



CHAPTER  
17

## Bringing it Together: Reflections about Emerging Issues

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The studies included in this research monograph provide a comparative perspective on the current foci of research and thinking about leadership in early childhood by committed and talented researchers from three countries, Australia, Finland and Norway. Although the early childhood sector in each of the three countries may be grounded in different cultures, politics and ideologies, competent leadership is recognised by their government and professional agencies as critical for improving the standard of professional knowledge and expertise of early childhood practitioners and relevant stakeholders, without whom the delivery of high quality early childhood provision would be impossible. Furthermore, many findings draw attention to the capacity of early childhood leaders and their distinctive leadership expertise for influencing the broader world of leadership. The contributors challenge the early childhood research community to engage more rigorously with this critical issue and core function, and signpost fruitful directions for meaningful investigation into various aspects of leadership by those with long-standing or emerging research interest and expertise.

These studies showcase a new level of maturity that research about leadership in early childhood has achieved since it emerged around five decades ago. Illustrating this fact, the focus of current research has shifted from earlier and simpler research aims and methodologies (which generally centred around the identification of key attributes, competencies, roles, functions, tasks and activities within early childhood contexts) to more theoretically and methodologically complex approaches and issues. The body of research illustrates

the development of more holistic, integrated and deeper understandings about leadership, particularly in relation to the profusion of roles, responsibilities, demands and challenges, its enactment and realms of influence, and the structural and contextual factors that shape it.

The content of and contributors to this monograph underline the international flavour of contemporary leadership research and offer an opportunity to access and compare a broader range of theories, literature, research foci and methodologies that might not otherwise be accessible due to language barriers or other restrictions in specific nations. Because the developmental practice and focus of many established and embedded early childhood leaders are very sophisticated, the findings could contribute to the development of new and better models for and approaches to leadership development. Consequently, this resource has the potential to stimulate and expand research interest in, knowledge about and capability for leadership throughout the global early childhood community.

The following three key themes, which are central to contemporary understanding about and practice in leadership in early childhood provision, pervade this body of research.

- ◆ Leadership and learning are inextricably linked at practitioner and organisational levels
- ◆ Changing government policies and guidance, socio-cultural expectations and the diversity of providers (for example, public, private, community, voluntary, educational phase) influence and shape enactment of leadership
- ◆ Professional conceptualisations about and experience of what it means to be a leader in an early childhood centre evolve continually.

These three themes, which are both explicitly and implicitly evident in the studies, affirm the holistic, complex and multifaceted nature of leadership in the provision of early childhood education and care. This overview draws together various issues and insights garnered from these Australian, Finnish and Norwegian research studies.

## LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED AT PRACTITIONER AND ORGANISATIONAL LEVELS

Throughout this resource, many authors present compelling evidence for and argument about the critical link between leadership and learning in early childhood contexts. A growing body of literature from a range of disciplines attests that leadership and learning are indispensable to one another, and that professional learning acts as a catalyst for educational reform and change.

Competent leadership demands that leaders are active learners and, in fact, lead the learning of both children and colleagues. Evidence indicates that early childhood settings with highly qualified and experienced leaders can be both arenas for young children's learning and learning organisations that support adult learning and professional growth.

In the global early childhood community, meeting government, professional and family demands for increased quality improvement in early education and care provision depends on a knowledgeable workforce whose members continually pursue the acquisition of appropriate and higher levels of qualification, relevant expertise and meaningful professional experience. However, enhanced quality can be secured only when improvements in early childhood practitioners' learning (through a coherent qualifications framework, systematic yet flexible professional development opportunities and relevant, timely practical experience) is accompanied by continuous engagement in dialogue, inquiry, creative and critical thinking, and reflective practice, ideally within professional learning communities.

In many countries, quality improvement in early childhood provision is linked to building an early childhood workforce around highly qualified practitioners. Consequently, government, professional agencies and employers expect early childhood practitioners to actively and continuously engage with professional learning and development as one pathway for improving their own practice, children's learning and the quality of provision. Equally, leaders of early childhood centres are expected to create and integrate a culture of learning at the organisational level. Developing as a learning organisation, where learning is at the centre of the professionalisation agenda of both practitioners and early childhood provision, is considered to be an essential element of quality improvement. However, some of the findings suggest that a proportion of the early childhood workforce in all three countries might not be sufficiently aware of, appreciate the need for or understand how to address these concepts in their daily work. In addition, the fragmented and heavy workload undertaken by many early childhood professionals may impede their willingness to engage with such expectations about professional learning.

While learning-centred leadership is a theme discernable in all of the studies included in this book, it is the explicit focus in over half of them, including Colmer, Halttunen, Hognestad & Boe, Marsh & Waniganayake, Skaeveland, Vannebo & Gotvassli and Wong. The range of findings and implications discussed make significant contributions to furthering our understanding about the links between leadership, learning, quality improvement and educational

change. For example, Colmer (*Leading professional development and learning in early childhood centres: a social systems perspective*) provides a thought provoking starting point for exploring this theme. She adopts a systems perspective for examining and understanding the relationship between leadership and learning. She points out that, because educational reform in early childhood provision is a complex and cumulative process, where changes in practice evolve from early childhood practitioners' continuous professional learning and development, competent leadership is vital for building the processes and systems required to create collaborative learning organisations on which educational change and quality improvement depend.

Consequently, quality improvement is dependent upon early childhood practitioners engaging as collaborative and interdependent learners, supported by competent leaders who are actively involved in shaping the conditions for meaningful professional learning. The creation of organisational structures that encourage and enable professional learning relies on authentic early childhood leaders who communicate presence both as a leader of, and as the leading learner in, professional development opportunities and collaborative learning organisations.

The emergence of ECEC centres as learning organisations is explored further by Vannebo & Gotvassli (*The Making of a Learning Organization in Norwegian Early Childhood Centres*), who point out that, in Norway, official policy and guidance explicitly state that all ECEC centres must aspire to become learning organisations. Their research illuminates the different ways in which early childhood leaders understand, explore and work towards realizing this concept in their centres. Interestingly, their findings indicate that few Norwegian practitioners truly understand the concept of a learning organisation or what it means for them as members of such an organisation. Although not confined to Norway, some early childhood practitioners seem to think that knowledge, practical expertise and consequently enhanced professional development are somehow absorbed unconsciously, automatically or intuitively from practice-based work within ECEC centres.

In contrast, many early childhood experts in leadership and professional development argue that professional development emerges from purposeful, planned and intentional engagement with worthwhile learning opportunities. Norwegian early childhood leaders are regarded as central to and responsible for meeting government policy and curriculum guidelines for transforming ECEC centres into learning organisations. Ensuring that practitioners acquire more sophisticated understandings about the need for and benefits of

professional learning and development is the starting point, combined with access to a variety of learning opportunities that offer alternative and flexible pathways that help them develop and grow professionally.

Hognestad & Boe (*Leading site-based knowledge development: a mission impossible? Insights from a study in Norway*) note that Norwegian early childhood leaders are increasingly accountable for building learning organisations. They explore how leaders of ECEC centres might lead site-based knowledge development and shape their centres as learning organisations. The term ‘practice architectures’ (adapted from Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) describes the conditions that underpin the development of a learning organisation, which are grounded principally in the relationship between professional knowledge, working conditions and staff composition.

Given that many early childhood leaders generally combine both teaching and leadership functions in their daily work, Hognestad & Boe attempt to reveal what the impact of this dual role and responsibility might be on leadership and learning. Their findings suggest that certain structural conditions, especially time constraints, hinder competent leadership of systematic knowledge development and consequently the development of a collective praxis in ECEC centres. In centres where Norwegian early childhood leaders do not have sufficient time to interact genuinely with staff about significant issues and incidents relating to improving professional knowledge and practice, leadership of professional learning tends to be reduced to an activity based merely on instrumental values and technical action, potentially resulting in role division and competition between the leadership of pedagogical development and the leadership of staff development.

Such findings highlight the value of ensuring that early childhood teams have opportunities to input into how best to strengthen the role of leaders, teachers and educators for developing professional knowledge, practice and pedagogy. Thoughtful reflection can enable greater appreciation of the impact of structural conditions on the leadership of site-based knowledge development, and this may assist early childhood teacher-leaders to capitalise on the opportunities within and overcome some of the structural obstacles inherent within ECEC centres.

In Finland, the current government guidance for qualified leaders of early childhood centres states they must possess ‘sufficient skills in leadership’. What this means in practice is unclear and elusive. However, without advocating a standardised ‘one size fits all’ approach, it appears that where leadership roles and responsibilities are not well-defined, poor understanding and

uncertainty about the work of leaders is evident. This lack of clear understanding can be seen in many countries' policy documentation and pre and in-service training curricula, and is illustrated by the numbers of early childhood practitioners who are unwilling or unable to engage appropriately with professional expectations about shared leadership.

Halttunen (*Developing leadership training: ECE leaders' views*) points out that in Finland, as is the case in many countries, no universal or systematic approach to preparing early childhood leaders exists. Today, in Finland and elsewhere, individual providers decide how best to prepare and develop early childhood leaders, often without reference to participants' expectations, needs or wishes. However, without specialised preparation and training, it is very difficult for early childhood professionals to make the transition from leading young children's learning to leading a diverse group of adults. Yet, considerable research over the past three decades (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Moyles, 2006) has identified sets of core leadership competences that most early childhood professionals recognise and ascribe to. Although it is acknowledged that learning to become a leader of early childhood provision evolves out of complex interaction between sophisticated learnings, contextual understanding and practical expertise, it could be beneficial for both early childhood practitioners and training providers to negotiate a set of core competences that illuminate the baseline parameters expected of early childhood leaders. Experienced early childhood practitioners often possess and can offer valuable insight into how best to identify, prepare and groom potential and emergent leaders.

Halttunen's findings suggest that, in Finland at least, those holding leadership positions or responsibilities in early childhood settings could assist program developers and trainers with clarification about the types of learnings and experiences that best prepare, develop and nurture early childhood leaders at different stages throughout their career. These may include open access for any practitioner who is interested in learning about leadership regardless of their experience as a leader, learning opportunities tailored to the stage and length of practitioners' careers in early childhood, interactive group learning experiences offered in local and national regions, the inclusion of theoretical frameworks and literature from early childhood education and care as well from as related disciplines, and practical material with adequate time between sessions to reflect about, implement and integrate ideas into practice at the workplace either now or in the future. In many countries, opportunities to participate in early childhood leadership training programs are expanding.

Consequently, it is helpful if program developers and trainers tap into early childhood practitioners' knowledge and experience (including that which is tacitly held) in the development of such programs.

Currently, early childhood professionals fulfil a multiplicity of roles, both professionally and personally, which impacts on and influences their leadership and professional development. The myriad of early childhood educators' roles and responsibilities is illustrated in a new career role entitled Mentor Teacher recently established by one employer in Singapore. Mentoring, especially by peers, is recognised by the worldwide early childhood community as an increasingly important strategy for strengthening the professionalism of the early childhood workforce and improving the quality of early childhood provision. Consequently, a greater appreciation of current beliefs about and practices in mentoring is likely to be of interest to policy makers, employers, practitioners and training agencies.

Mentoring in early childhood is a challenging and intricate professional learning and development opportunity that grows out of reciprocal interaction between the qualities, skills and responsibilities of the individuals involved in the relationship, that is, the mentor and mentee. Mentoring is also another example of the inextricable link between leadership and learning. Competent mentoring is considered to be an beneficial, often on-site strategy for learning about and developing leadership expertise in both emerging and established early childhood leaders because it can enhance professional growth, help to support colleagues and their understanding of their role and daily work. Many experienced early childhood leaders report having experienced successful mentoring relationships and consider mentoring to be an effective means of helping others to learn how to lead.

Although Wong (*Mentoring in early childhood settings: an exploration of experiences of early childhood staff in Singapore*) suggests that many Singaporean early childhood practitioners can differentiate between being a mentor (that is, an experienced and trusted adviser) and being a leader (that is, an ECEC centre director), they also think that competent leadership and successful mentoring share many similar qualities, skills and responsibilities. While all early childhood leaders should possess the capabilities to mentor team members, not all mentors are capable of strategic leadership. Wong's findings indicate that successful mentors and leaders display flexibility and openness to ideas, are respectful, positive, trustworthy and possess integrity. Successful leaders and mentors also are thought to be competent listeners, communicators and professional role models. Mentors' and leaders' professional responsibilities

include the provision of feedback based on observation of educators' daily work, demonstration of effective teaching practices and generally helping early childhood practitioners to fulfil job requirements.

In the global early childhood community, mentoring relationships offer important opportunities for furthering the professional learning and journey of both mentor and mentee. Such interaction impacts positively on each individual's self-awareness, professional development and identity, understanding about pedagogy, improved practice and engagement in further learning, thereby enhancing the quality of early childhood provision. Appropriately skilled mentors can assist novice and more experienced early childhood leaders to develop capabilities in strategic, operational and pedagogical leadership.

Today, early childhood is recognised as a critical period for laying the foundations for developing the disposition to lifelong learning that supports later educational outcomes, personal achievement and overall wellbeing. However, in some countries, more work is needed to embed early childhood as an integral phase in the learning and educational continuum. Unfortunately, the artificial structures and barriers between sectors and phases in some countries' educational systems, for example, those between early childhood and school-based provision for children birth through eight, may impede understanding about learning as a lifelong endeavour and constrain the development of a coherent learning continuum from cradle to grave. Marsh and Waniganayake (*Exposing and exploring the potential for greater connections between early childhood and school education*) recommend that closer connections between these two educational phases be established, especially in relation to shared leadership concepts and practices that improve learning. They suggest that this process may be initiated and mediated through the creation of learning cultures and learning-centred organisations where explicit connections are made between theory, research and the day-to-day realities faced by early childhood and school-based educators in their work.

Their findings also suggest that early childhood and school-based educators' lack of understanding about leadership, learning and their interconnectivity might be overcome through the establishment of a common language for learning and leadership, collaborative teams that engage in rich dialogue about leadership and learning, and improving the quality of a leader's presence in building relationships and effective communication. Learning-centred leadership may help early childhood leaders to initiate joined-up thinking and seamless dialogue between early childhood and school-based



educators. Through this process, educational leaders may be able to engender learning as a lifelong endeavour, from infancy through adulthood, regardless of the educational phase they work in. Given that leadership of learning is acknowledged as a critical and integral function within every educational phase, it is important that early childhood leaders take the initiative in building professional bridges between early childhood and school education.

## CHANGING GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND GUIDANCE, SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND DIVERSITY OF PROVIDER INFLUENCE AND SHAPE ENACTMENT OF LEADERSHIP

Currently, leadership generally is understood as a social phenomenon that is shaped and influenced by contextual factors, including agency and structure. Contemporary theoretical and research literature shows that the enactment and experience of leadership in early childhood centres is influenced significantly by contextual factors. Indeed, many of the contributors to this resource ascribe to and endorse this perspective, describing early childhood leadership as simultaneously hierarchical, collaborative and distributed, influenced by multiple internal and external structures and factors, and displayed at and fashioned by their operational level, for example, micro (small or ECEC centre), meso (interactions, linkages and processes) and macro (large or government, municipal) levels.

The provision of early childhood services is shaped and influenced by a range of divergent factors, none more powerful than those emerging from current economic, political, societal and cultural issues. The description of the Australian early childhood landscape and reflective overview in Chapter 2 underscores the impact of such forces. While early childhood centres generally are recognised as places of learning, the influence of contextual factors regarding the goals, priorities and modes of learning within ECEC centres is unmistakable. Over recent years, early childhood sectors in many countries have been challenged to implement government policies, directives, initiatives, reforms and changes aimed at quality improvement. Early childhood positional leaders generally are responsible and accountable for ensuring that all practitioners implement these agendas in ways consistent with the official documentation and guidance. Unfortunately, political agendas may not necessarily be congruent with professional expectations and expertise. Consequently, addressing the requisite changes in early childhood settings can be challenging for those leading them.

Three studies examine the impact of recent changes in government policy on the leadership of Norway's ECEC centres, focusing on how official policy and curriculum documentation from Norwegian government agencies define leadership and management responsibilities for ensuring that ECEC centres prioritise lifelong learning. Traditionally, Norwegian ECEC centre leaders possess considerable professional autonomy about choosing what and how children learn. However, recent government changes, with shifts towards more tightly defined and documented learning goals, pose a threat to this freedom to choose. In addition, policy changes in approaches to public sector administration, from direct authority to more indirect control, impact on the way in which competent leadership of ECEC centres is understood, interpreted, exercised and accepted.

The analysis of key policy documents by Skaeveland (*Government guidance on leadership of learning in early childhood education and care in Norway*), including the Kindergarten Act (Act 64, 2005) and Framework Plan (2012) identifies a critical shift in the learning focus of ECEC centres, from the strong Norwegian pedagogical tradition of a broad and holistic approach to care, play and learning, to a focus on lifelong learning, preparation for school and centre transformation into a learning organisation. This shift, along with omissions, discrepancies and contradictions within the government guidance provided regarding leadership responsibilities within ECEC centres, has implications for those responsible for leading learning, that is, the centre director and pedagogical leader.

While Norway's Framework Plan (2012) currently provides considerable detail about the values, content and tasks related to the core activity of children's learning that is helpful for pedagogical leaders, scant guidance about the leadership of learning is offered to centre directors. In reality though, Norwegian ECEC centre directors continue to enjoy considerable freedom and responsibility for deciding how to lead learning. Interestingly, a paucity of government guidance for those who hold overall responsibility for ECEC centres meeting government directives about learning is not confined to Norway. Early childhood practitioners in other countries voice similar concern about changes to fundamental early childhood policies concerning purpose and orientation, and about deficiencies in accompanying documentation. Unfortunately, poor definition, inadequate information about and lack of connection between leadership and learning in government guidance can make it very difficult for early childhood leaders to fulfil their government's educational priorities.

Granrusten (*The freedom to choose and the legitimacy to lead*) further illuminates the contradiction between government policy, public sector management approaches and the professional autonomy of Norwegian ECEC leaders. He investigates the interplay between the contextual framework of the small (ECEC centre) and large (government, municipality) community. It appears that competent leaders can and do capitalise on tensions between the small and large communities to gain some maneuverability, and thereby adapt their leadership to ensure that children's learning opportunities are appropriate. Interesting, ECEC leaders appear to exert different types and degree of influence in these two different realms in an effort to reconcile discrepancies between government policies and guidance, and professional autonomy, expertise and judgement.

As in other countries, competent leaders of Norwegian ECEC centres use their professional autonomy and authority, consistent with and within the constraints of the policy and municipal guidance and owners' expectations, to choose and decide how best to create an appropriate early childhood learning organisation. In Norway, ECEC leaders are confident that they have both the autonomy and the competence to choose the right means to achieve the government goals. As governments around the world take a greater interest in and legislate more complex policies and regulations around quality improvement in early childhood provision, leaders of such centres are likely to experience more professional tension and ethical dilemmas arising from disparity between government goals and expectations, and professional autonomy regarding pedagogy, learning and leadership. It is essential that early childhood leaders be recognised as autonomous and competent educational professionals who understand the most effective approaches for ensuring that learning is prioritised for children and staff in the setting.

Building on these two studies, Flormælen and Moen (*Expectations of external stakeholders and external leadership of early childhood centres*) explore the impact of the expectations of different stakeholders on the leadership of ECEC centres. In Norway, as in other countries, policy changes mean that different stakeholders often hold different expectations about ECEC centres as places of learning and the kind of leadership expected from centre directors. Typically, centre owners, employers and parents are named as the key external stakeholders. The findings indicate that while they expect high quality ECEC provision, Norwegian parents appear to be unclear about what and how their children should learn, and who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that children learn.

Interestingly, Norwegian ECEC centre leaders appear to function differently in their small (centre) and large (municipal, government) communities. They seem to have considerable influence at centre level, although for a range of personal and external reasons, not at the municipal or government levels. Furthermore, ECEC leaders of public centres think that they have fewer opportunities to exert influence in the large community compared to those of non-public centres. While contextual and structural factors impact on Norwegian ECEC leaders' perceptions about their ability and opportunities to influence external stakeholders, subjective attitudes, beliefs and personal expertise, especially in advocacy, contribute to how and where they display leadership.

Early childhood leaders in many countries operate at numerous levels and interact with different organisations and stakeholders in a range of contexts. The multiplicity of and interconnectivity between roles, stakeholders and contexts impact significantly on how leadership is enacted by early childhood professionals regardless of their position or level. Consequently, such factors must be considered and prioritised in future plans for, models of and approaches to leadership development by all concerned, regardless of country of origin.

## PROFESSIONAL CONCEPTUALISATIONS ABOUT AND SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LEADER IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE EVOLVE CONTINUALLY

Until recently, the study of leadership in early childhood attracted the interest of small numbers of committed theoreticians and researchers. Although the number and diversity of early childhood settings have increased dramatically, understanding about what leadership in ECEC centres entails has grown slowly. However, in the past decade, leadership has been recognised by many nations' professional and government agencies as the keystone for quality improvement in early childhood settings. Given the constant changes in the structure and delivery of early childhood services, how leadership is understood and enacted continually evolves. The research studies included in this book contribute significantly to furthering contemporary understanding about and practice for the competent leadership of early childhood centres.

One of the challenges of determining what currently is known about leadership in early childhood is limited access to literature that synthesises existing research and thinking. The meta-analysis of Finnish leadership studies by

Eskelinen and Hujala (*Early childhood leadership in Finland in the light of recent research*) is an important contribution that draws together what it means to be an early childhood leader in Finland. They categorise existing studies and examine them under four broad headings that resonate with ECEC leaders and practitioners around the world: pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership, leadership in changing ECEC organisations and directors' and leaders' responsibilities. The studies were also cross classified according to participants and methodologies, which is of interest to active and aspiring researchers.

While this work paints a portrait of the different faces, domains and challenges of early childhood leadership in the Finland, early childhood professionals around the world will recognise many similarities with their own countries and experience, particularly the current interest in and emphasis on pedagogical and distributed leadership. It is evident that leadership in early childhood is an organic and evolving phenomenon that only remains effective when those involved address the influence of ever changing contextual factors.

Research by Heikka (*Shifting the responsibility for leadership from a positional to a distributed perspective*) outlines the changing nature of early childhood leadership in Finland and illustrates all three of the themes that are apparent this book. Because of policy changes, pedagogical leadership is seen as a focal leadership responsibility for ensuring that the work of Finnish ECEC practitioners remains oriented to the overarching goal of learning. Despite some disconnection and tension between national policies, stakeholders and the professional knowledge and practice of Finnish ECEC educators, leadership opportunities are identified and available at the micro (centre) and macro (municipal) levels for implementing policy changes in early childhood provision. However, structural issues, specifically time constraints, appear to hinder some practitioners' engagement with leadership. Heikka argues that many of the obstacles that impede more practitioners from taking up leadership roles can be overcome by distributing leadership responsibilities, functions and tasks among stakeholders at both micro and macro levels.

While the concept of distributed leadership is popular in many early childhood communities, poor understanding about what it actually means and practical difficulties encountered in implementing the approach still need to be addressed. Insightful early childhood leaders appreciate that genuinely distributed leadership only emerges from a culture of learning and collaboration, and where all early childhood practitioners willingly pursue and take up new opportunities for professional growth.

Because of national policy changes in Finland, a shift from distributed leadership to a new model of joint leadership in ECEC centres may assist those charged with implementing the requisite administrative, organisational, structural and pedagogical changes. Research by Fonsén, Akselin and Aronen (*From distributed leadership towards joint leadership – a case study: the early stages of developing a new ECE leadership model for the City of Hämeenlinna*) draws attention to the constantly evolving nature of leadership in early childhood provision. Given the noticeable trend in some countries towards integrated, multi-purpose, multi-agency, one-stop service provision, the City of Hämeenlinna's model of joint leadership, where pairs of leaders work together horizontally and in a complementary manner, offers an alternative leadership opportunity that could be relevant for emerging innovative organisational structures.

This model appears to offer similar advantages as mentoring where both parties learn from each other and consequently develop personally and professionally. Interestingly, Marsh and Waniganayake's findings are relevant here. Competent joint leadership appears to rely on shared language, willingness to engage in dialogue, supportive relationships and willingness to work together as a team. Furthermore, Hognestad & Boe's research suggests that preventing paired leadership from disintegrating into divided and competing roles could be difficult and challenging in early childhood centres. However, it is evident that many early childhood leaders are searching for new and creative ways to approach leadership enactment and development and this model offers insight into one distinctive approach. What is clear is that the challenges faced by today's early childhood leaders are too complicated for one person alone. Innovative models of collaborative leadership and professional preparation and development are required to address the demands of social, political and organisational change in early childhood provision.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

The three key themes evident within the studies presented in this book point to a research agenda that exposes many questions about leadership in early childhood contexts including:

- ◆ How best can early childhood researchers and practitioners promote the significance of learning and leadership, learning leadership, leading learning and ECEC centres as learning organisations to become higher priorities within teacher education courses, professional development courses as well as research training programs?

- ◆ What types of professional development opportunities best prepare early childhood leaders and practitioners to meet unknown future challenges?
- ◆ What, if any, knowledge and expertise is important to pass on to aspiring and future leaders? What needs to be learned? How can it be learned, transferred or transmitted? How can learning leadership be measured?
- ◆ How can early childhood leaders effectively advocate to reconcile identified differences between government policy and guidance, and professional expertise, judgement and autonomy that might impact on the quality of provision?
- ◆ How might working in a specific sector (for example, government, private, community, early childhood or school) impact on how leadership in early childhood is understood and enacted?
- ◆ What models of leadership are most effective for realising ECEC centres' vision, mission, core goals and structural diversity?
- ◆ How might early childhood professionals benefit from learning about other countries' research, training, practice and experience in leadership of diverse early childhood contexts?

The research from Australia, Finland and Norway presented in this resource illustrates the growing sophistication of competent leadership in early childhood provision, and some international variations in how it is understood and enacted according to context. The fact that competent leadership of early childhood centres is now recognised by politicians, government agencies and the profession itself as central to the delivery of quality services for young children means that leadership attracts greater attention from the early childhood and well as broader educational research communities. Given the inextricable ties between leadership and quality, it is essential that more committed researchers become enthused, engaged and active in investigating leadership in early childhood contexts in all its variations and intricacies. Indeed, the global early childhood community would derive significant benefits from greater investment in and encouragement of an ethos of inquiry where, rather than being viewed as separate from professional practice, research becomes an integral and core aspect of the professional culture.

This publication has set the scene for further development of a coherent international research agenda that inspires, challenges and motivates the worldwide early childhood research community to prioritise the study of leadership in early childhood contexts. It calls for focused action that advances the conceptualisation of, theoretical explanations about and sophisticated expertise for competent leadership in early childhood settings around the world. Only through more innovative worldwide research will theorists,

researchers, practitioners and related professionals access a fuller appreciation of the complexities, subtleties, nuances, challenges and possibilities that impact on the multifarious undertaking of leading contemporary early childhood provision.



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