Looking back and looking forward: Exploring distributed leadership with Queensland Prep teachers

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There is an increasing expectation that early childhood teachers will be pedagogical leaders, particularly in a global context of curriculum reform. This paper reports on the distributed leadership experiences of early childhood teachers during the 2003 Preparatory year (Prep) trial in Queensland, Australia. In 2010, 13 of the first Prep teachers participated in interviews to discuss their definitions of leadership and reflect on the opportunities they had to lead curriculum development during and since the 2003 trial. Data were examined using a conceptual framework based on the work of Woods et al. (2004), with a focus on the structural and agential aspects of distributed leadership. Participants identified a range of contextual influences, challenges, skills and enabling strategies that illustrate the complexities in leading curriculum.

Introduction

Leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is gaining increasing attention. Internationally the work of Aubrey (2007), Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and Whalley (2006) have explored aspects of leadership in terms of characteristics and roles, leadership for learning and integrated services. In the Australian context the introduction of the Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline (QSA, 2010) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For all children from birth to eight years (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2009) represent increasing expectations, for teachers to lead curriculum and respond to accountability expectations. The new Australian curriculum (which is currently being implemented in early years settings, such as Queensland’s Preparatory year [Prep]), brings greater focus to the role of teachers and their implementation of curriculum. These curricular developments emanate from a political context in which calls for greater accountability, evidence of student achievement and standards are prominent. Such contextual factors are not inconsistent with international agendas such as those evident in England and the United States, where education systems are frequently driven by a ‘… narrow managerial science’ (Luke, 2011, p. 368). In Australia, curriculum change has resulted in varied perspectives and resulting tensions in regard to how pre-Year 1 programs such as Prep are constructed (Petrivský, O’Gorman & Turunen, 2013). A focus on pedagogical leadership in the early years appears necessary and timely but what do we know about the ability of ECEC practitioners to lead curriculum and sustain an early childhood pedagogical approach in this changing curriculum context?

This paper focuses on a 2010 project which investigated teachers’ experiences of the introduction of a Preparatory year of school in Queensland, Australia, and the resulting pedagogical leadership opportunities. In this paper, we refer to the work of Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise (2004) and Archer (2000) to explore notions of distributed leadership and how both structure and agency play out within the distributed leadership model. Based on this framework, our analysis highlights tensions between the distributed leadership opportunity afforded by the Prep Year Trial of 2003 and the capacity of teachers to enact leadership in a sustained manner.

In this paper, we define pedagogical leadership as the activity of leading, developing and implementing curriculum. The Victorian Blueprint for Education and
Early Childhood Development, *Every child, every opportunity* (DEECD, 2008), which underpins the current Victorian ECEC curriculum, stresses that leadership is a central feature of professional learning and a contributor to excellence, with leadership capacity seen as ‘a major driver of improved performance’ (p. 17). Further, leadership deserves attention as ‘a priority for professional learning’ (p. 35). The *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia Educators’ Guide* (DEEWR, 2010) encourages practitioners to model and reflect on their leadership. The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (QSA, 2006), developed to support Queensland’s Preparatory year, lacks reference to leadership, yet teachers are urged to advocate for children and play-based approaches. The new *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guide* (QSA, 2010) calls for collaboration and leadership in partnership with strong advocacy for ‘children, parents and quality learning and teaching practices’ (p. 5). Thus, it is evident that government documents increasingly refer to leadership with the implication that it is an ECEC teacher’s professional responsibility to lead. This paper draws upon the reflections of teachers involved in the Queensland Prep Trial from 2003 and analyses their distributive leadership behaviours in terms of their adaptive abilities and their capacity to lead others in curriculum change.

### Distributed leadership

Defining distributed leadership is challenging. However, in a systematic review of literature relevant to distributed leadership, Woods et al. (2004) suggest that there are three distinct elements to the concept which include:

- leadership as an emergent property of a group
- leadership as openness of boundaries
- leadership as effective use of various expertise, distributed across many.

It is on the basis of these three elements of distributed leadership that we contend that the Prep Year Trial was a distributed leadership opportunity for the trial teachers. The introduction of the Prep Trial was an emergent property of the group (as Prep teachers met with each other and were a defined group with opportunities to work and learn about the new program together), was certainly an expansion beyond traditional leadership boundaries; and made use of the expertise of many (as the trial teachers collaborated). Woods et al. clearly link agency to leadership, a connection important for the conceptual framework articulated in this paper.

Drawing on the work of Archer (2000), Woods et al. highlight the relationship between structure and agency (‘analytical dualism’) within the distributed leadership literature. Analytical dualism ‘… expresses the idea that both structure and agency have distinct effects. They each have properties and powers and continuously interact’ (Woods et al., 2004, p. 448). Structures can be both constraining and/or enabling and may include such things as material and social resources, ideas and values, patterns of social life and attitudes which are all in existence before any agency is enacted. Agency involves capacities such as self-consciousness ‘… that enable people to evaluate their social context, envisage alternatives creatively and collaborate with others to bring about change’ (Woods et al., 2004, p. 449). In this paper we argue that notions of structure and agency affect the ways in which teachers think about and enact leadership. The following section outlines the methodology and analysis that enabled us to explore these ideas.

### Methodology and analysis

Having obtained the necessary ethical approval, we sought out teachers who had worked in Prep classes during 2003–04 and asked them to reflect on the leadership opportunities they had experienced during and subsequent to the trial. Our primary mode of recruitment was through an advertisement posted on an early years discussion list, and through word of mouth. The 13 participants averaged over 20 years teaching experience, with several over 30 years and the least experienced with 10 years. Twelve participants had early childhood qualifications. Twelve of our participants had taught Prep in the first year of the trial,
while one began in 2004. Participants were distributed throughout urban (5), regional/rural (7) and remote areas (1) with several still teaching in the schools where they had worked during the trial. A number had moved on to positions outside Prep classrooms, and others were interviewed whilst on leave.

During 2010 the 13 interviews were conducted either by phone or in person. All were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted, on average, 55 minutes. Our questions prompted teachers to consider a range of aspects relating to the Prep trial, including their philosophy of teaching, their definition of leadership, and opportunities and impediments to leadership they had experienced during and since that time. Although guided by semi-structured questions, the interviews were wide-ranging and rich as these teachers reflected on their diverse experiences since the Prep trial.

The conceptual framework for this project (which subsequently formed the basis for our analysis) draws upon the notion of distributed leadership and the three elements defined by Woods et al. (2004); leadership as an emergent property of a group, characterised by open boundaries and featuring various expertise distributed across many. Our data analysis explored the tensions of analytical dualism and leadership enactment and we coded the data according to two main themes. The first of these identified the structural elements of leadership enactment and the second explored individual agential capacities impeding and enabling leadership activity (Woods et al., 2004). Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Findings

The teachers looked back on the Prep trial as a period rich in formal opportunities to share their philosophies and, for some, to enact leadership in curriculum. During that time, the participants actively engaged in information sessions, workshops, official visits and media events to inform communities about Prep. The teachers described the trial’s heady days in which the program stood centre stage, enabling them to speak of their hopes for early education in Queensland and the ways in which they were making a success of Prep in their classrooms and beyond. In establishing the context for our leadership discussion, we asked participants to share with us their teaching philosophy of teaching, their definition of leadership, and opportunities and impediments to leadership they had experienced during and since that time. Although guided by semi-structured questions, the interviews were wide-ranging and rich as these teachers reflected on their diverse experiences since the Prep trial.

The challenge, then, for these Prep trial teachers was to effectively articulate and reconcile their philosophy and take a pedagogical leadership role in the school context. We now explore the structural and agential aspects of their leadership experiences.

Structural aspects

In analysing data we identified in the teachers’ reflections, the resources, materials, values and ideas as structural elements which enabled or constrained their enactment of distributed leadership (Woods et al., 2004). We asked participants to define their notion of leadership and to describe their personal leadership skills. Leadership was described in the following ways: informed expertise, positional leadership, mentoring and encouragement, listening and dialogue.

Some teachers described their own leadership experiences, while some described the leadership of others. Participants acknowledged the different ways of being a leader:

[I]Leadership for different people is different things. Some people like to get up and say, right OK, this is what we have to do and this is how we’re going to do it. So that’s basically from the front. Others are more from within, like helping others to learn new things and new ideas and informing them; then probably trying to guide them in a direction. I’m not a person that likes to get up the front and say, right OK, this is what’s happening. I’ll share my ideas and what I know about things and then together we’ll work things out. (Mary)

This quote illustrates the first element of distributed leadership as defined by Woods et al. (2004) earlier in this paper, where attention is focused on a group or network of interacting individuals.

Teachers also nominated informed expertise as an aspect of leadership, similar to Woods et al.’s third element of distributed leadership, whereby varieties of expertise are distributed across many, not the few. For example, Carmel made the following comment:

[I] would … define leadership as someone who is sharing their knowledge with others and has some sort of knowledge in a particular area. (Carmel)

The teachers frequently referred to others when defining leadership. The authority of the institutional positional leader was significant for a number of teachers as they provided anecdotes about the Principal they worked with during the Prep trial. This is further illustrated by the following quote:
Amy’s reluctance to identify herself as a leader was typical of several participants, who preferred to describe themselves as classroom teachers advocating for their philosophies through relationships. Her association of leadership with power and position is also noteworthy. Teachers ‘bumbling along’ in their classrooms lack power, a point illustrated by another who felt her powerlessness left her as ‘a floating fish in a big sea’, incapable of taking a stand. Whilst the Prep trial presented an opportunity for distributed leadership action, our data illustrate that the positional leadership role, particularly in relation to the Principal, continues to be pivotal in contributing to effective distributed leadership enactment.

Mentoring and encouragement were frequently cited as leadership skills. These were qualities participants seemed comfortable applying to themselves, for example:

“I’ve probably been given more opportunity this year with having a first year and mentoring and being told, well basically we want them [the other teachers] to do what you’re doing.” (Carmel)

The teachers described listening, dialogue and relationship building as characteristics of their personal leadership style.

“I think for me, it’s influencing others and for me, I influence others by building a strong relationship with them … For them to realise that I’m genuine, for them to realise that I care …” (Anita)

Some teachers listed passion, confidence, presentation, communication and management skills as leadership qualities they possessed. Amy’s passion enabled her to get over her initial shyness:

“[W]hen I reflected on what was happening for me in the early days and saw others doing the same sort of thing, the passion really rose in me. I thought, no, you’ve got to get out, you’ve got to advocate. If you’re invited to speak then shelf the shyness and get out there and tell them how this should be implemented.” (Amy)

Teachers also identified confidence as a leadership attribute. Referring to the support she had received from curriculum advisors and school administration, Mary explains:

“I … gained a little bit more confidence because of the trust that others have put in me … said you can do that job, in that way.” (Mary)

With the trial providing opportunities for them to speak publicly about the program, teachers identified organisation, flexibility, and communication skills and interpersonal skills as important leadership qualities. Jackie described these attributes as ‘leadership competence’.

“You’ve got to have leadership competence, being able to adapt in different situations with different responses … You’ve got to be up to date … credible … good at communicating … I was always very organised … and I was always fairly good at communicating.” (Jackie)

Curiously, when asked about personal leadership skills, several teachers listed the skills they felt they didn’t have. One teacher described herself as ‘too blunt’, while others described themselves as overly sensitive, insecure and shy—perceiving these as obstacles to leadership.

This section has outlined a number of pre-existing structural aspects which participants identified as part of their notions of leadership. Structures such as informed expertise, positional leadership, mentoring and encouragement, listening and dialogue were invoked as participants described their own leadership experiences and the leadership of others.

**Agential aspects**

In line with Wood et al.’s (2004) framework our data analysis then focused on the agential aspects such as self-consciousness, the ability to evaluate, consider alternatives and act creatively and collaboratively with others. Our participants described agential behaviours that we then coded as impediments or enablers to distributed leadership enactment.

**Impediments**

Some teachers described the frustration they experienced given the expectations for them to lead the reform while they maintained a full teaching load. This led to exhaustion and missed opportunities. A number of the participants also reported resistance to their ideas as they introduced the new program to their school communities. For some, this resistance was a continuation of history.

“All my life as a preschool teacher, I feel as though it’s always been a fight to try to convince people that what children are doing is actually learning and that it is appropriate.” (Wanda)

While the first Prep teachers were usually required to work closely with primary teachers to share their knowledge, some described an attitude of ambivalence...
by their colleagues. The Prep teachers may have had a vision for the ways in which the new curriculum might influence practices in the early years of school, yet opportunities to lead this reform were sometimes stunted by unwillingness of the primary staff to consider changing their approaches. This was despite the promotion of the new curriculum as relevant for Prep to Year 3.

...They didn’t take it on board really. They weren’t really interested, they just said, ‘No, we can’t. We’ve got to do all this other stuff … We’re bound by all this curriculum that we have to do, all this assessment.’ (Cathy)

The following teacher suggested she’d made small progress influencing the practices of her primary colleagues:

I think it’s very difficult to get people to change. They’ve got to take little bites … and trial it and test it out. Because I was so well supported and [Principal]’s philosophy was very similar to mine the staff knew that this was the way we were moving and this is the types of the things that we wanted to see and they were very well supported too in making those moves. So we were able to shift but everybody had their own learning journey … if somebody had asked me to chalk and talk I couldn’t do it. So it’s the same with the chalk and talk teacher … If we could see them shifting slightly with some of their lessons and some of their ways, well, that’s great and then success builds, doesn’t it? (Fran)

This illustrates the successful interplay of positional and distributed leadership and also highlights the strategy of being aware of expectations—to move people slowly, not to have unreasonable expectations. In this quote, Fran describes a successful partnership between Prep teacher and Principal, enhancing the possibilities for leadership in her case. However, a lack of Principal continuity and some Principals’ lack of knowledge about the early years were cited as impediments to the teachers’ leadership. Cathy suggested that her current Principal’s lack of personal respect is a barrier to her leadership.

I think … I’m outspoken and I probably don’t sound like a normal old everyday teacher. I don’t put on the teacher voice, I don’t put on the airs and graces … what you see is what you get, and I tell it like it is. He is all about show, and we just have a different approach as far as that’s concerned … I personally don’t feel valued … He has his favourites and I’m not one of them and that’s just the reality of it. (Cathy)

In some cases, participants described resistance from peers who were still teaching preschool classes, before the universal rollout of Prep. Jackie reported metaphorical ‘tomatoes’ being thrown at her by preschool colleagues. She was accused of going to the ‘dark side’ as a result of adapting her pedagogical approach to fit the new context:

I got a lot of tomatoes thrown at me through this … I’d say, ‘Look, I can see some people don’t really like what I’m saying or can’t appreciate what I’m saying. You think I’ve gone over to the dark side.’ (Jackie)

Despite the hostility Jackie experienced from her colleagues, she considered her own leadership to involve compromise and adaptation, strategies we will discuss later in this paper.

Wanda implied that the bullying attitude of her colleagues prevented her from taking up leadership roles at her school.

[Sometimes other adults can be incredibly bullying, nasty, horrible … I wouldn’t accept a leadership role in a staff meeting because I don’t want to be bullied by somebody else … They don’t necessarily totally understand what I might be saying, and the context from which I’m giving the opinion, and they may feel threatened by my understanding and knowledge. (Wanda)

This is consistent with findings by Hard (2006), where aspects of peer to peer antagonism thwart leadership aspirations.

In pondering the question of their own leadership, some teachers nominated personal traits that impeded their leadership. Indeed, one participant described herself as ‘not a leader’s backside’. Some described themselves as naturally shy people, nervous when speaking to large audiences and uncomfortable in the spotlight. For example:

I am … a very, very shy person, so I didn’t take that role on very easily at all. It was always quite difficult for me to get up in front of a group … (Amy)

Fear of retribution may also impede leadership enactment. One teacher expressed apprehension about criticising the implementation of Prep because of the possibility of ‘a transfer to Bamaga’. Another resisted speaking freely on a discussion forum:

[You’ve got to be very careful because [the email list] is owned by Education Queensland and … you’ve just got to be very mindful of, as a teacher, what you say … (Debbie)

We might question the capacity of teachers to take a stand for issues in a context viewed by many as punitive. In reality, how much is leadership valued, especially when strong advocacy may cause discomfort and potential alienation from peers?

Enablers

Some teachers in our study articulated strategies enabling them to operate effectively in the new context
of the Prep year. These enablers included learning to speak and write the language of schools, negotiating compromise, creatively deconstructing aspects of their philosophy for others, being proactive with parents and focusing on the how rather than the what. In this section, we unpack these enablers.

In the interviews, several teachers negotiated resistance by changing the way they used terminology. Several spoke of their decision to drop the term ‘play’ altogether, validating their practices by using terminology such as ‘active learning’.

You know, that ‘play-based’ sounds wonderful but ... we really need to change that terminology to something like ‘activity-based’ or ‘inquiry-based’ learning, something that sounds a little bit more intelligent than ‘play’. (Cathy)

The word ‘play’ probably scares quite a lot of people that perhaps don’t have a huge definition of what it is and its value ... (Debbie)

... We were still pushing that it was ‘investigative’ and it was ‘hands-on active learning’. I suppose, all you’re doing is changing ‘play’, isn’t it? ... When you’re getting into Year 3 you’re just giving it a different name, really. (Fran)

For these teachers, it was important for them to become fluent in the language of primary schools. This is similar to the challenges highlighted by Bennett (2005) who uses the term ‘social pedagogic approach’ to define a play-based philosophy (p. 11). In contrast he defines a focus on teaching and child outputs as a ‘pre-primary approach’ to pedagogy (p. 11). One teacher in our project spoke of adjusting to the new school context by duplicating her planning so that the language of both primary schools and Prep was included. Dealing in an additional planning and linguistic currency in this way enabled her to maintain her philosophical authenticity while traversing the curriculum expectations of the school context.

I can talk the talk ... I’ve set out the planning for them to understand. So there’s words in the planning which I’ve also put on one side the Prep, and another column with the primary, what they say. (Vera)

‘Talking the talk’ for another teacher meant finding her own definition of what constitutes Prep ‘homework’:

Our kids are doing homework and we might do little cards and it might be go and ... draw pictures of everything around your house that’s blue ... because I am not going to be one of the resisters of change. I think you’ve got to be clever at how you join in the journey. (Jackie)

While Jackie’s application of language is strategic, she is negotiating difficult terrain, having been accused of ‘moving to the dark side’. These findings may be illustrative of the wider problem with language described by Woodrow (2007) who suggests we ought to adapt early years terminology if we are to more accurately inform policy debate. Perhaps these teachers have found ways to use language as a tool for power and advocacy.

The Prep trial provided scope for primary teachers to observe Prep classes first-hand. One teacher took a creative approach and used this opportunity to help others experience and potentially understand her philosophy. She described how she did this in the following quote.

It’s very hard to articulate the type of play that I believe is so valued. So I thought, oh gosh, what’s the best way for them to actually do it? So we used to have play sessions where I’d pose problems for the staff. Then they’d have to get up and play it. (Vera)

Leadership enablers may also include revisiting long-debated notions of process and content. In reflecting on the national curriculum, Fran illustrates this:

I actually think the national curriculum is a good thing ... It’s not telling you how to do it, it’s telling you what. (Fran)

Krieg (2011) uses the introduction of the EYLF as an opportunity for educators to interrogate the relationship between process and content, ideas expressed in the above quote regarding the how and the what. This is most pertinent in a context of curriculum change, which provides opportunities to consider the implications for teacher identities around the process and content dichotomy. Teachers may define themselves and each other according to their allegiance to either process or content but Krieg urges us to reconsider such simplistic definitions.

Finally, we recall Jackie’s earlier comments about ‘moving to the dark side’. This teacher continued with a call to compromise:

... If you really want the dark side to pick up what you’re doing and you value it, you’re going to meet them at least halfway. (Jackie)

This section has outlined a number of agential strategies used by Queensland’s first Prep teachers, enabling them to negotiate the new context and to take distributed leadership opportunities. These enablers (learning and using the language of primary schools; negotiating compromise; deconstructing their philosophy for others; and focusing on the how rather than the what) provided powerful opportunities for these teachers to advocate for their philosophy in the new context of Prep. These strategies illustrate interpersonal skills, creativity, sensitivity and advocacy on the part of the participants as they sought ways to enact their leadership; agential enablers that represent distributed leadership in the context of the introduction of Prep.
Implications

As suggested by Woods et al. (2004) distributed leadership should be understood both in relation to structural indicators and evidence of agency, given ‘their interplay requires them to be understood in combination’ (p. 450). In this project, we have identified some structural aspects participants noted to articulate their understanding of leadership during the introduction of Queensland’s Prep year. Participants discussed both their agency, in relation to impediments to their leadership and strategic enablers they had developed to negotiate their pedagogical position in the new school context.

The findings of this study suggest that the distributed leadership of curriculum in this context was fraught with complexities and challenges. For example, it was not systematic, featured a range of impediments, and resulted in limited evidence of systemic change. That said, the findings shed light on aspects of distributed leadership and highlight strategies that may enable the early childhood field to respond meaningfully to tensions inherent in the current context. For example, the structural elements illustrate the need for particular skills and attitudes to enhance distributed leadership. The identification of skills such as informed expertise, mentoring, encouragement, listening and dialogue illustrate particular skills that can be developed or enhanced in leaders. So too, attitudes such as passion and confidence can be fostered to enhance leadership activity. Particular management skills such as organisational ability, flexibility and interpersonal communication skills represent specific teachable and learnable leadership skills. In combination, these aspects suggest a need for leadership education much like those identified by Bennett et al. (2003). These authors note how important it is for staff involved in distributed leadership (but not those traditionally targeted, such as middle and senior managers), to have access to specific leadership professional development.

The identification of impediments highlights a range of structural elements which appear to frustrate the enactment of curriculum leadership. Our participants experienced problematic interpersonal relations which made leading curriculum difficult. Perhaps even more of a challenge was some primary school teachers’ ambivalence or open opposition to the Prep teachers’ ideas for curriculum reform. Further, and even more complex, was the peer-to-peer resistance which implied that some Prep teachers were abdicating traditional early childhood curriculum values in the eyes of their preschool teaching colleagues. However, some of our participants described strategies that enabled them to negotiate the new context of the Preparatory year, as outlined in the previous section. Such strategies demonstrate a level of agency within a distributed leadership context. Our findings also suggest that leadership aspirations and preparation are not highly or overtly developed in the ECEC field. None of the teachers described formal leadership preparation and most did not identify as leaders. So, how is it possible for teachers to enact their leadership in a changing and challenging context? ‘Competing discourses’ such as those described by McArdle (2006, p. 58) are colliding, problematising the work of teachers as they attempt to remain responsive to children whilst education is reduced to outcomes and results. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) suggest that the current leadership and advocacy in ECEC is ‘… proving inadequate to resist the regime of standardised tests, the measurement of performance, and the publication of these measures for the purpose of comparison’ (p. 110).

Many of our participants did not recognise themselves as leaders because they did not hold positional leadership roles. How can we expect teachers to lead the field in a time of change and tension when they describe themselves as ‘floating fish’ or ‘invisible’? When a participant identified as ‘just a teacher’ it was as though the implication was ‘… therefore, not a leader’. While the role of distributed leadership is highlighted in the literature (Aubrey, 2007; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Harris, 2008) our findings suggest there is considerable scope for enhancing the abilities and opportunities of early years teachers to lead in non-positional roles.

Some teachers in this study identified new strategies for enacting their leadership in the context of Queensland’s Prep year. For them, this required creativity, determination and intelligence: skills described by Woodrow (2007) as requirements for Australia’s early years teachers to negotiate the complexities of the current policy landscape. These teachers demonstrate clarity of purpose, the ability to compromise without sacrificing their philosophy and the capacity to adapt to a new context; to ‘reject the siege mentality’ (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010) and to engage with the challenge.

Conclusion

This paper explores the ways in which 13 of Queensland’s original Prep teachers considered their roles as leaders during a period of educational reform. While Australian early childhood curriculum documents promote the idea of early childhood teachers as pedagogical leaders, this may be a problematic assumption. The reflections of the teachers in this study bring into sharp focus the tensions, both structural and agential, which made distributed leadership challenging during the introduction of Prep in Queensland. At the same time, those reflections highlight valuable strategic enablers for negotiating tensions, not the least of which is the challenge to rethink and re-apply fundamental aspects of ECEC philosophy in the current curricular environment. Since the trial and introduction of Prep in Queensland, Australia has moved towards the implementation of a
national curriculum, with further implications for pre-Year 1 programs across the country. This has seen new tensions emerge, as expectations for increasingly school-based ideologies become evident (Petriwskyj et al., 2013). The changing curriculum landscape in Australia and beyond demands ECEC teachers reflect on their values and philosophy such that they determine what to relinquish, what to retain and what to revise. Such ‘collaborative dialogue’ as described by Ashton et al. (2008) may afford opportunities for new conversations and revision of ECEC curriculum into a shifting future.

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