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**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD CENTRES: A QUALITATIVE  
CASE STUDY**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

at

Massey University  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand

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2002

## **Abstract**

The provision of education and care for young children in Aotearoa/New Zealand has evolved in a haphazard manner for more than a century, with a marked increase in the number of childcare centres in the last decade. The present study was designed to use the concept of organisational culture to examine leadership and management practices from the perceptions of those involved in childcare centres, to compare these practices with the international literature on leadership and management, and to develop a theoretical model which could inform concepts of quality management in centres of the future. The underlying assumptions, beliefs and values of the organisational culture shared by those within each centre were mostly based on those originally articulated by the founder, and were taught in subtle ways to new staff and parents. An analysis of those assumptions revealed traces of many different historical, political, educational and theoretical influences that formed the image of the child and of childhood held by the adults in each centre. It was argued that the organisational culture and organisational structure of a centre, based on an unconsciously held image of the child and childhood, and influenced by external societal forces and beliefs, shaped the environment in which each child's learning took place. Perceptions of good leadership and management practice were contextually based. The study argues that a model for developing or reviewing practice in centre leadership and management should begin with a conscious consideration of the image of the child and childhood held within the centre. It is claimed that the influence of this image on the ways in which children learn and are taught should be central to leadership and management functions that govern and shape centre structures and activities. At the macro-level, however, our society also must address the hegemonic practices that underpin its treatment of young children so that children are seen as unique, with interests and rights rather than needs, and as competent, rich, strong and powerful.

## Acknowledgements

Beginning doctoral study is daunting. As I have progressed through this amazing learning journey, I have been indebted to many people who have encouraged me, critiqued my work, and assisted me to complete it. First, my supervisors have provided me with sound, steady, reasoned advice and support which has guided my thinking and writing. Dr. Sarah Farquhar encouraged me to begin the journey and assisted me conscientiously in the preparation of my proposal and pilot study. When she left Massey University, supervision of my study was undertaken by Professor Joy Cullen. I have valued highly her sharp eye for detail and strong intellectual focus, as well as her trust in me to keep the research moving on. Professor Wayne Edwards honoured me by offering to be second supervisor. I have appreciated his gift of inspiring me to see the “bigger picture”, and his ability to quickly and concisely sum up what needs to be done.

Central to this research was the generosity of 51 participants. They provided me with their time, thoughts and other details that have allowed me to take a closer look at early childhood practices and to make some recommendations that may, I hope, help to make their important work easier for them. Their support is gratefully acknowledged. Colleagues, too, have provided highly valued support for this research. A group of doctoral candidates with nursing backgrounds helped me to get started. As the work continued, I have been most grateful to Helen Hedges, who read several drafts, debated with me and provided on-going encouragement. I am indebted to Margaret Turnbull, who also read drafts, provoked many intellectual discussions, and led me to the APA manual. I was fortunate, too, to be able to draw on the information and opinion provided by other early childhood researchers in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

My heartfelt thanks go to my family and my husband, Jim McLeod. My family tolerantly coped with my absences from some motherly and grandmotherly duties and provided moral support for and interest in my research. Jim actively supported the research in many ways - housework, computer expertise and patience, encouragement, understanding and support for the time commitment - that I have been so grateful for.

Thank you all for accompanying me on the journey.

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## GLOSSARY

- Centre:** Used to denote a chartered early childhood organisation that is licensed to provide education and care for children up to the age of five years. In this study, the term excludes “Free” Kindergartens, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playcentres and family daycare.
- Centre personnel:** Used in the present study to denote all who work in a centre.
- Community centre:** An early childhood centre that provides sessional and/or full time care and education. It is a not-for-profit organisation, usually operated by a city council and administered by a management committee.
- Corporate/  
institution centre:** An early childhood centre that provides sessional and/or full time care and education, and which is part of a corporation or an institution such as a school. While some such centres are open to the public, others are provided for the use of employees of a corporation or employees and students of an institution. It may operate for-, or not- for- profit.
- Curriculum:** In relation to early childhood education, the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster learning and development in early childhood education centres.
- The Education  
Review Office  
(ERO):** A government organisation established under the 1989 education reforms, responsible for ensuring accountability within schools and early childhood services.
- Grounded theory:** A qualitative method of examining data in order to develop theory. The theory is developed as the researcher systematically examines everyday behaviours or organisational patterns.
- Charter:** An undertaking by an early childhood service (or umbrella organisation) to the Minister of Education that designates the special character of the centre and specifies the steps that the management will take to reach standards beyond licensing requirements.
- DOPs:** The Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) articulates the government’s expectations of early childhood education providers and specifies guiding principles and goals for the delivery of early childhood education and care.

<b>Kaupapa:</b>	Philosophy, principles, plan, purpose.
<b>Kindergarten:</b>	An early childhood centre provided under the auspices of the Free Kindergarten movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Usually offers sessional programmes, is a not-for-profit organisation.
<b>Licensee:</b>	In relation to a licensed centre, the holder of the license for that centre.
<b>Māori</b>	A member of the aboriginal race of Aotearoa/New Zealand; tangata whenua, or people of the land.
<b>Manager:</b>	A term often used interchangeably with “supervisor”. A manager can “manage” a centre without early childhood qualifications but must employ a “person responsible” (see below) if government funding is to be obtained.
<b>Ministry of Education:</b>	A Government organisation established during the 1989 reforms, responsible for providing policy advice to the Minister of Education, ensuring the implementation of national policies, overseeing the provision of funding, and negotiating charters.
<b>Ngā Tikanga Māori:</b>	Māori cultural practices.
<b>Ngā Kōhanga Reo:</b>	An initiative aimed at reviving Māori knowledge and cultural practices which has resulted in the development of language nests or centres in which whānau development is nurtured and where young children are immersed in te Reo Māori and ngā Tikanga Māori.
<b>NUD.IST:</b>	A computer package designed to aid users in handling non-numerical unstructured data by indexing, searching and theorising.
<b>Pakeha</b>	An Aotearoa/New Zealand person of non-Māori descent.
<b>Person responsible:</b>	In relation to a licensed centre, a person directly involved in, and primarily responsible for, the day-to-day care, comfort, education, health and safety of the children. The “person responsible” must have 100 licensing points, or, from 2001 if a new appointment, and for all centres from 2005, a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) or equivalent..
<b>Private centre:</b>	An early childhood centre which offers sessional or full time care and education. It is privately owned and operates for profit.

- Staff member:** A person employed to work in an early childhood centre who is not the owner, licensee or supervisor.
- Supervisor:** Term used to denote the person “in charge” of a centre. The position may include the responsibilities of “person responsible”, licensee and/or owner of the centre. Sometimes (outside of this study) the term is used interchangeably with director or manager.
- Tangata whenua:** Native, aborigine, local person (in Aotearoa/New Zealand, usually a person of Māori ancestry).
- Te Reo Māori:** Māori language or speech.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi:** The Treaty of Waitangi.
- Te Whāriki:** The mat (also the metaphor of woven mat chosen as the title for the Aotearoa / New Zealand early childhood curriculum document).
- Whānau:** Members of an extended family and its support network who form a context for the care and guidance of the child.
- Qualified:** In early childhood teaching terms, a person who holds a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) or a Teacher Registration Board-approved degree and is a registered teacher or able to apply (having completed an approved programme of teacher education) to become one.