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How senior teachers in kindergarten associations in Aotearoa New Zealand, define, understand and enact leadership.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Early Years)

Master of Education

(Early Years)

at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

Gaylyn Joy Campbell

2018

Abstract

Leadership in early childhood education is gaining increased attention as evidence suggests leadership is a key factor in raising the quality of early childhood curriculum provision and learning outcomes for children. The present study examined the way in which one group of positional leaders, senior teachers within kindergarten associations in Aotearoa New Zealand, define, understand and enact leadership. The study was situated within a pragmatic paradigm and was descriptive in approach, offering insight into participant's beliefs and practices. Employing a survey to gather both qualitative and quantitative data provided an avenue for participants to describe their understanding, practice and enactment of leadership. Qualitative data were analysed thematically with an inductive approach taken to identify patterns of meaning, while simple descriptive statistics were used to summarise and interpret quantitative data such as categorisations and ratings. Findings indicated the leadership role of the senior teacher is characterised by complexity, including the identification of eight key areas of responsibility: curriculum development, collaboration, managing human resources, staff development through the provision of professional development, liaison within and outside of the organisation, oversight across multiple sites, compliance and internal evaluation. Senior teachers' understanding of leadership as a collaborative, relational endeavor focuses on building the professional capabilities of others, with the intention of strengthening curriculum and pedagogy and thereby influencing outcomes for children. Findings also revealed senior teachers navigate multiple and at times competing demands on their leadership work, exacerbated by the complex external environment within which it is enacted. While leadership was seen to be rewarding and valuable, noted challenges included lack of time, a concentration on compliance and accountability functions, perceived lack of influence on strategic work within their organisations, human resources activities and at times, limited scope to change the practice of others.

Acknowledgements

My supervisors extraordinaire, Karyn and Tara. I couldn't have done it without your guidance, provocations and reassurance.

To the three gorgeous men in my life, Craig, Harrison and Fergus for your unwavering faith in my abilities and unconditional love.

In memory of Terence Leo Hall.

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