Professional leadership in early childhood:
the New Zealand kindergarten experience®

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Abstract

The kindergarten service in New Zealand was, until 1997, a state sector service. It has since 1988 been at the forefront of restructuring changes in education. 'Senior Teachers' in the service, who are mostly women, carry responsibilities for professional leadership. This paper, which reports on an exploratory qualitative study, examines the ideas about leadership that a group of Senior Teachers have for themselves, and investigates tensions and constraints for them in enacting their leadership in an increasingly neoliberal environment.

Theorising leadership in early childhood

Over the last few years there has been considerable interest in the concept of leadership in early childhood. Manuals on management and administration have included sections on leadership and the role of the director (Jorde Bloom et al 1991; Hayden 1996); and textbooks on leadership have been published (Rodd 1998). Recently the American organisation the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) took a leap forward from the previous more prescriptive and often competency based material in commissioning Leadership in Early Education and Care (Kagan and Bowman 1997) which endeavours to provide a forum for the discussion of 'current understandings' of leadership in early childhood. In the preface, the authors say:

Leadership in early care and education has many facets, including and not limited to management and administration...At its core is a deep knowledge of the field, a willingness to take risks, and a breadth of vision and thinking that transcends individual programmes, services or organisations. Leadership in early care and education is innovative, but sensitive to history, diversity and context, and it is collaborative yet bold. (xi - xii)

This stance is new to the early childhood field which has historically tended to equate leadership with management, a problem that Kagan and Bowman acknowledge in asking for a wider definition of who are leaders.

In their introduction to the book, Kagan and Bowman identify as an issue in leadership the slowness of the field in understanding and interpreting findings and theory from other fields. While acknowledging that in the past leadership theory may not have been appropriate to
early childhood because of its hierarchical, top down orientation they feel that the more modern leadership approaches support collaborative leadership and respect the role of gender in leadership development; these are more in concert with early childhood principles and practices (5-6).

Despite this statement, the references for the articles in this book are either from the early childhood field or from the field of management. Except for one mention of Sally Helgeson (1990) there is no mention of the growing literature on women in leadership, either in business or in education. The use of literature and research based on men's experience is still prevalent.

Research on women in education

Since the 1980s, however, there has been a growing field of literature on women in leadership, both in management and in education. Some of this material has argued the case for a women's perspective on leadership (Blackmore 1989; Grundy 1993; Gosetti and Rusch 1995; Strachan 1993) and some of it has also researched how women lead (Shakeshaft 1989; Neville 1988; Court 1989; 1994; Helgeson 1990; Olsson 1996; Ozga 1993; Pringle & Collins 1996; Shakeshaft 1995; Hall 1996; Blackmore 1996). Essentially, both research and argument have promoted a flatter, less hierarchical structure, based on collaboration and power sharing and similar to that recommended by early childhood writers.

Recent research has indicated that for education at least, there is a female culture of administration which also emphasises maintaining relationships and promoting the welfare of others rather than individualism, duty and rules. Charyl Shakeshaft (1989), researching women administrators in school in the United States, found that they regarded relationships with others as central to their actions. They communicated more, motivated more and spent more time with marginal teachers and students; morale was higher and relations with parents were more favourable: a school climate was developed that was conducive to learning; their style was more democratic and participatory and encouraged inclusiveness; and they encouraged a broad view of the curriculum and the whole child. Shakeshaft points out that the characteristics of women's ways of leadership that she found fit in with the current ideas of how to run successful schools.

These findings are also supported by research in New Zealand and England. Marian Court (1994) writing in New Zealand, has found that the group of leading women in education whom she studied had an affiliative style, with an emphasis on building relationships and the empowerment of others. Valerie Hall (1996), researching women in leadership in English schools, found that they favoured 'power for rather than power over': that is, empowerment and shared power, particularly with senior colleagues. They aimed to create an organisational culture characterised by trust, openness and involvement, and they showed a commitment to children and to education. Jillian Rodd, in her 1998 update of Leadership in Early Childhood, uses Hall's findings to support her theorising about what leadership in early childhood should be like.

Research into leadership in early childhood

Although there has been considerable theorising of leadership in early childhood, there has been very little research into ideas about leadership. One recent study into leadership characteristics was carried out in Victoria, Australia. Jillian Rodd and Margaret Clyde studied early childhood co-ordinators' perceptions and understandings of 'the attributes, roles and responsibilities that they consider to be associated with leadership in the early childhood
The research consisted initially of a questionnaire and later of 100 structured interviews of experienced, trained coordinators. They reported that

In addition to being kind, patient, warm, nurturant and so on, effective leaders were perceived ... to be goal oriented, having a planning orientation, assertive, proactive, professionally confident, visionary, influential and a mentor or guide. (Rodd 1996: 122)

In relation to early childhood leadership in particular, the interviewees considered that the most important skills were

- to develop good working relationships with all concerned within the centre, to acknowledge staff strengths and provide constructive feedback, to assist less qualified staff, assist in resolving staff disagreements and to participate in but not dominate decision making.

The following dimensions of leadership were identified:

- being a guide to children and staff
- acting like a professional
- being a good communicator
- being able to meet people's needs
- being a multifaceted and flexible person
- taking responsibility, and
- being visionary.

These findings are echoed by in a study done in New Zealand. Ann Hatherly (1997: 51-52), studying the organisational culture of a childcare centre, found that the director saw leadership as

focussed on systems and a belief in nurturing people, rather than on pedagogical leadership... 'good' leadership was about being supportive and approachable rather than pushing out the boundaries of expectations.

These ideas have similarities to the findings about women leaders in education reported above, although on a less complex level. Rodd suggests that the perception of leadership in early childhood is as yet simplistic. Emphasis is on stereotypical nurturant personal and professional relationships. There is little mention of the emphasis on improving teaching and learning or supporting teachers in their teaching, as described by Shakeshaft (1989) and Hall (1996) in particular. Leadership is perceived generally, rather than in an educational context.

**The context for this research: the New Zealand kindergarten service**

The New Zealand kindergarten service provides sessional programmes for children over two and a half years of age. It employs trained, registered staff. Over the years it had become a 'free' service within early childhood - free in that all children were welcome and in that fees were not charged: donations were requested but were non-compulsory. The service has
traditionally been government funded and until recently staff salaries were directly paid by the Ministry of Education, in the same way as primary and secondary teachers' salaries were paid.

There are about 37 kindergarten associations in New Zealand. They are administered by voluntary committees which employ General Managers who hold the licence for the kindergartens. The associations also employ the Senior Teachers, who are the professional leaders. Senior Teachers work either on their own or in groups of up to four.

In 1991 the Budget brought in bulk funding for kindergartens. The implications of this move were that services would be self-managed and finally self funded and privatised. The right of kindergartens to charge fees which was legislated for in 1992 and the devolution of responsibility to associations meant that eventually the government could stop funding kindergartens altogether if they wished. These changes were represented as bringing kindergartens in line with the rest of the early childhood services, which are bulk funded, and justified on the grounds of equity and 'neutral funding'.

In a survey of both staff and association chairpersons on the effects of bulk funding, Cathy Wylie (1993) found an increase in stress and workload for staff and voluntary personnel; more reliance on parents’ financial contributions; a widening in the gap in resources for kindergartens in low income areas; and an emphasis by associations on kindergartens' ability to survive financially on their own. Linda Mitchell (1995) reported that in addition to the above measures, associations were making ends meet by disbanding senior teachers and special needs positions, and not carrying out maintenance. There were further stress problems and problems in the recruitment and retention of staff.

The advent of bulk funding and increased accountability has added to the Senior Teachers' workload with more administration and managerial work, and more time spent advising Head Teachers on the management of change. Anthony Wilson and Ruth Houghton reported that senior teachers were seen as becoming more involved in association management through increased planning and policy development. In addition, the pressures felt by teaching staff were believed to have a flow on impact on senior teachers (1995:32).

**Kindergartens and the New Right**

The New Zealand kindergarten service could be regarded as the guineapig for the government's implementation of managerialism in education. Boston (1996: 18 -19) distinguishes as principal influences on the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s public choice theory and agency theory, both of which assume that individuals are 'rational, self interested utility maximisers'. New Public Management incorporates a form of managerialism that is based on the ideas of the scientific management or Taylorism, and proposes that there are generic skills that underpin all management tasks whether in the public or private sector (Boston 1996; Codd 1990). Boston identifies as characteristic of the New Public Management the following beliefs:

* that there are not significant differences between public and private organisations therefore they can be managed in the same way;

* a shift in accountability from input controls and bureaucratic procedures to outcome measures and performance targets;

* the devolution of management control coupled with the development of improved reporting, monitoring and accountability;
* a preference for private ownership and contestable provision;
* the separation of policy and operations:
* the development of strategic plans, performance agreements and mission statements and concern for corporate image.

Wylie (1995:151) identifies ‘the application (at school level) of the model of separation of policy and operations’ as of particular relevance to the education sector. In kindergartens, the private, non-professional management structures were already in place before the ‘reforms’. However, Before Five (1988), the foundation policy document for early childhood management, institutionalised this split. Successive governments have built on this, further separating professional leadership from management, and imposing on these structures an accountability system, based on charters and funding, that is onerous for voluntary associations. Furthermore, the charter system has not involved the community as was intended, but is seen by centres (and associations) as a mechanism for Ministry control rather than an opportunity for all stakeholders to have input into the philosophy and practice of the early childhood setting (Smith & Farquhar 1994). Codd and Gordon (1991: 21) have commented that in the present climate, such policies have as one purpose to shift the focus of legitimation problems away from central government. Thus it can be seen that the new administration structures produce a decentralisation of responsibility for resource allocation while maintaining centrally determined regulation of supply.

Wylie (1995) also identifies a model of private sector management with devolution of control as applicable within the framework of the ‘New Public Management’. The model of management that the government has endorsed for kindergartens has all of the characteristics of this. It is heavily dependent on charter mission statements, policy statements and management plans. Documentation is continuous, with policy being constantly revised and yearly management plans being written. Control and support of this is the task of the Senior Teachers, and there is a strong demand for accountability, expressed in their generic job description.

There has been little theorising on appropriate leadership for early childhood settings in this climate. The Education Review Office, which has published several booklets on quality in various sectors of early childhood, talk of management and administration, rather than leadership. For instance, in What Counts as Quality in Kindergartens (1997) they define kindergarten Senior Teachers as ‘managers of professional practice’ rather than professional leaders. The Revised Desirable Objectives (1996) and Quality in Action (1998) which are the guidelines for implementation of chartered, funded early childhood programmes refer to ‘management and educators' throughout, thus begging the question of whether there should be leadership and, if so, what kind.

There has not been a study of educational leaders in kindergarten for more than ten years (Meade 1985). Yet in that time the management structures have become stronger and leaders and managers have reported increased tensions and greatly increased workloads for them within all early childhood settings (Wylie 1993; Dalli 1993; Mitchell 1995; Davidson 1997).

THE RESEARCH

This research, which is an exploratory, qualitative study, investigates the ideas about leadership and leadership style that a group of Senior Teachers have for themselves. It also
investigates the effects of the administrative changes of the nineties on their jobs and their ability to carry out their ideas. This paper reports in particular on the difficulties they see in this.

Six Senior Teachers who were regarded by their peers as successful in their field were studied. All were Pakeha. All were trained, registered kindergarten teachers. All worked with a group of 13 or more kindergartens, which meant that they were responsible for professional support and supervision for about 40 staff. They had other responsibilities within the whole group of kindergartens in their Association, principally concerning professional development, staffing and advocacy.

Each of these women were interviewed in a semistructured interview. In order to obtain a wider picture of their work, they were also asked to keep a log of their work for a week. They also supplied the researcher with their job descriptions and other supplementary material that was in the public domain, such as Education Review Office reports and copies of material that they had developed for professional support and development. Interviews were also carried out with the General Managers/CEOs of the respective associations and with a Head Teacher or group of Head Teachers who worked with the Senior Teacher. In all, 21 people were interviewed. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured for all interviewees. All names have been altered in this report.

All of the participants were aware of the purpose of the research and were invited to add to the transcript when it was returned to them. Topics discussed included the interviewees' personal and work history, their ideas about leadership and their perceptions of the ways in which they worked. The diary and job description were used as a basis for discussion about their involvement in communication and decision making within their workplace and in describing how they carried out their job. The question of power and authority were also discussed, as were the effects of the changes to the kindergarten service since Before Five and particularly since the advent of bulk funding. The interviews with the General Managers and Head Teachers concentrated particularly on decision making, communication and the use of power and authority in relation to the Senior Teacher.

The transcripts of the interview material were read several times, then sorted, using the method described by Middleton (1988). They were colour coded into categories that arose out of the data and from the reading that had preceded the decisions about what questions to ask. Material was then sorted by using the cut and paste facility on the computer. As the sorting took place, other categories and themes became evident and were included in the analysis.

The findings from the research

Characteristics of a leader in early childhood

Participants identified the following characteristics of leadership as important for them:

* being a consultative leader
* sharing power
* being a good communicator
* a supporter of teachers and a promoter of good teaching

* commitment to children

* commitment to the ethos of the service

* having a vision for the service.

Representative of their ideas were those of Jennifer.

(Leaders) need good communication skills, written verbal, listening, all of those things that facilitate. They need to have the ability to be objective. I don't know what it is about early childhood, but you need to have skills in communication but at the same time the ability to support people to find their own solutions.

She also identified her attitude to power:

I've always endeavoured, any power I have, to share that power, by providing the opportunities for people to develop and take leadership roles that are mine to share or give away... why not allow the skills of people around me to develop? It makes my job a lot easier.

In reply to a question on what sort of leader she tried to be, Robyn said:

I try to be a supportive leader. I don't believe in autocratic leaders who go in and say, you will do this and you will do that. I think you are far better to work alongside a teacher and support them through... I don't think being supportive means doing for a person, but giving them the access to what skills they need or what resources they need to go on and do whatever it is.

Dorothy described her commitment to teamwork:

I'm really a team player and I think that's been my strength and what's helped me in leadership as well. I like sharing absolutely everything. When I was working in a kindergarten, I look back now and I didn't have the expectation that the Head Teacher should have everything under control ...I always felt that you did the jobs that came along and everyone worked on everything together. I think I try to be the sort of leader who works with people where they are at.

There was a commitment from all participants to consensus and consultation in decision making. Talking about how her group of Senior Teachers worked together, Christine said:

We invariably come to consensus... It might take us a while... There are times when we think differently on issues. Our approaches, our philosophies are different... Its like any relationship, you actually have to work at it and talk it through until you reach a point where either you can see and go along with the other person's point of view or else we take it and discuss it outside the team. Probably with {the General Manager}.

For all of the Senior Teachers, a commitment to children and to their right to kindergarten experiences was evident. Jennifer identified the rewards of the job:
to go out into the kindergartens to see the development of children and to see children explore and create and discover and just be confident people, you know, that's what I'm here for, children.

Christine identified the importance of the kindergarten service to children:

there needs to be some form of freely accessible high quality early childhood education for children that they can attend at no cost and have access to the experiences they are entitled to.

And Dorothy articulated her commitment to the kindergarten ethos:

To me, its that inclusive nature. I see the kindergarten service as being there for the whole gambit, those people who have never taken an interest in it, never paid a bean for it, but their children have had wonderful experiences in kindergarten.... While it has been forced into the business world, I just see the wonderful things that we've achieved in that volunteer level and the amount of energy that some communities have been prepared to put in for all of the years.

Christine talked about how leaders should foster good teaching:

They should promote the importance of reflecting and questioning. Looking at what you are doing and why you are doing it, and can you do it better? Is that what people want you to do? I think they should promote, disseminate, information.

The participants showed an awareness of the effects of the new structures and requirements on the quality of the programmes that kindergartens run, and of the need for vision and forward planning. Jennifer's comment is characteristic:

The big issues are how do we do some of the things to increase the quality, like look at group size and ratio and those young starters (under 3s), how do we do it without charging fees? {We need} skills development and opportunities for teachers to work with those very young children so that the children are supported in an appropriate way.

Christine also identified the need to be aware of a kindergarten philosophy:

I think you need to be innovative, to be able to look at the big picture rather than deal with a single issue at a time. You have to bear in mind the philosophical base that you are coming from. And I think you need to strive to think 'why am I doing this? And whose benefit am I doing this for?'.

The preferred characteristics of leadership style identified by these women are similar to those noted by Shakeshaft (1989), Hall (1996), Court (1994), Neville (1988) and Rodd (1996). There is an emphasis on consultation and communication, on decision making by agreement and on nurturing relationships with those they work with. Leaders are seen as people who encourage empowerment, who understand the professional field and who are committed to a better deal for women and children. Leadership is also seen in terms of support for the teaching staff, in order to enable them to do their job better. The emphasis on teaching, and on commitment to the philosophy of the organisation were more evident here than they were in Rodd's research (Rodd 1966).
Women's leadership in a neoliberal context

One of the questions to be asked is how this desired consensual style fits in with the ideas of New Public Management that are now part of early childhood, and kindergarten, management, systems. The sort of participatory, supportive leadership that these women are aiming for does not sit well with the ideas of competition, choice and accountability that are at present in vogue. For instance, the issue of accountability was discussed at length by both the Senior Teachers and the General Managers. This is not a new discussion. The problem was identified by Anne Meade when she reviewed the Senior Teacher scheme in 1985. Participants then, as in this research, found it difficult to both support staff and report on them, because they saw support as implying a certain degree of confidentiality. However, the problem has become more difficult of late.

Several researchers have identified dilemmas for educational leaders arising from the effects of neoliberalism (Grace 1995; Woods et al 1997; Blackmore 1996; Strachan 1999). Woods et al differentiate between dilemmas, where people have choice but the options are evenly balanced and can be resolved by professional action; tensions, where choice is limited, the effects are often personal, and the resolution is often strategic or political; and constraints, where the structure limits or negates choice. They point out that the same experience may have different outcomes for different people, but feel that there has been an increase in ‘the nature and source of dilemmas for teachers’ (Woods et al 1997: 15).

Despite their commitment to leadership, the Senior Teachers in this research also found that were dilemmas, constraints and tensions in enacting their leadership in the ways that they wanted. This section of the paper will briefly identify and discuss one tension: support versus compliance and accountability; and one constraint: the source of power and authority. The coping strategies that these women exercised in order to lead in a way that fitted in with the ideas about leadership that they had for themselves will then be examined.

Support versus compliance and accountability

The issue of support versus compliance and accountability was seen by these Senior Teachers as a ‘tension’ as defined by Woods et al (1997). Choice was limited by outside factors, and resolution of this issue was not possible without role tension.

Since the earlier Senior Teacher schemes were set up, there has been a shift from support to compliance and accountability Senior Teachers’ jobs. The recent Education Review Office publication What counts as quality in kindergartens (1997:20) says that Senior Teachers fulfil two functions:

They provide advisory support and guidance to the teaching staff..{and} they also provide professional support and guidance to the employers. They report on the quality of the programmes being offered in the kindergartens ... and are involved in staffing matters as the professional advisor. They help ensure that association policy is being implemented and legal requirements and contractual undertakings are being met. Senior teachers are, therefore, delegated the responsibility for the management of the education programmes delivered by kindergartens.

The Senior Teachers in this group found it difficult to reconcile the roles of support to staff, and accountability to the Association implicit in this statement. They saw their role of supporting teachers being undermined by the requirement that they should report to the Association.
The visits that the Senior Teachers made to kindergartens had elements of both support and accountability. The Senior Teachers were also asked to monitor and report on material to do with compliance, with health and safety issues, the regulations and with follow up from Education Review Office visits. Margaret described a recent visit as follows:

I visited a kindergarten yesterday. Part of what I do is observing how the children interact and the flow and the layout and all that general stuff. How the teachers interact with each other and the parents, and safety issues and a whole range of things. So I make a report on that and make recommendations, perhaps on how things could be better managed. There might be a curriculum issue or I might notice that the evacuation plan isn't on the wall and that's an Association requirement, those sorts of things. I do a roll revision .... and make notes of how many children will go to school in terms three and four and whether they can sustain the numbers at the moment. So I guess that all of that is support for the teachers and it is also feedback for them.

Although Margaret saw this visit as support, it also has elements of compliance in the roll checking, the emphasis on health and safety issues and particularly in the report that is written and filed with the Association office. She has redefined 'support' to include elements of compliance and accountability over which she has little control.

Her General Manager, who worked closely with her in this small Association, saw Margaret's visits similarly, and acknowledged that the redefinition of responsibilities was a tension for Margaret. She saw the ongoing tension within a wider context.

The feedback I'm getting from my board is that they're wanting more formal reports, on each kindergarten, on the staff, as opposed to the verbal reports we have relied on....[Margaret] wears a very difficult hat, where often she's seen as a confidante of the teachers and they see her as a sounding board and speak to her on confidential matters. And she had the problem of, should that information be passed back to the Board because it could directly affect that teacher's performance, so I think that's a very difficult line for a Senior Teacher to work with.

The Senior Teachers all asserted that the staff saw the reports before they went any further and so long as they were open with staff in what they wrote, it was legitimate to file this sort of report. However, opinions about whether they should be involved in reporting on compliance and accountability varied. Brenda identified this as a change in her role in the two years that she had been a Senior Teacher. Previously she had reported solely to the K4 Senior Teacher; now she was being asked to report on these matters directly to the General Manager (who is the licensee) and she felt concerned that this was an addition to her responsibilities and an ethical dilemma. The General Manager acknowledged the dilemma and expressed it as she saw it:

They are trying to be supportive of their staff but we are asking them to, to take some really firm management decisions here and they are caught in between.... I would like to see them still provide professional support {but} I would like to see them reporting in detail. They report but it is wishy washy, it's got no substance to it. Like, I read a report that comes in and it says, I have asked the staff to remove the swing because it's not safe. Now, I read that report and I think, well, have they removed it?

This General Manager also expressed her concern that the feedback in the written reports from this group of Senior Teachers often gave very little idea about whether there were quality programmes in the kindergartens. For some of the Senior Teachers in this
Association, it seemed that the response to a request for accountability had been to provide generalities only. She maintained that the response to her request for more detail had been to say 'you employ a Senior Teacher team, that is enough'. The General Manager, however, asserted that she had delegated authority from the Council for disciplinary measures:

*but the Senior Teachers need to do my investigation work for me....In one particular case I said to the K4, I want you to go out, speak to the teachers involved and prepare a report and she was reluctant. And I said, 'Look, I don't care, either do it tonight or you can do it first thing in the morning'.*

Jennifer, who worked under a different job description from the other Senior Teachers, pointed out that she had accountabilities in her job description and investigating compliance was one of them. She felt that there was no problem so long as the kindergarten staff were aware of what she had said. The Head Teachers interviewed from her group of kindergartens agreed; they felt that she was professional and scrupulous and was able to treat 'mistakes as learning opportunities'. Jennifer's General Manager, to whom she was responsible, took this view of the Senior Teacher responsibilities with kindergartens:

*So far as I'm concerned, their responsibility over their role is to manage the professional practice within each of the kindergartens they are responsible for. So they do not have to report back to me and ask what they should do in given circumstances, unless it is something outside of policy.... If a {Senior Teacher} goes into a kindergarten and sees an inappropriate learning environment for children, she is able to deal with that directly. And she can give a lawful instruction as it were to the staff that they will change.... But they don't have to come back to me. As far as I'm concerned it's a professional matter.... They can't fire anyone but they can give them warnings. {But} the principle that we work on is really, you should try not to get to the stage when people get written warnings and those kind of things....I see {their} responsibility to try and work through and address those issues before they get to that.*

This statement is in line with Jennifer's job description, which has as one of her accountabilities 'to provide professional management for the staff of kindergartens within an allocated geographical area.' The language used in this statement places Jennifer in a management role rather than as a professional leader, a shift from the way in which the job was envisaged previously.

However, while it was acknowledged that there could be a tension, confidence in the professionalism of the Senior Teacher was seen by Head Teachers as transcending the demands that the Association put on them. Particularly, Jennifer's Head Teachers felt that they could rely on her to support them even though they were aware that she was reporting to the Board about them. Again there was transparency in the process as she asserted and they confirmed that she did not report on anything that she had not discussed with them first. Moreover, the element of trust was a factor here. Jennifer's Head Teachers trusted her to support them.

The source of power and authority

In addition to the 'tension' discussed in the previous section, the Senior Teachers experienced 'constraints': situations in which they had little or no choice One constraint was in the source of power and authority.

The context for the Senior Teachers' relationships with the Association lies in the designated responsibilities of the General Managers. All of the General Managers were the licensees of
the kindergartens, but the range of their responsibilities varied. One, who worked for a large Association, described the job as follows:

*I am essentially the Chief Executive of the organisation. I give policy advice to the Board, and I am responsible for the total management of the Association. And we have a six million dollar budget, most of that is teachers salaries but nevertheless its a large budget.... I have formal written delegation for responsibility for all employment related issues. So that the governing Board of this Association is my employer and pays me and I'm delegated the authority to employ everyone else, so I'm the employer of all of the management and administrative staff and the teachers.*

There were differing perceptions by participants of the relationship between the Association and the Senior Teachers. These depended on both the job descriptions of the Senior Teachers and the delegated responsibilities of the General Managers. For one of the larger Associations and both of the smaller Associations, the Senior Teacher team reported directly to the Association. Concerning the division of responsibilities between her and the Senior Teacher, Margaret's General Manager said:

*Don't know if it has really been clearly defined. {Margaret} would have the responsibility or authority to deal with issues with teachers and make recommendations... In some ways her position is quite difficult because she's sort of middle management with no real power or authority, with the Association being the employer of staff and she has the delegated authority to manage. I do have more delegated responsibility for maintenance side....I wouldn't see that I had more power than {Margaret} or I had power over her. I see us working in a joint relationship.*

For the other Associations, however, the role of the Senior Teacher was more clearly defined, though in some cases this had taken time to establish. Christine's General Manager who had been in the job since 1995, and had begun with a large, well established Senior Teacher team observed:

*Senior Teachers have to accept the fact that the reality of today is that they report to a manager, they don't report to parents. And so that was a learning curve, we had to move through that... We had little games played where they ambushed me from time to time at the Council meeting. And the Council had to {learn to} say no, that is a matter for the General Manager. That is now accepted, I mean they now use that ability, of me standing between them and the Council, to give them the freedom to manage in the way they want.*

The Head Teachers, however, were all aware that in the final analysis the power lay with the General Manager, principally because s/he was the licensee. A typical response was:

*Even though she's an employee, she's the licensee. It gives her the responsibility and it certainly gives her the power... I don't know that the Senior Teachers have power, in any way, I think they are called upon within the organisation to have a lot of input into whether this should happen or that should happen. So maybe they do have that sort of power, a sort of consultative power.*

Senior Teachers working on their own, regularly attending Board meetings, were very aware of the perceptions of the staff and the problem that the Senior Teachers faced. Margaret said:
Dorothy identified a difficulty between her responsibilities to the Association and her responsibilities to the teachers, but had no doubt about where she stood:

*Making the decision to put 45 children on the roll in the kindergarten I do not agree with that. I opposed it at the time. I see that {the Board's} responsibility is to make that decision and go with it, but I'm not going to agree with it... I have always made it clear to this Board here, ever since I have been in the job, that I'm a teacher first. And I think for them its a bit of a dilemma because they see it as, Dorothy is going to side with the teachers, it doesn't matter what.*

She felt that it was important to support teachers, sometimes against management:

*I really value the diversity of the teachers I work with. And I think its a real privilege to get involved with so much of their personal and private lives. They have to share things with me that they might never choose to share, except for my position... I do get over zealous about teachers' issues, and I try to keep that perspective with the management. The frustration that I sometimes feel in working with the voluntary management system means that I sometimes appear to be quite a bolshie leader to the Management Board.*

Despite Margaret's perception described previously, the Head Teachers tended to see the Senior Teacher as 'their' representative to the Association. While they were aware that she did not have a vote, they felt that she could be relied on to put the professional point of view. One Head Teacher who worked with Margaret described it as:

*working with the Board and being able to show that kindergartens are really important and what their needs are.*

All of these observations highlight a philosophical divide between the teaching profession and the Association Board. Both Senior Teachers and Head Teachers saw a necessity for teachers to be represented before the Board, who were not, in the main, regarded as sympathetic to the ideals of the kindergarten movement. While this constraint in relationships with the Board is not new, the advent of bulk funding and the excluding of kindergarten teachers from the State Service has given the Boards more financial responsibility and more control over staffing and job contracts. In addition, they work within a very confined budget, and are themselves constrained by Ministry requirements.

The role of the General Manager has also changed. For four of the larger associations, the General Manager was the representative of the association, and the Senior Teacher team was responsible to that person rather than directly to the association. With the exception of Jennifer, this devolution of control to a manager who had the interests of the Board foremost was seen as a constraint for the Senior Teachers working in these associations.

**Coping strategies: a balancing act**

The effects on education of neo liberalism and the New Public Management have been discussed previously. Boston (1996) and Wylie (1995) both identify increased reporting and monitoring and the formal devolution of control from Board to management as important
features of this shift. Blackmore (1996) argues that for educational leaders, there is a tension between the collaborative style that is regarded as appropriate, and the climate of competition and control that has developed. The, tensions and constraints that were evident for this group of Senior Teachers mirror the above findings. The enactment of their preferred leadership ways is thus overlain by the demands of neo liberalism and the New Public Management and we should ask how they coped with these

Both Jill Blackmore (1996: 346-8) and Jane Strachan (1999:132-5) have investigated the ways in which groups of women leaders in schools cope in this situation. Blackmore says that for her group the coping mechanisms were related to managing their own and others' emotions: she epitomises the reactions as resistance, controlling, distancing and exit. Strachan describes interconnected themes of resistance, agreement and appropriation. For Strachan, 'resistance' includes speaking out on important issues, continuing to use 'inclusive models of decision making' and 'resisting pressure to involve themselves in managerial tasks that took them away from what they personally and professionally enjoyed doing'. 'Agreement' denoted agreeing with all or some of the philosophy of the reforms and acting accordingly; and 'appropriation' conveyed the idea of using opportunities offered by the reforms to further their own agendas. Strachan points out that identical ways of behaving may have their origins in the women's different philosophies and personalities. The women in her study each had their own ways of keeping focussed on children.

All of the Senior Teachers in this study described their commitment to children, support of teaching and learning, and affiliation to the kindergarten movement as important to their leadership. In addition, they were committed to a leadership style which included power sharing and consultative leadership. Each of them was aware that trying to fulfil their leadership objectives meant a balancing act between their ideals and the demands of the Association and the Ministry expressed through the General Manager. There were elements of resistance, agreement and appropriation in their coping strategies.

Each achieved some sort of balance, but in different ways. For all of them - Dorothy, Margaret, Brenda, Christine, Robyn and Jennifer - their belief in their professional identity as teachers was a determining factor. Hall (1996) also regards this as a determining factor for the women principals in her study. Despite the changed responsibilities and increased workload, their commitment to the promotion of teaching, to children and to kindergartens kept them going. They also worked best where their personal day to day culture allowed them to enact their ideas about consultation and communication, particularly where the office culture of trust included the General Manager. In situations where this happened -for Robyn, Margaret, Christine Jennifer - this commitment and trust was reflected in their reported professional relationships with the Head Teachers.

Strachan (1999:135) suggests that the women in her study were characterised by diverse ways of coping, reacting in different ways to the same event. She suggests that the human factor, ignored in much theorising needs to be taken into account. She sees this human factor as encompassing the women's value systems; their educational philosophy; their commitment to putting students' needs first; the involvement of the 'emotional' in their leadership; the energy needed to bring about change in a context of managerialism; and the ethnicity of the principal.

Court (1998:51) points out that research shows that

There is not a universal women's way of leading: women, like men, lead in different ways, influenced by their values, political persuasions, personalities and ethnicity.
In the case of the women in this study, their values and philosophy, their commitment to children and the strengths of their personalities influenced the ways in which they wished to lead, and made it possible to cope with the tensions and constraints brought about by a shift to a neo liberal, managerialist system.

References


