

Distributing leadership and collaborative learning: Growing professional identity and professionalism of educators

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Research questions

What is the relationship between leadership and professional learning in early childhood curriculum change?

- What processes and practices do directors use to encourage professional learning?
- How are positional and informal leadership practices implemented in professional learning?
- How does distributing leadership contribute to professional learning and curriculum change?



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Key assumptions from literature

- ‘Contextual model of leadership’ allows consideration of societal and organisational influences within EC centres (Nivala, 1999; Hujala, 2004)
- Implementing curriculum change requires professional development and professional learning (Nuttal, 2013; Rinaldi, 2012)
- Leadership is positional and distributed (Stamopoloulos, 2012; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007)
- Distributing leadership supports collaborative professional learning in early childhood (Oberhuemer, 2005; Thornton, 2010, Clarkin-Phillips, 2011)



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Definition of professional development and learning

- PD integrates educator learning with their pedagogical practice, where PD&L occurs collaboratively within everyday operational contexts (Rinaldi 2012)
- Educators explore curriculum and pedagogical impacts on children's learning through looking at the gap between what children are expected to learn and their actual performance (Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007, p11)



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Collective and collaborative professional learning

- PL encompasses transformative processes through which educators re-examine their existing beliefs which leads to cognitive and behavioural changes in practice ([Zwart et al 2007 cited in Nabhani et al 2014](#))
- Collaborative work enables new knowledge and learning to be integrated and embedded in new professional practice ([Groundwater-Smith & Campbell, 2010](#))
- Learning is contextualised to the specific setting, related to educator's practice and includes peer support ([Fleet et al 2009](#))



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Director influence

- **Director vision**, influence & presence
- Director is pedagogical leader - planning & leading PD&L
- **Centre culture** - cohesion & collaboration, commitment to PD&L
- Centre has **organised systems** - leadership structures, roles of positional leaders, organisation of project work, time/resources



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Leader promotion of, and participation in PD&L produced 'large effects'. Their ability to deliver PD&L was a significant leadership indicator.

(Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008 cited in Robinson, 2009)



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Collaborative opportunities for PD&L

Centre A

Centre-wide inquiry project with mixed staff project groups encouraging professional dialogue throughout the centre

Centre B

Only positional leaders worked together on projects restricting professional conversations to leaders or room teams



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Collaborative professional learning

Centre A

- Professional dialogue
- Informal feedback
- Shared decision-making
- Staff satisfied with feedback
- Mutual support & respect

Centre B

- Mentoring
- Learning from each other 'on-the-job'
- Talking & asking questions
- Shared decision-making
- Lower staff satisfaction with feedback
- Building staff capacity



Face-to-face communication (inter-subjective)

- Collaborative professional environment
- Professional relationships & interactions
- Staff mutual influence
- Professional communication & conversations
- Staff support each others' learning
- Staff value & respect each other



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Positional leader's leadership styles

Inclusive

- Consulting with staff
- Dialogue & exploration in room team
- Not being too much the 'boss'
- Listening to others' ideas
- Rooms had autonomy for analysis & solutions

Directive

- Guidance & direction of staff
- Instructional focus
- Questioning
- Leaders holding on to tasks
- Rooms had autonomy for analysis & solutions



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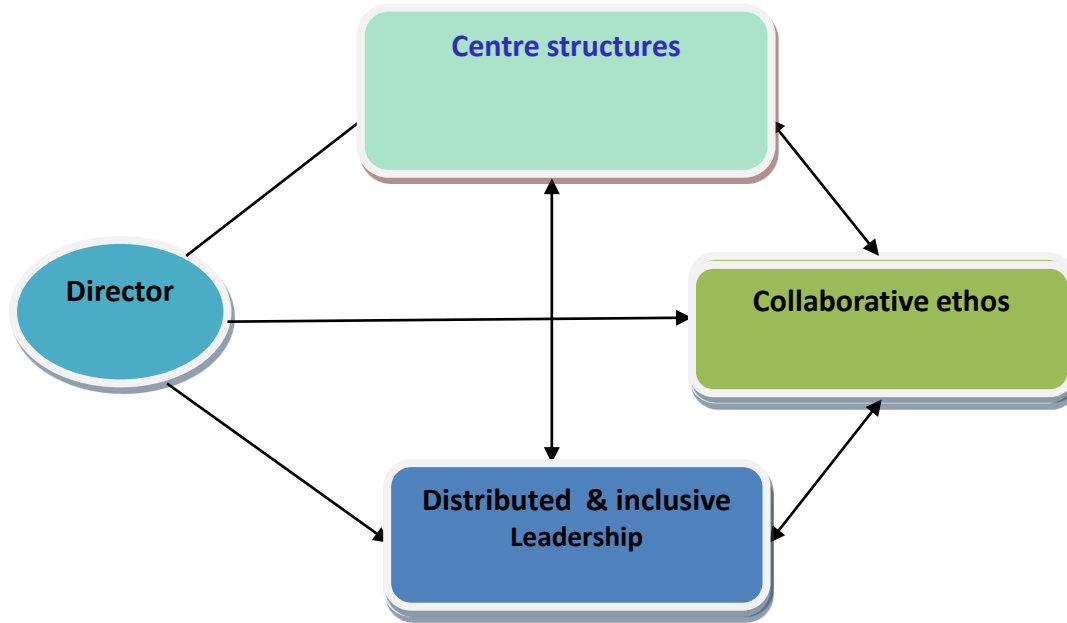
“...listening to everybody's ideas... realising the strengths of other people in your team...”
(Room leader, A)

“...we brought it to room meetings and I guess this highlights that we probably need to get a bit more feedback or we just take over as ...leaders.”
(Room leader, B)



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Director influence



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Professional Identity (subjective)

- Making decisions
- Educator professional judgement respected
- Collegiality - recognition of knowledge & experience
- Having power to influence others & initiate action
- Engage in own critical reflection
- Contribution & skills recognised
- Satisfaction in achievements
- Access to ongoing learning beyond qualification - PD as a right



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Agency and autonomy

- Professional growth – make own choices
- Able to pursue own professional interests in PD choices
- Individual sense of ownership & autonomy in decision-making
- Sense of power to institute actions & influence others
- Sense of belonging & feeling supported & valued for their knowledge
- Build own career



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Professionalism

- A managerial conception of professionalism values effectiveness, efficiency and compliance with policy – systems are externally imposed, focus on self-interest
- A new democratic professionalism values an inclusive approach and self - regulation & emphasises importance of collaborative, collegial action with critically reflective practice within an ethical code of practice, inclusive, enquiry driven, knowledge building

(Keay & Lloyd, 2011)



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Culture of professionalism

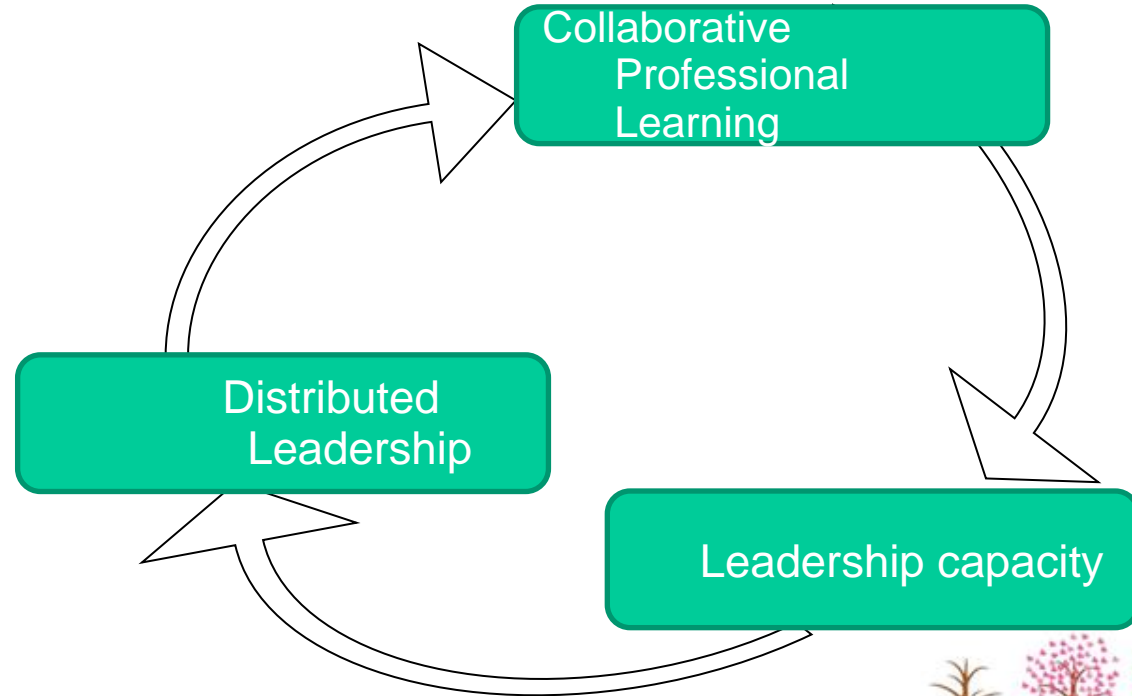
- Reflective practice
- Participatory relationships
- Collaborative and cooperative action among stakeholders
- Centres need to create the conditions for professionalism
- Distributed leadership promotes participatory culture of peer learning (Oberhuemer 2005)
- Grows through cyclical investigations in a supported in a learning community

(Fleet, Patterson & De Gioia, 2009)



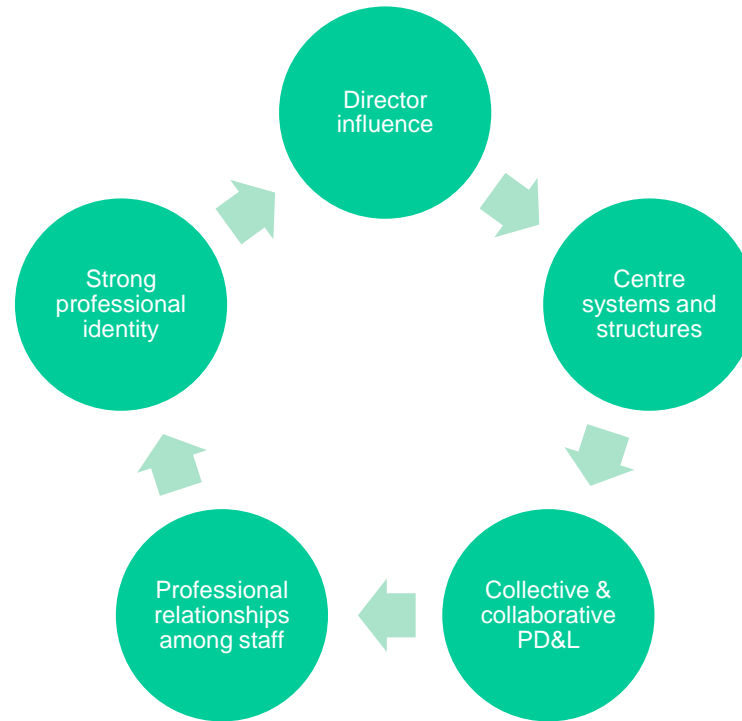
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Collaborative
professional
learning
strengthens
leadership



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Processes towards culture of professionalism



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Thank you

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