

Faith and practice in the work of Directors of Christian Early Childhood Education and Care Centres: A pilot study

Marion Shields.



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Background: The Early Childhood Sector

- ECEC-critically important stage (*Gibbs 2008*).
- 2006/2008 Poor reports from OECD & UNICEF
- Legislation 2010, NQF & ACECQA.
- “*..acute and chronic change, pressures for rapid and extensive adaptation, innovation and transformation have occurred over an extended period of time*” (*Rodd, 2013, 183*).



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Additional factors:

- 70% of ECEC by private providers (*Pocock & Hill, 2007*)
- Predominantly female staff (*Hard & Jonsdottir, 2013*)
- Age range: high level duty of care (*Rodd, 2013*)
- Poor remuneration, high turnover rate of staff
(*Waniganayake et al, 2012*)
- Lower level of qualifications than teachers
(*Waniganayake et al., 2012*)



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ECEC Leadership factors:

- Many experienced early childhood administrators do not perceive themselves as 'leaders' (*Rodd, 2006*)
- Many are not confident in publicly advocating for Early Childhood Education (*Osgood 2004*)
- Many find themselves in a leadership position with little or no professional development in leadership and management (*Aubrey, 2011*).



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ECEC Leadership factors Contd.

- Traditional female values of care and nurturing are often incompatible with accepted perceptions of successful leadership behaviours (*Hard & Jonsdottir, 2013*).
- Leadership models in other education sectors do not 'fit' early childhood education (*Brock, 2012*).
- Unfortunately the topic of leadership in early childhood attracts few researchers (*Rodd, 2013*).



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- **Why do this study?**
 - Information for tertiary studies and students
 - Information for beginning leaders
 - Collecting and sharing the wealth of knowledge and experience from practising leaders.



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- **This presentation describes a pilot study**
- **Where?** (NSW)
- **Who?** (Independent Christian centres, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Montessori and Anglican centres).
- Independent centres (not preschool classes)
- ‘Christian’ in centre or system title.



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Research Design:

- Qualitative paradigm
- Constructivist grounded theory
- Three phases
 - Survey questionnaire
 - Three rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews
 - Concurrent in situ observations.



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• Phase 1 Survey Questionnaire

- Developed in consultation with 2 experienced Directors.
- Sent to all participants
- Designed to set the scene for the interviews
- Explore attitudes, enjoyment of role & sense of self-efficacy
- Directors' perceptions of 'Christian' expectations
- Areas of difficulty (general & in relation to 'Christian')



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Some early results.....



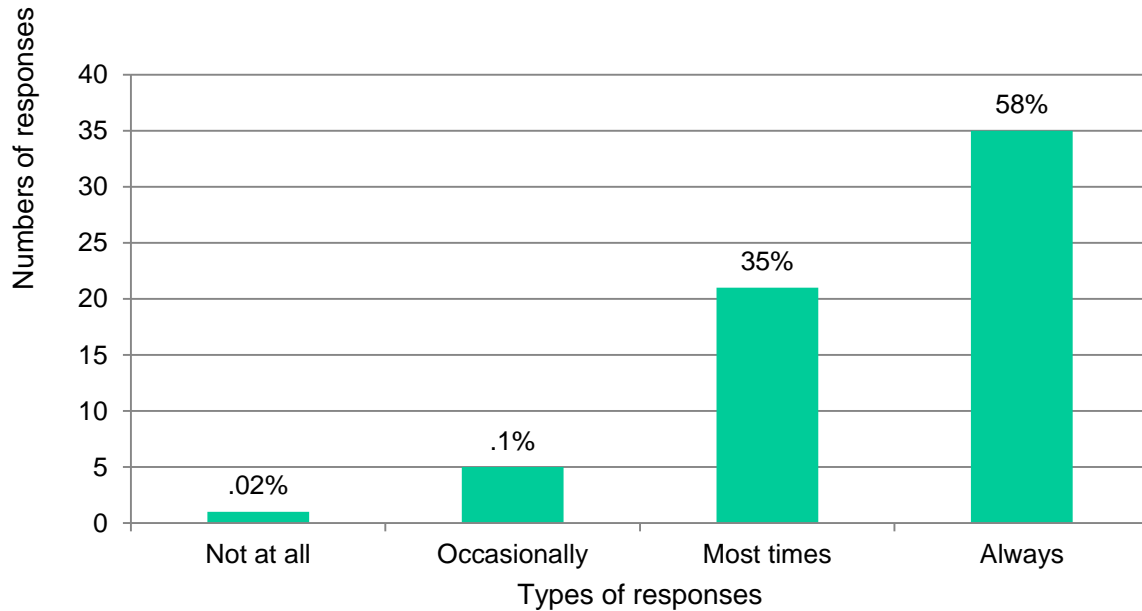
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Beliefs about personal competence in and enjoyment of the Director's role.

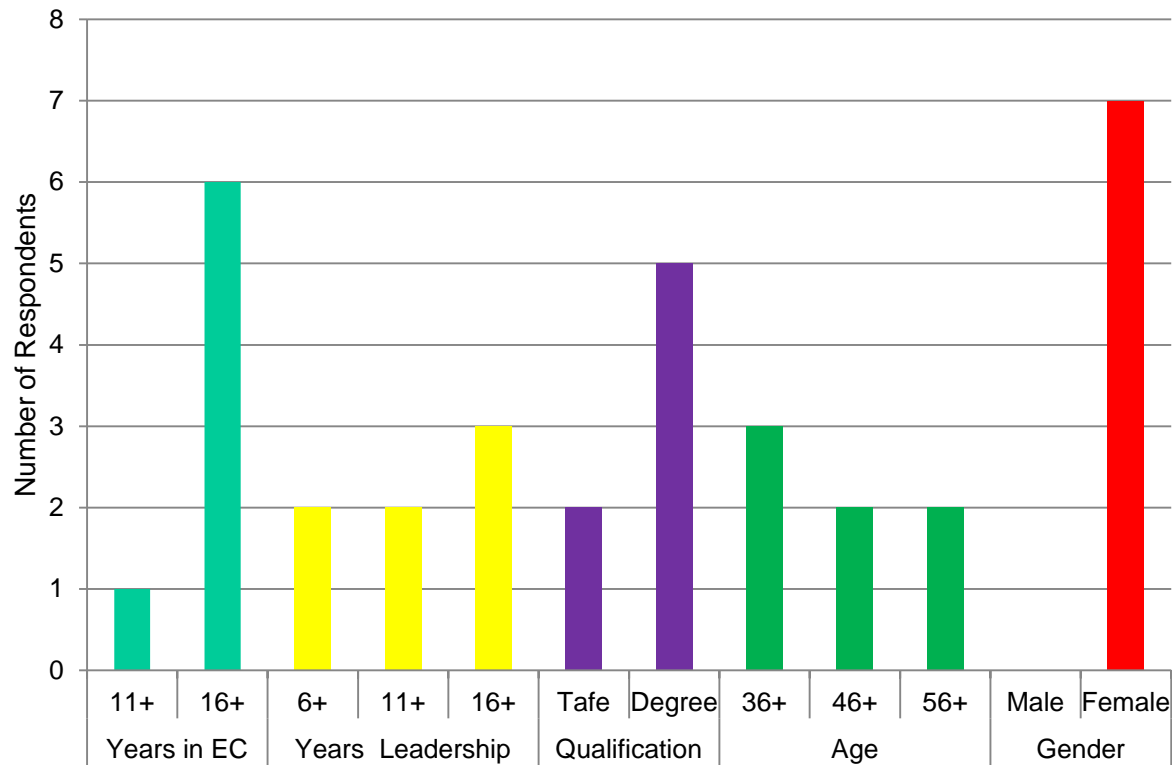


Comment:
A large majority (93%) felt confident about their competence and enjoyed their work as Director



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Demographics



Comment:
Experienced
Qualified
Mature
Female



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- General Problem Areas:
 - Time constraints – I work a lot at night
 - A sense of isolation and responsibility
 - Understanding from the main school – they forget about us sometimes!
 - Understanding the importance of play and its value
 - Budget management & dealing with ‘head office’.
 - Obtaining relief staff during absences
 - Policy changes.



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Problem areas in the Christian context:

Two main themes emerged:

- Conflict between personal values and individual staff or parent values:

“Disrespectful parents not following policy or procedure – constantly and disrespectful staff not considering other staff or thought patterns of children.”

- A lack of support and affirmation from the system (for system schools):

“Pastoral care and the wider school campus tend to overlook this service as needing that kind of support



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- A question asked how to recognise Christian leadership:
 - *actions speak so much stronger than words.*
 - *a leader is confident to affirm staff and support them.*
 - *the team should feel their leader respects them.*
 - *the 'leader' to demonstrate a Christ-like approach, e.g. valuing all staff and families.*
 - *patience, gentleness, kindness etc in all circumstances.*
 - Again and again the responses to this question emphasised kindness and valuing people.



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Where to from here?

- Continue and follow-up survey-questionnaires
- Continue analysis
- Move into phase 2 – the three rounds of interviews
- Concurrent phase 3 – the observations
- Analysis of data
- Writing!



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Thank you!

Questions? Comments? Suggestions?



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