher's perceptions of leadership point to a preference for a collective, distributed form of leadership rather than leadership existing as the domain of a single person in charge. Sole leadership is perceived as being lonely and less productive than a co-operative endeavour. Harnessing the strengths within a teaching team speaks directly of distributed leadership whereby it is recognised that everyone has their own strengths and interests and encouraging team members to utilise these affords them greater agency and motivation (Clarkin-Phillips, 2009). The concept of leading amongst or from within the people, invokes imagery of leadership as being highly relational and of accomplishing tasks together. Teacher's notions of leadership provided a promising platform to explore distributed leadership and to move towards democratic holistic practices within our kindergarten.

Children's notions of leadership

Children's notions of leadership were sourced through semi structured conversational interviews.

Me- I wonder what you would do if you were a leader?

Sharkman - go in front

Cyborg – be at the front and if you were a soldier you could be a leaders

Me- Ok so soldiers can be leaders do you know any other things about leaders?

Cyborg- they lead the soldiers I see them on my TV

Me- soldiers

Cyborg- yeah like they have guns like they're army, leaders are in army

Elsa 1 – Queens and Kings can be leaders of soldiers and stuff and princesses like Disney on Ice

Me – Yip Ok, are there any leaders at kindergarten?

Elsa 1 – little girls and big boys

Mermaid – my mum has a boss

Me – I wonder if a boss is a leader?

Mermaid –maybe

Discussions with children around the concept of leadership gained little traction. The concept seemed to be on the periphery of their knowledge bank, associated with the imaginary world of TV and stories. Not wanting to prolong discussions on topics that seemed to hold little or no interest to children I abandoned the direct approach and was rewarded some days later when Mermaid, while playing, offered some further thinking around her impressions of being a leader;

Mermaid - King Tuheitia is the boss so King Tuheitia is the leader, all the other Māori people listen to him cos he's the king.

Me; what sorts of things does he ask them to do?

Mermaid- he would say to them to do the haka for him. He's nice.

Me- how do you know he's nice?

Mermaid - cos he's the King he has to be nice.

My conversation with Mermaid suggests that she had been making links with conversations and discussions during the previous days which had centred on

attending the Koroneihana (coronation) celebrations at the marae³. Mermaid's thinking around leadership centred on the individual who held power and authority. Additionally she incorporated funds of knowledge, possibly sourced from home, linking leadership with the expression of being the boss. I realised that my future findings would be unlikely to reveal explicit references, by children, to leadership. Rather I would look for leadership activity by children expressed as agency and emerging from collective dialogue and activity.

Context for research excursions

Over a ten week term children and families from the kindergarten were involved with regular excursions into the community. This research documents five excursions into the local community undertaken over the period of one ten week term. Excerpts from discussions between teachers, children, family members and community members have been selected to illustrate examples of democratic leadership as practice. The initial excursion to the Koroneihana celebrations of King Tuheitia is a regular feature of the kindergarten calendar. The decision to visit the local Hakarimata ranges was decided by a group voting system whereby children considered whether to first go on a bush walk or go to the local library. A side line outing to a local pa site: Puke-i-aahua was incorporated into the Hakarimata trip. The excursion to the local council was a fact finding mission initiated by a parent suggestion. A trip to the library followed our bush walk and the final excursion to a large kauri tree came about as the result of a prolonged discussion with the children as to where our next adventure would take place.

Excursion 1 – The Koroneihana – “Does he live in a castle?”

In August each year the kindergarten children visit Turangawaewae Marae as part of the annual Koroneihana or coronation celebrations. In past years King Tuheitia has been observed along with dignitaries from around the Pacific and New Zealand. It is a chance to soak up the atmosphere, meet up with community members, past families and observe the sights. The children posed a number of questions about King Tuheitia that they could collectively find the answers to either during the visit or by utilising other investigative skills. The above question

³ Marae – is a place of meeting for Māori people and the family home of generations that have gone before. It holds spiritual significance and is a place to stand and belong where Māori customs are given ultimate expression.

was posed by Cyborg aged 4 years and came about during a group discussion between children and teachers;

Jeri – what else do we want to know?

Cyborg – does he live in a castle?

Jeri – ok I'll put that one here

Mermaid – or does he live in a house?

Jeri – ooow, I wonder if he lives in a house or a castle?

Mermaid – in a house

Jeri – who do you think could help us find the answer?

Mermaid – umm Lily

Me – maybe yip, maybe our friends can help

Jeri – what about your mum Cyborg

Cyborg – I don't know

Mermaid – my mum does my mum will. I got an idea my grandma and my grandad, oh yeah they might know something.

Cyborg – I'm going to go and see him

Jeri – Yeah we're going on Friday

Cyborg – Friday

Cyborg returned the following day with some information for the group;

Cyborg – I know where he lives

Melanie – do you? What does he live in?

Cyborg – a house

Mermaid – a castle

Cyborg – no a house, cos my dad told me

Melanie – he told you he lives in a house

Mermaid – he lives in a castle

Cyborg – no a house

Melanie – I wonder where his house is?

Cyborg – by Rachel's house

Mermaid – Oh owww wow

Melanie – so he is Rachel’s neighbour?

Jeri – does he stay there by himself?

Cyborg – Umm no the Queen does, the Queen does

Robber- She could be the Māori Queen

Jeri – Are you talking about the Māori queen Robber?

Robber – yes

Cyborg – yes Tuheitia

Mermaid – and his kids

Jeri – has he got some kids?

Mermaid – yes he’s got 10

Robber – I think 2

Cyborg – I think 6

Kirsten – how can we find out?

Mermaid – ask him

Cyborg – even my dad might know

Prior to visiting the marae some of the children looked at a video of a previous Koroneihana;

Jeri – here they are outside the marae

Mermaid – tututu

Jeri – Turangawaewae is the name of the marae, remember it’s on the other side of the river. Some of us have been there before, Rapunzel you’ve been there and Cyborg, Sharkman you came. All the people in the video, all the people in Tainui, cos its Tainui area, all the people that died from the last Koroneihana to this Koroneihana, all their whānau went over to the king. The photos they are carrying are the people who have died. They went over to Turangawaewae to pay their respects. Bit long aye

Mermaid – yeah

Jeri – what do you think Mermaid?

Mermaid – they were wearing black

Jeri – yeah, when you go to a funeral or tangi at the marae you wear black

Cyborg – that’s the haka boys

Jeri – Do you hear, that’s the haka, if you listen to the words that’s the haka

Melanie – see what he’s holding

Elsa 2 – yeah a Māori stick

Cyborg – that stick looks cool

Melanie – the walking stick, someone pointed that out on the board the other day

Cyborg – what’s it called?

Melanie – a tokotoko (carved Māori walking stick)

Cyborg – tokotoko and yeah I like those sticks

Information and knowledge relevant to children’s lives as citizens of a community can be shared by teachers. In this case video footage of a past Koroneihana celebration was found by a teacher as a visual prompt for reflection and sense making, in a similar manner to the use of photographs. Teacher’s strengths and expertise are incorporated into the discussion and assist in advancing children’s knowledge of a cultural aspect of the community. Learning focuses on real events and the sphere for participation in leadership widens.

Whānau contributions to this inquiry were not direct. They came in the form of time spent looking at children’s questions on the board, some slowly offered contributions. One child had asked ‘*does the king have a crown?*’ A whānau member dictated knowledge around this question;

“He has a korowai (cloak) and a tokotoko. When Tuheitia was crowned the people present were asked three times if he should be king and three times the people replied ‘ae’ (yes)”

Knowledge from whānau needed to be respected, it was not simply a matter of widening the space for contributions, the manner in which people wished to offer any contributions had to be thought through.

Unfortunately we did not see King Tuheitia on the day we visited the marae and were unable to gain answers some of the questions children had wondered about such as; does he have shoes? Does he have a queen? Reflecting on photographs taken at the marae the children came to their own decisions about the day;

Mermaid – I think he’s in charge of the Māori people (a person painted in white body paint)

Elsa 2 – but I think he’s a Māori clown

Robber – it’s a white party dress

Mermaid – well he wasn’t there he didn’t come in to do the lego

Some days later the topic of where the King Tuheitia lives was revisited

Cyborg – years ago I wanted to meet Tuheitia and mum said he’s at home

Me – ok

Sharkman – I think he lives in Hamilton

Cyborg – no he lives by Rachel

Cheryl – I think he has 2 houses, one in Huntly and one in Turangawaewae

Mermaid – one’s for him only and ones for his family only

Cyborg – Cheryl, Cheryl, Tuheitia’s mum died aye

Cheryl – yeah that was sad

Raelin (2011) asserts that L-A-P focuses on agentic relationships that produce pragmatic outcomes and relies on the commitment of the group to function as a working unit in order to accomplish their mission. This first inquiry; *does he live in a castle?* shows consistency with these ideas. Cyborg displays agency as he initially offers a possible direction for the inquiry and later acts upon his decision by seeking answers from his family, others are also mobilised to act independently, seeking information for the benefit of the group. The question posed by Cyborg connects with Woods and Woods (2013) holistic democratic framework highlighting that the type of knowledge valued isn’t pre-determined but rather what Dewey referred to as created through active inquiry. Opportunities for participation arose as consideration was given to who could provide assistance to answer the question and as new participants entered the group and offered knowledge. Evidence of intersubjectivity within the group occurred as social interactions unfolded; the dialogue was open-ended, subject to debate and a willingness to change viewpoints, no predetermined conclusion apparent. Shared experience was apparent through everyone’s knowledge of Rachel’s identity,

where she lived and the Māori Queen's passing. The brief reflection as where King Tuheitia's was during the marae visit gave a glimpse of children making sense of an experience and actively constructing their own conclusions. Families were seen as valuable sources of expertise, a source of knowledge to tap into. Leadership in this instance was a collective, collaborative effort involving agency, responsibility and a negotiated shared understanding.

Excursion 2 - The Hakarimata Ranges - "Who owns the Hakarimata's?"

The Hakarimata Ranges are a dominate feature of the local landscape. Many of the children walk the tracks with their families and the bush is well known to all who live in the town. The above question evolved once again through shared dialogue and an initial prompt by a teacher;

Jeri – I was just wondering who could answer all our questions?

Mermaid – the owner who owns the Hakarimata's

Sharkman – some children and a daddy

Elsa 2 – some people who are kids

Mermaid – my dad knows

Robber – we can have a BBQ there

Elsa 2 – there's a sign in that picture, it knows where the people live in the Hakarimata's

Sharkman – let's ask who owns the Hakarimata's

When the above question was posed by Sharkman, aged 4, two possible lines of inquiry were offered by whānau; it could be a reserve owned by the Department of Conservation or possibly the local Waikato District Council. With the assistance of a whānau member who worked at the council a meeting was set up between the council and the four children driving this question. A short walk to the council and the quest began;

Robber- can we tell her what we have?

Me-yeah you can talk to her

Robber – hey who lives at the Hakarimata's?

Council – who lives there?

Robber – and who owns it?

Council – who owns it is a very special question

Sharkman – we are going to talk about that

Robber – yeah

Cyborg – and who owns it?

Sharkman – I live up there

Council – do you? Who do you think owns the Hakarimata's?

Sharkman – I do

Council – you do?

Sharkman – Yeah...oh wait , cos I live here

Council – Ohh that's a very good answer. Well the council doesn't own it, we own the carpark beside it. (shows a photograph of the carpark and surrounding area). So this is the carpark we own called the Hakarimata reserve carpark. So that's what we own but the actual land here you climb when you go up the big stairs, we don't own that. That's looked after by what's called DOC or the Department of Conservation. So I've got some people here that you can go and talk to, these people can tell you a lot more about the Hakarimata's. But do you know who really really own's it?

Mermaid – No

Council – everybody in New Zealand

Mermaid – wow

Robber – we, we live in New Zealand so we own it

The information was brought back to kindergarten and shared with the children and teachers;

Me – Sharkman, do you remember who own's the Hakarimata's?

Sharkman – she doesn't, she said that

Me – no you're right she doesn't

Robber – She said all of the people from, from New Zealand owned the Hakarimata's

Me – all of the people from New Zealand

Mermaid – cos I telled him that

Robber – actually I thought I own it cos I live in in umm Ngaruawahia umm I live there

Me – Yeah you live in New Zealand

Mermaid – and me too so I own it too

Melanie – that is cool

Mermaid – yeah

Elsa 2 – I used to live in Australia

Melanie – so when Elsa 2 lived in Australia did she own it?

Mermaid – no

Elsa 2 – no

Melanie – but now she lives in New Zealand she does own it?

Elsa 2 – yes

The trip to the Hakarimata Ranges involved the whole kindergarten and a community member who was suggested by DoC as someone who could offer expertise. The council answer to Sharkman's question was further verified on the excursion;

Me – some of the children had wanted to know who owns it, who own's the Hakarimata's?

Community person – we all own it

Me – there you go Robber

Community person – we all own it, everyone in New Zealand owns this forest it's all um owned by all New Zealander's. It's as much yours as anyone else's

Sharkman – I own it

Community person – yes and we're here to look after it aren't we. Everyone's able to come here as long as they look after it, take away their rubbish.

We walked along the Hakarimata, as we went our community guide pointed out interesting facts about the bush and likely places to see insects:

Community person – if you lift up some wood on the ground or a stone you might see a little worm or a little insect crawling along. When you have finished looking put the stone or rock back where it was because that'll be its home. Specially rotting logs, insects like rotting logs.

My buddy was Mermaid, we chatted as we walked;

Me – ooww we've got some steps to go up 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

Mermaid – you don't have to count, then you will lose your breath

Me – Ok I don't want to get puffed

Mermaid - My mum said that

Me – have you been here before

Mermaid – Yip I always go up the stairs, I even see glow worms

Me – Wow I've never seen the glow worms

Parent – yeah there amazing. If you come at about 5 o'clock in the morning by the waterfall it's just covered in there, it's amazing.

Me – I need to do that.

The second question; *who owns the Hakarimata's?* provided ample opportunity to make connections with holistic democratic leadership and leaderful principles of L-A-P. There is a real, substantive commitment from the children towards one another as they come together as a working body; actively making decisions, aspiring to find the truth. A sense of agency whereby children make decisions and influence the course of the inquiry are evident as they take charge of the visit to the local council office. Inclusive participation is an essential element of holistic democracy and can be interpreted in L-A-P as the collective capacity of people to accomplish tasks together (Raelin, 2011). This can be seen as openings are created for an ever widening circle of people to become involved in this investigation. Whānau participation was made possible via contributions, either verbally or by writing on a whiteboard displayed at the entrance to the kindergarten. Community involvement came about as the children actively sought knowledge from the council. Later, a community person suggested from the council visit, was able to confirm who owned the Hakarimata ranges and introduced the concept of *kaitiātanga* or guardianship, reminding the children that ownership comes with responsibilities. In this case to care and protect the forest and creatures that live there. During the excursion Mermaid expressed agency as my knowledgeable companion. Her prior experience visiting this place positioned her as an expert and me as a learner. She was able to advise the best approach to climbing the stairs and could provide facts concerning the natural environment. A whānau member was able to corroborate Mermaid's local knowledge about glow worms. Leadership took on a sense of being concurrent and collective as the conversation

offered new ways to understand this location. An inclusive community of participants collectively worked to achieve outcomes that importantly were not previously known by the children, teachers or whānau of the kindergarten. The generation of new knowledge, as opposed to transferring knowledge from those that have it to those that do not, is highly valued both within L-A-P and holistic democracy. Reflecting upon the council information provided an opportunity for sense-making; if a person lived in Australia could they own the Hakarimata's? No, it was concluded residency in New Zealand was required to qualify for ownership. New knowledge could be declared valid within the group.

Leadership in this example is democratic, not relying on one single person to make decisions for a group of followers. Confirmation that leadership can be both concurrent and collaborative was demonstrated during the visit to the council as numerous voices could be heard seeking information and speaking on behalf of the group. Spaces for participation are created as whānau and community members share knowledge and expertise concerning a well-known physical landscape feature within community.

That same morning we took a short visit to Puke-i-aahua pa, a historic pa site situated in the town. A short discussion as to the best method of transport to get to our destination took place prior to the excursion.

*Jeri – it's near Robber and Cyborg's church right down the road by Z's house.
What are you thinking Sharkman?*

Sharkman – should we swim there?

Jeri –It's by the river

Mermaid – are you actually allowed?

Cyborg – I think we could kayak over there

Melanie – have you got a kayak Cyborg?

Cyborg – I'll just buy one

Melanie – it costs money

Robber – go to my house I've got heaps of money

Sharkman – I've got heaps of money in my money box

Jeri – I'm not sure if the kayak will get us up the hill

Mermaid – yeah there's no river up there

Elsa 2 – we can go on a bus and climb up the hill

Mermaid – we could go on a banana car with wheels and a steering wheel (lots of laughter follows)

Cyborg – a helicopter

Sharkman – can we walk there?

The conversation to decide upon the best method of transport to Puke-i-aahua pa illustrates a co-operative effort towards finding a solution to a real problem. It would be all too easy for the teacher organising this excursion to step in and offer an answer to the issue, instead the teacher suspended any notions of taking charge and dialogue became an opportunity to explore the possibilities of different modes of transport. Room for self-expression was evident with ideas such as a kayak, a banana car and a helicopter being suggested. It is helpful to think about what L-A-P looks like in action. Raelin (2012) writes that this approach to leadership entails people thinking, talking, fighting and playing together, exhibiting a level of autonomy to be collectively involved in the task at hand. The process of leadership is made possible, in this example, by the group's ability to accommodate a diverse range of opinions, be open to debate yet remain committed to investigating possible transport options. A leaderful discussion takes place whereby everyone can participate collectively and concurrently and a satisfactory outcome is achieved.

While on the excursion we found some information that gave a brief story of how Ngaruawahia and the Hakarimata Ranges got their names. During this discussion a further question emerged

Excursion 3 - Puke-i-aahau Pa – “Who's that guy?”

Me – what did you think about the story?

Cyborg – he said it was cool

Me – it was cool, what did you think Cyborg?

Cyborg – it was Māori, I liked it

Me – it was a Māori story about how Ngaruawahia got its name

Mermaid – open the food pit (said very slowly)

Me – yeah, I wonder why it was called a food pit?

Sharkman – we're in the food pit

Ava – it's a picnic

Sharkman – because the whole kindergarten is the food pit

Mermaid – they cos they heaps of food in it

Me – yes heaps of food, what about the Hakarimata's?

Cyborg – Umm Ranginui

Sharkman – food pit

Me – mountains of food, it means mountains of food

Cyborg – yeah that says that. Hey who's that guy?

Me – I think he is a Māori King

Ava – he looks like have a funny head in that picture

Cyborg – he was going to get married

Me – I think his daughter was, it says he is King Tāwhiao

Cyborg – he was the brother?

Me – he was the Māori King a long time ago

Cyborg – does he have earrings?

Me – umm, I don't think so. He has a lot of tattoos on his face

Cyborg – yeah, I like those tattoos

Me – yeah me too, they look a little scary

Cyborg – not scary for me

Me – I think he was Tuheitia's great great great great grandad

Mermaid – Tu Tu then heitia

Me – that's how you say his name

Elsa 2 –Tuheitia

Me – I wonder what it means?

Elsa 2 – It just means Tuheitia

Communities hold stories that require action combined with thought to uncover. In doing this new understandings can be forged together with a sense of unity and connectedness to the local environment. The opening segment of the discussion concerning how the town got its name illustrates engagement in collective sense making dialogue. Various interpretations as to how the town got its name are put forward by children. True to the principles of L-A-P and holistic democracy the answer to this sense making is not outwardly clear. Ideas evolve but autonomous thinking is retained by each participant, clearly the idea of a food pit is novel and unusual. Creating meaning is a feature of holistic democracy, enabling individuals to grow as whole people who aspire to increase their understanding (Woods & Woods, 2013). As the discussion moves forward Cyborg changes the direction of the dialogue and mutual understanding progresses, incorporating a cultural dimension. Intersubjectivity between all participants ensures that the dialogue has structure; prior knowledge of the Māori king intertwines with the topic under consideration.

Leadership activity in this example is identified as a process of engagement as the group maintains a social dialogue to construct meaning and highlights a characteristic of L-A-P; that of dialogue being disrupted and a new round of activity beginning (Raelin, 2016a), as Cyborg changes the direction of the conversation. An alignment with the principle of collectiveness is observable as conversation is used to invent new ways to collectively make sense of the material artifacts of leadership, in this case photographs.

Excursion 4 – Ngaruawahia Public Library – “*Are there libraries in Australia?*”

The local library is a regular excursion destination. The children choose books to bring back to kindergarten and participate in a music and craft session run by the library. It is a familiar destination within the local community. It was interesting to hear the children discussing the possibility of libraries other than the one we frequently visit.

Elsa 1- do you know there's a library far away

Me – I know there's one in Hamilton

Elsa 1 – by Chartwell square

Me – yeah I go there sometimes

Elsa 2 – there's one really far away

Melanie – is that in Australia?

Elsa 2 – no, there's not a library in Australia

Melanie – why not?

Elsa 2 – cos cos it's not cos there's not a library in Australia

Melanie – I wonder who would know about that?

Elsa 2 – go on an aeroplane ages away

Melanie - S thinks her mum might know cos she lived in Australia for a little while

Cyborg – Australia?

Elsa 2 – I got a friend in Australia her name is Kira

Me – I could ask S's mum when I see her

Elsa 1 – my neighbour might know cos they lived in Australia

Me – ok maybe you could ask your neighbour and I could ask S's mum

Elsa 2 – we can find out from my Grandpa cos my Grandpa's not dead

Elsa 1 – did you know that my great Nana is dead

Elsa 2 – how did she got dead?

Elsa 1 – she got old that means she got dead

Woods (2015) reminds us that holistic democracy is concerned with the way in which groups work together to facilitate co-responsibility, mutual empowerment and fair participation of all. In this instance more than one member of the group assumed responsibility and decided on the type of activity they would work on to benefit the group in the quest to discover whether there are libraries in Australia. A sense of agency and responsibility towards the group can be detected from Elsa 1 as she proposes to tap into the funds of knowledge available to her disposal. A coordinated effort was set in motion to achieve a desired outcome. The following day the conversation continued;

Me – I talked to S’s mum and she said they did have libraries in Australia. They lived in a small town but it had an amazing library. There were ipads for the kids to use and lots of cool things in there to do

Melanie – that’s cool, what do you reckon now?

Elsa 1 – yes but Elsa 2 didn’t know there was

Elsa 2 – umm when I was in Australia I didn’t saw it but I didn’t know

Cyborg – but we’re not going to the other library

Elsa 1 – if there’s ipads

Melanie – we could ask if there’s ipads there

Elsa 2 – we wanted to play on the ipads

Robber – some food there

Melanie – can we have food in the library?

Mermaid – no cos cos its only for reading cos cos it’s a library

Elsa 2 – yeah cos it’s not the eating place

Mermaid – cos um you can eat at home

Entertaining notions of being changed, or transforming understanding is a hallmark of holistic democracy and this can be recognised when Elsa 2 changes her view at the beginning of the dialogue, in light of newly discovered knowledge. As frequently happened the co-ordinated conversation became somewhat disorganised as the group changed tack and set about a shared sense-making discussion as to whether food was allowed in the library. Collective ideas emerged to move the conversation to a conclusion and there was a feeling that the group had achieved as true an understanding as possible of the topic under investigation. The visit to the library revealed no ipads only computers.

This discussion positions leadership activity in the form of collective agency whereby individuals act independently making their own choices as to where to source information in order to benefit the whole group. This aligns closely with Raelin’s (2016a) description of practice as being “a co-ordinated effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinct outcome” (p. 125). Agency is also recognised as children influence the direction of the dialogue. Leadership is both concurrent, as power to make inquiries is taken on by more than one person and collective, emerging from many directions. Many voices can

be detected in this dialogue positioning leadership as compassionate and connecting leadership with democratic participation.

Deciding where our next excursion would take place followed a familiar pattern of extended dialogue before a final destination was agreed upon;

Elsa 1 – we could go to the shop where my dad got a scary mask. We could buy some stuff

Melanie – great idea, has anyone else got an idea

Sharkman – there's a park on my house on a hill, it's at my house

Melanie – would that be a good place for a visit?

Sharkman – no

Mermaid – I got a park near my house as well

Melanie – could we go there?

Mermaid – no cos um cos kindy teacher's aren't allowed there

Melanie – ok

Mermaid – cos my mum said no

Melanie – alright, have you got an idea Sharkman?

Sharkman – why don't we go to that tree

Mermaid – it's too far away

Melanie – it is far away but we could do it

Mermaid – yeah on a bus

Kirsten – ok, have you been to see that big tree?

Mermaid – yeah cos I was climbing up the top to see the kauri tree, but when I went there I didn't see a kauri tree. There's no park there

Cyborg – a kauri tree

Sharkman – 2 kauri trees

Ava – it's for everybody

Kirsten – yip you're right.

This ongoing flow of interactions to determine where our next excursion would take place revealed the children's sense of belonging and connectedness with the local community as they mentioned possible shops and parks to visit. A

participatory process is discernible and in line with holistic democracy as a shared responsibility for decision making occurs. Fair inclusive participation was promoted by the teacher who asked questions to seek individual children's ideas. Through a process of shared dialogue, ideas emerged; active engagement and respect for all ideas saw a final decision being made. Leadership in this instance was compassionate due to a definite reduction in power by the teacher involved and respect for the children's ability to talk through options to come up with an eventual destination. The decision to go to 'that tree' highlights the presence of intersubjectivity within the group. Knowledge of the local community and environment meant that all involved realised 'that tree' was the giant kauri situated in the Hakarimata ranges.

Excursion 5 – Kauri Tree – “Is it big or is it small?”

Prior to the kauri tree visit some photographs were examined and knowledge shared. While discussing the possibility of finding bugs on the walk the subject of bats emerged. On a previous excursion to the Hakarimata ranges the community member who accompanied us mentioned that bats lived in the bush.

Me – we might see some bugs

Mermaid – at night time you can still see some bugs so we could see some glow worms

Cyborg – I wanted to see a dead bat

Me – you wanted to see a dead bug?

Cyborg – I said bat, I think we will see some praying mantis'

Me – praying mantis'. Where will be the best place to see a praying mantis?

Cyborg – on a tree. I know how bats die

Me – do you, how?

Cyborg – if they go in the sun they die

Me – so if a bat goes in the sun it will die?

Cyborg – Yeah, they come at night

Me – we are going in the morning I'm not sure we will see a bat

Cyborg – we might see some sleeping bats

Rapunzel- yes, yes but we might wake them up and they'll fly up up and after us

Me – I remember that the bats in the Hakarimata's are tiny like a little mouse, I think we'll be ok

Moss (2011) offers that in order for early childhood education to be deemed democratic children should be “active constructors of their learning and producers of original points of view” (p.3). As an example of this Cyborg offers an unprompted explanation as to how bats die while talking about insects. Intersubjectivity renders this subject reasonable as the group is quickly able to link Cyborg's thinking with previous discussions concerning the Hakarimata ranges where it was discovered bats lived. Contesting dominant discourses is a further democratic principle advocated by both Woods (2005) and Moss (2011). Adults are most frequently positioned in education as experts, holding privileged positions of objectivity and knowledge, however here we have Cyborg positioning himself as an expert in bats. Thinking-otherwise is welcomed and supported within holistic democracy and L-A-P.

Unfortunately Cyborg wasn't able to come on the walk to the kauri tree. In the spirit of collaboration we invited a group from another kindergarten in the town to come along on the walk with us. Following a hard walk we reached the kauri tree and sat to observe it, after a short period of time the topic of bats resurfaced. Rapunzel declared she could see a bat in the tree.

Rapunzel - a bat, a bat there's a bat

Me – a bat?

Rapunzel – there

Mermaid – in the tree, it's a baby bat

Me – Oh that hanging bit off the tree

Parent – Mmmm looks like a bat aye

Mermaid – it is a bat, a sleeping bat

Rapunzel – yeah a sleeping bat

Me – we know that there's a lot of bats that live in the Hakarimata's

Deb – out at Pukemokemoke they've got bat boxes up all over there and they're little square boxes and real skinny and they have a roof on them. At the back it has spray painted Project Echo.

Interconnectedness between all actors is clearly apparent in this dialogue and reveals how the participants are able to nurture and accommodate a seemingly implausible view. A sense of unity within the group is detectable, no one disputes the presence of a bat and through a brief exchange the group creates its own reality. Regimes of truth are interrupted by Rapunzel as she offers a point of view that was unexpected yet vaguely possible. Both L-A-P and holistic democracy promote inclusive spaces for participation and this is evident when a teacher from another kindergarten shares further valuable knowledge about bats and their whereabouts in the Waikato region. Once again leadership is collective and can originate from any source and collaborative as all perspectives are equally valid during conversations.

Before visiting the kauri the size of the tree had come under discussion;

Rapunzel – it's nearly at the top of the clouds

Mermaid – we could ask if it's big or small

Rapunzel – the trunk is small

Mermaid – is it small or big?

Me – what do you think Cyborg

Cyborg – it's big

Me – you think big

Cyborg – I think it's huge, cos it's I can't see it, it's so big

Mermaid – up to there the branches, a bird could fly up there a nice friendly bird

Cyborg – what if they build a nest

Me – the tree has lots of places I think nests could be

Mermaid – it's peaceful

Me – its peaceful, that's nice

Debating the size of the tree highlights some fundamental principles of holistic democracy. Openness to debate and exchange of ideas are considered part of the general flow of communication. Unity and harmony with the natural world contribute towards holistic well-being. This is identified when Mermaid expresses that the tree is peaceful connecting with the holistic democratic notion of promoting the 'embodied self' (Woods, 2013) whereby individuals are capable of

generating spiritual type feelings and other ways of knowing. Once again leadership is collaborative as feelings and thoughts are sought from all group members.

Reflecting on the trip we again discussed the size of the tree and its age using information from the sign at the tree;

Me – it says this tree is the largest tree in the Waikato with a 7metre circumference

Rapunzel – it's bigger than a river

Mermaid – yeah it's bigger than the whole world

Me – so it was big

Mermaid and others – yes yes

Rapunzel – not bigger than the whole world

Me – the whole world is bigger than the kauri tree?

Mermaid – and god, god is bigger than the kauri tree, cos the kauri tree is very big and god is very big and cos god can't fit in the whole world

Me – so it's really big and the sign says how old it is

Mermaid – yes it's 65

Me – it says it's even bigger than 65

Mermaid 101

Me – bigger than 101 even, it says 1000 years old

Mermaid – 1000 years old

Me – yeah and it also says the tree can stay alive until it is 2000 years old

Mermaid – 2000

Me – it is so old that this tree was alive when the Tainui canoe came to Aotearoa

Cyborg – the canoe arrived

Me - yeah the tree was here

Rapunzel – and it was very little

In this shared reflective dialogue the communication flow between participants is always evolving. They freely offer opinions in order to determine an understanding of the size of the tree. Mermaid and Rapunzel produce original points of view and challenge regimes of truth through their unique method of

measurement; is the tree bigger than a river or the whole world? Consistent with holistic democracy, the answer to any question is not always immediately apparent; though I venture that at the end of the dialogue Rapunzel displays an intuitive understanding of the size and age of the tree by expressing that when the Tainui canoe arrived a long time ago the tree was small. This dialogue reveals the participants ability to fuse the spiritual realm to the physical world. Woods and Woods (2013, p.10) explain that holistic democracy takes into account peoples holistic growth as embodied selves and democratic leadership when interaction includes the capacity to generate profound feelings of spiritual awareness. As the participants have the opportunity to reflect on experiences within the natural environment a capacity for this element of holistic democracy arises. The dignity of all members of the group is preserved and respected throughout the dialogue, even though there exists a point of possible contention.

In this next section teachers discuss children asking questions related to the community and visiting the library;

Jeri – I think it's the process of asking the questions that's probably been their (the children) highlight.

Melanie – absolutely

Jeri – I think they've enjoyed that we're really listening to them, you know.

Melanie - It's cool seeing those quieter kids find that they can warm up. It takes a little while or time to feel like they're comfortable enough to come out and say things. It's about giving them that opportunity and keeping going with it. It's really awesome that it's not just the outgoing children that have that opportunity.

Jeri – yeah they know what they want to know

AB – it's the process

Melanie – we're not just here putting words in their mouth, they're in charge of what they want to do.

AB – exactly and it's just an ongoing thing. Look at the library they (library staff) say they really enjoy it.

Jeri – and see a lot of the children went in there and moved everything around

Melanie – they (the children) feel like they have some ownership

Jeri – yeah they do actually

AB – remember the first time we go and I guess the thing for us as teachers when you go out of the kindergarten it's like ooww

Melanie – especially somewhere like the library because there's lots of other people in there, but that's part of the learning

The discussion moved towards reflecting on expanding the view of leadership to be greater than that of a single individual;

AB – it's just to have the respect aye, among each other, so that's the bottom and out of that other stuff will develop and again it takes time. It doesn't just happen in a moment, so you need to..it takes time to build those relationships. How do you build trust it doesn't just happen.

Me – yeah it needs that time

AB – and some of the kids don't either want to or don't they are maybe having ideas in their head but they don't feel safe enough to add them.

Jeri – It (leadership) probably needs to be role modelled. It depends on the community, sort of show them it in action

AB – we have to encourage it instead of drive it, encourage it, encourage thinking. There's a fine line between asking and driving.

Jeri – sometimes they (whānau) just want to sit and chat and you know that's when it's about building that relationship. But it's been good you know to see the whānau talking about the board. H's mum talks about the board and you see the whānau standing there all reading it and having a little giggle or the kids are there with their whānau showing them all the writing.

Melanie – and you're never going to get everyone in but whether they're looking at it or contributing its good.

Jeri – yeah and the children offer some really good stuff now, you can see them really thinking about it

Melanie – I know, they're so passionate aye

Reflections reveal teachers beliefs that exploration of the local community, teamed with children's questions, afforded a platform from which to promote children's agency and an expanded view of leadership. Children were empowered as they shared ideas which were respected through attentive listening and engagement. Encouraging quieter children to feel safe to contribute was identified as a leadership activity that resulted in widening the capacity for fair democratic participation. Holistic democracy values learning aimed at expanding

thinking, encouraging unique points of view and co-creating knowledge through active learning. This is supported by Melanie as she explains that exploring the community is a type of learning experience that is not about transmitting knowledge, children direct the creation of their own learning. Jeri affirms this opinion stating that the children “*know what they want to know*”. The process is identified as being important and connects with Raelin’s (2016b) notion of ‘practice’ which values the *how* over the *who* aspect of leadership. Children’s growing sense of citizenship is indicated in the discussion of their feelings of ownership within the library. They felt sufficiently familiar and comfortable with this setting to move the furniture, rearranging things to their satisfaction. Interestingly teachers voiced an initial sense of apprehension regarding taking learning out into the community, particularly to places where other members of the community gathered. By expanding the boundary of the learning setting to encompass the local community, the teaching environment moves from a familiar, safe location to one of potentially challenging encounters and equally unique opportunities. This new learning environment causes teachers to reassess thinking around young children’s physical capabilities along with their relationship and engagement with the natural and cultural world. Kelly and White (2013) identified that in uncertain teaching environments teachers have to shift into thinking, believing and knowing that there is huge learning on the other side of the gate and have faith and trust in taking those teaching skills and abilities into the wider context (p.57).

Teachers identify specific factors and techniques necessary to grow a collective form of leadership; respect, trust, time, developing relationships along with the nurturing of an environment to ensure children and whānau feel safe to contribute. AB identifies that whānau will come to share what they choose to share when they are ready, when the relationship has been sufficiently built (Ritchie, 2010). Role modelling, encouraging participation and experimenting, in this case using a white board to share learning, impact on how spaces for participation are created. Teachers acknowledge children’s increasing passion and commitment as they engage with topics of interest within the community indicating the fundamental element of both holistic democracy and L-A-P, that of personal growth of individuals.

Summary

This section has traced five excursions and corresponding narratives as a means of experimenting with an alternative arrangement for leadership. An arrangement that is invested in the inclusive participation of people involved with meaningful work, not reliant on any one nominated person to taking charge. These findings suggest that leadership can be conceived of as a collective, cooperative practice when it is viewed through the lens of L-A-P underpinned by holistic democratic values. Results indicate that open ended social dialogue is the primary medium through which leadership activity occurs. It mobilises activity, generates shared meaning and understanding, supports reflection and invites thinking otherwise. Leadership can be seen to emerge from everyday interactions, within immediate situations and be attended to by one or many, either individually or concurrently. Intersubjectivity among participants was identified as providing cohesion within the group and ensuring all members retained a shared understanding of the topic under investigation. Leadership involved agency, either collectively or individually. The findings positioned dialogue and inclusive participation driving the democratic process, one that requires commitment and intention to generate.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

Overview

In this chapter I expand on my findings and specifically consider how explorations of the local community contributed towards an expanded notion of educational leadership within early childhood. I present my interpretation of leadership as being connected to a practice that is expressed in the collaborative, coordinated work of communities, embodying the principles of holistic democracy. Themes that I will examine include transforming dialogue as the foundation of leadership, cultivating inclusive participation, challenging the dominant leader/follower leadership discourse and its relationship to power.

Introduction

Leadership in the early childhood sector is highly relational and social, providing an ideal site in which to cultivate distributed forms of leadership. As a means of promoting L-A-P underpinned by holistic democratic values, an exploration of the local community provided the dual means of representing a context in which to anchor collective learning and a vehicle to stimulate inclusive participation. Collaborative explorations offered a unique and specific context in which to analyse leadership activity and processes, highlighting the power of shared discovery to mobilise a collaborative effort that could be orderly or arbitrary. As a unit of analysis children's inquiries associated with their local community enabled me to look closely at the everyday goings-on of leadership activity. Children's questions concerning aspects of the local community mobilised activity and empowered children as protagonists. Exploring the local community offered a forum to hear all stakeholder voices and importantly allowed me to challenge the dominant leadership discourse which positions the individual as leader in preference to collective models of leadership. Results indicated that leadership was not a discrete and easily recognisable event, rather it could be located in the messy, complex interplay between individuals, contexts, dialogue and activity.

Leadership-as-practice in an early childhood setting

Raelin's concept of L-A-P was conceived in the realm of business organisations, involving adults discussing topics of a business nature. Applying this conception

of leadership in an early childhood setting unsurprisingly resulted in a form of L-A-P somewhat changed from its original form. Results illustrated young children's growing tolerance for the views of others together with an emerging awareness of the self in relation to others and the prospect of being changed. Dialogue could quickly change direction and was never guaranteed to remain consistently on topic. A fun, enjoyable environment contributed to children freely expressing ideas, slightly different to the staff meeting scenario I imagine Raelin to have envisaged. It became apparent that a high degree of intersubjectivity was required to provide cohesion within any sequence of dialogue. Results reveal that young children are regularly able to offer original points of views while engaged in dialogue and these original points of view can be junctures from where debate arises or activity begins.

Transforming dialogue

Woods and Woods (2013) describe transforming dialogue as the fostering of a climate in which differing views are exchanged and debated enabling people to cooperatively seek to exchange mutual understandings (p.37). Similarly Raelin (2016b) describes dialogue as the "primary vehicle of engagement" (p.136). Based on my overall findings I agree with these interpretations and wish to position dialogue as the lifeblood of democratic leadership. Results suggested that leadership activity resides primarily in our everyday conversations and it is in this co-joint activity a democratic culture can be stimulated into being. In addition to impacting on the sociality of leadership, dialogue can be viewed as representing the principal means in which collaborative agency is shaped and would imply that in order to sustain a practice form of democratic leadership an interactive flow of conversation where ideas are freely expressed is required. Furthermore it connects with the leaderful tenet of collaboration as all stakeholders can speak and freely express views, every view and contribution matters (Raelin, 2005). This interactive flow needs to include multiple voices and encourage wide participation. Raelin (2014) maintains that by attending to the social interactions between all actors involved we come to shape what it is we know, seek shared meanings, consider changing our point of view and determine future action. In this study dialogue became a point of reference by which it could be determined how a collaborative exploration of the local community afforded leadership

opportunities for children, families and teachers and exposed that it is in the to-and-fro, the give and take, for fleeting moments or in protracted discussions, that the activity of democratic leadership takes place.

Central to the concept of dialogue is listening. The results clearly illustrate that in order to foster democratic leadership teachers needed to listen closely to children's thinking, take children's ideas seriously and be prepared to act upon them. Listening to young children has links to democracy as it moves learning away from knowledge transmission towards meaning making and welcoming the unexpected (Moss, 2014). Responsive listening adheres to the aspiration of democratic leadership to widen the space of participation and adds an emergent character to any form of distributed leadership through the notion that everyone, though virtue of their human status should be able to play apart in democratic agency (Woods, 2004, p.12).

Exploring the local community enabled a particular form of transforming dialogue, one which allowed for a richer connection with place. Knapp (2005) describes this dialogue as an 'I-Thou' way of relating to the world. Cultivating 'I-Thou' relationships with places involves shifting thinking about the physical environment from being a backdrop to adventure towards growing a greater knowledge and connection with the land (Knapp, p.278). Results indicated the kindergarten moving towards understanding local histories such as the story of how the town derived its name, wondering and questioning about local land features and being interested in significant cultural events such as the Koroneihana. Inviting children's questions about their place not only expanded their awareness of the natural and cultural aspects of their community but facilitated dialogue that involved participants in sense making experiences. Dialogue in this case moved beyond narrow confines to a sociality through which everyone could begin to understand the wider world not just through their own eyes but in relation to others (Raelin, 2016a), thus making links with concepts of embodied learning. A beginning sense of being open to understand 'other' was detectable in the results as children grappled with pictures of people that looked different from themselves and stories that introduced ideas that were novel.

The study highlighted the significant role intersubjectivity played in imagining leadership as a collective endeavour. In addition to providing cohesion to many of the narratives, intersubjectivity limited the idea of individuality as it always required participants to think of themselves in relation to others. (Raelin, 2016b) Dialogue emphasises two characteristics of L-A-P. First the outcome of dialogue is never predetermined; it always involves give and take as views are exchanged. Secondly recipients of communication are seldom passive as might be the expected case in followership (Raelin, 2016b).

Power sharing - revisiting the leader/follower dyadic

In this study dialogue, as previously discussed, was the primary basis for agency. Children were clearly detectable as active agents constructing meanings and making choices. Children were resourceful, frequently taking responsibility to seek out knowledge for the good of the group. This aligns with the L-A-P view of agency as both individual and collective in nature. Children's agency was also apparent in their eagerness to negotiate curriculum decisions such as the destination of excursions. The role of the teacher was commonly one of encouraging quieter voices to be heard and modelling behaviours such as tolerance and openness to novel thinking. A willingness to share power was clearly discernible.

The leader/follower relationship is a common starting point from which to approach leadership studies. In the broader literature discussion I indicated a wish to explore a form of leadership that moved away from the traditional leader-follower dyadic towards a concept of leadership more invested in a collective approach that promoted a sense of group purpose; a concept less concerned with hierarchy and the roles of individuals within the organisation, more in line with dispersing power and agency.

Neo liberal influences of managerialism and individualism which reinforce leader/follower roles through performance criteria seem to work at odds with this aspiration. Study results indicated that a democratic practice form of leadership was able to evolve through recognising leadership in the flows of interactions between all members of the kindergarten. A fluid network of relationships existed as opposed to the traditional hierarchical arrangement of power and authority.

Power to make decisions, pose possible lines of inquiry and contribute towards learning and sense making was shared and inclusive, demonstrating that a democratic form of leadership such as L-A-P lessens the need to define people as leaders and relegate others to be followers.

The question of how to balance hierarchical responsibilities, which cannot be avoided in neoliberal realities, with the desire to lessen the divide between leader/follower roles was a barrier to making this study seem practical. By applying Woods and Woods (2013) degrees of democracy framework the emphasis became not so much to determine if all democratic characteristics were absolutely present in the results but rather to consider the kindergarten as an organisation moving towards these characteristics. Findings highlighted the highly social and relational dimension of exploring the local community, creating what Woods (2015) refers to as a social environment where there exists a shared social authority amongst people even though there still remains a distinction in formal authority. Woods (2015) refers to this as a 'holarchic social environment', one I consider to mitigate the traditional leader/follower division. Within a holarchic social environment people are valued for their individuality and uniqueness and what they can contribute towards an organisation rather than their formal status. Flexible open relationships existed where leadership could come from any part or level of the kindergarten (Woods, 2015), making strong links to Raelin's (2005) notion of 'leaderful' organisations, where everyone participates in leadership collaboratively, collectively and in particular concurrently. Raelin (2005) suggests that in any community there can be more than one leader operating at the same time, so leaders willingly and naturally share power (p.22). Collinson (2005) informs us that beliefs around the identities of leaders and followers are deeply embedded in Western societies (p.1436). In order to shift thinking around leadership from an activity primarily associated with the roles of individuals towards an emergent group property, it is necessary to envisage teachers, children and families as being present in leadership rather than being containers of leadership (Denis, Langley & Sergi, 2012). Viewing leadership as existing in the process of engagement as the group goes about doing their own meaningful work validates the idea proposed by Wood (2005) that leadership is never about either *A* or *B*, or *A* in relation to *B*, rather it is located in the "undefined middle, the

‘inbetween’ of all participants where both *A* and *B* are ‘inseparable moments’, each necessarily referring back to the other” (p.1112).

One obvious paradox exists in relation to power sharing; the capacity to share power still resides with the person with appointed formal authority. A holarchic social environment will only exist if head/lead teacher is willing to relinquish authority and control in favour of a quieter less directive approach. Herein lies the challenge for those in appointed roles of authority to understand their beliefs, be guided by values, be prepared to reflect on underlying purpose of early childhood education and question the structural norms that govern leadership conceptions.

Holistic well-being - meaningful inclusive participation

This study has centred on the formation of a type of democratic leadership through which members of the kindergarten community crafted new and unique forms of knowledge during a process of social interaction referred to as dialogue. In order for this form of leadership to occur results showed that the provision for participation, as outlined in Dewey’s conception of democracy, was intentionally fostered through collective investigations of the local community. Inquiry was viewed as a type of participatory democracy. The elevation of this value linked with Raelin’s leaderful principle of compassion, recognising that there is no higher value than democratic participation (Raelin, 2005, p.23). As a social activity, inquiry connected participants to a common purpose that allowed for full and unrestricted expressions of thought and provided purpose and direction for collective work. Teachers identified that the inclusion of the voices of quieter children in discussions was a highlight of this study. One of the most powerful means of eliciting participation came from the use of the question “*What do you think?*” The results showed the important role teachers perform in staying true to Te *Whāriki*’s vision of the child as being confident and competent. Children’s thinking was respected and accepted and at no stage brought into line with forms of mature thinking (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). Unique and creative points of view were valued and enjoyed. Children were highly motivated inquirers throughout this study. They frequently viewed their whānau as funds of knowledge to be tapped into and had great faith that the answers to many of their questions could be found by consulting family members. Children and teachers were the main

actors in this study and trusting, respectful, reciprocal relationships played a key role in ensuring an environment conducive to supporting meaningful participation.

Parents and whānau were afforded opportunities to participate in leadership activity through contributions to information gathering, networking with the community and suggested lines of inquiry. Dialogue with parents came primarily in the form of conversations whereby teachers listened to parents and added their ideas to the growing collection of thoughts and ideas on the whiteboard. Parents always accompanied children and teachers on excursions, engaging in conversations and sharing responsibility for safety. Results suggested that there exists scope to increase participation of whānau in dialogue and better utilise funds of knowledge families can offer in order to expand our leadership story.

Raelin (2016b) reminds us that in addition to L-A-P being highly relational and social, materiality is embedded within any leadership investigations. Materiality concerns artifacts, people or ideas but only when they influence a particular course of action. Serge (2016) describes materiality as cogenerating leadership. Unlike a business setting where documents, graphs and data would be obvious materialities influencing courses of action, this study focused on photographs as visual materialities. Photographs of people, place and things encouraged talking, stimulated reflections and provoked the formation of questions which set the course as to what the group wished to investigate. In this study photographs were a prime influence of leadership production by expanding dialogue and encouraging participation.

Holistic meaning – purpose and knowledge

Teachers held strong beliefs that the wider community held potential for children to be active constructors of their own learning. Excursions connected children with their wider world permitting holistic learning experiences that associated children with being in the real world rather than separating children's learning from life outside the early childhood centre. Increasingly childhoods are being experienced within the confines of institutions; segregating young children from the real worlds. Engaging collaboratively within the community from which children are citizens presents emotional, imaginative and spiritual ways of connecting with the world they inhabit. During excursions abstract thinking,

which was frequently apparent in discussions, began to link with the real world emphasising that to know their world young children need to engage and connect in it. This sense of interconnectedness with the human and non-human world expresses itself in democratic leadership through a commitment to viewing people, land, stories, culture, language, relationships and collaboration as existing together, not in discrete parts. This spiritual principle of the interconnectedness of all things is important in most indigenous societies and explicitly links with holistic notions of embodied learning. Kenny (2012) writes of the convergence of human and non-human in leadership, stating that “the notion of embodied concepts animates our leadership theories with a richness that keeps our worlds vital, integrated and whole” (p.12). Knowledge formation was always a collective endeavour, true to socio-cultural approaches that value co construction and emphasise active participation.

Relevance for leadership in early childhood education concerns how the purpose of education is viewed. Could the purpose be to build democratic models of living that connect children and potentially all stakeholders with the community in which they are situated, or is leadership to remain imbued with neo liberal values of individualism and tidy efficiencies? This dimension of Woods and Woods (2013) framework holds potential for further investigation as early childhood educators struggle to push back against narrowing curriculum outcomes that value learning experiences that can be neatly measured as progress is tracked.

Utilising community - explorations as democratic experimentalism

The premise of this study has been to experiment with a form of leadership emerging from collective agency and locating knowledge as a meaningful, social co construction of ideas. Explorations of the local community provided an opening through which children and adults could participate in inquiries of a cultural, environmental and social nature. These explorations were a focal point for active citizenship as participants became involved in collective action and the practice of democracy (Moss, 2014). Democracy in this instance was learnt through active participation and an interplay of relationships constantly evolving, adhering to Dewey’s notion that democracy should elevate experience as the basis of knowing (Jenlink, 2009, p.392). Fielder and Moss (2012) speak of the need for

democratic experimentalism among ordinary people as a means of affirming alternative thinking. Explorations of the local community can be viewed as small scale, probing experimentalism, operating as a local experiment but making connections with wider social goals.

Engaging with the community presented encounters with difference; people might look different to ourselves, the bush might smell and sound different to our everyday environments, at the marae we might encounter different or alternatively similar ways of speaking, sleeping (communally) or performing rituals.

Encounters with difference caused a constant revising of theories of reality (Moss, 2014) and provided points to stimulate conversation, reflection and meaning making. From here the emergence of leadership occurred. This perspective of emergence emphasised *becoming* over the existence of always *being* and therefore challenged the primacy of the individual leader (Woods, 2013, p.2).

This study has revealed that a system to stimulate a democratic, participatory learning environment was required in to order to give L-A-P life. Children's questions and inquiry offered this stimulus and structure to understand this democratic form of leadership. As people engaged with democratic values a cultural layer was added to this study and a further social dimension was created through everyday conversations regarding the local community.

Elevating the voices of children in this research can in itself be seen as an act of resistance to neoliberalism. Children are generally cast as reliant and needy within the neoliberal story. Emphasising the voices of children adhered to the earlier assertion calling for researchers to see children as capable and knowledgeable in matters pertaining to their lives. As citizens of the local community children were able to offer knowledge that was relevant and helpful during investigations. No singular expertise was suffice to understand what was wanted to be known about the community. The contributions of intersubjective others were always required. Leadership has long been considered the domain of adults, frequently a singular adult. L-A-P as a democratic form of leadership repositioned all stakeholders, including children, as active participants in the production of leadership, reversing the neo liberal tendency to be dismissive of alternative thinking and valuing of individualism. Advancing the notion that leadership can be understood in terms

of the ongoing collaboration of many voices, generating dialogue to set future directions and making sense of matters relevant to participant's lives, without preconceived ideas of what is correct, challenges the sameness of leadership within every context. Leadership is no longer a transferrable product but a locally constructed, unique conception.

Neoliberalism perceives parents and children as consumers of early childhood education and regards teachers as human resources to be managed (Moss, 2014). Explorations of the local neighbourhood positioned all stakeholders as citizens of a community, interconnected with one another, the physical and cultural dimensions of community and the historical stories of past inhabitants. Just as *Te Whāriki* gives us the metaphor of a woven mat, these explorations encouraged a vision of education as holistic and interwoven.

Ritchie (2010) offers that *Te Whāriki* provides legitimatisation for early childhood educators to explore de-colonising possibilities through its commitment to honouring Māori ways of knowing, being and doing. This statement does however come with a caveat; that this requires commitment and I would add intention on behalf of early childhood educators in order to transpire. Dialogue and reflection are cited, by Ritchie, as enabling tools to provoke post-colonial thinking. At a micro-local level the community is a site of interaction with alterity. During the study this encountered 'other' may not necessarily have always been understood but the opportunity to create individual interpretations and meanings was there. The power to create meanings was not solely the domain of adults, throughout the study children were frequently engaged in conversations that permitted the other to be explained in relation to the self.

Practicing democracy and active citizenship supported opportunities for equal power sharing, empowered all stakeholders and reclaimed the purpose of education to go beyond predetermined outcomes (Moss, 2014) to become invested in relationship building, exploration and adventure. It is a subtle resistance, not loud and confrontational, just a different way of making choices, with no experts or grand truths, just a community going about making their own alternative arrangements to represent leadership, a type of democratic experimentalism.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Implications and limitations

Throughout this study I have advanced the view that leadership can be understood beyond the construct of an individual single actor. One such approach I have advocated is to link leadership with democratic values. I have utilised excursions within the local community as a mechanism to support a democratic form of leadership known as L-A-P and suggested that leadership can be perceived as emerging from the collective work of people in everyday contexts. This research highlighted the complexities surrounding the contested notion of leadership and serves as a reminder that a 'one size fits all' (Davis, Krieg & Smith, 2015) conception of leadership is not appropriate for the diverse communities and services that represent early childhood education. I consider the contestable nature of leadership in early childhood education to be strength. A singular and universal truth leaves no room to accommodate the beliefs and values of others. I suggest that there is unlimited scope for early educational settings to further explore plural modes for leadership enactment, looking beyond leadership as associated with the roles of people, towards local, collaborative, socially constructed representations. The leadership construct within early childhood is up for negotiation, needing ongoing conversations and engagement with the topic. While I have used the lens of democracy opportunities to reimagine distributed early childhood leadership from topical perspectives such as social justice and ethics of care abound. Each early learning centre provides a unique context in which to explore alternative leadership arrangements that challenge traditional notions of leadership that adhere to leader/follower identities and to construct original possibilities that work for individual communities.

Dewey argues that democracy and community are inseparable and that a foundation for democracy lies in a faith in the power of collective and cooperative experiences (Jenlink, 2009). The value of extending the learning environment beyond the boundaries of the kindergarten to engage with the local community offered an alternative curriculum path, intersecting democratic leadership with wider issues of citizenship and sustainability. Citizenship education in early childhood is largely unexplored. Given the increasingly intolerant world in which

we exist it seems timely to bring citizenship to the educational agenda and further investigate ways in which leadership can be constructed to promote a sense of belonging to a common humanity.

Although a case study approach was appropriate for this research, the narrow group size and time constraints placed on the research had a limiting effect on the results. A longer time data collection period and a wider participatory group would have contributed towards more substantial data. However as a practitioner researcher I was faced with balancing both employment obligations and research practicalities. The requirement to include child participants who were physically able to be involved with the research, contribute verbally and remain at the kindergarten during the research period was a limiting factor for the group size. Spending a longer period of time focusing on the research aspect would create spaces for greater whānau participation. With regard to whānau participation, more time was required to nurture this aspect of the project. As one of the teachers pointed out time is needed to build relationships and encourage whānau involvement, rather than driving the necessity to contribute. The latter is forceful and demanding and goes against the principles of democratic leadership which supports participation given freely. Further research could consider ways in which to include less verbal and younger participants.

Conclusion and some final thoughts

As an early childhood practitioner I am constantly reflecting on how to stay true to the values I hold as important for early childhood education; namely the spirit of democracy, education as a wider public good, respect for diversity and each another as fellow human beings. The current early childhood environment is saturated with neoliberal talk that trusts in numbers, desires efficiency, tracks children's progress to predetermined goals, invites competition, elevates the individual and feels comfortable with a singular known truth. Framing my leadership story around the local community with democratic underpinnings shifted thinking around leadership away from 'roles' towards a shared collaborative practice acting as an antistructure intentionally counteracting neoliberalism and "privileging the process of engagement as a basis for learning" (Raelin, 2011,p.22).

Research into early childhood leadership research is tentatively emerging and engaging with notions of leadership beyond the behaviours and traits of the head or lead person invested with formal authority. Democratic forms of leadership acknowledge that early childhood education is a highly relational, collaborative undertaking and therefore a receptive environment to reconsider new leadership possibilities. This study has introduced a perspective of leadership referred to as L-A-P. Drawing on the work of Joseph Raelin, leadership is described as emerging from the activity of a collective group and mobilised through social interaction.

Exploring the possibility that democratic values could guide leadership I used explorations of the local community to create a participatory environment that maintained close links with place based education and citizenship education. L-A-P underpinned by holistic democratic values as presented by Woods & Woods (2013) connected leadership with democracy. Results revealed a complex, collective form of leadership activity involving dialogue, meaningful participation which I consider to be a form of democratic leadership. In summary for children leadership took the form of agency and empowerment to understand their lives in relation to others. For adults democratic leadership meant a commitment to democratic values and a critical consciousness of the wider happenings of society. It meant creating spaces for human potential to flourish and always existed in tension with market values (Woods, 2005). Opportunities to inquire together in the local community was at the core of democratic leadership and involved energy, a trusting environment and a shared sense of purpose.

Fielding and Moss (2011) frame democracy in early childhood education as a type of idealistic utopia, always needing to be strived towards but perhaps never quite fully achieved. Transformations are never instantly achieved; they are always a work in progress. Conditions need to be shaped, bridges between thinking and achievability built. In a similar way I frame this exploration of democratic leadership; always in the process of emerging, palpable, temporary and fleeting. Like all utopia's worth striving for.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Information letter for teachers

Kia Ora Colleagues

During the past 12 months I have been studying at the University of Waikato towards my Masters of Educational Leadership. The next phase of my study involves undertaking a research project. This project is titled: *Affording leadership possibilities: towards a collective perspective of early childhood leadership*. The project will focus on making connections between inquiry focused learning, or collaborative learning and the idea of leadership as a collaborative practice that can involve more than one person. Inquiry focused learning involves children researching questions or topics of interest to them with the support of others.

The aim of the project is to examine whether inquiry focused learning can act as a gateway through which a collaborative form of leadership might take place. My intention is to utilise trips exploring the local community, which many children have previously been involved with, as a way of introducing inquiry focused learning. I would like to know if this type of collaborative experience will afford opportunities for children to lead their own learning and create spaces for whānau to contribute their knowledge, skills and abilities, thereby becoming leaders within the kindergarten. I will be interested in finding out in what ways this approach will extend learning during our exploratory walks, particularly for those children nearing school.

The research question under investigation is; *how can a collaborative exploration of the local community afford opportunities for children, families and teachers to be leaders?*

My interest in this project came through thinking about the walks we had been on around the community and realising that there is so much local history, culture and natural potential in this community. I believed that there was the possibility to learn more about our community within the context of these walks. Through my studies I have come to believe that leadership is not solely about one person but can be viewed as a participatory collaborative practice. Interest with both these subjects led to my research question.

During this research I will be seeking the perspectives of children, whānau and teachers through conversations and interviews which will be video/audio recorded and transcribed. Information gathered will help me to assess the effectiveness of collaborative inquiry based learning, focusing on community walks, as a means of affording collaborative leadership at our kindergarten. I will be collecting the following data;

- Audio/videoing children formulating questions/topics for research
- Recording children's conversations during trips
- Recording conversations with children to gain their perceptions of this type of learning and to better understand children's early notions of leadership.

- Recording interviews with whānau concerning their perceptions about sharing knowledge, expertise and whether their views around leadership may have changed.
- Recording focus group interviews with teachers as you reflect on collaborative forms of leadership and collaborative inquiry focused learning.
- Copies of children's learning stories that relate to this research.

This data will be analysed and used in my published thesis and possibly any academic publications and/or presentations. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my house for 5 years, after which time it will be destroyed. The kindergarten will not be named and participants will be invited to make up a pseudonym instead of their real name in order that they cannot be identified. . Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw yourself and your data at any time up until you have viewed and amended transcripts that relate to you.

I am looking forward to engaging in this research and hope it will be a positive experience for all those involved. Please feel free to talk to me about this project at any time, I am happy to answer any questions, give more information or discuss any concerns you may have.

My supervisor for this project is Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips from the University of Waikato. Jeanette can be contacted if you have any concerns regarding this research by email; jgcp@waikato.ac.nz or by phone on 078384875.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information,

Ngā mihi

Linda Dowling

Appendix B – Information letter for Whānau

Kia Ora Whānau,

During the past 12 months I have been studying at the University of Waikato towards my Masters of Educational Leadership. The next phase of my study involves doing a research project. This project is titled: *Affording leadership possibilities: towards a collective perspective of early childhood leadership*. The focus of the project is to see if there is a connection between children asking and investigating questions about the local community and the idea that leadership can involve more than one person.

I am going to use our trips exploring the local community, which many children have previously been involved with, as a way of introducing inquiry focused learning (children asking and researching questions). I want to know if this type of experience will give children opportunities to lead their own learning and make openings for whānau to contribute their knowledge, skills and abilities, thereby becoming leaders within the kindergarten. I will be interested in finding out whether this approach will extend learning during our exploratory walks, particularly for those children nearing school.

The research question under investigation is: *how can a collaborative exploration of the local community afford opportunities for children, families and teachers to be leaders?*

My interest in this project came about through thinking about the walks we had been on around the community and realising that there is so much local history, culture and natural potential in this community. I believed that there was the possibility to learn more about our community on our walks. Through my studies I have come to believe that leadership doesn't have to be about one person, it can be spread across any number of people. Interest with both these subjects led to my research question.

During this research I will be looking to get the perspectives of children, whānau and teachers through conversations and interviews which will be video/audio recorded and written down. Information gathered will help me to assess the effectiveness of collaborative inquiry based learning, focusing on community walks, as a means of allowing a collaborative form of leadership at our kindergarten. I will be collecting the following data;

- Audio/videoing children making up questions/topics for research
- Recording children's conversations during trips
- Recording conversations with children to gain their ideas about this type of learning and to better understand children's thoughts of leadership.
- Recording interviews with whānau concerning your ideas about sharing knowledge, expertise and whether your views around leadership may have changed.
- Recording focus group interviews with teachers as they reflect on collaborative forms of leadership and collaborative inquiry focused learning.

- Copies of children's learning stories that relate to this research.

This data will be analysed and used in my published thesis and possibly any academic publications and/or presentations. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my house for 5 years, after which time it will be destroyed. The kindergarten will not be named and participants will be invited to make up a name instead of using their real name in order that they cannot be identified.

I am looking forward to engaging in this research and hope it will be a positive experience for all those involved. Please feel free to talk to me about this project at any time, I am happy to answer any questions, give more information or discuss any concerns you may have.

My supervisor for this project is Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips from the University of Waikato. Jeanette can be contacted if you have any concerns regarding this research by email; jgcp@waikato.ac.nz or by phone on 078384875.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information,

Ngā mihi

Linda Dowling

Appendix C – Informed Consent for parents of participant children

I have read the Information Letter and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Any questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask any further questions during the research. I understand that all data collected will be used to inform the research investigation: *How can a collaborative exploration of the local community afford opportunities for children, families and teachers to be leaders?*

I understand that;

- My child does NOT have to participate in this research.
- The research will be fully explained to my child and he/she will be asked to sign a separate consent form which has been shown to me.
- I may withdraw my child from this research and their data at any time up until data analysis begins.
- My child's real name will not be used; my child can choose a pseudonym.
- All efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality but this cannot be guaranteed.
- I agree for my child to be audio/video taped during this research.
- I agree for my child to be a participant in this research.
- All data will be stored at the researcher's house in a locked cabinet and a password protected device for 5 years. After this time it will be destroyed.
- All information from this research will be used in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may also be used in academic publications and/or presentations.

Child's name _____

Parent/legal guardian signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D - Adult Participant Consent

I have read the Information Letter and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Any questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask any further questions during the research. I understand that all data collected will be used to inform the research investigation: *How can collaborative exploration of the local community afford opportunities for children, families and teachers to be leaders?*

I understand that;

- My participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw myself and my data at any time up until I have viewed and amended transcripts that relate to me.
- My real name will not be used in the study, I will choose a pseudonym.
- All efforts will be made to ensure anonymity but this cannot be guaranteed.
- I will meet with the researcher for one 30 minute individual interview.
- I may be audio and video recorded during interviews and excursions.
- All information from this research will be kept by the researcher for 5 years in a locked cabinet and password protected device. After this time it will be destroyed.
- All information from this research will be used in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may also be used in academic publications and/or presentations.

Signed _____

Date _____

Participant's Name _____

Pseudonym _____

Appendix E - Child's Consent Form

Linda is going to be asking us to think about some questions that we would like to find out about when we go on walking trips.

When we are out on our walks Linda would like to use a small machine to listen to any words we use when we are talking. She will also take some videos. Linda will want to talk to us a few times and ask us some questions. We can listen to any words she records and look at the videos when we are at kindergarten.

Linda will use the questions we think up and the words we say to write a long story that other grownups might want to read.

Put a tick below if you are OK for Linda to;

Use her ipad to take a video of you

Ask you some questions about our walking trips and what you know about being a leader

Write down the words you say about the trips

I don't have to join in with helping Linda with her story.

I can make up a name for Linda to use in her story instead of my real name.

The name I choose is _____

My signature

Witness _____

Date _____

Appendix F - Sample of proposed questions/prompts to be used during semi structured interviews and conversational interviews;

When conducting interviews with young children I will be conversing rather than asking too many direct questions as I know that this is a much more effective method to illicit responses from children. The types of comments/questions I will be making will include;

1. I remember when we were talking about our walks you had a good idea to find out about.....
2. Do you have any ideas about leaders?
3. I wonder what leaders do?
4. I wonder if children can be leaders.
5. I liked finding out about.....(subject or question under investigation)...do you any other ideas we could find out about?

When talking with family participants in this research I will primarily want to know if their involvement in inquiry based learning has influenced their views on the concept of leadership.

1. When you think of the word leadership what ideas come to mind?
2. Would you be willing to share any previous experiences of leadership, either as a leader or being led?
3. Would you mind talking about your involvement with our community walks
4. Do you think your involvement in investigating children's questions could be seen as leadership?
5. Have your ideas about leadership changed at all as a result of being involved in this research?...if so in what way?
6. Do you think there can be more than one leader in a kindergarten?

When conducting the focus group interview with teachers I will be concentrating on understanding teachers notions of leadership.

1. What does the term leadership mean to you?
2. Would you be willing to share any previous experiences of leadership, either as a leader or being led?
3. How can a collaborative approach to leadership emerge within an organisation?
4. Thinking about your involvement in this research, has your view on leadership changed in anyway?
5. Can you see any advantages/disadvantages in moving towards a more of collaborative form of leadership?
6. Do you think collaborative learning experiences have opened up spaces for multiple leaders - why/how?
7. What factors influence leadership with organisations?
8. Can collaborative leadership happen naturally happen or do you think it needs to be intentionally introduced?

