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When babies have teachers: a study of how three community-based children's services employ early childhood teachers in infant-toddler programs.

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Abstract

The Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW) makes it possible for children aged between birth and two years to be without a university qualified teacher in a centre-based long day care service. However, research demonstrates important links between caregivers' formal training and quality of interactions for infants and toddlers. This research project, undertaken as part of my Master of Education, is a phenomenological study which focuses on the pedagogical beliefs and management strategies of three community-based children's services that have employed a university qualified teacher in their infant-toddler room. The directors from each of the three children's services were interviewed. Each case study is reported independently of the other to draw upon the individual narrative of each service. A discussion draws together commonalities and nuances of the beliefs and strategies that these services assumed. The analysis illuminates strong pedagogical beliefs and a commitment to high quality early childhood education. Management strategies used to enact these beliefs include a detailed understanding of the financial status, effective leadership skills, partnership links with industry and a stable management committee. The research project has implications for employment conditions for staff, leadership in early childhood education, and the provision of high quality infant-toddler education.

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Introduction

This presentation is based on the findings of a research project which is designed to address four key research questions: What were the decisions which led to the children's service employing a university qualified teacher in the infants-toddlers' room?; What are the pedagogical beliefs which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?; What are the management strategies (e.g. budgeting, staffing) which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?; And What are the benefits and constraints of employing a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddler age group? While the project details three case studies from diverse children's services, this paper will concentrate on the findings and discussion drawn from the data collected.

Background

Licensing requirements for Children's Services in the state of New South Wales, Australia, do not require a university qualified teacher for every group of children in a children's service. It is common practice to emphasise the importance of employing a university qualified teacher in the 3-5 year age group of children rather than for the children aged from birth to two or three years, that is infants and toddlers' group. Subsequently, this group of younger children in the service is often staffed by less qualified staff than the older children. This situation is problematic, as evidence within the current early childhood education literature, strongly suggests that the qualities of children's experiences are affected by the qualifications of the staff employed (Fisher & Patulny, 2004; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow 1990; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips & Grajek, 1985; Philips, 1987; Phillips & Adams, 2001; Wangmann, 1995; Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990)

This research project aims to:

- Provide data about the pedagogical beliefs and management strategies in three community-based children's services where a university qualified teacher is employed to teach the infant-toddler age group.
- Identify critical success factors associated with the employment of a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddler age group.
- Stimulate further conceptual thinking about pedagogical beliefs and management strategies which can lead to providing high quality early childhood education in centre-based children's services.

Literature Review

What is a teacher?

While a teacher's work is broad, multifaceted and complex, the Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW), which replaces the Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Regulation (No 2) 1996, defines a teaching staff member as a

member of staff who:

- a) has a degree or diploma in early childhood education from a university following a course with a duration (on a full-time basis) of not less than 3 years, or*
- b) has some other approved qualification or*
- c) has other approved training and other approved experience (Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW) r52).*

While the Commonwealth Government contributes funding to children's services in all states and territories of Australia, the regulations that determine minimum standards are specified quite differently. Minimum admissible 'trained' staffing qualifications vary throughout Australia, from a two year TAFE qualification (or a recognised training organisation) in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland to a four year education university degree for pre-schools in Western Australia

(Press & Hayes, 2000). In NSW, teaching staff are required for centres with thirty or more children per day (Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW)), however licensees are not required to have a teacher as a primary contact for each group of children. The *Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW)* does not exclude a teacher being employed in infant-toddler programs, but this is above the stipulated minimum standards. This could mean that instead of a teacher, NSW licensees are entitled to employ staff in the infant-toddler program who hold a two year qualification from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or other Recognised Training Organisation (RTO) i.e. Diploma of Community Services (which is equivalent to the previous qualifications of Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Studies), Certificate of Child Care Studies or Child Care Certificate); an enrolled nurse who holds a certificate IV from TAFE or a Certificate III from TAFE or a RTO; or a registered nurse with some previous experience in a children's service (Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW)).

There has been substantial discussion (Early Childhood Australia 2001; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997), research (Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow 1990; Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990; Wangmann, 1995; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips & Grajek, 1985; Phillips, 1987; Phillips & Adams, 2001;) and increasingly, practice within the field (Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004) advocating for teachers in infant-toddler settings. An infant or toddler experiences higher quality early childhood education where the staff: child ratio is high and there is a university qualified teacher employed in the room than when lower qualified staff are employed in the same setting. Educational research is supported by neuro-scientific evidence which indicates that the first three years of life are critical to a child's learning (Duvall, 2000; McCain & Mustard, 1999), and yet it is clear that the introduction of new Children's Services Regulation in 2004 does not reflect this substantive evidence. Regulations continue to contradict what we know about good quality programs for this age group. Fler and Udy describe the state of qualified teachers in Australia in 2000 in the following way:

Of some 60,000 staff employed in Commonwealth-funded long day care centres in Australia, almost half (46%) held no qualification, 38% held a Child Care Certificate or Diploma of Child Care, 12% held teaching qualifications, 4% held nursing qualifications and 7% held other relevant qualifications...Similar proportions of staff in private and community-based centres had no formal qualifications (47% and 46% [respectively]) (Fler & Udy, 2002).

What is high quality early childhood service provision?

High quality child care has two interrelated components- structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to objective aspects that are often regulated by government which allow for optimal conditions for process conditions to occur in the setting (Helburn & Howes, 1996,). Process quality refers to the interactions that occur in the child care environment and the child's daily experiences (Helburn & Howes, 1996,).

Extensive research supports the notion that staff training which relates specifically to knowledge of child development is the most identifiable contributing factor in producing good quality interactions (Fisher et al, 2004; Hayes et al, 1990; McCartney et al, 1985; Phillips, 1987; Phillips & Adams, 2001; Wangmann, 1995; Whitebrook et al, 1990;). Importantly, studies make links to caregivers with formal training in child development as being more sensitive and responsive to the infants and toddlers in their care (Howes, 1991; Rubenstein & Howes, 1983). Research presents strong evidence of the link between the quality of a program and the level of teacher education (Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese and Russell 1995; Kagan and Neumann, 1996; Ochilree, 1994; Smith 1999; Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Massee & Barnett, 2000). It is increasingly evident within the field that

...the knowledge and skills that are more likely to lead to the provision of high quality early care and education may more readily be present in well-educated individuals, these with 4-year degrees. (McMullen & Alat, 2002 p. 15).

It is important to recognise that education for infants and toddlers should not look like education for children of other ages. Katz (1999) cautions teachers to establish carefully what should be learned and when it should be learned. "As for the learning environment, the younger the children are, the more informal it should be" (Katz 1999, paragraph 2). Group infant-toddler education should mirror high quality home environments- rich, stimulating and safe spaces; a sense of belonging for the child and the family; caring, adults who are flexible, attentive and in tune to the needs of each child (Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997).

What are the barriers to providing university qualified teachers for infants and toddlers?

There are a number of complex issues which are fundamental to the debate around affordable, high quality children's services for children in New South Wales. These issues, summarised briefly below, commonly impact on the ability of children's services to employ university qualified teachers for infants and toddlers.

- The perceived dichotomy between care and education which continues to divide services into those that have been historically for education and those that are for child minding (Wangmann,1995; Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997; & Fleer,2001).
- Infant-toddler centre-based programs are more expensive to provide than centre-based programs for children aged three to five years (Press & Hayes, 2000).
- Tensions are evident among researchers, government, service providers, parents, and the wider community as to what level of care and education is necessary in the prior-to-school sector and who should be responsible for paying for its provision (Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004; Press & Hayes, 2000).
- Poor employment conditions are disincentives for early childhood professionals to remain in the workforce. The OECD Thematic Review (Press & Hayes, 2000) cites industrial issues such as fragmented union representation for early childhood professionals, disparities between long day care, preschool and school teaching award wages (including leave entitlements), and discrepancies between giving similar teaching and administrative responsibilities to workers with different qualifications and pay levels. Warrilow, Fisher, Cummings, Sumsion & a'Beckett (2004) cite education opportunities, graduates leaving the profession, work conditions and professional status and support as added disincentives.
- The level of ability for early childhood professionals to advocate for improved working conditions also proves to be a barrier itself (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003).
- Press & Hayes (2000) describe early childhood education as complex and fragmented. Different roles and responsibilities are allocated to each tier of government and in a number of different policy areas.

It is clear that elements of the profession are moving beyond the parameters set by policymakers to address the issue of improving the quality of education for infant-toddlers. There is emerging evidence that about 50% of services which provide infant-toddler education have already improved their ratio of adults to children (Department of Community Services, 2003; Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004). Recent data collection from the Growing Up in Australia Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) suggests that of the 221 participating infants being cared for in long day care centres across Australia, 19.7% had a staff member who held a bachelor degree or above working in the infants-toddlers' room. (Dr. L. Harrison, pers. comm., 1st February, 2006; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004).

Method and Methodology

The methodology is discussed in detail elsewhere (Ireland, 2006) This study seeks to investigate three directors' perspectives regarding the pedagogical beliefs and management strategies which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in the infant-toddlers' room in their children's services. There were few, if any, preconceptions of the ways in which the services would be able to achieve this as this was the detail that the project wanted to generate. I wanted to investigate if there were any commonalities of the experience as well as describe and/or identify the essence or essential characteristics in each service (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p.436). This process is described as a phenomenological approach (Wiersma, 2000, p.238).

Case study methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was selected (Edwards as cited in MacNaughton, Rolfe & Blatchford, 2001, p.126). This study takes an interpretivist inquiry approach as it examines "how people make sense of their world" (Hughes as cited in MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p.39). It attempts to capture

the complexities and realities of three different situations where a teacher has been employed. Hence, each participant who has shared their narrative with the researcher has provided one way of employing a teacher in the infant-toddlers' room.

Methodology

This research project aims to investigate the participants' perspective on how decisions are managed within a specific children's service so that a university qualified teacher can be employed to teach in their infant-toddlers' setting. The project aims to "increase understanding through the naturalistic generalisation that the readers do themselves" and thus "any generalisations should be reader-made ones" (Burns, 2000, p.474).

Selection of participants

Invitations seeking participants for the study were advertised in a newsletter for an early childhood education association within NSW. Six possible participants responded to the invitation. Four participants were finally interviewed. Three interviews proved useful to the study as they provided an adequate amount of data for analysis and discussion. For each participant, one semi-structured interview was carried out by the researcher.

It should be emphasised here that, while I have tried to cover a diverse range of community-based services in this project, it is not intended that these services are representative of all community-based services within their affiliated group, nor am I implying that by selecting services across a range of community-based service groups (i.e. industry partnered, church affiliated or unaffiliated) that their stories are derived from being identified with this group.

Data collection

Each interview was taped to accurately collect the data and refer to it at a later stage. Enrolment forms, parent handbooks and any other documents that the service offered were gathered. This documentation provided support to the interview data and provided some aspects of data which was more detailed than the interviews had time to provide (Wiersma, 2000).

Data Analysis

After the interview, the data was transcribed and interpreted. From the phenomenological perspective, the data was approached without any assumptions of what would emerge (Wiersma, 2000). Instead, I approached the data from a holistic perspective which detailed the complexities of each case study (Wiersma, 2000). Initially, I proposed to analyse the data as a narrative to detail the natural nuances of the children's services. However, as I continued to read the data and consider the essential characteristics (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p.436), I recognised that they related to the functions of leadership and management in early childhood education as described by Kagan and Bowman in *Leadership in early care and education* (1997). The data was thus eventually coded into the emerging themes that were appropriate within these five distinct facets of leadership and management to develop a thematic analysis of how children's services employed a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers' setting.

Validity and reliability

I was aware of the need to be carefully critical and reflexive of the data being analysed to avoid the risk of over-interpreting the data that was collected. Edwards argues that "Validity in qualitative research is a matter of being able to offer as sound a representation of the field of study as the research method allows" (as cited in MacNaughton, Rolfe & Blatchford, 2001, p.124).

To achieve the desired integrity, conversations with the participants continued until each participant was satisfied that the report adequately reflected the story of their service. In addition to the interviews, I checked the interview data with the documents that had been collected from the participants.

Findings and discussion

Saltbush Children's Service

Saltbush Children's Service (a pseudonym) is a community-based long day care centre located on the site of a large corporation in the central business district of Sydney. The service began in 1982, to meet the needs of a group of parents working in the large organisation. It operates from 7.30am until 6.30pm for 50 weeks of the year. 'Sally', the Director, has worked at the service for seven years.

Age group	No. of children	Staffing	Adult:child ratio	Fees per day (as at September, 2005)
Birth–two year old room	10	1 Early childhood teacher 2 qualified child care workers	1:3.3	\$53
2-3 year old room	10	1 qualified child care worker 1 unqualified worker	1:5	\$53
3-5 year old room	24	1 Early childhood teacher 1 qualified child care worker 1 unqualified worker.	1:8	\$53

Table 1 Staffing, qualifications and cost for Saltbush Children's Service. Data gathered from transcript data, preliminary administration application and service's newsletter.

Banksia Children's Service

Banksia Children's Service (a pseudonym) is a community-based long day care which operates from 7.30 am until 6pm 50-51 weeks per year. It is located on church property in a suburb of Sydney. The service operates within the organisation of the church. Betty has been the Director at this centre for the last two years.

Age group	No. of children	Staffing	Adult:child ratio	Fees per day (as at September, 2005)
Birth–two years	15	1 Early childhood teacher 1 qualified child care worker 3 unqualified workers	1:3	\$80
2-3 year olds	20	1 Early childhood teacher 1 qualified child care worker 3 unqualified workers	1:4	\$75
3-5 year olds(two rooms) *data quoted is for each room	20	Early childhood teacher 1 qualified child care worker 2 unqualified workers.	1:5	\$70

Table 2 Staffing, qualifications and cost for the children's service at Banksia Children's Service. Data gathered from transcript data, preliminary administration application and service's newsletter.

Blue Gum Children's Service

Case study three is situated in a regional New South town that has a population of about 23,000 people. Blue Gum Children's Service (a pseudonym) is located in a residential area a few kilometres from the central business district. The service is an unaffiliated community-based long day care centre which provides short day, long day, occasional care as well as before and after school care. It operates from 7am until 6pm for 49 weeks per year. The service draws on families from a radius of one hundred and fifty kilometres around it. Bill has been the Director for the past nineteen years.

Age group	No. of children	Staffing	Adult:child ratio	Fees per day (as at September, 2005)
Birth–two years	13	1 Early childhood teacher (Director) 1 qualified child care worker (studying B Teach) 2 advanced child care workers	1:3.25	Up to 8.5 hour per day: \$47.00 per day or \$223.25per week Over 8.5 hours per

				day: \$49.00 per day or 232.75 per week
2-3 year olds	18-20	3 qualified child care workers (1 studying B Teach)	1:6- 1:6.67	Up to 8.5 hour per day: \$44.00 per day or \$209.00 per week Over 8.5 hours per day: \$46.00 per day or \$218.50 per week
3-5 year olds	30	Early childhood teacher(job-shared by 2 teachers) 1 qualified child care worker (studying B Teach) 1 unqualified child care worker (studying at TAFE)	1:10	Up to 8.5 hour per day: \$37.00 per day or \$175.75 per week Over 8.5 hours per day: \$39.00 per day or \$185.25 per week

Table 3 Staffing, qualifications and cost for Blue Gum Children’s Service. Data gathered from transcript data, preliminary administration application and service’s newsletter.

Pedagogical Leadership

Each service held established philosophies which value the educational element of long day care service provision. In all three case studies, the director described that employing a teacher was a pedagogical decision rather than a financial one. The philosophical underpinnings of these services establish a framework to guide their staff practices and management decisions. All three directors identified learning in the early years as critical to the growth and development of young children and recognised the value of good quality teaching in the early years of life. It is this knowledge and understanding about age, developmental stages and “socially appropriate play” (Helburn & Howes, 1996, p.64) that contribute to the quality of pedagogy in a children’s service.

From the interview data collected, each director discussed the significance of the relationships between adults and infants/toddlers. The directors reported that these relationships improved in the room when a teacher was able to mentor staff members in how to build strong relationships with the children. Howes (1991) and Rubenstein & Howes (1983) observe that it is these more sensitive and responsive interactions which provide stronger attachments with the children and, as a result, improve the quality of experiences for infants and toddlers. The focus is thus shifted from routines and schedules to responding to the pedagogical objectives of extending upon the interests and developmental abilities of each child.

Each service considers that the teacher in the room impacts on the professionalism of all staff. In the case of Saltbush Children’s Service and Banksia Children’s Service, the teacher’s role is seen as the leader of a team of staff. Their role is to lead the staff in program planning and the decisions made for the group of children. Betty states “...we have found that it has changed the culture of the centre and so consistency of the approaches throughout the centre has been evident” (transcript data, Banksia Children’s Service). Blue Gum Children’s Service has a somewhat different view of the teacher’s role. The teacher sits “beside” the role of the other staff members, in a team that is led by the Associate Diploma staff member as opposed to the teacher. This allows for the teacher to lead pedagogically and the room leader to manage the day to day organisation of the room. Bill states that “... while you are modelling something that you strongly believe in, it strengthens your service, your connections, the whole success of what you do” (transcript data, Blue Gum Children’s Service).

The directors discussed the infants and toddlers experiencing an emergent curriculum as opposed to an activities-based curriculum. This suggests that teachers are familiar with current early childhood education practices. The *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* endorses this idea of the

profession moving forward by stating that “continual reflection and growth is the essence of being a professional” (Department of Community Services, 2002, p.18). Importantly, the directors also believed that the broad base of pedagogical knowledge and understanding is carried over to the rest of the staff in the room and, in the case of Banksia Children’s Service, the whole centre. This professional growth is a particularly desirable benefit of the teacher being employed in the infant-toddlers’ room.

It was observed that all three services interviewed also had a commitment to offer adult: child ratios that were above the rate stipulated in the Children’s Services Regulations 2004 (NSW). This recognises the research which identifies that the number of adults interacting with children improves process quality as it creates opportunities for staff to interact with children more often and for sustained periods of time (Harrison & Ungerer, 2000; Helburn & Howes, 1996; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Peiener-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici & Zelazo, 2000) and is closely connected to the reasons for employing a university qualified teacher for infants and toddlers. The commitment to higher ratios. Hence, the directors seemed to be committed to both the process and structural quality in their service provision through implementing more than one strategy to improve quality.

Helburn and Howes identify process quality as “socially appropriate play with adults and peers, and [exploring] materials in ways that fit their age and developmental stage” (1996, p.64). It is evident that the children’s services in this research project have made a concerted effort to improve the pedagogical outcomes and thus, the process quality for the infants and toddlers in their services by employing a teacher in the infant- toddlers’ room.

Administrative Leadership

Staffing

To accommodate the employment of a university qualified teacher where traditional staffing models do not cater for this, the management of staff more widely becomes an important administrative consideration. In all of the cases studied, the role that a teacher is qualified to undertake has been valued and prioritised in the job description of the teacher.

It was identified that two strategies were used within the participating case studies to employ a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers’ room. The first strategy, used by Saltbush Children’s Service and Banksia Children’s Service is to employ the stipulated number of teachers and then an extra teacher in the role of non-teaching director. The second strategy, taken by Blue Gum Children’s Service, is to have the director teaching in the infant-toddler’s room. In this case, extra costs have been minimised by reallocating the room leader duties, for which the teacher has ‘traditionally’ been responsible, to the Associate Diploma staff member and allocating administrative tasks to the administrative manager. This allows for the teacher to spend more time on pedagogical issues. The table below summarises the number of university qualified early childhood teachers in the participating children’s services compared to the regulatory requirements.

Case Study	Utilised number of licensed places per day	Regulatory requirement of university qualified teachers (Children’s Services regulations (NSW) (2004))	Actual number of university qualified teachers
Saltbush Children’s Service	44	2	3, including non-teaching director
Banksia Children’s Service	80	4	5, including non teaching director
Bluegum Children’s Service	59	2	2, including teacher-director

Table 4 The number of university qualified early childhood teachers in the participating children’s services compared to the Children’s Services Regulation (NSW) (2004).

Expenditure

It was significantly evident that while all three of the directors believed that well qualified staff should be provided, they also showed a concern that the service should be financially viable. In all three cases, the directors reported that their services were able to operate an annual budget that resulted in a surplus which was then reinvested into the service for ongoing service provision.

The directors all believed that a strong financial situation would enable them to maintain the standards that they believed to be necessary for good service provision. Decker & Decker (2005, p.231) state that “Budgets must be carefully made in keeping with program goals; that is, expenditures should reflect the goals of the

program". This requires strong leadership capabilities by the director and the management committee to maintain their focus on achieving the philosophies of the services.

Each director spoke of financial strategies that helped to keep fees affordable. Bill described the critical need to avoid waste in all aspects of service provision. Each service professionally and regularly monitors their financial status. The size of the service was able to positively impact on the cost effectiveness in the cases of Banksia and Blue Gum Children's Services. These services describe an economy of scale which allows them to save money by purchasing resources, consumables and food in bulk. Both of these services had staffing patterns which were carefully tailored to enrolment patterns. At Blue Gum Children's Service, enrolments are monitored so that they are as close to capacity as possible, ensuring that staff are utilised effectively. In all three services, occasional staff absences are absorbed by existing staffing. Like the Child Care Cost and Quality study undertaken in USA reported, strategies such as these demonstrate how a larger size service "had lower expended costs per child per hour with no apparent ill effects on quality of care" (Helburn & Howes, 1996, para 59).

Helburn and Howes (1996) indicate that staff who have higher wages and better working conditions are more likely to stay at their service. Helburn and Howes (1996) also establish a link between poor quality care, poorer language and social outcomes for children and high staff turnover. The participants understood these ramifications for the quality provision of services in their settings and actively worked towards retaining staff. Banksia Children's Service considers that looking after staff actually is financially effective, recruitment costs are avoided and professional knowledge is preserved for use within the service (transcript data, Banksia Children's Service).

Staffing is also efficient when the skills and capabilities of each staff member are utilised to their full capacity. In the case of Blue Gum Children's Service, this is evident in the use of the teacher to be pedagogical leader rather than doing administrative duties. In the case of Saltbush and Banksia Children's Services, this is evident in the way the teacher is used to lead the room pedagogically so that the director is able to attend to other duties.

The strategies discussed above reflect a sound understanding of business management which is essential for the effective running of a large business operation such as a children's service. This is a finely skilled process where "Cost efficiency is achieved when all program components are optimally used" (Decker & Decker, 2005, p.219).

Income

In all cases, the majority of the income for the service was accrued by fees to families. Banksia Children's Service and Blue Gum Children's Service charge marginally more for the cost of infants compared to older groups. In both cases, the fees charged do not reflect the true costs and presumably some of the actual costs are absorbed across all of the enrolled children. Sally, from Saltbush Children's Service, believes that there is not a lot of difference between the extra costs in staffing for the younger children compared to the extra cost of resources for the older children and this view is manifested in an 'across the board' fee structure.

The directors were all aware of the affordability of their service compared to their competitors. Lengthy waiting lists in all cases indicate that the children's services are in high demand and also indicate that their service is competitively priced in their local area. None of the participating directors reported disadvantages of affordability because of the decision to employ a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers' room. Ergo, the issue of affordability with other comparable children's services in their local area is not impacted upon because of the decision to employ a university qualified teacher. This is an interesting outcome for the research project as one would assume that employing a university qualified teacher would cost more overall than not employing a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers' room and higher quality should cost more than lower quality services (Helburn & Howes, 1996, p.63).

In all of the three cases studied, it was apparent that the income from fees does not make up the total income of the service. Apart from the Child Care Benefit that parents may be eligible for and a small subsidy from DoCs reported in the case of Saltbush Children's Service, the participating children's services received some of their income from other sources. These sources include partnerships with corporations seeking child care facilities for employees, grants and donations. Saltbush and Banksia Children's Services have negotiated supportive financial links with industry in exchange for reserved places for the corporation's employees. It is this optimal use of partnerships with industry which can make significant gains for service's budgets. This strategy enabled these services to employ a university qualified teacher, without passing the cost on to families using the service. Sally describes the level of service provision at Saltbush "...we want them [parents] to understand that they are in a centre where, for very little money, they are getting very high

quality ...” (transcript data, Saltbush Children’s Service). Blue Gum Children’s Service did not ask parents to fundraise to raise revenue for service provision.

While it is imperative that early childhood professionals continue to advocate strongly for increased government funding in the education of children prior to school, this research project has demonstrated that these community-based children’s services are able to use a range of financial strategies to disperse the cost of early childhood education beyond the children’s families to the wider community.

Advocacy Leadership

In all cases studied, it was evident that the directors saw the role of teacher as an advocacy role for early childhood education. Ebbeck and Waniganayake liken leadership during the process of change to “leading a cultural change” (2003, p.63). Each of the three participants spoke of strategies which could advocate for the working conditions of early childhood professionals such as above award condition breaks, above award wages, relieving stress levels by having better than regulation ratios, relieving staff from face to face teaching for programming and providing career structure within the children’s service.

While all directors expected their staff to be committed to their jobs, no director expected staff to work harder or longer than their position statements specified. This is evidenced in statements such as “It’s very much reflective, if the staff are stressed the children are stressed and vice versa” (transcript data, Saltbush Children’s Service) “... associate diploma staff are not paid enough to be responsible for programming” (transcript data, Banksia Children’s Service); “I want them to work smarter, not harder” (transcript data, Blue Gum Children’s Service). If we are to depend upon and retain valuable staff in the early childhood profession, it is critical to consider the working conditions for staff (Decker & Decker, 2005). These services have demonstrated that they are able to effectively respond to these industrial relations issues within the limitations of the service’s budget.

Advocacy to the professional community was evidenced by these directors, collectively, having undertaken roles to advocate for early childhood education by undertaking committee positions in peak early childhood organisations, positions in advisory committees, and contributing to presentations at conferences, authorship of text books and piloting the *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* (Department of Community Services 2002).

The directors from Banksia Children’s Service and Blue Gum Children’s Service spoke of advocating for early childhood education to the wider community by writing for local magazines, inviting politicians to visit their service, talking at service clubs and maintaining a high profile for the service within the community.

The directors in this research project have demonstrated a commitment to the profession’s changing expectations of education for infants and toddlers. Kagan and Bowman (1997) reflect on the need for the role of advocacy leadership to develop state and national policy: “The face of early care and education will not be changed in this country solely through the efforts of the field. Good leaders move beyond their own colleagues to convince others of the importance of their case” (Kagan & Bowman 1997, p.40).

Community Leadership

In each case study, spoke about meeting the needs of the families. The directors reported that the teachers were able to offer a range of valuable provisions to parents. These provisions include providing a sense of security for the care of infants and toddlers through mature and knowledgeable staff, accurate information about child growth and development and best practices in early childhood education. The *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* (Department of Community Services 2002) identifies that the benefits which are achieved by staff and families working in partnerships such as these contribute to an enhanced sense of security for the child and more coherent, meaningful and appropriate learning experiences.

Effective education for parents about early childhood education has also led to participation in the services’ management committees. The case studies all reported of ongoing and stable participation within their management committees by parents and community members. Betty believes this is “because they know they are making meaningful decisions about the centre, they are involved” (transcript data, Banksia Children’s Service). A well established management committee benefits the effective management of the service by ensuring ongoing knowledge and commitment to the philosophy of the service as well as the development and retention of substantial business management skills.

Betty and Bill discuss the notion of building strong communities. As Bill says “... if I can create success for families ... I can create families that are successful, then I have a better opportunity to build communities that are successful. And I think that early childhood is the best model for that to happen in ...” (transcript data,

Blue Gum Children's Service). Betty from Banksia Children's Service is "very conscious that we are working with working parents" (transcript data, Banksia Children's Service). Their fees are all inclusive to "help build relationships for families" (transcript data, Banksia Children's Service).

Conceptual Leadership

As discussed earlier, Bill reconceptualised the role of staff members at all qualification levels by removing the power issues often evident when the teacher is the room leader. By placing the Associate Diploma staff member as the team leader, the role of leader became shared between the teacher being the pedagogical leader and the qualified staff member being the person responsible for organisational aspects of the room such as routines, staffing and resources. Kagan and Bowman note that "it is not yet clear what constitutes a leader, whether leaders are defined by role or individual characteristics" (1997, p.6), and hence this reconceptualisation of the roles and responsibilities of early childhood professionals offer interesting leadership possibilities which may lead to effective service provision for children and inclusion of leadership roles for staff with various levels of qualifications.

Conclusion

All three directors spoke of the clear need for children's services to prioritise their focus on education and care for service provision. However, this may not be so clear for other service providers and policy makers where a paradox exists between 'the needs of families and the commercial/business orientations associated with the provision of childcare services within a socially responsible framework' (Goodfellow 2005, p.54). Rodd (2006, p.247) prompts ethical early childhood education leaders to provide "quality and economically viable services that do not compromise children's rights". Alexander (Rodd, 2006 p.249) cites one of a child's rights as being able to "depend on adults to provide the conditions which will enable them to reach their full potential".

Woodrow & Press (2005) explain that fragmentation of early childhood education comes from a political "lack of a shared philosophical underpinning" which the OECD Country Note observed "left ECEC in Australia open to influences from all sides" (Press & Hayes 2000, p.46) While it is evident that community-based services are being innovative to provide the services that they philosophically desire, these tensions have "undermined the capacity of voluntary community-and parent-based committees to run services efficiently" (Woodrow & Press, 2005, p.280). The discussion around the "commodification and marketisation" (Woodrow & Press, 2005, p.278) of children and child care under the current policy is a concern for the field in Australia (Woodrow & Press, 2005; Goodfellow, 2005; Rodd, 2006). Ongoing discussions about how children's services can ethically and viably provide high quality early childhood education in the prior to school sector are required by the field. It is evident that further support from government funding would better enable more services to achieve improved outcomes for children.

This research project illuminates the need for a director to have well developed skills in leadership. It requires a leader who is able to focus on the 'big picture' of the service's philosophy and goals. This requires professionals to have a maturity to be able to deal with many complex and ethical decisions. This will only occur if we can continue to attract and retain competent people into the field by improving work and pay conditions.

The three community-based children's services that have been focused upon in this study have shown that it is possible to employ a teacher in the infant-toddler setting. This has been underpinned by each service's strong philosophical belief that a university qualified teacher is essential for infant-toddler service provision and is implemented by the services' efficient management strategies described herewith. There are many different factors which may present limitations for a particular service to respond in a similar way to the case studies that have been detailed e.g. competency of the teacher, competency of the director, the structure of the decision making process, the locality of the service, financial constraints and teacher availability. However, the review of literature identifies that research makes a clear link between a university qualified teacher's contribution to high quality interactions with children and staff, increased knowledge of child development, improved pedagogical outcomes and early childhood practices. This project will contribute to the ongoing debate around the financial viability and the pedagogical outcomes when a qualified teacher is employed to teach infants and toddlers.

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