Developing teacher leadership in early childhood education in Aotearoa through a potential-based approach

Tamar Weisz-Koves
Manukau Institute of Technology, New Zealand

Abstract

Given the links between leadership and educational quality, there is concern that leadership in early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa has a low profile (Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009). According to the New Zealand Teachers Council and educationalists within the sector (Thornton et al.; Rodd, 2006), it is crucial that the ECE profession break through barriers and consciously develop teachers' leadership capability. In the interest of enhancing quality in ECE, this paper will provide an overview of current barriers and introduce a potential-based approach to developing teacher leadership based on the New Zealand Ministry of Education's (2009) Māori Potential Approach in Education *model. The intention is to provide discussion around a beginning framework and recommended strategies for transforming current barriers and deficit perceptions within the sector into opportunities to develop teacher leadership.*

Keywords: *Early childhood education; teacher leadership; potential-based approach*

Introduction

According to a paper recently published by the New Zealand Teachers Council, *Conceptualising Leadership in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009), leadership within the early childhood education (ECE) sector has a low profile. As part of an initiative by the Early Childhood Education Advisory group, this discussion paper draws on international and local research and the results of a collective Think Tank to explore the current state of leadership and leadership development in Aotearoa. Thornton et al. identify current issues and dilemmas facing the ECE sector and conclude that there appears to be a degree of confusion and reluctance on the part of the sector to engage with the concept of leadership, and for teachers to identify themselves as leaders. Thornton et al.'s conclusion is supported in the ECE Taskforce's 2011 report which notes that there is "a lack of understanding about what leadership is and lack of support for leadership development" (p. 159) within the sector. This is concerning given the links between teacher leadership and educational quality (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010; Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). Arguing passionately for quality in ECE provision Rodd (2006) asserts that leadership is an essential ingredient and can no longer be "an optional extra" (p. 1).

Thornton et al. (2009) purport that the consequences of not engaging and identifying with the conceptualisation of leadership are serious. Rodd (2006, as cited in Thornton et al., 2009) asserts that members of the ECE field will not be able to meet the increasing demands for "competent administrators, supervisors, educators, researchers and advocates" unless there is an "active and strong identification of the leadership role" (p. 6). In the foreword to the paper *Conceptualising Leadership in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Thornton et al., 2009), the director of the New Zealand Teachers Council, Peter Lind, has implied that ECE risks missing out on its rightful place in the vision of "ensuring that teaching is a respected and viable profession" (p. iii) unless there are opportunities for early childhood teachers to further develop their leadership capability. Drawing on research emerging from the *Centres of Innovation* programme, Thornton (2006) concludes that teacher leadership needs to be encouraged to ensure that ECE teachers work collegially,

are committed to quality practices and maintain their dedication and enthusiasm. It is crucial that the ECE profession break through barriers and consciously develop teachers' leadership capability.

In line with Hargreaves's (2009) assertion that "effective teacher leadership turns ideas into action and overcomes barriers by turning obstacles into opportunities" (p. xii), this paper aims to contribute to the dialogue around quality in ECE by putting forward a potential-based approach to developing teacher leadership. The intention is to provide discussion around a beginning framework and recommended strategies for transforming current barriers and deficit perceptions into opportunities to develop teacher leadership. This beginning framework has been adapted and developed for ECE based on the New Zealand Ministry of Education's (2009) *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model.

Background and rationale

The idea for this paper developed out of participation in the University of Southern Queensland's online MEd course *Educators as Leaders: Emerging Perspectives*. Throughout this course I was challenged to develop my personal leadership philosophy and relate leadership theories to my field of work in ECE teacher education in New Zealand. Literature searches at the time highlighted the link between leadership and quality ECE provision (Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009), and concern that the sector as a whole has not been engaging and identifying with the concept of leadership (Institute for Early Childhood Education & Research [IECER], 2009; Scrivens, 2002; Thornton, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). While there are examples of leadership research and practices within the sector – such as those associated with the *Educational Leadership Project* (ELP) (2010) and *Centres of Innovation* programme (Thornton, 2006) – overall much of the literature discussed pervasive barriers to leadership such as low status, gender, lack of research and lack of appropriate models. This raises the question as to how the sector could move beyond these barriers and empower more teachers to see themselves as leaders.

After completing my MEd I was employed to make recommendations for a professional development programme in the area of leadership in ECE. As part of my literature searches I came across the Ministry of Education's (2009) *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model and started to engage with the possibility that a potential approach could be a useful tool for developing ECE teacher leadership. In relation to current ECE leadership research in Aotearoa, there is promising research emerging from sources such as the ELP (2010) and *Centres of Innovation* programme (Thornton, 2006), however, to my knowledge there are no models for ECE which specifically focus on identifying strategies for transforming underlying barriers and deficit perceptions into opportunities to develop teacher leadership. This paper embodies Crowther et al.'s (2009) suggestion that an important strategy for developing teacher leadership is having the courage to identify and confront barriers within the profession, and then turn those barriers into opportunities.

Definition of key terminology

Formal leadership

The term *formal leadership* is used throughout this paper to refer to management and designated leadership roles. According to the ECE Taskforce (2011), leadership in the form of governance and management of a centre is how leadership roles have traditionally been perceived in New Zealand. While there are benefits to developing formal leadership within the ECE sector, the focus of this paper is on developing *teacher leadership* specifically, because fostering teacher leadership is consistently highlighted in literature as a factor linked to educational quality (Crowther et al., 2009; ECE Taskforce, 2011; Thornton, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). The ECE Taskforce explains that while it is important to support formal leadership within the sector "we also need to acknowledge the benefits of thinking more broadly about how different types of leadership can benefit our children" (p. 155).

Teacher leadership

The term *teacher leadership* is used throughout this paper to reflect the understanding that leadership is not limited to formal roles; rather, teacher leadership refers to dispositions and behaviours that all teachers have the potential to demonstrate. Rodd (2006) explains that while not everybody wants to become a formal leader with designated responsibility, "leadership can be displayed in many ways, both formally and informally and in different circumstances and situations" (p. 2). For example, while a teacher may not have a formal leadership role, s/he may display *educational leadership* (ECE Taskforce, 2011) by engaging in practices such as those relating to: curriculum development; initiating and taking responsibility for new projects; working collaboratively with others; mentoring students; and networking and sharing resources and information.

Distributed leadership, collaborative leadership and educational leadership

The concept of teacher leadership is aligned with theories about *distributed leadership*, *collaborative leadership* and *educational leadership*, in which all members of a learning/teaching community are encouraged to take personal and group responsibility and develop their leadership potential in order to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Crowther et al., 2009; ECE Taskforce, 2011; Thornton, 2006). Distributed forms of leadership encourage collaboration and build positive teaching and learning cultures through mutual trust, role modeling, power sharing and democratic processes which include the valuing and development of teacher leadership in various forms (Crowther et al. 2009; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Thornton, 2006). This involves new and different working relationships and the re-defining of formal leadership roles (Crowther et al., 2009).

Deficit perceptions

The term *deficit perceptions* refers to pervasive negative perceptions and thought processes that have become part of how leadership in ECE is regarded and spoken about. Deficit perceptions include the internalised processes through which ECE teachers may view themselves and the profession, for example, the belief that "I'm just a teacher" (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 44) or the perception that ECE is not as important as the school sector (IECER, 2009).

The links between quality leadership and quality ECE provision

Crowther et al. (2009) assert that "all teachers are potential leaders", and that "teachers collectively are the key to enhanced student outcomes" (p. 23). Harris (2002, as cited in Thornton, 2006) explains that teacher leadership "engages all those within the organisation in a reciprocal learning process that leads to collective action and meaningful change" (p. 5). According to the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) (2006, as cited in Thornton et al., 2009), professional leadership is "second only to effective teaching among all education-related factors that contribute to students' learning" and that "it accounts for approximately twenty-five percent of total centre or school effects" (p. 1). Rodd (2006) asserts that leadership is "an essential and vital component of professional development for quality service provision" and that "the fundamental importance of leadership must be acknowledged within the profession and incorporated into the initial preparation and continuing development of early years practitioners" (p. 1). Thornton (2006) concurs that leadership is a priority for the sector as a whole and places emphasis on developing distributed models of leadership and fostering teacher leadership as a way of encouraging teachers to work together and maintain their dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to quality practices.

Despite the clear connection between quality and leadership, Rodd (as cited in Thornton et al., 2009) maintains that "leadership is still an enigma for many teachers in the sector" (p. 6). It is vital that the ECE sector engage in dialogue about leadership, and develop appropriate leadership models and strategies to ensure quality

in ECE; so what are the current limitations or barriers?

An overview of current barriers to teacher leadership in ECE in Aotearoa

Table 1 provides a summary of barriers to teacher leadership in ECE and their corresponding deficit perceptions as discussed in this section.

Lack of emphasis on leadership in ECE by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and the low status of ECE

In comparison to the compulsory school sectors, relatively little research has been undertaken to address leadership contexts in ECE (IECER, 2009; Thornton et al., 2009). Thornton et al. argue that the New Zealand Ministry of Education currently provides low levels of support for leadership in ECE, in distinct contrast to that which it provides for the school sector. This lack of emphasis on leadership in ECE is a significant barrier which reflects the lower status afforded to ECE in general. The IECER (2009) explains that, historically, early childhood has been excluded from the professional arena of 'formal' education and that ECE teachers have been "less visible and less valued than teachers of older children and that this impacts early childhood teachers' view of themselves as potential leaders" (p. 1). Crowther et al. (2009) identify the thinking "I'm just a teacher" (p. 44) as a significant barrier to teacher leadership. In ECE the barrier runs even deeper with the disempowering misperception of ECE teachers being 'just babysitters' whose work is not as important as those who teach older children. In contrast Crowther et al. (2009) argue that teachers are actually powerful originators of social and cultural knowledge, and that all teachers are potential leaders with the capacity to influence their communities and wider society to bring about positive change.

Lack of research, lack of appropriate leadership models and the impact of gender

Lack of emphasis on leadership in ECE by the New Zealand Ministry of Education has corresponded with a lack of research into shared understanding and appropriate leadership models for the ECE sector (IECER, 2009; Thornton et al., 2009), and this has impacted on ECE teachers' ability to relate to available constructs of leadership. As Scrivens (2002) and Thornton et al. point out, it is not always appropriate to adopt models from the business or compulsory school sectors. Arguing from a feminist perspective, Scrivens concludes that women may find it difficult to relate to the concept of leadership because ideas about successful leadership are still largely derived from corporate models which historically reflect 'male-based knowledge' and practices. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003, as cited in Thornton et al.) explain that "the belief that leadership is about a single person and that leaders are concerned with competitive and product-oriented organisations obviously does not fit the early childhood sector, which has a non-hierarchical structure and is dominated by women" (p. 6). It is clear that ECE teachers need models of leadership that are contextualised within our professional experiences and expertise, that reflect our values, aspirations and ways of relating to others (Scrivens, 2002; Thornton et al., 2009).

Confusion over management/leadership terminology and the perception that leadership is hierarchical and linked to formal roles

One of the issues Thornton et al. (2009) identify is that the concept of leadership is often confused with that of management. The IECER (2009) explains that traditional leadership theories drawn from the business world tend to "conflate leadership with management and administration" (p. 1), and are therefore associated with hierarchical distributions of power and a focus on rules and procedures, rather than people. Thornton et al. also draw attention to the issue that management is currently emphasised over leadership within the ECE sector. This is a significant barrier because it makes it difficult for teachers to relate to constructs of leadership, and to see

Table 1. Barriers to teacher leadership in early childhood education

Barrier	Deficit perception
Low status (Crowther et al., 2009; IECER, 2009).	ECE is not part of the compulsory school sector (IECER). ECE teachers' work is not as important as those who teach older children (Crowther et al.; IECER).
Lack of emphasis on leadership in ECE by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Thornton et al., 2009).	Leadership in ECE is perceived to be less important than leadership in schools (IECER).
Lack of research relating to leadership in ECE (Thornton et al.).	Because leadership in ECE is perceived to be less important than leadership in schools, there has been less emphasis on leadership research within the sector (IECER).
Lack of appropriate leadership models for ECE (Thornton et al.; Scrivens, 2002).	The perception that leadership models drawn from the business sector and compulsory school sectors have little relevance for ECE (Thornton et al.; Scrivens).
The impact of gender (Thornton et al.; Scrivens).	The perception that leadership models are based on masculinist constructs that are not relevant in a predominantly female sector; as a result women may feel uncomfortable with leadership (Thornton et al.; Thornton, 2006; Scrivens).
Confusion over management/leadership terminology and the emphasis on management within the sector (Thornton et al.)	The perception that only those in management roles are leaders. Leadership involves valuing administration, rules and procedures more than people (IECER)
The perception that leadership is hierarchical and linked to formal roles (IECER)	The perception that leadership is linked to formal roles and having power over others (IECER; Scrivens).
Newly qualified, inexperienced teachers taking on formal leadership roles (Thornton et al.)	The perception that having a qualification and on the job experience is enough to prepare ECE teachers for leadership roles (Waniganayake, 2002).
Teachers' sense of inefficacy (Berry et al., 2010; Meister, 2010; Protheroe, 2008)	Unless they are in a formal leadership role ECE teachers may feel powerless to affect positive change (Meister).

themselves as leaders, unless they are employed in formal positions of responsibility.

In contrast, Crowther et al. (2009), Thornton et al. (2009), Thornton (2006), and Robinson et al. (2009) advocate for distributed forms of leadership in which all members of a learning/teaching community are encouraged to take responsibility for educational outcomes and develop their leadership potential. As Crowther et al. point out, this requires "new and different working relationships" (p. 47) involving significant power shifts and the redefining of formal leadership roles. Harris (2004) explains that "the job of those in formal leadership positions is primarily to hold the pieces of the organisation together in a productive relationship" (p. 161). Productive relationships are nurtured when those in formal leadership positions promote and model respect and collaboration, and provide support, mentoring and encouragement for others to become involved in centre leadership (Thornton, 2006).

Newly qualified and inexperienced teachers taking on formal leadership roles

While we are yet to see the full impact of recent National Government initiatives to reduce the required number of fully qualified teachers in ECE centres, a shortage of qualified and registered ECE teachers has been a significant issue in Aotearoa. This shortage has often led to newly qualified and inexperienced teachers holding formal leadership positions that they are not well prepared for (Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). Rodd argues that not enough is being done to sufficiently prepare new teachers for leadership roles and that student teachers need stronger leadership training:

> The current training of early years teachers and nursery nurses does not prepare them to appreciate and take on leadership roles. Rather, it prepares them to deliver child-centred education and care. While most courses offer a brief examination of leadership, this is not sufficient to prepare adults who can administer and manage diverse service and provide leadership to a multi-disciplinary team. (p. 1)

Waniganayake (2002) points out that somehow "leadership training is perceived as additional and supplementary" (p. 119) to teachers' initial education and raises the question as to whether on-the-job experience is enough. The perception that leadership professional learning is additional and supplementary to teachers' initial education is evident when comparing the current *Graduating Teacher Standards* (New Zealand Teachers Council [NZTC], 2007), which say nothing about leadership, with the *Registered Teacher Criteria* (NZTC, 2009), which require fully registered teachers to "show leadership that contributes to effective teaching and learning" (criterion 5, n.p.). It is assumed that somehow, somewhere in between graduating and becoming registered, teachers develop essential leadership skills. However, Rodd (2006) draws attention to the current "paucity of professional development opportunities and pathways to foster leadership potential in early years practitioners" (p. 1). In their recommendations to lead the way forward, Thornton et al. (2009) raise the importance of teachers having access to ongoing leadership development programmes that are contextualised and provide follow-up support over sustained periods of time.

Teachers' sense of inefficacy

Efficacy, as it refers to teachers' self beliefs and confidence in their ability to affect positive change and make a difference through the work they do, is a disposition which underpins effective leadership. While the literature on leadership in ECE does not specifically identify teachers' sense of inefficacy (or feelings of powerlessness to affect change) as a barrier to developing ECE teacher leadership, readings from the wider educational field highlight a connection between quality, teacher leadership and teachers' sense of personal and collective efficacy (Berry et al., 2010; Meister, 2010; Protheroe, 2008). Meister argues that "true reform can only occur if the

people who are instrumental in implementing the mandates are at the forefront of change" (p. 880). However, Meister points out that "teachers are often excluded from important decisions that directly affect them, which produces feelings of inefficacy and isolation that erode the profession" (p. 883). In contrast, Robinson et al. (2009) identify distributed leadership as an essential element in empowering teachers and building a positive teaching/learning culture.

Shifting the focus from deficit to potential

After reading about pervasive and widespread barriers to developing teacher leadership in ECE, it was refreshing to come across a model which specifically focused on transforming deficit perceptions and thinking into potential opportunities. The *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model is embedded in the Ministry of Education's (2009) strategy, *Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success/Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012*. This model (see Table 2) aims to improve learning outcomes for Māori by shifting teachers' focus on deficit to identifying opportunity and potential.

Table 2. Māori potential approach in education (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 19)

Less focus on …	More focus on …
Remedying deficit	Realising potential
Problems of dysfunction	Identifying opportunity
Government intervention	Investing in people and local solutions
Targeting deficit	Tailoring education to the learner
Māori as a minority	Indigeneity and distinctiveness
Instructing and informing	Collaborating and co-constructing

While at first glance this model could be critiqued for appearing to over simplify complex socio-political issues and shift the locus of responsibility from that of Government and wider society onto teachers, what is useful about the model is that it acknowledges existing barriers and endeavours to create new and better possibilities by significantly changing the lens through which we see and act. This model also highlights the powerful leadership role teachers have when they are aware of creating and sustaining meaningful social change through their everyday practice. According to Crowther et al. (2009), teacher leadership is a transformative process and teachers have considerable power to shape social and cultural meaning systems. Ultimately, it is more empowering for teachers to see themselves as agents of change with the capacity for self determination, than as victims of circumstance and forces beyond their control.

The next section of this paper pulls together key themes and recommended strategies for intentionally developing teacher leadership within the ECE sector.

Key themes and recommended strategies for developing ECE teacher leadership
Challenging and transforming deficit perceptions

As previously discussed, the *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model (Ministry of Education, 2009) highlights the importance of shifting teachers' focus on deficit to identifying opportunity and potential. An example of research which focuses on transforming teachers' beliefs and practices in order to bring about positive change is the *Kōtahitanga* project (Bishop, Berryman, Powell, & Teddy, 2007). Bishop et al. advocate for educational equity and quality by asserting that teachers need to examine their own position, interrogate deficit thinking and where necessary change their theorising and practice. While their discussion is contextualised within discussion about challenging and changing deficit thinking about learners' socio-cultural backgrounds,

particularly Māori learners, the powerful strategy of challenging deficit thinking can be applied to other educational contexts, including leadership in ECE. What is clear is that any meaningful shifts in teachers' practice need to be accompanied by significant shifts in awareness and theorising; and this involves deep and complex change processes.

Furthermore, while it is important to confront and deconstruct barriers and deficit perceptions with honesty and courage, part of the transformative process necessarily involves moving beyond these barriers to explore new possibilities and develop more appropriate and effective theories and practices. In relation to developing teacher leadership within the ECE sector, key themes and recommended strategies from the literature include:

- promoting distributed forms of leadership (including teacher leadership);
- fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy;
- encouraging collaborative leadership work;
- placing more emphasis on leadership in initial teacher education; and
- increasing access to ongoing leadership development programmes.

Promoting distributed forms of leadership

A key theme which has consistently emerged from the literature is the recommended strategy of promoting distributed forms of leadership (Berry et al., 2010; Crowther et al., 2009; Hargreaves, 2009; Harris, 2004; Robinson et al., 2009; Thornton, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). Distributed forms of leadership build positive teaching and learning cultures through mutual trust, role modeling, power sharing and democratic processes which include the valuing and development of teacher leadership in various forms (Crowther et al.; Robinson et al.; Thornton). This involves new and different working relationships and the re-defining of formal leadership roles (Crowther et al.). Hall (1996, as cited in Scrivens, 2002) advocates for the radical concept of "power for rather than power over" (p. 28) people, which supports the view of Thornton that formal leaders have an important mentoring and support role.

Distributed forms of leadership offer alternative leadership models to those traditionally drawn from the business sector. As a result, larger numbers of ECE teachers may be able to relate to models based on distributed power, because they are more in line with ECE values, contexts, and experiences than traditional models (Thornton et al., 2009). Furthermore, teachers who see themselves as leaders may become involved with important leadership work around generating their own research and models, such as those emerging from the ELP (2010) and *Centres of Innovation* programme (Thornton, 2006).

Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy and encouraging collaborative leadership work

According to Robinson et al. (2009), distributed leadership is an essential ingredient in empowering teachers and building a positive teaching/learning culture. This is because teacher leadership is closely aligned with teachers' sense of professional efficacy and their belief in their ability to make a difference through their work (Berry et al. 2010; Meister, 2010; Protheroe, 2008). Crowther et al. (2009) assert that "all teachers individually and collectively are the key to enhanced student outcomes" (p. 23), and define teacher leadership as "an ethical stance that is based on views of both a better world and the power of teachers to shape meaning systems" (p. 10). When teachers understand and believe in the value of their work they are in a better position to advocate for themselves, children, whānau and the wider profession, and to engage in collaborative leadership work such as teacher research. Berry et al. make an interesting connection between teachers' effectiveness with learners, and their sense of professional efficacy and engagement in collaborative leadership work. Teachers with high levels of personal and collective efficacy contribute to educational quality through being more effective in their teaching

and collaborating with other teachers (Berry et al.; Protheroe).

Placing more emphasis on leadership in initial teacher education and increasing access to ongoing leadership development programmes

Because of the links between quality and leadership (Berry et al., 2010; Crowther et al., 2009; Thornton et al., 2009), it is vital that those working within the sector understand the importance of developing leadership in ECE. Rodd (2006) raises the importance of leadership being a stronger part of teachers' initial education. This is a factor that the ECE Taskforce (2011) supports with its recommendation that a review of early childhood education teaching qualifications include a review of content relating to leadership education. The Taskforce also recommends that the New Zealand Government "provide greater support for early childhood services to adopt educational leadership practices" (p. 159). Thornton et al.'s recommendations to "lead the way forward" (p. 19) include the recommendations that teachers need access to ongoing leadership development programmes that are contextualised and provide follow-up support over sustained periods of time. Thornton et al. identify the following key attributes which they assert should be considered in leadership development models:

- encouragement of distributed leadership approaches;
- support and mentoring provided by other leaders;
- opportunities for reflection on real-life experiences and scenarios;
- follow up support over sustained period of time;
- a programme based on the particular assessed needs of individual leaders;
- a programme which is problem focused and specific to workplace context;
- collegiality and networking opportunities;
- inclusion of the wider team in aspects of the programme;
- ongoing leadership development programmes. (p. 19)

A potential-based approach to developing teacher leadership in ECE in Aotearoa

Table 3 is based on the Ministry of Education's (2009) *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model. It has been adapted to include identified barriers and deficit perceptions on the side headed 'less focus on', with the corresponding strategies for developing teacher leadership placed on the side indicated for 'more focus on'.

Engaging with the framework and moving forward

It is hoped that as a result of engaging with this framework, teachers and other stakeholders will be encouraged to challenge barriers and deficit perceptions within the sector and implement strategies to intentionally develop ECE teacher leadership. It is anticipated that, as more ECE teachers begin to see themselves as teacher leaders and engage in leadership behaviour, children, whānau, the wider community, and teachers themselves will benefit. According to the ECE Taskforce (2011), there is currently "little research about the extent to which the concept of leadership as a tool for improving teaching and learning exists within early childhood education in New Zealand" (p. 159). The next step for this beginning framework is to consult with teachers, and other stakeholders within the sector, to gage interest in this beginning framework and consider its potential application. This could lead in to a research project designed to measure actual outcomes.

Table 3. A potential-based approach to developing teacher leadership in early childhood education in Aotearoa

Less focus on … (Barrier *Deficit perception*)	More focus on … (Strategies for developing teacher leadership)
Low status *ECE is not part of the compulsory school sector. ECE teachers' work is not as important as those who teach older children.*	• **Challenging and transforming deficit perceptions** (Bishop et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009). • **Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy** (Berry et al., 2010; Meister, 2010; Protheroe, 2008). For example: • Fostering the understanding that all teachers are potential leaders with the capacity to influence their communities and wider society and to bring about positive change (Crowther et al., 2009).
Lack of emphasis on leadership in ECE by the New Zealand Ministry of Education *Leadership in ECE is perceived to be less important than leadership in schools.*	• **Challenging and transforming deficit perceptions** (Bishop et al.; Ministry of Education). • **Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy** (Berry et al.; Meister; Protheroe). For example: • Emphasising the importance of leadership in ECE and highlighting the connection between quality leadership and quality service provision (ECE Taskforce, 2011; Rodd, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). • Advocating that the New Zealand Government provide greater support for ECE services to adopt educational leadership practices (ECE Taskforce).
Lack of research relating to leadership in ECE *Because leadership in ECE is perceived to be less important than leadership in schools there has been less emphasis on leadership research within the sector.*	• **Challenging and transforming deficit perceptions** (Bishop et al.; Ministry of Education). • **Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy** (Berry et al.; Meister; Protheroe). • **Encouraging collaborative leadership work** (Berry et al.). For example: • ECE teachers engaging in collaborative leadership work around generating their own research and models, such as those emerging from the *Educational leadership project* (ELP, 2010) and *Centres of innovation* programme (Thornton, 2006).
Lack of appropriate leadership models for ECE *The perception that leadership models drawn from the business sector and compulsory school sectors have little relevance for ECE.*	• **Promoting distributed forms of leadership** (Berry et al.; Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Hargreaves, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Thornton; Thornton et al.). • **Encouraging collaborative leadership work** (Berry et al.). For example: • Accessing emerging ECE leadership models such as those being generated through the *Educational leadership project* (ELP) and *Centres of innovation* programme (Thornton). • Adapting and creating new models that reflect the unique contexts within which ECE teachers work, their experiences, values, and ways of relating (Scrivens, 2002; Thornton et al.).

The impact of gender *The perception that leadership models are based on masculinist constructs that are not relevant in a predominantly female sector; as a result women may feel uncomfortable with leadership.*	• **Promoting distributed forms of leadership** (Berry et al.; Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Hargreaves; Harris, 2004; Robinson et al.; Thornton; Thornton et al.). • **Encouraging collaborative leadership work** (Berry et al.). For example: • Understanding that authentic leadership is linked to collaboration and empowering people, rather than having 'power over' people (Scrivens). • Creating models of leadership which fit ECE values and the communities within which they teach and learn (ELP; Scrivens; Thornton; Thornton et al.).
Confusion over management-leadership terminology and the emphasis on management within the sector *The perception that only those in management roles are leaders. Leadership involves valuing administration, rules and procedures more than people.*	• **Promoting distributed forms of leadership** (Berry et al.; Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Hargreaves; Harris; Robinson et al.; Thornton; Thornton et al.). For example: • Clarifying management/leadership terminology (Thornton et al.) and redefining formal leadership roles (Crowther et al.). • Encouraging teacher leadership and nurturing productive relationships based on respect, collaboration and shared leadership (Thornton)
The perception that leadership is hierarchical and linked to formal roles *The perception that leadership is linked to formal roles and having power over others.*	• **Promoting distributed forms of leadership** (Berry et al.; Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Hargreaves; Harris; Robinson et al.; Thornton; Thornton et al.). • **Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy** (Berry et al.; Meister; Protheroe). For example: • Emphasising the importance of developing ECE leadership based on models that empower teachers and build positive teaching/learning cultures (Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Robinson et al; Thornton). • Creating new and different working relationships involving significant power shifts and the redefining of formal leadership roles (Crowther et al.). • Nurturing productive relationships based on respect, collaboration and shared leadership (Thornton).
Newly qualified, inexperienced teachers taking on formal leadership roles *The perception that having a qualification and on the job experience is enough to prepare ECE teachers for leadership roles.*	• **Placing more emphasis on leadership in initial teacher education.** • **Increasing access to ongoing leadership development programmes.** For example: • Ensuring that ECE leadership is a stronger part of undergraduate teacher education programmes (ECE Taskforce; Rodd, 2006). • Increasing access to ongoing leadership development progammes that are contextualised and provide follow-up support over sustained periods of time (Thornton et al.). • Encouraging collegiality and networking opportunities (Thornton et al.).
Teachers' sense of inefficacy *Unless they are in a formal leadership role ECE teachers may feel powerless to affect positive change.*	• **Promoting distributed forms of leadership** (Berry et al.; Crowther et al.; ECE Taskforce; Hargreaves; Harris; Robinson et al.; Thornton; Thornton et al.). • **Fostering teachers' sense of professional efficacy** (Berry et al.; Meister; Protheroe). For example: • Building positive teaching and learning cultures based on models of distributed leadership (Robins et al.). • Encouraging teachers' sense of personal and group efficacy (Protheroe) and encouraging collaborative leadership work (Berry et al.).

Conclusion

Developing teacher leadership in ECE in Aotearoa has been identified by the Teachers Council and educationalists within the sector as a crucial issue. Given the links between leadership and educational quality, there is concern that, on the whole, ECE teachers do not see themselves as leaders. This paper has presented an overview of significant barriers and deficit perceptions which are currently affecting ECE teachers' ability to relate to and engage with constructs of leadership. In response, this paper has introduced a potential-based approach to developing teacher leadership. This beginning framework, based on the Ministry of Education's (2009) *Māori Potential Approach in Education* model, aims to contribute to dialogue around quality in ECE by recommending strategies to transform current barriers and deficit perceptions within the sector into opportunities to develop teacher leadership. It is hoped that as a result of engaging with this framework, teachers and other stakeholders will be encouraged to challenge barriers and deficit perceptions within the sector and to implement strategies to intentionally develop ECE teacher leadership. It is anticipated that as more ECE teachers begin to see themselves as teacher leaders and engage in leadership behaviour, children, whānau, the wider community, and teachers themselves will benefit. This paper has provided a starting point for further consultation and research within the ECE sector.

References

Berry, B., Daughtrey, A., & Wieder, A. (2010). *A better system for schools: Developing, supporting and retaining effective teachers*. Hillsborough, NC: Centre for Teaching Quality.

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Powell, A., & Teddy, L. (2007). *Te kōtahitanga phase 2 – Towards a whole school approach*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Crowther, F., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2009). *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

ECE Taskforce. (2011). Essay on policy design 10: Improving staff education and professional development. In *Final report of the ECE taskforce* (pp. 150–161). Retrieved July 6, 2011, from http://www.taskforce.ece. govt.nz/essay-10-improving-staff-education-and-professional-development/

Educational Leadership Project. (2010). *Our approach*. Retrieved July 25, 2010, from http://www.elp.co.nz/ EducationalLeadershipProject_OurApproach.php

Hargreaves, A. (2009). Foreword to the second edition: Bringing teacher leadership back in. In F. Crowther, M. Ferguson & L. Hann (Eds.), *Developing teacher leaders* (2nd ed., pp. vii–xiii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school development: Leading or misleading? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 32*(1), 11–24.

Institute for Early Childhood Education & Research. (2009). Leadership in early childhood education: New trends and possibilities. *Research into Practice, 7,* 1–3.

Meister, D. G. (2010). Experienced secondary teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness: A guide for professional development. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(4), 880–898.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki, he whāriki mātauranga mo nga mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (2009). *Ka Hikitia: Managing for success/Māori education strategy 2008–2012*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

New Zealand Teachers Council. (2007). *Graduating teacher standards: Aotearoa New Zealand*. *Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Teachers Council*. New Zealand Teachers Council. *(2009). Registered teacher criteria*. *Wellington, New Zealand: Author.*

Protheroe, N. (2008). Teacher efficacy: What is it and does it matter? *Principal, May/June*, 42–45.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *Schools leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why, Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Rodd, J. (2006). *Leadership: An essential ingredient or an optional extra for quality early childhood provision*? [Discussion paper]. Retrieved August 3, 2010, from http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/Reflection-rodd.pdf

Scrivens, C. (2002). Constructions of leadership: Does gender make a difference? Perspectives from an English speaking country. In V. Nivala & E. Hujala (Eds.), *Leadership in early childhood education: Cross cultural perspectives* (pp. 25–32). Oulu, Finland: Oulu University Press.

Thornton, K. (2006). Notions of leadership in the New Zealand ECE centres of innovation programme. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education, 15*, 153–167.

Thornton, K., Wansbrough, D., Clarkin-Phillips, J., Aitkin, H., & Tamati, A. (2009). *Conceptualising leadership in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Teachers Council.

Waniganayake, M. (2002). Growth of leadership: With training, can anyone become a leader? In V. Nivala & E. Hujala (Eds.), *Leadership in early childhood education: Cross cultural perspectives* (pp. 115–124). Oulu, Finland: Oulu University Press.

Author

Tamar Weisz-Koves graduated as an early childhood teacher from the Auckland College of Education in 1989. Since then she has taught in a variety of early childhood settings, both within New Zealand and overseas, and completed a B.A. through the University of Auckland before moving into teacher education. Between 2004 and 2008 she was the practicum co-ordinator and a senior lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology. Since 2008, Tamar has been contracting as a lecturer, teacher registration mentor and professional development facilitator, and has recently completed her M.Ed through the University of Southern Queensland.
Email: tamar.w@xtra.co.nz