Innovative Methods for Researching Leadership Emergence

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Abstract

There is a growing understanding, internationally, that effective leadership has an influence on the quality of early childhood education programs. The leadership research agenda has expanded accordingly but despite this expansion there is little empirical research on the emergence and development of leadership in early childhood education. The article focuses primarily on the methodological challenge of studying the phenomena of emerging and developing leadership. We describe the innovative methods for data generation that were used to address these challenges for an Australian study of leading within early childhood education sites. We explain in detail two of the methods—a field observation tool and the Dialogic Café. Some findings, that serve to highlight the benefits of the method, are shared. We conclude by advocating for the use of innovative methods to understand the phenomenon of emerging leadership and development in early childhood education sites.

Keywords

Dialogic Café, Early Childhood Education, Field Observation Tool, Mini-Ethnographic Case Study, Leadership, Leadership Emergence, World Café

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There is a growing understanding, internationally, that effective leadership has an influence on the quality of early childhood education programs. The leadership research agenda has expanded accordingly but despite this expansion there is little empirical research on the emergence and development of leadership in early childhood education. The article focuses primarily on the methodological challenge of studying the phenomena of emerging and developing leadership. We describe the innovative methods for data generation that were used to address these challenges for an Australian study of leading within early childhood education sites. We explain in detail two of the methods—a field observation tool and the Dialogic Café. Some findings, that serve to highlight the benefits of the method, are shared. We conclude by advocating for the use of innovative methods to understand the phenomenon of emerging leadership and development in early childhood education sites. Keywords: Dialogic Café, Early Childhood Education, Field Observation Tool, Mini-Ethnographic Case Study, Leadership, Leadership Emergence, World Café

Introduction

Effective leadership in early childhood education (ECE) supports the delivery of high-quality programs for young children (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). High quality ECE programs have a powerful influence on children's intellectual, emotional, and social outcomes and life trajectories and play an important role in the development of productive societies (Heckman, 2011; Sylva et al, 2004; The Front Project, 2019). As Waniganayake, Rodd, and Gibbs (2015) note, there are challenges to leadership—specifically in relation to how leaders can engender sound philosophy and practice to deliver high quality education for all children. In particular, Waniganayake et al. posit that the continuity of high quality ECE is dependent upon a skilled and experienced profession that has a pipeline of educators willing and prepared to lead. However, effective preparation for the enactment of leadership is challenged by inadequate succession planning for formal leadership roles, insufficient theorization of leadership, and few opportunities for inclusive professional development for emerging and existing leaders (Hard & Jónsdóttir, 2013; Rodd, 2012; Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2017; Waniganayake & Stipanovic,

2016). Despite the important influence effective leadership has on the quality of ECE, researchers acknowledge there has been insufficient empirical research on how effective leadership practice emerges and develops and what may enable and constrain it (Fonsén & Mäntyjärvi, 2019; Waniganayake et al., 2015). The recognition of emerging leadership and the support for its development is imperative to the continuity of high-quality early childhood education in Australia.

Leadership emergence and the organizational practices that foster that emergence are relatively unfamiliar phenomena and, we argue in this article, a developing field of research such as this is best served by creative and innovative methods that support the discovery of new and unfamiliar concepts. Creative and innovative methods can disrupt the existing discourse on leadership and contribute new discoveries (Bryman, 2011; Kara, 2015).

This article explains how we addressed the methodological challenge of studying the phenomena of emerging and developing leadership within Australian early childhood education sites. We give an account of the use of innovative methods: a field observation tool and the Dialogic Café. We discuss how these approaches strengthened insights into leadership emergence and development and generated rich data for analysis. But first we outline dominant conceptualizations of leadership in the field of ECE, evident in the literature.

Conceptualizations of Leadership

Leadership in early childhood education (ECE)[1], historically linked with a positional role at an ECE site, was formerly defined by centralized power and generally determined by leadership style and traits (Waniganayake et al., 2017). Contemporary conceptualizations of the role see leadership framed by three elements: person (traits, values, personality), the place (ECE settings), and the position (formal leader; Rodd, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2017). An alternative conceptualization views leadership as pedagogical praxis defined by the key features of knowledge, theory, practical wisdom, craftsmanship and action (Palaiologou & Male, 2019). Elements of knowledge and action, in this conceptualization may include effective communication, critical reflection, collective vision building and development of learning communities (Coleman, Sharp, & Handscomb, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Nicholson, Kuhl, Maniates, Lin, and Bonetti (2018) in a recent review on ECE leadership studies noted a shift in thinking where hierarchical conceptions of leadership are being replaced by distributed and relational approaches.

Leadership as practice (Raelin, 2016; Thomas & Nuttall, 2013) offers another construct for ECE that describes leading as a socially just practice occurring as a relational activity within a collective. We use this framing construct for our study as it acknowledges that leadership can be practiced by emerging and positional leaders. It is a dynamic activity that can be undertaken by anyone and is not limited to those in formal leadership roles (Wilkinson, Olin, Lund, Ahlberg, & Nyvaller, 2010). It is important to note that all conceptualizations of leadership and leading in early childhood education are set in a complex environment of dynamic and constantly transforming policy, workforce, and pedagogy. Approaches to researching leadership at ECE sites ideally take this complexity into account, particularly when studying a cultural phenomenon such as emerging leadership.

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[1] In this article, early childhood education is described as an educational program delivered at a site for children birth to five years.

Approaches to Studying Leadership

Various approaches have been employed in the study of leadership. According to Bryman (2011) research on leadership generally was predominantly quantitative. Traditional studies typically employed methods of self-completed questionnaires on leadership traits and behaviours and were based on the epistemological orientation of positivism (Bryman, 2011; Raelin, 2016). This research orientation, with generalisable principles and predictable cause and effect, was thought to provide answers on how best to lead and govern (Bryman, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Such studies perpetuated the notion of the leader as an autonomous, charismatic, and heroic individual, able to predict and control outcomes (Bryman, 2011; Raelin, 2016; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). This perspective situates leaders as autonomous authorities. It ignores the environment within which leaders operate and how leadership is contextually cultivated. Lichtenstein, Dooley, and Lumpkin (2006) argue that this perspective may also cause us to overlook both the emergence of leadership and the development of leadership as a practice (Raelin, 2016).

Conversely, studies of leadership in early childhood education have tended to use qualitative methodologies. Studies have predominantly focused on centralized, positional leadership of teams and organizations (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015; Fonsén et al., 2019). Our review of recent research identified a range of topics on ECE leadership such as perspectives and conceptualisations of leadership (Heikka, Halttunen, & Waniganayake, 2018), changing leadership models (Fonsén, Akselin, & Aronen, 2015), leadership responsibilities (Heikka et al., 2018; Sims, Waniganayake, & Hadley, 2018), sustainable practices (Nuttall, Thomas, & Henderson, 2018; Thomas & Nuttall, 2013), and post graduate preparation for leadership (Waniganayake & Stipanovic, 2016). Methods used in the research included ethnographic observation, focus groups, interviews, content analysis, questionnaires, and narrative analysis (Fonsén & Mäntyjärvi, 2019; Waniganayake et al., 2015). Theoretical orientations encompassed distributed and collective leadership, "joint leadership" and extended to transformational leadership and leadership-as-practice (Heikka, Hujala, Rodd, Strehmel, & Waniganayake, 2019; Thomas & Nuttall, 2013; Waniganayake et al., 2017).

One theoretical approach to researching leadership that we believe has been overlooked in ECE is a study through the lens of complexity leadership theory (Dooley & Lichtenstein, 2008; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011). This theoretical approach to studying leadership acknowledges context and the role of the organization in developing emerging leadership and potentially contributes to the ECE leadership discourse. As complexity leadership is based on patterns of emergence, interactions and unexpected outcomes, the theory also aligns with the phenomena of emerging leadership. Complexity leadership research offers a particularly useful way to theorise the emergence of leadership in early childhood. According to the principles of the theory, applied in education contexts, complexity leadership theory can account for the administrative, adaptive, and enabling functions of leadership. The theory attends to compliance and regulation whilst welcoming disruption and a lack of surety (Marion & Gonzales, 2013). A lack of surety is typical of an emerging phenomenon, where a culture is dynamic, outcomes are unknown, and yet compliance and regulation are vitally important. A culture that lacks certainty combined with the important attention to regulation and compliance is typical of early childhood education sites in Australia (Hard, 2008; Waniganayake et al., 2017).

Studies grounded in complexity leadership theory, outside of ECE, have mostly employed quantitative methods such as computer modelling and statistical pattern analysis. Some researchers using complexity theory to explore leadership emergence have called for more qualitative approaches to research (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011). These researchers believe that "connecting to innovative methodologies can enrich our understanding of how leadership

gets enacted and received in complex environments" (Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, et al., 2006, p. 3). Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) for example argue that challenges are created for researchers "who must combine or replace individual level constructs—like those built through surveys or factor analysis—with richer theories that investigate networked meso dynamics, multilevel phenomena, emergent processes, and organizational outcomes" (p. 1). Similarly, Marion and Uhl-Bien (2011) explain that qualitative research is required to further develop our understanding of the strategic capacity of complexity leadership theory. More recently, qualitative studies for complexity leadership theory used methods such as longitudinal, qualitative in-depth case study including ethnographic observation and interviews with leaders (Mäkinen, 2018) and in-depth interviews (Dawson et al., 2018). These studies have generated the thick data that gives an insight into the various dimensions and complexities of a phenomena such as emerging leadership (Dooley & Lichtenstein, 2008; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

Emerging leadership and the organizational practices that support this emergence are the focus of the study described in this article. This qualitative study of emerging leadership, within ECE sites in Australia, is located in a complexity leadership ontology and uses methods that respond to the calls for innovative and dynamic qualitative methods (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011). The following section outlines the research study and the alignment between the study's theory and methods.

A Study of Organizational Practices That Enable and Constrain the Emergence of Leadership

The research study aimed to identify and understand how organizational practices and arrangements enable and constrain the emergence and development of leadership within "exemplary" Australian early childhood education sites[2]. Ethics approval for this study was received from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee. All potential participants received information detailing the purpose of the study and the procedure for engagement. The values driving the research project and the context for participation were communicated at each site by one researcher—emphasizing that this was a study of leadership emergence and development. Such a study could be a catalyst for changes to self-identity, and power may shift within places of work. Written informed consent was subsequently received from twenty-eight participating educators.

The twenty-eight educators involved in the study were center directors and senior leaders as well as educators who may have been a room leader or an educational leader. Participants held certificate, diploma and degree qualifications in early childhood education and qualifications were in accordance with requirements of the national standards, described below. Educators had worked at the ECE sites for between twelve months and thirty years. Length of participant experience within the field ranged from three to forty years.

We selected mini-ethnographic case study as our methodology. Mini-ethnographic case study offers an alternative to pure ethnographic studies by shortening the span of time spent in observation of a narrower cultural phenomenon—in this case, leadership emergence and development. However, a critical feature of ethnography is preserved—that is to make sense of the observed events and phenomena in context (Delamont, 2011; Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2017; Parthasarathy, 2008). In mini-ethnographic case study, multiple cases are incorporated into the one case study to expand the frame of reference and to seek trends and disruption to trends. The methodology uses "data collection methods that are not bound in time and space,

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[2] ECE sites are identified as "exemplary" for their achievement of an Exceeding rating in all measures of legislated standards of ECE practice (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2017a).

allow for causal links, and for the generation and study of theory" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 926). Using multiple cases of ECE sites within the mini-ethnographic case study, helps to account for the complexity of Australian ECE organizational arrangements. Governance and management arrangements across organizations in the early childhood education sector, include "stand-alone" public and private ECE centers, multiple ECE sites run by non-profit sponsors, for-profit corporate providers, or state education systems (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2016).

By studying early childhood sites with varied governance arrangements, we were able to identify and analyse a range of organizational practices that enable and constrain leadership emergence and development that existed across sites. Organizational practices are characterised by the allocation of resources, policy language and design, social and political relationships and the approaches to communication that are defined by overarching management structures (Mahon, Fransisco, & Kemmis 2017; Wilkinson, 2017). The diversity of governance arrangements in this study was moderated by a common feature: all ECE sites were rated as being of very high quality by the legislated national accreditation system. Each had achieved an overall rating of "exceeding the national quality standard" and obtained an exceeding rating for all possible individually rated areas, standards, and elements (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2017b). ECE sites rated at this level exhibit consistently high-quality practices as defined by the National Quality Standard and therefore provide a moderated exemplar for studying practices within an organization.

Our methods for the collection and generation of data, theoretically aligned with the aforementioned complexity leadership theory, assisted us to observe and analyze emerging and developing leadership. Complexity leadership theory exhibits dynamics of leadership that emerge over time in all areas of an organizational system. Each exchange, interaction and connection encourage individual and collective growth. Hence, methods planned for the study were designed to identify the dynamic practices of leadership emergence amongst educators and the arrangements on those sites that enabled and constrained leadership practices (Raelin, 2016; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Wilkinson & Bristol, 2018). Field observations, unstructured interviews and document analysis generated rich and thick data on leadership emergence, disruption, unpredictable outcomes, and unknown responses—all characteristics of complexity leadership theory (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2013a). We expanded on these methods by using an augmenting field observation tool and the Dialogic Café, both described below. Our intention in using these innovative methods was to understand the phenomenon of emergence more fully, to clarify thinking and to deepen our analysis of contributing organizational practices.

Making Possible the Observation of Leadership Emergence.

Whilst the qualities of effective leadership in ECE sites are broadly understood (Coleman et al., 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007), an understanding of how evolving phenomena such as leadership emergence and development demanded further exploration. It was important, in this research project, to expand on the methods of field observations, interviews and document analysis with approaches that draw out unique and unexpected responses. Such responses are associated with the phenomena of emergence (Lichtenstein, Dooley, et al., 2006). We believed that the data generated for the study could be enhanced with the use of creative research methods (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012; Dooley & Lichtenstein, 2008). We therefore introduced a tool to augment the identification of effective emergent leadership and subsequently employed a method for dialoguing to add richness to our observations. These methods are described below.

The Field Observation Tool

To identify if and how organizational practices enabled and constrained leadership and leading, it was important to first observe individual educators at the exemplary ECE sites to capture a perspective of the emergence and development of leadership. To reliably capture this perspective an observation tool was created specifically for the study. The tool for observation of practices that support the emergence and development of leadership (Table 1) was created after an extensive literature review confirmed that no such tool existed for observing and identifying the presence of emergent effective leadership in early childhood education sites and enabled the identification of the characteristics of effective leadership and leadership emergence that eventually populated the tool.

Table 1. Field Observation Tool for observation of practices that support the emergence and development of leadership.

Research Questions	Could be present in arrangements of the	Could be seen in practices (but are not limited to);			
		Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007)	**Coleman et al. (2016)**	**Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2016)**	**Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015)**
What personal, professional and organizational language and communication enhance the emergence and development of leading and leadership in ECE sites?	Enabling leadership (as defined by Marion and Gonzales, 2013)	Ensure shared understandings, meanings, and goals. Communicate well.	Engaging responsively	Communicate well	Articulate an idealized future with shared values and aspirations. Ask each person to invest their energy and resources in the organization. Clarify in-group/out-group boundaries perhaps by using "us" versus "them" language.
What are the networks of professional relationships and communication that boost leading and leadership?	Adaptive leadership (as defined by Marion and Gonzales 2013)	Identify and articulate a collective vision. Communicate well	Clear vision Understanding of ECE	Communicate well Commitment to ongoing professional development Encourage critical reflection Statement of philosophy	Community-building Initiate and perform inclusion rituals like group celebrations. Bring diverse experiences and perspectives together and support differences of opinion. Form small teams and rotate membership often to break-up stale thinking. Initiate and perform inclusion rituals like group celebrations.
What personal, professional and organizational resources enhance the emergence of leading and	Administrative leadership (as defined by Marion and Gonzales, 2013)	Builds learning community Builds team culture	Motivating staff Uses business skills strategically	Effectively documented policies and procedures Appropriate governance arrangements	Make people feel they are part of something valued and significant. Use resource allocation authority to "kill" dead-end

leadership in ECE sites?				Administrative systems are established and maintained	projects or wasteful activities. Establish specific task targets, dependencies, and deliverables. Provide resources and space to try new things and new directions. Encourage broad adoption of innovations that have been vetted. Build trust that individuals will have access to shared resources.
What skills, understandings and dispositions underpin the development of leading and leadership?	Cultural discursive Material economic Social political Enabling leadership (as defined by Marion and Gonzales, 2013)	Communicate well Contextual literacy Critical reflection Commitment to ongoing professional development Builds team culture Encourages and builds community partnership. Uses evidence to drive improvement and outcomes.	Contextual literacy Embracing integrated working Engaging responsively Committed to own and others learning Motivating and coaching staff	The induction of educators, coordinators, and staff members. Commitment to continuous improvement. performance of educators, coordinators and staff members is evaluated, and individual development plans are in place.	Encourage openness to surprises to learn/do not punish failure. Provide clear roles, task-specific training, and follow-up on expected activities.

The tool was developed with reference to Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2017a); Coleman et al. (2016); Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015); Kemmis et al. (2014); Marion and Gonzales (2013); and Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007).

The tool mapped complexity leadership theory (Marion & Gonzales, 2013) with complexity leadership practices (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015) and observable effective leadership practices drawn from empirical research by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) and Coleman et al. (2016), as well as quality measures for leadership and governance from the *Australian National Quality Standards* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2016). The tool concentrates attention on inclusive actions, disruption, and dynamic interactions. These are characteristics of leadership emergence within complexity leadership theory. In the development of the tool, practices of leading were cross checked with known characteristics of effective leadership in early childhood education (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

The field observation tool enabled the identification of emerging leadership as defined by practices of effective ECE leadership and framed by complexity leadership theory. Using the tool, the practices of *all* educators were observed, not just the practices of those educators who held formal leadership roles. The observation tool was used throughout a period of six days of field work in each setting. Emerging leadership was observed and cross-checked with the tool noting the frequency of each enactment of leading thus quantifying specific behaviours. The tool enhanced the observation of leadership by concentrating attention on practices and stimulating in-depth annotations and descriptions. Subsequent field notes described leadership enactment in more detail and added rich descriptions of interactions. Conversations and actions of educators and the organizational practices that supported their actions were also recorded. The observations, gathered with the tool, provided a foundation for follow up unstructured

interviews and group dialogues, that would go on to more thoroughly examine dispositions, knowledge, and skills of emerging leaders. The tool for observation of practices that support the emergence and development of leadership (Figure 1) also mapped the abovementioned characteristics to the questions of the research study, fostering focused thinking on the site arrangements that enable and constrain emergence of leadership, at each research site.

To gain further insight and reveal unique themes and ideas one researcher went on to use another method for data generation. This method was the Dialogic Café or World Café.

Dialogic or World Café

We followed the identification of emerging leadership through observation, with unstructured interviews, with 24 participants, and then the employment of a Dialogic Café. The use of the Dialogic or World Café method, both aligned with the theoretical framework of complexity leadership and responded to the abovementioned calls for qualitative research and the use of innovative methods for the complexity leadership field (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2013b; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011). In this study, the Dialogic or World Café method contributed further depth by following themes and ideas of the participants, revealed through unstructured interviews, on the topics of emergence and development of leadership. The Dialogic Café was used in this study for two main reasons. The first reason was the potential for the method to generate quality data (both thick and rich) that could be gathered within a relatively short period (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Steier, Brown, & Mesquita da Silva, 2015). The second was the capacity the method had for supporting collaborative learning and co-creating knowledge that could potentially lead to an environment of equality and innovation (Agger-Gupta & Harris, 2017) thus maintaining theoretical integrity within the study. The method, outlined and described in detail here, is referred to hereafter as the World Café.

The World Café is a semi-structured conversation that creates knowledge for shared learning (Fouché & Light, 2011; Jorgenson & Steier, 2013). This collaborative method engages participants in dialogue around critical questions. It is by nature participatory and reveals new ideas and questions for analysis and in-depth exploration of the research questions. In the World Café, participants pose their own questions, following a provocation, that form the basis for critical dialogue. This approach contrasts, for example, with interviewing techniques that tend to place the power in the hands of the interviewer. The direction for the conversation of the World Café rests with the participants. As a result, themes are emergent (as they are not predetermined), power is shared and learning is collaborative (Steier, Brown, & Mesquita da Silva, 2015). The World Café method is variously characterised as creative, inclusive, and disruptive (Carson, 2011; Jorgenson & Steier, 2013; Tan & Brown, 2005). A brief history of the World Café, outlined below, gives an insight into the evolutionary, emergent nature of the method and its contribution to the study.

The foundations of the World Café method lie in the dialogic organizational development movement. The evolution of the movement represented a shift away from a diagnostic approach to organizational change that relied on technical rational approaches that did not achieve sustained change (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). According to Bushe & Marshak (2015) the evolution of the approach recognized that disruption, diversity, and dialogue could bring unique solutions that energised and transformed people and organizations. The core processes of dialogic organizational development are embedded in the principles and practice of the World Café method. Dialogic organizational change rejects rational approaches and embraces disruption through changes to common narratives (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Steier et al., 2015b). Hence, the World Café method developed as a facilitation method. The evolution of the World Café method, recounted by Steier et al. (2015) as a serendipitous invention that led to a suspension of the usual group authority structures, is conducted using seven core

principles. The principles, identified here and illustrated below are; 1. The creation of a hospitable space; 2. The setting of the context; 3. Exploration of questions that matter; 4. Encouragement of everyone's contribution; 5. Connection of diverse perspectives; 6. listening together for patterns and insights; and 7. Sharing collective discoveries (The World Café Community Foundation, 2017).

For our study, the abovementioned principles were adopted as a framework for sessions hosted with research participants. Sessions were conducted following the use of the field observation tool and unstructured interviews. The description that follows, illustrates the use of the World Café through the account of one case study site within the mini-ethnographic research study. All participants gave written informed consent, in accordance with ethics approvals, to participate and share perspectives throughout the research study and specifically for the World Café event.

The World Café at a Case Study Site

The research site, an education and care center for fifty-six children from six weeks to five years, is one of three case study sites that make up the mini-ethnographic case study. Following a period of six non-consecutive days of gathering data through observation and interviews within the early childhood setting, the World Café took place one evening in the center after it had closed. The event was facilitated by one researcher with a support person and a graphic illustrator. Ten educators, both emerging and positional leaders, participated in the World Café event described below.

The following description of the event demonstrates the World Café principles in action. Participants were encouraged to attend through an invitation that described the event as an opportunity to talk about the research and generate knowledge on emerging leadership and organizational arrangements. The World Café unfolded according to the method's principles in the following manner.

The Creation of a Hospitable Space

Participants were welcomed to the World Café with refreshments and space to talk in a relaxing and collegial environment. Seats were arranged facing each other to encourage friendly conversations. The World Café is designed to create conditions for collaborative conversations (Lewis, 2016) hence this thoughtful establishment of the physical space was a critical factor for success.

The Setting of the Context

An invitation, by the researcher, to dialogue set the context for the World Café. A short introduction was given on the intentions for the conversation—to talk about the emergence of leading and leadership in the setting. Participants read excerpts from their own interview transcripts which they selected for their perspectives on leading and the conditions for emergence and enactment of leadership. This strategy was used to build trust and develop the community, and to support participants in the co-creation of knowledge (Lewis, 2016).

Exploration of Questions that Matter

Following the introduction and provocation, participants were invited to pose their own questions about the emergence and development of leadership. This approach at the World Café added richness to initial research questions. Participants asked questions that were

personally meaningful for their own leadership enactment and these questions were connected to their purpose in their roles as educators. Questions developed by participants in the World Café tend to evoke a sense of possibility and may differ from the researcher's perspective (Lewis, 2016) and this was evident at the event hosted at the research site. Examples of questions developed with participants during this event included:

> What skills and qualities do you need to support your own and other's leadership?
> Does leading come from following?
> How can we develop a shared vision that uses people's strengths?
> How do we empower staff?
> How can I encourage leadership that is different to my own and challenges me?
> How can we recognize emerging leadership?

These questions were important for understanding the emergence and effectiveness of leadership within the research site. The questions, inspired by the provocations and constructed by research participants, promoted an inquiry into how to develop leadership within the site. Participants noted that their questions had evolved, not just through the provocation, but also over time through ongoing exchanges of ideas and conversations throughout the period of one researcher being based at the case study site.

Encouragement of Everyone's Contribution

To encourage contribution and promote a democratic community of practice, Kline's "thinking environment" framework based on equality, diversity, contribution, and incisive questions was shared with the group (Kline, 1999). This framework was presented and suggested as a basis for the conduct of the group throughout the World Café event. The thinking environment is a method for inquiry on topics of importance to workplace communities. The technique focuses on the quality of people's attention to others and the perceptiveness of questions. Kline proposes the technique leads to rich thinking and expansive conversation. By using the framework for the World Café, the contribution of all participants was appreciated regardless of qualifications and position held.

Connection of Diverse Perspectives and Listening Together for Patterns and Insights

Participants dialogued and reflected on their assigned and unassigned positions as leaders, how they nurture leadership and how leading was enacted informally. Diverse perspectives that responded to the abovementioned questions were documented on large format paper by participants throughout the World Café (See Figure 1). Lorenzetti, Azulai, and Walsh (2016) describe this combination of dialogue and documentation as weaving insights into a collective whole.

Sharing Collective Discoveries

The final principle of the World Café of sharing collective discoveries was enabled through a communal conversation in a kind of "story circle" at the conclusion of the session. This was made possible, and enhanced, through the recording of multiple conversations by participants (An example shown in Figure 1) and through the work of a graphic illustrator[3]

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[3] A graphic illustrator records key themes and ideas throughout the World Café session.

(Figure 2). The graphic illustrator worked with the researcher and participants, throughout the event, to record key ideas. This activity resulted in a rudimentary in situ thematic analysis. As the World Café closed, participants shared insights and collective discoveries by reviewing what they considered to be their most important visual recording. The collaborative dialogue promoted the identification of emergent themes, the generation of ideas and knowledge and calls to action (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Steier et al., 2015). The participants also reviewed the graphic recording, and this became an artefact that they could take away and use to reflect further on their leadership and its emergence. The graphic recording also generated more data for the study.
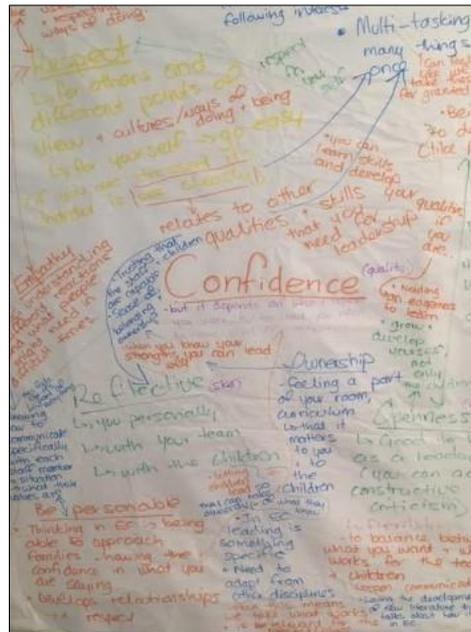

Figure 1. What skills and qualities do you need to support your own and other's leadership? One example of a question and response generated by participants during the World Café—exploration of questions that matter
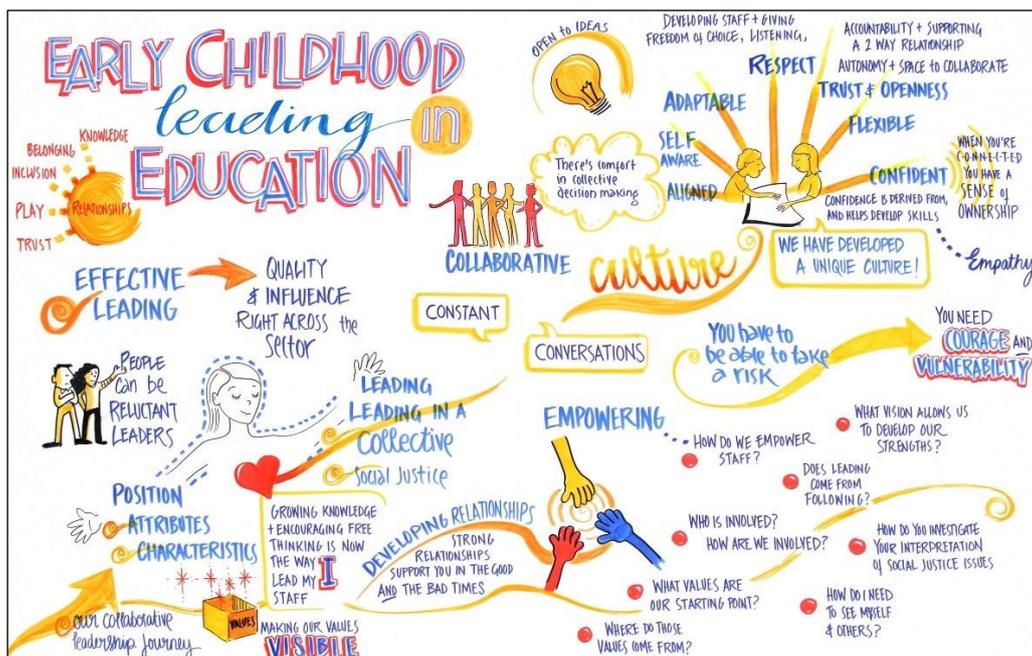

Figure 2. Graphic illustration of the World Café; documentation of emergent themes and ideas by a graphic recorder—sharing collective discoveries.

Findings and outcomes with the World Café method

The World Café method generated rich data captured in the form of participant documentation and graphic recordings for the research study. This method expanded on ideas and themes that were exposed, but not fully explored, through other methods. The themes encompassed the identification of emerging leadership and empowerment of leaders though organizational practices and characteristics that are less often associated with leadership—such as vulnerability, and the governance culture. The World Café conversations, where these ideas were cultivated, had a self-governing quality that was shaped by the principles of the "thinking environment" (Kline, 1999). To highlight the benefit of the method, a selection of findings in the form of participant questions and responses from the World Café at the site are described below.

How do we empower staff to lead?

Participants noted mutual respect amongst educators and positional leaders, a sense of ownership of leadership at the site, shared vision, values and thinking and a sense of autonomy were integral to the empowerment of educators (staff) in developing their leadership. Relationships that were open, positive, and honest also created conditions for empowerment.

What skills and qualities do you need to support your own and others' leadership?

This question generated a multitude of responses that ranged from administrative skills (time management, awareness of regulations and ethical codes, ability to multitask), to adaptive skills (problem solving, flexibility, confidence), and enabling capacity (empathy, mutual respect, welcoming new ideas and innovations). These components are typical of complexity leadership (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2013b; Marion & Gonzales, 2013).

How do I need to see myself and others to enable leading?

Participants who were positional leaders believed they needed to see themselves as knowledgeable but not expert, and to see themselves as a part of a collective as opposed to a heroic individual directing "followers." To enable leading, positional leaders saw the value of "others'" strengths and personal experiences and their contribution to the success of their initiatives and decision making.

How can we develop a shared vision that uses people's strengths?

This question was motivated by an understanding that a shared vision was a characteristic of leadership in effective early childhood education sites (Coleman et al., 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). The question elicited practical ideas to use within the center at the next staff meeting. Participants decided to reassess the setting's philosophy with the whole team of educators and to conduct a "round table" conversation on personal values and ethics, thus highlighting the value of diversity in thinking. The group also noted that an understanding of different communication styles within the team would promote democratic approaches to the development of a vision for the setting.

The use of the World Café method also led to transformative consequences for the emergence and development of leadership amongst participants at the research site. In subsequent discussions, participants identified their change in thinking about leadership and how it develops. For example, an educational leader who had formerly rejected the idea that

she was a leader had her "eyes opened to the fact that she actually does think and do leadership" (Personal Communication S1a, 2019)

The method also inspired the formal leader (the director) of the early childhood setting to send the following reflection to educators after the World Café took place. The formal leader at the site wrote to the team of educators the next day:

> I feel that some people feel scared of taking on leadership roles, primarily because having a leadership title means taking responsibility, being accountable to others and being confident to make decisions that affect others. However, when thinking about enacting everyday leadership, team members generally do this naturally with confidence, following policies and procedures, within our values and our philosophy.
>
> It can be seen that people feel more confident within this everyday leadership as they have a structure within which to work, within the organizational values and philosophy. So, when the group works together to create their organizational values and philosophy, they are then able to individually enact acts of leadership as they have the confidence to do so. We enact leading and leadership each day. We have a sense of purpose and direction and we feel very confident to stand publicly as a team and say this is what we believe in and this is what we are enacting. (Personal Communication S1b, November 17, 2018)

Furthermore, this communication demonstrates the value of the World Café method in transforming thinking and leadership practice in ECE leadership. The use of the World Café at this research site, demonstrates the capacity the method has for supporting collaborative learning and also the capacity to challenge the "status quo" through dialogue between participants who come to conversations with different ideas and perspectives (Agger-Gupta & Harris, 2017).

Valuable data on leadership emergence and the organizational practices that enable such emergence were generated through the creation of an environment of equality and innovation (Agger-Gupta & Harris, 2017). Methods such as the World Café have a complementary generative capacity, augmenting other data collection strategies. The World Café method embodied theoretical and philosophical alignment and realised benefits for both the researcher and the participants. It addressed the challenge of identifying "emergence" of leadership by creating the conditions in which emergence could be expressed and observed in a democratic process where power was shared with an equality of contribution.

Conclusion

A study of emergence of leadership where outcomes are unknown is well served with the implementation of innovative and, at times, unstructured research methods. This is particularly so in a study that considers leadership through a complexity leadership theory lens where the dynamics of leadership are considered to emerge over time in all areas of an organizational system and where each exchange, interaction and connection encourages individual and collective growth (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Leadership in early childhood education is complex. In order to capture the emergence and enactment of leading and leadership, original and theoretically aligned methods are beneficial. Central to the methods of this study were the field observation tool, to initially identify emergence, and the World Café to explore concepts more comprehensively. The use of the field observation tool facilitated the identification of emergence as framed by complexity

leadership theory, the national standards for quality of ECE and research on effective leadership (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2016; Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011). The World Café went on to enable the expansion on themes and further the development of self -knowledge in the enactment of leading and the practices that potentially cultivate leadership within organizations.

This paper has explained the use of a field observation tool and the World Café and provided an example of how these methods have been productive in studying emerging leadership and development in early childhood education sites. The researchers have argued for the use of creative and innovative methods that combine with traditional methods to reveal how leadership emerges and how it develops in an organization.

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