‘Everyday teacher leadership’: A reconceptualisation for early childhood education

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Abstract

Many early childhood teachers fear or avoid discussions about leadership due to misconceptions about what leadership entails. These misconceptions challenge teachers’ ability to recognise, understand and engage in leadership as part of their everyday practice. They also indicate a need for improved teacher access to leadership concepts that are relevant to the collaborative, contextualised, and community-based ethos of early childhood education. This paper seeks to propose, define and critically analyse a new concept of ‘everyday teacher leadership’ for the context of early childhood education. Its central tenet is that knowledgeable and committed teachers have potential to lead, regardless of position or title. The paper draws on leadership literature and concepts of social learning and relational agency to argue that everyday teacher leadership is a relational construct that centres on teachers’ empowering influences on children, families and teaching colleagues, for effective educational provision. The aim of this paper is to stimulate reflective discussion and debate about the potential and nature of everyday teacher leadership within, and perhaps beyond, early childhood settings.

Keywords: *Everyday teacher leadership; leadership practice; early childhood*

Introduction

The potential for teachers to engage in shared leadership is a current topic of interest in early childhood research and practice. Such a view encourages a shift in thinking about leadership as a set of traits and qualities, to leadership as a relational, everyday practice. It also suggests that leaders are not necessarily those with designated leadership titles and responsibilities. Some challenges facing the early childhood sector, however, potentially inhibit teachers’ ability to recognise, understand and engage in leadership as part of their everyday practice. These challenges include teachers’ hesitancy to engage with the notion of leadership, minimal access to and knowledge of relevant leadership concepts, and under-examination of the specific nature of teachers’ leadership practices, which may occur as part of everyday activity. This paper aims to stimulate reflective discussion and debate about how teachers, including positional leaders with teaching and learning responsibilities, in early childhood contexts, understand and enact leadership in their everyday practices to improve educational provision. To support the aim, this paper argues that the notion of teacher leadership be reconceptualised for the context of early childhood education (ECE). The premise is that a new concept which is acceptable to teachers in the sector, and highlights teachers as central to leadership, may help to address current concerns.

The paper first outlines the context of ECE. It then explores the leadership and ECE literature to highlight key issues regarding teacher leadership, including a discussion on the complex notion of teacher leadership. The paper then introduces and critically analyses four interrelated themes evident in the literature, which underpin the argument that the notion of teacher leadership ought to be reconceptualised for the collaborative, contextualised, and community-based ethos of ECE. The interrelated themes include:

- relational and empowering influence is central to teacher leadership;
- leadership is embedded in teachers’ everyday practice;
- teacher leaders embrace an identity underpinned by advocacy and relational agency; and
- teachers’ identity as leaders emerges within an effective community of practice.

A work-in-progress definition of everyday teacher leadership is then proposed, inviting reflective discussion and debate from the ECE sector and beyond.

The context of ECE

ECE in New Zealand (NZ) comprises a wide range of diverse parent-led and teacher-led services, including education and care services, which currently have 62% of all enrolments in licensed services (Ministry of Education, 2014). The approach to leadership within these services is diverse, with many groups of teachers employing an approach to suit the values and philosophical underpinnings of their context, including a preference for collaborative forms of leadership (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Thornton, 2005, 2010). Yet, without knowledge of the scholarship of leadership, teachers may draw on, or perhaps continue to draw on, notions of leadership that fall short in terms of making substantial contributions to the actual needs of their context (Neumann, Jones, & Webb, 2012). This issue may be complicated by the fact that many leaders in early childhood services are unlikely to have engaged in formal leadership preparation (Thornton, 2010). Thus, improving teacher access to professional knowledge of effective leadership in relation to ECE may assist teachers to recognise and foster leadership in their own and colleagues' everyday practices.

Teachers in this paper are defined as the adults in teaching roles who teach children aged from birth to five years. This term is inclusive of adults holding a recognised qualification to teach young children, positional leaders with designated leadership titles and responsibilities who have teaching and learning responsibilities and regular contact with children, teachers, and families, and adults in a teaching role without a recognised qualification.

Literature review

Many teachers internationally, across the school and early childhood sectors, hesitate to view or label themselves as leaders (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; Krieg, Davis, & Smith, 2014; McDowall Clark, 2012; Rodd, 2013). Exacerbating this concern is the ongoing issue that the notion of leadership in early childhood remains largely under-conceptualised and under-theorised (Krieg et al., 2014; Rodd, 2013; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). However, research on leadership in the sector is growing, thereby minimising concerns of its paucity (Rodd, 2013; Thornton, 2010). The literature highlights an increasing emphasis on teachers' capacity to engage in shared or distributed forms of leadership within early childhood contexts (e.g., Clarkin-Phillips, 2009; Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Krieg et al., 2014; Stamopoulous, 2012; Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha, & Te Kōpae Piripono, 2006). Many of these studies focused on shared forms of leadership in early childhood contexts involving action research projects, as in the NZ Centres of Innovation programme, or implementing a new professional learning initiative.

Dominant images of leadership in the wider community, particularly those derived from the business sector, present a challenge for ECE. Business-inspired models in education equate leadership with technical, managerial and administrative work (Woodrow & Busch, 2008), tight regulations, highly prescriptive curriculum, a 'right' way to teach, and overall school coherence that relies more on control over people than commitment from people (Sergiovanni, 2005). Yet, the nature of ECE tends to be collaborative, as reflected in the collective approach to teaching, less hierarchical than the leadership structure in schools (Thornton, 2010), and contextualised and focused on community (Krieg et al., 2014). Business-inspired approaches to leadership might therefore sit at odds with the collaborative, contextualised, and community-based ethos of ECE (Krieg et al., 2014; Thornton, 2010). Additionally, their dominance might reveal a reliance on hierarchical frameworks derived from outside the sector, a concern which has led researchers to argue for the development of leadership concepts specific to ECE (for example, see Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jovanovic & Roder, 2008; Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009; Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2012; Woodrow &

Busch, 2008), including notions of leadership that incorporate diverse perspectives and cultural influences (e.g., Jovanovic, 2012; Tamati et al., 2006; Weisz-Koves, 2011) to align with the diverse nature of early childhood contexts (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Thornton, 2010).

A lack of teacher interest in leadership is a concern shared by the early childhood sector internationally (see Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Rodd, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012; Woodrow & Busch, 2008) and nationally (see Thornton et al., 2009). As effective leadership and enhanced educational provision are interrelated (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Rodd, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Waniganayake et al., 2012), it is vital that teachers committed to improving infants', toddlers', and young children's experiences in ECE pay attention to how leadership might enhance provision. Engaging teachers' interest in the scholarship of leadership might be supported by a coherent and theorised conception of teacher leadership that reflects everyday practices of teachers in ECE contexts.

The complex notion of teacher leadership

The notion of teacher leadership has developed over time in both strength and complexity (see Crowther, 1996; Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Lambert, 2003, Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Scholarly discussions about teachers engaging in leadership and shifts in thinking about leadership are evident in recent literature (e.g., Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Yet, the notion of teacher leadership remains elusive, evidenced by its numerous, sometimes conflicting, definitions and descriptions. This complexity is illustrated by several examples:

- teachers' leadership practice is viewed as both a delegated responsibility and an emergent, organic response to problematic situations (Sato, 2005);
- it comprises both subtle acts of interaction (Karp, 2013) and explicit and visible practices (Frost & Durrant, 2003); and
- it is viewed as a responsibility undertaken either by experienced teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2004) or by both experienced and novice teachers (Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011; Tamati et al., 2006).

Further, Dalli and Thornton (2013) highlighted the changing foci of leadership from individual qualities to collective and collaborative practices, from leadership styles to leadership practices, and from managerial leadership to educational leadership.

The use of several terms analogous to teacher leadership in the early childhood literature adds another layer of complexity. For example, pedagogical leadership (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011) refers to the actions of teachers appointed specifically to improve pedagogy and to "ensure that the educational pedagogy employed matches with children's interests, abilities and needs" (p. 510). This role raises the expectation that teachers will enact leadership by developing pedagogy and curriculum. Its main focus on pedagogy and curriculum is narrower than a more encompassing notion of teacher leadership that focuses on empowering children, teachers, and families, and transforming educational provision, including pedagogy and curriculum.

Another term that resonates with teacher leadership is catalytic leadership (McDowall Clark, 2012), which refers to qualified teachers, specifically Early Years Professionals in England, as "leaders of practice" (p. 394) and catalysts for change. By taking on a position of influence and authority, earned by leading "from within" (p. 397), teachers become change agents for educational improvement in early childhood settings. Catalytic leadership describes not only the practice but also how teachers approach leadership within an inclusive and social context (McDowall Clark, 2012). The term, specifically its emphasis on agency, which is the capacity to interpret and act on one's world (Edwards, 2005, 2011), is broad enough to provide the backdrop for a reconceptualised notion of teacher leadership relevant to ECE.

The plethora of descriptions, definitions and conceptions of teacher leadership suggests that the notion resists a single, narrow definition. Yet, this complexity need not be viewed as a weakness. Rather, it leaves room

for nuanced variations of teacher leadership to be formulated to suit the actual needs of particular contexts. The context-specific nature of teacher leadership was evident in a NZ study that employed a qualitative multiple case study approach to investigate leadership in three types of early childhood services: a childcare centre, a playcentre, and a kindergarten (Thornton, 2005). Thornton focused on educative leadership, including the idea of a collaborative culture as a catalyst for teacher leadership.

Thornton's (2005) teacher participants were questioned for their understandings of leadership, leadership roles and approach, new leadership opportunities, and leadership support. Leadership was defined during the study as "working collaboratively in a learning community towards a shared vision" (p. 92), which was found to involve innovative practice, engagement in research activity and sharing research findings with the early childhood community. Despite being supported by academic researchers, teachers in the study feared and/or avoided viewing themselves as leaders, a finding which was supported by further recent studies (e.g., Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2014; McDowall Clark, 2012; Rodd, 2013). In Thornton's (2005) study, teachers believed that leadership aligned with competition, additional responsibilities, and personal recognition, something they felt uncomfortable to embrace.

Thornton (2005) also found that teachers in each context took their own approach to leadership. The childcare centre, which had recently undergone significant change, reflected a structured and hierarchical type of leadership, but with some commitment for shared responsibility and teachers taking on leadership responsibility. The playcentre, a parent-led early childhood service, reflected a form of emergent leadership by distributing leadership across adults as a way to recognise individual strengths and interests, and to reflect the idea that everyone can be involved in leadership practice. Finally, the kindergarten case study presented a view of leadership as involving support for other kindergartens in the early childhood community, despite teachers feeling hesitant about identifying as leaders. Future research investigating teachers' leadership practices might give careful consideration to the idea that their leadership will play out in different ways in different contexts.

The work of Thornton (2005) and other scholars (e.g., Clarkin-Phillips, 2009; Krieg et al., 2014; Tamati et al., 2006) highlights the potential for shared forms of leadership in early childhood organisations. Yet, what appears to remain under-examined at this time are the specific practices, perceptions, and challenges of early childhood teachers who willingly engage in leadership as part of their everyday activities, regardless of their position or title, in services that are not currently involved in whole-centre action research or professional learning initiatives.

Reconceptualising the notion of teacher leadership: Four key themes

This paper now critically discusses four interrelated themes evident in the literature that help support the rationale for a reconceptualisation of teacher leadership for ECE. First, relational and empowering influence is central to teacher leadership. Second, leadership is embedded in teachers' everyday practice. Third, teachers embrace a leadership identity underpinned by advocacy and relational agency. Fourth, teachers' identity as leaders emerges within an effective community of practice.

The centrality of relational and empowering acts of influence

A central feature of teacher leadership is its influence on others (Karp, 2013; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Robinson, 2011; Sato, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), including children, teachers, and families in ECE. Effective influence can occur through relationships based on collegiality and reciprocity (Leithwood et al., 1999), in ways that maintain harmony in those relationships (Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, & Taylor, 2011). Placing relationships at the heart of teachers' influence on others contrasts with leadership influence that directs others' actions (McDowall Clark, 2012). In this way, teachers engage in leadership when they act ethically and influence children, teachers, and families in relational and empowering ways.

Viewing leadership and its influence as relational constructs emphasises the dynamic interplay between individuals, everyday situations, and leadership (Karp, 2013; Sato, 2005). It locates leadership in the interactive and shared professional practices of teachers. It also reflects leadership as a mutually empowering process, whereby teachers who willingly engage in informal leadership may feel empowered to do so, and lead with a consideration for others around them. In turn, those being influenced feel empowered to change as they accept that the influence emerges from professional collegiality. This receptivity to being influenced may foster, and be fostered by, a sense of trust and collegiality in relationships.

Positioning influence within trusting and collegial relationships contrasts with the 'great-man' theory of leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2007, p. 112), or relying on individual 'heroic' leaders to improve educational provision. While the individual leader influences others, this model has been critiqued on the basis of not being sustainable and being inefficient in terms of utilising expertise in an organisation. In contrast, leadership from a contemporary perspective is dispersed and occurs through collegiality and shared decision-making, with minimal emphasis on who the leader is and more focus on what people do, and how and why they do it (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; Lambert, 2003; Neumann et al., 2012; Thornton, 2005). Consequently, current early childhood discourse reveals an increasing use of terms such as distributed, relational, shared, and collective leadership (Dalli & Thornton, 2013).

Yet, it may be idealistic to expect teachers' relations with others to be always positive and conflict-free. It is therefore important to distinguish collegiality from congeniality. Sergiovanni (2005) described congeniality as the climate of interpersonal relationships within a community. While this might be pleasant and friendly, it has little link with improved educational provision. Alternatively, collegiality can refer to the professional nature of interactions with others. Collegial interactions might involve conflict but may also include efforts to resolve conflicts in order to reach some level of consensus, even if a tolerable level of dissensus remains. Indeed, conflict is a part of learning; "the ability of educational leaders to productively embrace conflict and dissent is critical" (Toole & Seashore Louis, 2002, p. 270).

It is essential that teachers remain vigilant to the ways they influence others, especially teachers who teach as part of a collective. Influence can maintain or destroy harmony in relationships, it can empower or disempower others, and it can be acceptable or not to those being influenced. It is also important that the influence is accepted by others who are being influenced if it is to be viewed as leadership (Karp, 2013). This idea suggests that leadership is qualified by its followership, but the leader-follower argument is problematic in that it suggests a linear relationship between the leader and the influenced. A leadership/follower binary may also ignore "the reality of the complexity of human relationships and identity formation and maintenance" (Woodrow & Busch, 2008, p. 86). In reality, influence may be more fluid and organic, arising within the dynamic of a group where individuals feed off and inspire each other in various ways.

The varying ways in which influence is explained in the teacher leadership literature highlight further issues. For example, York-Barr and Duke (2004) highlighted influence as a key feature of teacher leadership, yet offered little detail about the nature or source of that influence. Rodd (2013) highlighted influence as one of several key principles of leadership but also did not explain the nature of this influence in any depth. In contrast, Leithwood et al. (1999) explained that influence is about "the influence over the beliefs, actions and values of others as is the case with leadership from any source" (p. 116).

Robinson (2011) was more specific and argued that leadership in the school sector involves the exercise of influence, and then qualified that influence as deriving from three sources which are not restricted to those with positional authority. The first source is an authority that is accepted or perceived by those who are influenced. A second source involves the personal qualities that are considered attractive by those who are influenced. A third source is the expert knowledge and skills, which enable others to progress with their responsibilities. The emphasis on knowledge resonates with Stamopoulous' (2012) argument that effective leadership in ECE requires "knowledge of research, leadership and early childhood pedagogy" (p. 45).

In summary, teacher leadership is distinguished by its central feature: influence on others, which in ECE might include children, teachers, and families. This influence can be empowering and relational, and based on collegiality and knowledge. It can also emerge naturally, rather than be exerted on others intentionally, as teachers engage in shared practice. In this way, influence is located in the relational everyday practices of teachers.

Viewing teacher leadership as embedded in everyday practice

Viewing teacher leadership as an everyday practice suggests that leadership is embedded in, rather than added on to, teachers' practices. In this manner, teachers who are driven by their commitment to children, other teachers, families, and the early childhood profession can engage in informal leadership practices, regardless of their formal role. While positional leaders carrying out expected responsibilities earn the right to lead based on authority, teachers can earn the right to lead based on knowledge, willingness and practice. Sergiovanni (2005) argued that teachers' right to lead comes not from position or title, but from being able to lead and the practice of leading itself. Similarly, leadership can be earned by those who have the competence and commitment to lead, even when it is not expected or wanted (Karp, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2005). The emphasis on competence highlights that knowledge of the scholarship of leadership is important. Thus, a close examination of teachers' knowledge of leadership, willingness to lead, and evidence of actual practice, appears integral to understanding teacher leadership as an everyday practice.

Leadership that is embedded in teachers' everyday practice may occur when teachers practice in leaderful ways (Raelin, 2003, 2005). Raelin's (2005) framework of leaderful practice, which originated in the field of management and organisational development, is based on leadership as a collective practice, where those leading "need not be the designated position leader of the community" (p. 18). Four key tenets form the basis of Raelin's framework:

- leadership is concurrent, as multiple individuals willingly engage in leadership practice at the same time;
- it is collective, as leadership emerges from the collective when many people work as leaders together, particularly when a need arises;
- it is collaborative, as everyone is in control, engages in dialogue, takes responsibility for and speaks for the whole community; and
- it is compassionate, as individuals are committed to maintaining the dignity of others in the community, regardless of each person's background or perspectives.

The notions of concurrency, collectivity, collaboration, and compassion resonate with the collaborative, contextualised, and community-based ethos of ECE.

Raelin (2005) further argued that one role of the positional leader is to encourage everyone in the organisation to embrace a leaderful approach in practice, suggesting that leaderful organisations are intentional and might not emerge on their own. It is, however, possible that some teachers who disagree with a shared leadership model may challenge this approach. Therefore, teachers ought to collectively engage in regular, collegial and reflective discussions with positional leaders about the potential benefits of leaderful practice in relation to supporting children, teachers, and families.

Viewing leadership as an everyday practice also means acknowledging that teachers can choose to engage in leadership. Teachers might engage in leadership in various ways, including by sharing their expertise, introducing new ideas and supporting their colleagues (Frost & Harris, 2003). In this manner, teachers employ their professional agency as they willingly step up to respond to unplanned events, address important issues, or promote new initiatives, rather than focus on "the big visions, the strategising, the change initiatives, the hairy goals or the big decisions" that positional leaders might be expected to carry out as part of their designated role (Karp, 2013, p. 10).

Similarly, Sato's (2005) study on teacher leadership involved coining the term 'practical leadership' to explain leadership as a voluntary, everyday practice, which involves teachers' enacting agency to address uncertain or problematic situations. Teacher leadership was defined as:

> teachers' actions to bring about change in their local contexts, to influence the actions and beliefs of others (teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers), and to engage in actions that they believe contribute to the educational quality of their schools. (p. 57)

Sato's concerns included the ways teacher leaders engaged in leadership practice but that went unnoticed by others. Evidence of teacher leadership arose when teachers employed professional judgment and were strategic and reasoned in their responses during problematic situations. These teachers therefore enacted leadership, not by delegation or expectation, but by practising agency within everyday practice when problematic issues arose.

Recent research focused on the everyday nature of teacher leadership has posited that teachers do not become leaders, but lead as they teach (Collay, 2013). Collay's notion of everyday teacher leadership in schools centred on the idea that "teachers lead every day by teaching well, collaborating with others, conducting well-designed inquiry, and forming partnerships" (p. 76). The idea that teachers lead as they teach acknowledges that leadership can be embedded in everyday practice. Yet, viewing teaching as leadership is problematic as it may also risk watering down the concept of leadership or conflating the role of teaching. It is therefore important to distinguish effective teacher leadership from teaching by emphasising one of its key features: empowering influence on children, as well as families and other teachers.

In summary, teacher leadership can be viewed as an everyday practice when it is embedded in the practice of teachers committed to improving educational provision. Teachers are intentional when they choose to engage in leadership, and do so by acting in leaderful ways. They embrace leadership as a collective practice and exert leadership by influencing others in empowering and relational ways and employing agency and advocacy to transform educational provision.

Teacher leaders embrace an identity underpinned by advocacy and relational agency

Teachers develop professional identity by thinking and acting in diverse ways and transforming their values, beliefs and what they want to achieve (Stamopoulous, 2012). The literature highlights advocacy, in the form of an ethical stance and an activist orientation, as a consideration for teachers' professional identity. Crowther et al. (2009) viewed teacher leadership as an ethical stance embedded into teachers' values and beliefs system, based on the idea that teachers have autonomy and ability to shape the meaning systems in their world. Similarly, Sergiovanni's community of responsibility, Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, and Edwards' (2005, 2011) notion of relational agency emphasised the ethical and moral commitments between people as fundamental to the building of effective communities. These ideas suggest that teacher leadership in ECE can be underpinned by a view of teachers as ethical and moral agents.

Leading from an ethical stance and moral attitude can be reflected in teachers' advocacy for children. Collay (2013) promoted the idea of teacher leadership in schools as an ethical responsibility for all students' learning. Similarly, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) advocated for educators to consider the place of ethics (and politics) in early childhood services in order to think critically about the conditions of childhood and the role of ECE in shaping those conditions. Thus, teachers might engage in leadership when they actively engage in ethical decision-making that involves caring for and taking responsibility for others, such as children, other teachers, and families. In this way, teacher leadership in ECE is not a technical task, but involves an intellectual, complex, and moral commitment to children, other teachers, and families.

Activism has been argued as another key aspect of teachers' leadership practice in ECE (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Activist professionalism centres on democratic values of collaboration, collegiality, and

emphasising the collective (Sachs, 2000). It involves a commitment to and responsibility for others, with space for discussion and debate within educational settings (Sachs, 2000, 2001). Sachs (2000) described this willingness to engage in collective discussion and debate about issues of education as adopting a political view of one's role. Teachers who take on an activist orientation also draw "for inspiration and momentum from the work of people in the broad democratically-based enterprises which hold the best interests of the clientele at heart in recognition that needs vary, are contextualised, and require careful and thoughtful decision making" (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002, p. 352). The notion of activism in relation to teacher leadership aligns with teachers' ethical and moral commitment and advocacy for children, other teachers, and families.

Yet, developing an activist professional identity may take time to develop and may not come naturally to teachers, as it needs to be negotiated, lived and practised (Sachs, 2001). However, it is recognised that long-standing advocacy and activism have underpinned the early childhood sector for many years (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Thus, teachers in ECE are likely to be familiar with, if not already engaging in, such practice. Even so, an activist professional identity might be difficult to progress when managerialism, and its associated notions of individualism and competition, dominate conditions and practice (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). Similarly, Sachs (2000, 2001) pointed out that activist professionalism is risky, as it involves exposing one's practice to the scrutiny of others, and negotiation about what personal and professional changes might be necessary for educational improvement. Even so, activist professionalism enables teachers to reflect an understanding that teaching and learning are complex processes.

Another underlying notion that appears relevant to teacher leadership in ECE is relational agency. Inspired by cultural historical activity theory, Edwards' (2005, 2011) concept of relational agency refers to purposeful joint action that involves negotiating and sharing professional knowledge to enhance how people interpret and respond to their worlds. In other words, relational agency is the capacity to bring together different forms of expertise into a shared practice. It requires that teachers recognise how others read and interpret a particular issue, know what informs their reading and interpretation of the issue, and align their motives with others' motives to enhance how a particular issue is addressed (Edwards, 2005). In ECE, relational agency might emerge in the leadership actions of teachers as they share their expertise in pedagogy, learning and teaching, with other teachers and children's families, seek teachers' and families' expertise, and attempt to align their intentions with the intentions of other teachers and/or families, in order to support effective educational provision.

In summary, the notions of advocacy and relational agency can underpin a teacher leadership identity. These concepts recognise teaching and learning as complex, interactive endeavours. They also reflect teachers' ability to contribute to ethical, moral, and relational decision-making towards improving educational provision as a form of leadership. Developing an identity of leadership, however, can be challenging or even risky for some teachers. What might be needed then is for teacher leadership to be fostered within an effective community of practice.

Teachers' identity as leaders emerges within an effective community of practice

A community of practice is helpful in understanding the context in which teachers' identity as everyday leaders might emerge. Wenger's (1998) communities of practice are social groups which comprise individuals who share knowledge and engage with each other in practices that reflect the educational interests of the community. Individuals develop a sense of identity to that community and learn as they share practice and participate in the collective. In ECE, for example, a collective of teachers may share an interest in improving educational provision. When these teachers collaborate regularly to explore and inquire about their shared interest, and identify themselves by the practice of early childhood teaching, the group reflects a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Even so, communities of practice are not always effective, especially where teachers' motives

and intentions are not in alignment with that of children, other teachers, families, or the overall aims and values of the organisation.

However, the synergies between an effective community of practice and teacher leadership might enable teachers' leadership identity to emerge naturally from practice. For example, both concepts emphasise everyday practice (Neumann et al., 2012; Sato, 2005; Wenger, 1998), emerge when a need or desire arises (Karp, 2013; Sato, 2005; Wenger, 1998), and are naturally formed and shaped by shared interests and collegiality (Bolden et al., 2011; Leithwood et al., 1999; Wenger, 1998). Additionally, both concepts are held together by strong relationships, and centre on teachers' ethical commitment to others and effective teaching and learning (Collay, 2013; Crowther et al., 2009; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2005; Wenger, 1998). These complementary synergies highlight that the context, or community of practice, that shapes teachers' leadership practice and identity, is an important consideration for future research on teacher leadership.

Teachers might also need to consider cultural issues when leading within a community of practice. In communities where shared decision-making is foregrounded and everyone's voice matters, there may be a need to negotiate differences of opinions and conflicts with colleagues (Ho & Tikly, 2012). Toole and Seashore Louis (2002) suggested that some consensus might only be reached when all voices have been heard. Yet, tension may exist between a focus on individual autonomy and cultural norms practised by collectivist cultures. One example of a collectivist cultural norm might be to downplay the focus on individual voices, and instead, rely on a representative to speak for the group (Ho & Tikly, 2012). Issues related to cultural norms and expectations regarding teacher leadership reflect possible features of diverse contexts, such as ECE settings in NZ, which are worth exploring in future research.

Similar to the issue regarding collegial relations, teachers within a community of practice are unlikely to always reach consensus on how or why to enhance educational provision. Communities of practice in ECE are likely to experience this complex issue as they often comprise diverse adults with different values, beliefs and educational insights. Also, expecting an educational group to reflect a community of learners is challenging and is "both an ambitious, welcome vision and an empty promissory note" (Barth, 2002, p. 7). Barth argued that while some school cultures are resistant to change, the involvement of both teachers and positional leaders can help. This idea suggests a need to explore teachers' and positional leaders' understandings of leadership in order to reveal the ways in which teacher leadership might be enacted within diverse communities of practice.

Teachers' identity as leaders can potentially emerge where the social structures of the community of practice are "managerially loose and culturally tight" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 36). In this manner, teachers are trusted to collaborate and make decisions about teaching and learning based on shared values, beliefs and practices. The emphasis is on teachers forming a collaborative culture (Sergiovanni, 2005) with little management control to undermine this trust. Sergiovanni argued that "few leaders have all the competence, all the time, and all the information needed at any one time to get the job done" (p. 22). Similarly, Raelin's (2005) framework of leaderful practice requires that positional leaders relinquish some of their authority and control in order to foster opportunities for everyone to share in the leadership experience.

In contrast, some scholars argue that both forms of leadership are necessary (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Thornton, 2005). Hallinger and Heck (2009) highlighted the central role that positional leaders play in driving change and supporting the building of leadership capacity in others, particularly in communities where leadership is distributed across the collective. It therefore appears essential that research on teacher leadership within a community of practice includes an exploration of the role of the positional leader, including how they might also engage in leaderful practices.

In summary, teachers' identity as everyday leaders can emerge within an effective community of practice. This community is deemed to be effective when leadership is viewed as a shared practice,

and formal leaders relinquish some control. Further, an effective community of practice might empower teachers to contribute to decisions about educational improvement in leaderful ways, influencing children, teachers, and families in positive ways while doing so.

'Everyday teacher leadership': A reconceptualisation for ECE

The critical discussion of four interrelated themes of teacher leadership has provided the impetus for a reconceptualising of the notion of teacher leadership to suit the collaborative, contextualised, and community-based ethos of ECE. The work-in-progress definition is:

> *Everyday teacher leadership is a relational construct that emerges within a collegial community of practice. Its central feature is its empowering influence on children, families, and teaching colleagues, aimed at improving educational provision. It is embedded in knowledgeable teachers' leaderful practices and underpinned by advocacy and relational agency.*

This definition draws from theoretical perspectives of leadership (e.g., Sergiovanni, 2005), social learning (Wenger, 1998), and relational agency (Edwards, 2005, 2011) alongside research literature pertinent to the themes from the school and early childhood sectors. Waniganayake et al. (2012) argued that any definition of leadership for ECE is always subject to debate, due to the growing diverse nature of educational settings. The same argument might therefore apply to this effort to re-envision the concept of everyday teacher leadership. However, the context-specific nature of teachers' leadership practice (Thornton, 2005) suggests that any derivative of the concept of teacher leadership embraces fluidity, negotiation and contextual variations. It is therefore expected that the new concept of everyday teacher leadership may be contextualised and adapted for use in different contexts. Cultural diversities and practices within communities may also lead to differences in interpretations, views and perspectives. Such fluidity allows the concept of everyday teacher leadership to reflect and to be shaped by the values, beliefs, and practices of a particular community (Waniganayake et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The paper has proposed a reconceptualisation of everyday teacher leadership based on current concerns facing the early childhood sector. These concerns include teachers' hesitancy to engage with the notion of leadership, the importance of teachers' knowledge of relevant leadership concepts, and under-examination of the nature of teacher leadership practices in ECE, which occur as part of everyday practice. The paper has proposed four interrelated themes derived from the research literature, which contributes to a new concept of everyday teacher leadership for ECE: its influence is relational and empowers others, it is embedded in everyday practice, it is supported when teachers embrace an identity underpinned by advocacy and relational agency, and teachers' identity as leaders emerges within an effective community of practice. The paper invites reflective discussion and debate about the potential and nature of this concept. This concept remains open to further interpretation and teacher insight, within the early childhood sector, and beyond. Stimulating reflection and inquiry regarding the topic of teacher leadership in these ways potentially opens up avenues for future research and transformations in thinking about leadership practice.

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