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# **United We Stand:**

**An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood settings.**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Masters of Educational Leadership**

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## **Abstract**

Early childhood has a professional standing in education circles, however the team teaching that is necessary in this field, often doesn't reflect the professionalism required. This research project was motivated by the researcher's growing awareness and concern of disharmony within early childhood teams. Disharmony frequently dominates the researcher's professional time in the bid to unravel the sources and work with teams to resolve issues and dilemmas.

This research project investigates leader's and teacher's perceptions about the underlying sources of team disharmony in early childhood, drawing on their lived experience and strategies implemented to re-culture the team, to restore harmony, collegiality and collaboration.

Qualitative methods of an online survey and face to face semi-structured interviews were used to gather data on both leaders and teachers perceptions of the underlying sources of disharmony.

The research found that poor communication, personality, leadership and a lack of relational trust and clear values that underpinned relationships and practice were participants' perceptions of contributing factors to team disharmony. In addition, structural issues and pressures of time for meaningful dialogue also contributed. A darker side of leadership was revealed where power and control tactics were used to bully teachers; leaving them disempowered and fearful of reprisals should they disagree or push for change.

Team harmony, founded on clear values, is critical in an ECE environment where teacher's team teach in the one open plan environment. Collaboration and collegiality are necessary dispositions for the team to hold, to enable them to collectively plan, reflect and inquire into their every day practice. Quality outcomes for children's learning can only be met when teams are clear on their goals and they are working synergetically.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This study explores team disharmony in the early childhood education (ECE) context. The early childhood profession is predominantly women; only two percent of the sectors teaching force are men (Ministry of Education, 2014). Consequently there is a large majority of women as leaders in ECE leading mostly women. Given the team teaching nature of ECE, in an open plan environment, there is an expectation that responsive and reciprocal relationships, founded on trust, will underpin the team interactions in any given service. However, from my experience as a senior leader, I have witnessed that this is not always the case.

Currently I am a senior leader, responsible for teacher's professional practice, in a multi service organisation. I also belong to a national group of senior leaders where disharmony among teams is a frequent topic of debate as we try to identify contributing factors and solutions. Hence, I believe disharmony is not a localised issue, but a sector wide issue where relationships within teams are frequently punctuated with episodes of disharmony, that range on a continuum from minor to very serious.

As both a teacher and later a head teacher within ECE this was not my world. I find it both confounding and frustrating that trained professionals are unable to get along, work collegially and collaboratively for the good of the children and families within the service. As I worked through early master's degree papers it became clear to me that research on organisational culture and team work focused on the positive, what made good leadership and what made effective teams, creating a tension for me between what the research espouses as best practice and what often happens in the relationship of team teaching in ECE. It was then I decided that for my master's thesis I would study the sources of disharmony and how leaders respond to re-culture professional relationships and restore collaboration and collegiality within the team. It is intended that this study will support the sector as a whole, to improve relationships and ultimately the outcomes for children.

## **Rationale for the research project**

The early childhood profession is predominantly women, with these teachers positioned as a professional group (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003) who, unlike other education sectors, team teach in an open-plan environment. To work in this way requires clear communication, commitment and trust. As a consequence, early childhood teaching in New Zealand requires teachers to work as a unified and collaborative team as well as engage as professionals in caring and nurturing relationships that underpin young children's learning (Thornton & Wansborough, 2012). Hence, the effective provision of ECE requires concerted interaction between the team, where the joint work of planning, teaching and inquiring together creates a climate of support and collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rodd, 2006; Thomas, 2012). Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett and Farmer (2007) suggest "collaborative teamwork" is the early childhood mantra. However not all teams behave in a supportive manner, often the collaboration can be superficial with teams becoming awkward, artificial and even oppressive (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hatherly, 1997). Clearly, these investigators collectively espouse a variety of attributes for team harmony; however there is a place for research that attempts to go beyond the obvious, that actively explores why the practice does not match the rhetoric.

This research therefore, will draw on participants lived experience of how both leaders and teachers manage disharmony in a team teaching context and what leaders do to re-culture the professional relationships and restore collaborative team work. From my observation, disharmony within teams often leaves members disenchanted with both the team and the profession. As the researcher, I am optimistic that this study, based on the reality of lived experiences, will be advantageous for the ECE community, by building on the existing theoretical understandings of teamwork and leadership.

## **Context of early childhood education in Aotearoa**

Early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand had very humble beginnings, which have been eloquently documented by Helen May (1997) in her book *Discovery of Early Childhood*. Therefore there is no need in this research to elaborate on the historical past. What is pertinent is the status of ECE today.

## **The 1980's and onwards**

Prior to 1986, the ECE sector had two main factions, public kindergartens and childcare. Kindergartens, often referred to as the flagship of ECE (Duncan, 2007), were focused on the education of three to five year olds, with administration being posited in the Department of Education. The focus of childcare was care for infants and young children for mothers who worked and needed more than the sessional hours of care public kindergartens provided. Administration for childcare was the responsibility of the Department of Social Welfare. However, prompted by the concerns of the care for children in childcare services, administration became the responsibility of the Department of Education (now the Ministry of Education) in 1986. The shift saw the coalescing of childcare and education, despite historical, philosophical and organisational differences among services (May, 1997). The merger prompted a re-conceptualisation of ECE, how it should be regulated and funded (McLachlan, 2011).

Three significant events happened between 1985 and 2002 to align the various early child services more strongly, building a robust professional base. First, the introduction of a three year teacher diploma programme for early childhood teachers was provided to increase the quality of ECE. Later the benchmark became a three year degree programme.

Second, was the development of Te Whāriki, an inclusive curriculum of care and education for all ECE licensed services (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996). The curriculum was built on four key principles, Relationships, Family and Community, Empowerment and Holistic Development. This curriculum offers a flexible approach to teaching, working from individual children's strengths, interests and funds of knowledge. Children are no longer viewed from a needs perspective. On the contrary, the curriculum aspiration for children is:

*To grow up competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge they make a valued contribution to society (MoE, 1996, p.7).*

Third, in 2002, the incumbent Labour Government's ten year strategic plan, Pathways to the Future, *Ngā Huarāhi Arataki* (MoE, 2002) had the enlightened

goal of fully trained and registered teachers in ECE by 2012. This was a significant move to align childcare services to the quality provided by the kindergarten movement, who since its inception had a policy of only employing trained teachers (Duncan, 2004). ECE historically had very low professional status, however through the integration of training, the development of an ECE specific curriculum and the expectations of 100% trained teachers, a new professionalism was realised, (Dalli, 2008). This situation however was short lived.

### **A change of guard**

The vision of 100% trained and registered teachers, was dampened by the incoming National Government of 2008 who quickly abolished the strategic plan and the ideal of 100% trained teachers. In 2009 they lowered the baseline funding from a 100% trained teachers to a maximum of 80%, with funding for under two year olds cut even further to a maximum of 50% of trained teachers (MoE, 2011). The reduction in funding has been detrimental to the professional standing of ECE teachers that had been strongly fought for over many years.

These moves have been counterproductive to the sectors ability to maintain high quality teaching and learning in ECE (New Zealand Educational Institute, Te Riu Roa [NZEI], 2014). Quality outcomes for children's discourses are frequently underpinned by the notion of 100% trained and registered teachers, who deeply understand the intentions of the curriculum Te Whāriki (Carr & Mitchell, 2010). Anything less undermines the professionalism of the sector.

### **Current situation**

Neoliberal reforms position ECE as a private good that should be paid for by the individual. The reforms see choice and competition as the way to better efficiencies (Duncan, 2007). As governments have pushed for deregulation, privatisation and corporatisation since the 1984 reforms, private enterprise has been encouraged to invest in ECE; consequently this has seen the rise in numbers of long service daycare centres in the ECE market putting pressure on trained registered teachers (Duhn, 2010).

Within this market focused approach, ECE education is viewed as a product and ECE services are seen as being similar to small businesses (Codd, 2005). Bigger corporations such as KidiCorp and ABC<sup>1</sup> were welcomed as they aggressively bought up individual services and opened new centres. 2007 saw a flood of activity in the opening of new services by independents and corporates, as 20 hours free, a new higher funding rate, was introduced to increase participation. This move afforded at-home parents more opportunities to engage in part time work (Bushouse, 2008). The sessional function of the flagship of ECE (kindergartens) has been left in the wake of private enterprise, with private enterprise now commanding 86% of all new services since 2001, totalling 57% of all services nationally (NZEI, 2014). Hence, most kindergartens have been forced to restructure their hours of operation to compete, with most now offering a school day model of six hours.

The impact of these reforms on kindergarten in particular, has meant they are now taking two year olds to fill their roll numbers. Teachers are neither psychologically nor pedagogically prepared for these younger children. The environment and ratios are out of kilter with the needs of the under three year olds in attendance, shifting the focus from learning to care routines. From observation the rapid growth of private enterprise has meant an imbalance in teams, some centres are staffed with a large portion of new teachers who grapple with the rigours of teaching in ECE.

### **Changing hours and function of ECE**

Changing demographics, and needs of parents, as the socio-cultural climate of the country changes, has resulted in the sessional model mostly replaced with a six hour school day model in the public kindergarten system. Other daycare models may run from 6.00am in the morning to 6.00pm at night, with variations on this to meet the centre needs and the changing requirements of parents. Full time teachers in these models can work anywhere from six to eight hours contact time a day. The longer hours of contact time raises issues within the whole sector in terms of quality (NZEI, 2014). These changes have caused challenges for leadership and

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008 ABC went into receivership and was bought out by KidiCorp

team work, as they work with both trained and untrained teachers, as well as multiple teachers within any given day to cover the longer hours of operation.

### **Leadership and teamwork**

Leadership in ECE is steeped in relationships. It is the leader's responsibility to set a culture of collaboration and harmony within the service by developing, with the team, a clear vision, purpose and values. As well as managing relationships there is a component of managerial tasks that sit alongside and support the leadership function, adding to the complexity of their role. They can be the budget manager, curriculum driver, team leader and team player, relationship manager, child advocate and administration overseer, all within the course of a day (Rodd, 2006).

The team teaching nature of ECE requires teachers to be good colleagues, working as a unified and collaborative team, as well as engaging as professionals in caring and nurturing relationships, that underpin young children's learning (Rodd, 2006; Thornton & Wansborough, 2012). Arthur et al. (2005) suggest 'collaborative teamwork' is the early childhood mantra. Team work and collaboration is critical to the success of the service.

However, not all teams behave in a supportive and collaborative manner, as evidenced in other studies (see Cardno & Reynolds, 2008; Hard, 2006; Reynolds, 2011). Within this complex environment it is easy to understand how difficult ECE leadership can be and how the lack of skilled leadership can undermine the most dedicated team.

### **Lack of leadership research and training**

Research on leadership in ECE is sparse, with only intermittent attention over the past 30 years (Rodd, 2006). The lack of leadership research leaves leadership in ECE under theorised and leaders unprepared for the role of leader, making the sector less fortunate than other education sectors, which have an abundance of leadership research and leadership development programmes available to draw on. Added to this is the lack of support for leadership programmes in ECE from the Ministry of Education (Thornton et al., 2009).

This lack of research and formal leadership training prior to taking on a leadership role is a pressing issue for ECE. Frequently, teachers fall into leadership positions through necessity. It is not uncommon for graduates to be placed in leadership positions immediately upon graduation, with little support or acknowledgement of their newly qualified status (Aitken, 2006; Thornton et al., 2009). The current governments drive for quality and accountability makes leadership training even more critical. How leaders fulfil their role impacts on the quality of relationships with and between team members (Hewison, 2014).

This study will use an interpretive framework and qualitative methods to gain insights into the leaders and teachers lived reality of team disharmony. In addition, it will explore strategies leaders use to restore collaborative and collegial relationships. Chapter three outlines the methodology, including data collection and analysis.

### **Thesis contribution**

It is intended that this research will further contribute to understanding the sources of team disharmony within the ECE sector, by stimulating both leaders and teachers to reflect on their practice in relation to team disharmony. As well, it will provide a proactive approach to addressing issues, no matter how small, before they develop into something bigger that creates tension and distrust within the team.

Essential leadership attributes and skills, that contribute to and support positive team relationships, of collaboration and collegiality have been identified as well as successful strategies in restoring team harmony. I am optimistic noted strategies will support the ECE sector to some extent; however strategies identified are not exhaustive, but may provoke leaders and teachers to open discussion on team disharmony.

### **Structure of thesis report**

Chapter One has provided a rationale for this research as well as an overview of the current context of ECE.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature that draws on leadership attributes that contribute to harmonious, collaborative and collegial teamwork. There is also a

short discussion on the “dark side” of leadership as not all leadership is positive and glowing as the gathered data demonstrated.

Chapter Three focuses on the interpretive qualitative methodology used in the study. It outlines the interpretive framework employed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of both teachers and leaders, and the qualitative methods used in gathering the data and in the analysis.

Chapter Four focuses on the findings. These are presented as individual vignettes of each interview.

Chapter Five is a discussion on the key themes elicited from the findings and an analysis of the contributing factors to disharmony in relation to the broader field of research. Strategies used and their success in re-culturing professional relationships are discussed. Limitations of the study are considered, along with future possibilities of research. The chapter is drawn to a close with an overall conclusion of the research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **Introduction**

It is widely accepted that leadership is the key constituent to a quality ECE programme and in securing successful organisational development and change (Bloom, 2003; Branson, 2010; Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003; Fullan, 1993; Harris, Day, Hadfield, Hopkins & Hargreaves, 2002; Rodd, 2006). However, given the dominance of women in leadership in ECE, specific research on leadership in the sector is lacking (Thornton, Wansborough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken & Tamati, 2009). The small amount of research available is dominated by a few researchers such as Bloom (2003) and Rodd (2006), with much of the literature anecdotal and concerned with leaders roles and responsibilities, as opposed to leadership practice (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2012; Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003). In an extensive review of current literature, dedicated to leadership in ECE by Mujis, Aubrey, Harris and Briggs (2004), the authors affirm there is an absence of sound evidence-based research on leadership practice in the sector. Along with other researchers such as Ebbeck and Waniganayaki (2003), Rodd (2006) and Thornton et al. (2009), Muijs et al. (2004) stress most strongly that research into leadership practice needs to be a priority of the sector.

The limitation of leadership research in ECE may be due to educational or public sector/business leadership concepts and theories not working well in this field (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). They believe a distinct collaborative approach is needed. Interestingly, Aubrey et al. (2012) point out that complexity of the ECE sector, characterised by a great diversity of philosophies, organisational and institutional structures, prevents literature on ECE leadership to connect with that of school leadership. They further contend that ECE organisations are smaller than schools, which raises different leadership issues, hence the need for sector specific research.

### **Women in leadership**

The ECE sector is unique in the fact that it is dominated by women. Consequently there is a predominance of women leading women and the small percentage of men in ECE. Whilst leadership is widely theorised, there is a dearth of research on

leadership in ECE, leaving leadership in the sector under-conceptualised (Thornton et al., 2009). Given that the sector works differently from any other it is unfair to compare their leadership with that of other sectors and models. However some characteristics of leadership are universal, such as vision, courage, ethics and work culture (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001). Consideration of relevant research (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Waniganayaki, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2012), indicates there are clear differences between the traditional masculine approach and women in educational leadership roles.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify that there are fewer models for women leaders to draw on; however they suggest women in educational leadership are defining their own styles of leadership based on an ethic of care. In their study they found that the preferences and approaches, that characterise the style of women in leadership was that they were more relational and inclusive, with the relationships horizontal rather than hierarchical. They further found that women in leadership talked about accomplishing goals with and through others, using strategies that allowed them to “hear the input of others” (p. 8). As such, women create more collegial working environments, where decision making is democratic and collaborative. de la Rey (2005) supports Grogan and Shakeshaft’s (2011) findings and believes that female educational leaders are moral leaders which is driven by an ethic of care and relationality. de la Rey (2005) cites the work of Helgesen (1990), who believes women’s caring, sensitive and empathetic leadership stems from gender-specific experiences, such as managing the household and raising children, while at the same time juggling a career, as the reason women leaders operate this way.

In Brunner’s (2000) research, many women described their leadership this way, “In order to get things done through others you must be able to admire the human resources of your staff and build personal relationships with highly talented people who want to grow and want to do their best” (p 77). These notions affirm de la Rey’s (2005) thoughts that women in leadership roles are more likely to display moral leadership.

## **ECE leadership issues**

### **Understanding the concept of leadership**

As noted, the ECE sector of education is predominantly women. Rodd (2006) suggests that many women have problems identifying with the concept of and need for leadership in the sector. This historical view limits the sector as times and needs of organisations have changed. All organisations big and small require effective leadership to enable them to grow and prosper, particularly from a relational and collaborative lens. Research (Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006), identifies this reluctance may be due to more traditional masculine notions of leadership (command and control) not fitting well with women in leadership. In their study Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) affirm, “women were advised not to act like women, instead they were taught to talk like men, hide emotions, act tough and never let their guard down and play hardball” (p. 83). It is little wonder that Stonehouse’s (1994) concept of nice ladies, where leaders think they ought not to be concerned with power and authority still prevails in ECE (Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003). Sitting closely aligned with this, is the poor public perception of women in leadership, which may impact on their own self perception and confidence as leaders (Thornton et al., 2009).

The lack of engagement with the concept of leadership is somewhat of a leadership enigma in ECE. Rodd (2006) sends a serious message and the consequences of the lack of unravelling the mystery:

*Unless there is an active and strong identification and recognition of the leadership role and broader conceptualisation of their professional role and associated skills, members of the early childhood field will not be able to meet increasing demands for competent administrators, supervisors, educators, researchers and advocates. (p. 6)*

### **The leadership-management dilemma**

The dominance of neoliberal managerialism has created tension for ECE leaders. Leaders and teachers express an aversion to business notions filtering into the sector and can be resistant to the managerial lens that is now required in ECE (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Within the concept of horizontal team work,

where the leader does not claim hierarchical status, preferring to be equal to team members, managerial discourse and expectations brings tension between what leaders see as their core role, (nurturing, caring, supporting children and being responsive to their interest) and the expectations of their managerial role (Krieg, Smith & Davis, 2014).

The complexity of the ECE environment and the multi tasking now required of ECE leaders, makes the leadership-management issue a vexing problem as leadership and management are inextricably linked (Nolan, 2007; Rodd, 2006). Managerialism has resulted in work load intensification, with more of the leaders time focused on management issues rather than leadership, impacting on the leader as a full time teacher and their ability to remain focused on sustained interactions with children (Gower<sup>2</sup>, 2012). In her personal and unpublished research on managerial interruptions of the leader (such as: family needs, community liaison, mentoring, collegial liaison, maintenance and general interruptions), Gower found that the leader was taken from interactions with children 130 times over a two week period. She further claims these interruptions have a detrimental effect on relationships with children. Healy's (2012) research further found that the focus of staff meetings was on managerial tasks, taking the emphasis off leadership and the needs of children. This dramatic shift to managerialism, brought about by neoliberal ideology, is often contrary to the leader's philosophy.

### **Time**

Time is a factor that is woven into the milieu of leadership and management, especially in long daycare services where teachers may only have two hours a fortnight to meet as a whole team. Rodd (2006) and Reynolds (2011) cite insufficient time as the most pressing dilemma in ECE; time to complete the complex array of responsibilities, and build relationships with staff. Rodd (2006) claims that, "The demands of leaders has increased dramatically over the past decade" (p. 91), supporting the assertions made by Gower (2012). The heavy focus on management tasks, issues and housekeeping, sees a decline in the sociability of teachers. Healy's research revealed, "There is little time for debate

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<sup>2</sup> This research is unpublished. The author has allowed me to use her research in this thesis. If you are interested to know more about this research, please contact the writer of this thesis.

and theorising of practice and children's learning, decisions are rushed as teachers have to get on to planning for the next two weeks" (p. 81), this further supports Gower's (2012) claims. The work load and time tensions mean there is less time for professional learning for the team which impacts on the overall quality of the service (May & Mitchell, 2009).

### **Effective Leadership**

Leadership is a relationship between the leader and the followers. At its very essence, leadership is about how we interact with each other that creates a sense of belonging and unity. To build strong relationships, effective leaders know how to work with people's emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013). Given that that leadership in ECE is under-conceptualised, it is more pertinent that the focus is on identified effective leadership practices that support the notion of a learning organisation (Senge, 1990), where leaders energise and mobilise their people (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). To build a relational and collaborative team, leaders need to foster a clear shared direction and a deep understanding of the behaviours that will enable the realising of a compelling vision (Senge, 1990). To be a relational and high functioning team, members need to gain alignment on team context and purpose, as assumptions about purpose can inadvertently destroy morale and sub-optimize team efficiency and effectiveness (Slattery, 2015). Clarity on a compelling vision, an insightful purpose and values that people will live and work by create emotional safety and harmony within the team. The importance and inter-connection between vision, mission, values and culture will now be discussed.

### **Organisational Vision**

The concept of a vision is essential to an organisation, as it is the guiding path for the hopes and dreams of the future. According to Nanus (1992, p.8), a vision should be a "Realistic, credible attractive future for your organisation". He sees the vision as a powerful engine driving the organisation toward excellence and long-ranging success. Stevenson (2005), coming from a futures studies lens, portrays a vision as 'utopia' for the preferred future; the best possible real world you can imagine and strive for. However, he adds a critical addition to Nanus's description, citing reflection and re-evaluation as essential, as you move forward.

To be effective, worthwhile compelling and achievable vision of the future must be shared by the whole organisation (Nanus, 1992; Senge, 1990).

Vision building and goal setting are key leadership practices that unite the organisation. Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) believe that without a vision teams are following a blind man. Engaging others in a compelling vision of their own future is a leader's primal task (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013).

Kouzes and Posner (1996, p. 103), speak more firmly about the expectation of leaders, "Not only do we demand that leaders be credible; we also demand that they be forward looking; that they have a sense of direction and a vision for the future" (as cited in Branson, 2010). Thus, a vision is a significant factor in the search for team harmony.

A shared vision is at the heart of a successful organisation. In developing a shared vision, it is the dynamic enquiry through open and authentic conversations that uncovers the organisations emotional reality (what people really care about), freeing them from the binaries of the status quo (Goleman et al., 2013). A formal vision rises from the sustained and collective deliberation of views (Leithwood et al., 1999) that "paint pictures of the soul of the organisation, as well as share their hopes for the future" (Goleman et al., 2013, p.199). A vision can only be a shared vision when it connects with the personal visions of people, inspiring the organisation to "hopefulness and success" (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p.163). However, the dynamic inquiry that gets to the 'soul' and future of the organisation is dependent on the skills of the leader.

Ownership and resonance is built within the team when the vision creation involves reflection of self and the organisation. A sense of commonality pervades the organisation as coherence between the dreams, the actions fosters trust and cooperation (Branson, 2007; Senge, 1990). A clear shared vision provides direction and motivation to the team, giving meaning to practices, inciting positivity, innovation and sustainable change in pursuit of the ultimate dream.

The long term effectiveness of an organisation is in the hands of the leader. Leadership is the critical factor as the future unfolds. Leaders need to be able to articulate the vision clearly to engage and inspire others. Leaders who are able to

articulate a clear vision are likely to be able to engage in behaviours identifying new opportunities (Branson, 2007). If leaders are not clear on what they mean, the lack of clarity creates confusion in the followers. The emotional climate within the team will become unbalanced as people work from assumptions. You can't inspire others with a vision if you can't articulate it (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). However articulation is more than words, the leader needs to live the vision by "walking the talk" (Branson, 2010; McShane & Travaglione, 2007). A vision becomes the living force when people truly believe in it and it shapes the organisations future as well as cements relationships (Senge, 1990).

Change is actioned in the shaping of the vision. A compelling vision is the starting point that supports the pathway to change, as one can't move from a current reality to a new reality without change (Stevenson, 2005).

### **Organisational Mission**

A vision for the future by itself will not sustain an organisation. To be meaningful and achievable, a vision is underpinned by a purpose or mission statement. In order to accomplish the vision this insight needs to be developed collaboratively, with the statement getting to the very heart of what the organisation is there to do and achieve (Branson, 2007; Davies, Davies & Ellison, n.d.). Carter (1998) endorses a shared clear purpose is the fundamental ingredient in an organisation's effectiveness in supporting the vision to reach its potential. An inspiring and motivating shared vision without purpose is a vision without direction. When people feel aligned and have clarity about where their organisation is heading, they are more likely to be committed to the outcomes of the organisation (Davis et al., n.d; Senge, 1990).

### **Organisational Values**

The principles by which you will operate, significance and relevance is underlined by their central place in literature on effective organisations, effective leadership and effective teamwork (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Branson, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Goleman et al., 2013; Rodd, 2006; Senge, 1990; Waniganayake et al., 2012). Shared values transcend the purpose and vision, acting as the moral compass that shapes the ethical stance of the organisation (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Branson, 2007; McShane &

Travaglione, 2007; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Values are the glue that meshes relationships, mission and vision together, creating meaning and community within the organisation (McShane & Travaligone, 2007; Nupponen, 2006). In short, values define who we are as an organisation, describing the way we will act that is consistent with living our mission and realising the vision (Senge, 1990). As well as driving actions and behaviours, values guide perceptions on what is good and bad, right and wrong. Without values alignment, organisations revert to operating by objectives and obligations, sticking to hard and fast rules and routines, rather than working by preference (McShane & Travaligone, 2007). In developing shared values, the process requires a focus on things such as psychological commitment, communication, teamwork, trust, participation and flexibility (Branson, 2007).

Bourne and Jenkins (2013) tender a somewhat cynical view of the role of values, they contend that “conformity to shared values is offered as an alternative to bureaucratic control” (p. 497). McShane and Travaglione (2007), temper this view, they claim that when there is a “defined set of values embodied by all employees, there is less need for overt management and control” (p. 43). Values are integral to the healthy and positive respectful relationships that are required to meet organisations purpose and goals (Nupponen, 2007).

### **Values and Leadership**

Effective leaders intentionally work to create alignment between people’s values and that of the organisation. However the leader’s behaviour has a profound impact on both their integrity and the team. When a leader’s behaviour demonstrates alignment to the organisational values, trust and openness prevail within the team (Rodd, 2006). Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin and Collarbone (2003) and Kouzes and Posner (2012) put huge emphasis and responsibility on leaders, claiming they are essentially the value carriers. Gold et al., (2003) further add that their leadership status is only confirmed by followers when they perceive the values are being fulfilled in the outlooks and actions of the leader. A leader’s integrity is undermined if there is incongruence between espoused and enacted values. Hence, leaders must have a deep understanding of the values, beliefs and attitudes of the organisational culture that drive the decisions made throughout the organisation (McShane & Travaglione, 2007; Schomburg, 1999). Leaders who

have clear shared values, with a strong commitment to the purpose and vision, determined to do the best for the organisation, as “principled leaders” (Gold et al., 2003, p. 136).

### **Collaborative cultures**

In teaching environments the notion of collaborative cultures is not only gaining attention but is also being practised as a way to unite the learning community. With the fast pace of change, high expectations and accountability, a collaborative culture is now an imperative for the education environment (Waller, 2014). Collaborative cultures are places of hard work, dedication, collective responsibility, empowerment, joint decisions and pride (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The essence of a collaborative culture is the concept of a pool of knowledge and resources that benefit everyone, creating a strong sense of interdependence (Waller, 2014).

Like any culture, the collaborative culture must be founded on clear shared values as well as a shared understanding of the value of a collaborative culture (Kohm & Nance, 2009; Waller, 2014). A shared vision of what teaching and learning looks like is integral to the formation of a collaborative culture (Kohm & Nance, 2009). This vision along with clear values and goals are the foundation on which collegial relationships and collaboration develop and flourish. An effective attachment to the organisation is afforded through three key beliefs that guide the collaborative culture. First transparency, where little is discussed behind closed doors; second, trust, and third, shared decision making, (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waller, 2014). Trust is developed through joint decisions and responsibilities being openly shared; the stronger the trust the more people will be open and ask for help (Rosenholtz, 1989; Waller, 2014).

In the collaborative culture, cooperation, a willingness to being adaptable, flexible and help others prevails as teachers engage in joint work, sharing and building on each other’s ideas through reasoning, formulating, debating, discovering and reflecting (Coatney, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). Through these processes teachers discover the relevance and usefulness of each other’s skills and competencies; they are motivated, holding confidence and certainty on what they are trying to achieve (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In this

cohesive and interdependent environment, a new synergy is built as the creative energy is released increasing goodwill and efficiency. Innovation is enabled through peoples commitment, unbridled enthusiasm, strong sense of trust and uninhibited sharing of ideas.

The moral imperatives of reciprocal support and assistance, plus learning together that values individuals, individuality and all contributions, raises the social capital of the team and organisation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). Social capital refers to:

*How the quality and quantity of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their sense of expectation, obligation and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the norms and codes of behaviour.* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 90)

Trust is an inherent feature of social capital. One's knowledge is increased through social capital, as you access and draw on others knowledge, expanding the boundaries of your influence, opportunity and achievement.

Two critical elements that support the growth of a collaborative culture are dialogue and time. Dialogue, a discipline of team learning, asks that people be open minded and able to suspend judgements, with the aim of going beyond any one individual's understanding (Senge, 1990). When this occurs the thinking of both the speaker and the listener becomes clear and coherent (Kohn & Nance, 2009; Senge, 1990).

Time is needed to build relationships for meaningful exchanges, reflection and joint decisions must be on a consistent basis or the collaboration will not survive (Waller, 2009). Collaborative cultures do not just happen; their development needs to be deliberate. There are no short cuts; the less teachers talk professionally the lower the cohesion in the team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). Through collaborative cultures, teachers create their own conditions, they are empowered to exercise creative leadership together, building the confidence that they need to lead (Kohn & Nance, 2009). Shared power helps build leaders and supports the growth of an effective collaborative culture.

Shared power within collaborative cultures takes the brakes off directive leadership (Kohn & Nance, 2009), mindsets are in a growth mode (Dweck, 2006), accelerating the capacity to improve (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Self and centre renewal become normalised as the moving collaborative culture utilises strengths and skills in the bid to aim higher (Rosenholtz, 1989). The strong sense of progress fosters the ability for people to be forward looking. Under these conditions, people are prepared to take risks, act with foresight and deliberate calculation, thus creating an environment where improvement and change are natural parts of the daily practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Leadership is the key to a successful collaborative culture. It is crucial that leaders of collaborative cultures are inspirational, they cannot sit back and manage from afar; they must have presence and work collaboratively with teachers sharing the responsibility as often as possible (Waller, 2014). Leaders must value teacher collaboration, and be intentional in planning and creating the conditions necessary for a positive and collaborative environment. Without active support the collaborative culture cannot be created and maintained. It is highly improbable leaders can forge collaborative relationships simply by inviting teachers to work together (Rosenholtz, 1989). Leaders need to commit time to build secure relationships. Without investment in building the underlying relationships, collaboration will be forced, stilted and damaging (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Empowering and discerning leaders will know when to step out of the way and lead from the back (Hudson & Hudson, 2011).

Collaborative leaders are transparent; share the good and the bad, and openly discuss necessary changes (Kohn & Nance, 2009). These behaviours foster teachers trust and an ability to develop collaborative problem solving skills necessary in building “new norms” founded on this trust (Rosenholtz, 1989).

### **Emotional Intelligence and social competence**

Relationships are a key principle of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996). To meet the outcomes of this principle, relationships need to be responsive and reciprocal. Reciprocity is underpinned by the two way relationships where understanding that other people are as much individuals as self; they too have strengths, weaknesses and ways of doing things.

To be an effective team member you have to know and understand the attributes of co-workers (Drucker, 1999). However, we are also emotional beings; neuroscience affirms one's cognition and emotions influence perceptions, attitudes, decisions and behaviour (McShane & Travaligone, 2007). Our emotions grow out of the social interactions we engage in (Barczak, Lassk & Mulki, 2010). We need to be able to understand our emotions and join them with reasoning (Wood, 2010). Not an easy task as the emotional mind can be both impulsive and illogical at times as it guides the operations of the rational mind. The more intense the feelings the more the emotional mind becomes dominant (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence (EI), is best described as being intelligent about emotions (Goleman, 1995) and marks the intersection of two fundamental personality traits; the cognitive and emotional systems (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The capacity to perceive, assimilate, understand and manage emotions (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005), is based on three key premises: one, emotions play an important role in life; two, individuals vary in their ability to understand and manage emotions, and three, an adaptation to a variety of contexts is affected by individual differences (Cherniss, 2010).

Two key approaches to perceiving, understanding and managing emotions have emerged. Mayer and Salovey (1997) who coined the phrase emotional intelligence, view EI as an actual dominance of intelligence composed of specific emotional and mental abilities, known as the ability model. Ability to recognise the meanings of emotions and their relationship and to reason and solve problems on the basis of them relies on two distinctive mental processes of thinking and feeling working together (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton & Boyle, 2005). Whilst inspired by the thinking of Mayer and Salovey (1997), Goleman's (1998) view of EI, known as the mixed model, combines emotional abilities with elements of personality, motivation and social skills within four broad themes; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.

**Table 1: A comparison of emotional intelligence.<sup>3</sup>**

Mayer and Salovey's (1997) Emotional Intelligence Model	Goleman's (1998) Emotional and Social Competency Model
<b>Perceiving emotion:</b> the capacity to accurately identify one's own and others emotions and feelings, as well as being able to express these emotions.	<b>Self-awareness:</b> the ability to identify and recognise one's emotional states and to understand the link between emotions and performance.
<b>Utilizing emotion:</b> the capacity to enhance the thinking process by using emotions.	<b>Relationship management:</b> ability to utilise social skills and build interpersonal relationships.
<b>Understanding emotions:</b> the capacity to comprehend complex emotions and how they operate in the social world.	<b>Social awareness:</b> the capacity to read, be sensitive to other people's emotions, in order to achieve results in service and organisational contexts.
<b>Managing emotions:</b> the capacity to manage and control one's emotions.	<b>Self management:</b> the capacity to manage emotions- to control ones emotions or to shift negative emotions to more positive emotions.

Emotions are the adaptive processes that promote personal growth and development and have a profound effect on everything we do. Those with high EI are better at interpersonal relationships in the work place (McShane & Travaglione, 2007). People who connect thoughts to feelings better discern the emotional implications of their own thoughts as well as understand the feelings of others from what they say (Mayer & Geher, 1996). The implications of EI on leadership and teamwork are far reaching; individuals, leaders and teams with high EI have better people skills, are cooperative, creative, and perform better to those with low EI (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013; Riggio & Lee, 2007; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted from Human Resource Management, Review 17(4), Riggio & Lee, Emotional and interpersonal competencies and leader development, 418-426, Copyright 2007, with permission from Elsevier.

## **The Emotionally Intelligent Team**

We come into this world with our own nature, pattern of behaviour and our own natural reactions to people (Littauer & Sweet, 2011). EI, the emotional regulator of personality traits, sits at the heart of effective team work, with the ability to join emotions with reasoning dependent on ones levels of emotional intelligence (Snyder, 1983; Woods, 2010). Our social behaviour is readily predictable from our personality, however with self-awareness one can improve how we respond and interact with people (Goleman et al., 2013).

Self-awareness, private self-consciousness, is a critical factor in EI and is a prerequisite for all other emotional competencies (Bratton, Dodd & Brown, 2011). People with high EI are able to re-script and act with integrity in relation to values held, whereas low EI results in reacting to emotion and circumstance (Bratton et al., 2011).

The social nature of team teaching requires high levels for EI to work effectively. Self-aware teams recognise the congruence between circumstance, actions and values (Covey, 1994). They are able to accurately identify their own emotions and feelings and read those of others. The ability to express emotion allows the self-aware team to distinguish between different emotions and effectively communicate how they feel (Riggio & Lee, 2007). The self-aware team are attuned to the emotional undercurrents of individuals and as a group (Goleman et al., 2013). Being aware of their own and others emotions affords teams the best course of action as emotions are contagious, with the team taking emotional cues from each other for good or for bad (Barczak et al., 2010).

The emotional bonds within a team high in EI are resultant from the interpersonal care and concern for each other. Teams high EI, members have the ability to monitor and regulate their emotions and have sensitivity to others emotions (Barczak et al., 2010). Driven by the situational and interpersonal cues of appropriate behaviour teams are more able to self-manage (Snyder, 1983). If the team has learnt to recognise and confront negative emotions, one person's behaviour will not hijack the team's effectiveness, as the norms for positive proactive action guide the team's relationships; people have the confidence to reinforce resonant norms and hold others to account (Goleman et al., 2013).

Both individual and team EI enhances their ability to communicate with one another, in high EI teams, people are willing to listen, be receptive to divergent views and opinions (Goleman, 1995) and utilise emotions to improve team decision making (Barczak et al., 2010). This interpersonal dynamic creates trust within the team, drawing on the emotional bonds that have been fostered and the perceived competencies of individuals within the team. With trust, people feel less vulnerable and can channel energy into creating and discovering, rather than defending their cause (Barczak et al., 2010). Trust is the key to holding the collaborative teams together. The team's EI enables them to work together as a group to overcome conflict and miscommunication through the norms that have been established.

Negativity will pervade if the team is unable to acknowledge angry and dissonant feelings. To understand the reality of how they function on an emotional and visceral level, teams need to work and develop authentically and honestly (Goleman et al., 2013). Uncovering sources of discontent that often arise from the tacit norms is paramount. Without this clear understanding disharmony and lack of cooperation will have an adverse effect on the team's ability to make sound decisions. EI is essential to the performance of the team, without it bickering; interpersonal rivalry and power plays will become the norm, creating a toxic environment.

Empathy, a fundamental aspect of relationship skills and social interaction, promotes pro-social behaviour and inhibits aggressive behaviour toward others (Berrios Martos, Lopez-Zafra, Pulido-Martos & Augusto, 2013). People who understand emotions are more able to be empathetic and provide support for each other (Liu & Liu, 2013). However, empathy is more than being nice; it requires one to look beyond self and understand the needs of the whole group. To maintain levels of empathy and accommodate others perspectives, people need high levels of self-monitoring, the ability to consciously observe and regulate one's self (Sandhya, Priyadharshini & Kannadasan, 2011). Working collaboratively and empathetically builds resonance within the team (Goleman et al., 2013).

### **The Emotionally Intelligent Leader**

Leadership is a process of social interaction where the leader's interpersonal and emotional competence enables the ability to influence the behaviour of their followers, as well as have a positive effect on team work and the organisation (Kerr et al., 2005; Goleman, 1998). Research on EI is closely linked to leadership style and effectiveness, the higher the leaders EI, the more emotionally mature they are to manage the teams behaviour and emotional states (Lui & Lui, 2013) and prime good feelings in those they lead (Goleman et al., 2013).

Leadership is intrinsically an emotional process, with the leader being the emotional guide to the team. Their primal work is to monitor the emotional tone of the team and help the team recognise underlying dissonance (Goleman et al., 2013). It is critical that leaders have the skills to manage emotions positively by guiding the team to better understand each other and bringing out the best in everyone (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2000). Whilst EI has many aspects in terms of leadership, two critical aspects, self-awareness and empathy, underpin the leader's EI competencies and effectiveness (Berrios Martos et al., 2013; Goleman et al., 2013; Riggio & Lee, 2007).

#### **Leader Self-awareness**

Leader behaviour has a strong influence, positive or negative, on those around them. Leaders who know their inner resources, abilities and limits are attuned to the inner signals; they can recognise feelings, understand the causes and how to respond proactively and constructively (Goleman, 1998). Hence the self-aware leader will recognise the impact they are having. A positive impact will raise performance, which is directly associated with the organisations desired affective outcomes and employee satisfaction (Bratton et al., 2011; Riggio & Lee, 2007). Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, Douglas, May and Walumbwa (2005), draw the connection between the self-aware leader, leader effectiveness and authentic leadership. All three require particularly high levels of follower trust and leader mentoring capabilities. Self-aware leaders have higher EI and are considered to be more effective by team and superiors (Sosik & Megerian, 1999).

However, in discussing leader self-awareness Bratton et al. (2011) draw attention to overestimators. They describe overestimators as "Having negative attitudes,

misperceiving their strengths and weaknesses, and lack awareness for the need for further professional learning” (p.130). An accurate self-perception relies on the social context of feedback. Overestimators ignore feedback if they feel it is inaccurate, unfair or lower than expected, especially if it is coming from a lower ranked employee (Bratton et al., 2011).

Relationships suffer within a team when a leader is unaware of emotions. The self-aware leader understands relationships between team, and is able to focus the team on the task in hand whilst creating an environment that is friendly, cooperative and collaborative (Goleman et al., 2013). In this environment teams will be fully engaged, feel energised, affirmed and inspired to tackle the next challenge (Semann, 2015). The self-aware leader understands the need for a coordinated effort between them and the team to respond to the fast pace of change, drawing on shared leadership to enhance the team capabilities (Riggio & Lee, 2007).

### **Leader Empathy**

Empathy, understanding and sensitivity to the feelings thoughts and situations of others have both a cognitive component and an emotional component. The empathetic leader is cognisant of others situations and individual circumstance, as well as having an understanding of their feelings (Salovey & Mayer, 1997; McShane & Travaligone, 2007). Effective leadership, communication and relationship management requires high levels of empathy from the leader, as empathy enables us to connect with people (Berrios Martos et al., 2013; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). The empathetic leader has an innate ability to sense others emotions and is able to take an active interest in other’s concerns, listen to and understand the other’s perspective, free from their own judgement (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman et al., 2013). When we listen with empathy, our perceptions shift. When we open our hearts to someone we begin to see how the world unfolds from their eyes (Scharmer, 2009). The effective leader, who acts on what they have learnt with feeling and care for the other, builds an affective trust within the team. Emotional bonds are strengthened through the interpersonal care and concern, plus the understanding and support that is provided (Barczak et al., 2010; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

## **Effective Communication**

The relational world of teaching and team work requires effective communication skills by all to enable teams to work collegially and collaboratively. The purposes of communication are to discover, to relate, to help, to play and to persuade, with communication ranging from simple to complex given the context, purpose and the individual's ability to communicate effectively (DeVito, O'Rourke, & O'Neill, 2000). Communication is the most important skill in life; we spend most of our waking hours communicating in one form or another (Bolton, 1987). However interpersonal communication is fraught with barriers and defensiveness as people protect their perceptions and shortcomings (Argyris, 1994; Covey, 1994). Often people conform to dominant patterns of polite behaviour not saying what is really on their mind. From a team perspective this can result in dysfunctional behaviour that stifles development and growth (Scharmer, 2009). If we don't talk about the "undiscussables" there is no room for reflection and change (Argyris, 1994). Continued poor communication prevents people from doing their best, they feel frustrated, unhappy and trapped (Goleman, 1998).

Trust underpins and affects the quality of relationships and communication in teamwork. Without strong trust it is impossible to have an open and rigorous conversation that genuinely inquires into important issues and divergence in team thinking (Covey & Merrill, 2006; Dalton, 2010). A lack of trust enables controlling mechanisms and suspicion to spread through the organisation (Covey & Merrill, 2006). Effective communication requires two critical emotional competencies; empathy, listening to another's point of view with sensitivity and social skills to enable teams to collaborate productively in exploring differences, tensions and challenges (Goleman, 1998). Empathic listening enables you get inside others frame of reference, using ears, eyes and heart to understand and feel the world from another's perspective (Covey, 1994). As you sense, feel and understand you gain accurate data from which to work, the data is not clouded by the projection of your thoughts, feelings and motivations (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005). Deep listening is a critical element of influence, as first you have to understand. To understand you have to be in a space of "presence", a state of deep listening, being open beyond ones preconceptions and historical ways of making sense (Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2005). Through

being consciously engaged, using all your senses and deep listening, allows ideas to come; you move from re-creating the past to realising the emerging future (Senge et al., 2005).

Communication is an essential team process and a vital pillar of their success, as such team members must feel free to express themselves and be valued for their contribution (Cook & Macaulay, 2011). The issues in communication appear to be not so much what we are communicating but how we communicate. The way we talk together has a profound impact on relationships as well as the quality of the collaboration and the collective intelligence that emerges (Dalton, 2010; Kegan & Lahey, 2001). A conversation that leads to a deepened relationship has to be balanced (Schein, 2013), taking in all perspectives including that of the dissonant voice (Goleman et al., 2013).

### **Dialogue**

Dialogue is an essential function of team learning and communication. It goes beyond conversation and debate and it is more than analysing. Bohm, the master mind of dialogue, claims, in dialogue people are making something 'common', i.e. creating something new together (Bohm & Nichol, 1996). Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith (1994), build on Bohm's notion of making something common and describe dialogue as "The sense of occupying collective sensibilities through thoughts and emotions resulting in learning and actions that belong to the group collectively" (p. 358). Dialogue as co-creation gets to the heart of inner conversations of what people think and feel about what is going on (Goleman, 1998). Thus, through dialogue, the emotionally intelligent team draws on people's human capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) to maximise their collective intelligence (Dalton, 2010).

Dialogue can only create something new if people are able to 'freely' listen without prejudice, hold on to historical thinking and conceptions, or trying to influence each other (Bohm & Nichols, 1996). There is no win/lose, all are winners as the dialogic process breaks down the taken for granted assumptions or polarised opinions held within a team in a way that goes beyond the reflection of individual teachers, as they explore what may be complex issues from many points of view (Deakin, 2007; Grey, 2011; Senge, 1990). Through dialogue there

is a widening of your perspective as others perspectives are brought to light (Scharmer, 2009). As one engages in empathic listening, it takes you out of yourself as you move from defending points of view to inquiry (Senge, 1990). Dialogue that is grounded in reflection and inquiry, reveals the incoherence in thoughts, the insights gained collectively strengthen the common meaning making, building the teams capacity for constant development and change (Senge, 1990).

The theory of dialogue suggests that defensive routines such as defence of individual's perceptions and world view of reality, creates barriers to reasoning which breaks down the effectiveness of the teams. When inquiry and reflection skills are unleashed against the defensive routines (Argyris, 1994), harmony is fostered through joint understanding of others mental models (Senge, 1990).

For a team to be cooperative and collaborative, they have to be able to create something in common that is driven from their mutual discussions, rather than conveyed from another in authority (Bohm & Nichols, 1996). Dialogue generates a depth of understanding and commitment. When teams move through the stages of sensing, observing and reflecting; presencing occurs, Presencing, allows inner knowing to emerge, creating a deep connection to the essence of peoples work, who they are as individuals and collectively, realising possible actions (Scharmer, 2009). A flow of shared meaning permeates through the group, creating deep bonds between individuals and the group which acts like glue and holds them together (Bohm & Nichols, 1996).

### **Dark side of leadership and team work**

Good leadership is vitally important for the success of the organisation and the well being of employees (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). The attributes, dispositions and practices of good leadership have been widely theorised (Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003; Fullan, 2006; Rodd, 2006; Senge, 1990; Thornton et al., 2009). Currently, authentic moral and ethical leadership has come to the fore (Begley, 2006; Branson, 2007; Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa, Christensen & Hailey, 2011). Moral, ethical and authentic leaders use high levels of emotional intelligence and effective social and communication skills to forward moral goals (Woods, 2007).

Statistics indicate that 50-75% of leaders do not perform well and or experience failure, the reality of this leadership deficit is largely ignored (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Most references to leadership in the literature seem to depict the leader as a 'paragon of virtue' and focus on the leader's positive characteristics, however a darker side of leadership does exist (Kets De Vries & Balazs, 2011). The dark side of leadership that is destructive to teams and organisations is filled with incompetence, negative personality traits and unethical behaviour (McCleskey, 2012; Slattery, 2009).

McIntosh and Rima (1997, as cited in Woods, 2007) claim the dark side of leadership is the inner urges, compulsions and dysfunctions of personality that often go un-examined or remain unknown to us. Dark side leaders lack self-awareness and insight into their counterproductive behaviours, hence they fail to have the necessary components of moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation and moral action (Kaiser, LeBreton & Hogan, 2015). The dark side leadership corrupts one's charisma (Slattery, 2009), the leader's behaviour becomes exaggerated; they lose touch with reality or become vehicles for purely personal gain (Conger, 1990). Although there is little empirical data and a lack of cohesiveness of thinking around an agreed definition of the dark side of leadership, the characteristics of the phenomena are supported widely (Conger, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2004; Slattery, 2009; Washbush & Clements, 1999).

### **Characteristics of the dark side of leadership.**

Recognising the characteristic of the dark side of leadership is as important as identifying the positive attributes that contribute to effective leadership. A key characteristic of the dark side of leadership is self aggrandising-personal power that seeks to use that power and charisma for personal gain (Conger, 1990; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2004; Washbush & Clements, 1999; Yeung, 2008). Excessive confidence, with a heroic and egotistical lens, encourages the dark side leaders to take on risky ventures. They are often gifted communicators, but misuse this ability to screen out problems, creating the illusion of control as a form of manipulation (Conger, 1990). In addition to this they have a natural impatience that increases their controlling manner, often alienating themselves through an aggressive style. Khoo and Busch (2007) see a key characteristic as not being able to monitor and manage emotions in themselves, frequently ignoring

or responding negatively to pertinent feedback. They can be belittling, with their inflated ego discouraging of initiative, or claiming others ideas as their own in their bid to be the “hero” (Slattery, 2009). Blase and Blase (2002) cite other characteristics such as bullying, aggression and passive aggressive behaviours as being typical of dark side leadership behaviour.

These personality traits and behavioural tendencies of a dark side leader are written about widely as narcissism (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Unwittingly, “blind” followers contribute to the negative outcomes through compliance of the unethical behaviour (Kets De Vries, 2004). Motivated by egomaniacal need, the narcissist has little empathy or concern for their followers (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). When challenged or criticised they can be cruel and abusive. In the face of the narcissists abuse, followers may revert to identification with the aggressor (engaging in the same behaviours), as a protective mechanism against future abuse (Kets De Vries, 2004).

Whilst dark side leadership and narcissism sits outside the concept of authentic leadership the behaviour can be seen as a cover up or defence mechanism against fragile self esteem as they have not got the emotional capacity to work collaboratively. However, a level of narcissism can be productive, inspiring and leave a lasting legacy (Kets de Vries, 2004). It is the lack of self-awareness, to keep it in check that leads to exploitation, sense of entitlement and privilege, apathy and a gross lack of empathy (Slattery, 2009).

The dark side of leadership does not escape the ‘nice ladies’ in ECE. Hard (2006) discusses the notion of horizontal violence in ECE centres which has a close alignment to the dark side of leadership. Horizontal violence is defined as “Psychological harassment which creates hostility and involves unethical behaviour such as verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, humiliation, excessive criticism, innuendo, discouragement, the withholding of information and passive aggressive behaviours” (p. 44), all of which are destructive to individuals within the team.

The long term effects from dark side leadership and teamwork in education are harmful to teacher’s professional and personal lives. Blase and Blase (2002) found teachers were humiliated, lonely and suffered injured self esteem, fear, anger and

anxiety. Along with this organisational relationships were damaged, with frequent impairment of all decision making.

## **Summary**

This literature review has explored the practices, attributes, knowledge and skills required of ECE leaders to enable them to build a culture of reciprocity and collaboration. Focus has been given to emotional intelligence, how it drives personality, the way we communicate, and how together these impact on the way we construct our own reality. Ways forward for leadership have been interspersed throughout the literature review, such as having clear vision, purpose and values that build the culture you desire, developing self-awareness and collaborative cultures.

Aspects of effective communication have been discussed, particularly dialogue that explores team's thinking that illuminates incoherence in thoughts, where the insights gained collectively strengthen the common meaning making and build the teams capacity for constant development and change.

The chapter concluded with the dark side of leadership. As leadership is the critical factor in collaborative teamwork, there is no avoiding the dark side. This literature review discusses the notion of the dark side of leadership; the characteristics of this dysfunctional personality and its ability to wreak havoc within a team.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, discusses the methodology used to explore the sources of team disharmony, and strategies leaders use to re-culture the team.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The concept of research is full of complexity, being both a moral and political activity (Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina, 2006). As a form of enquiry, research is a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of education practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Research is seen as a critical educational tool that adds to one's own body of knowledge and that of others, creating new thinking and enabling us to relate more effectively with our environment (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden, 2011). It is through the planned, systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data, that the discovery of significant facts and insights are made (Cohen et al., 2011; Herbert, 1990).

Complexity lies in the varying paradigms and approaches and processes of research. The paradigm that underpins the study must suit the research purposes and research question. Methodological considerations such as data gathering techniques and analysis are driven by ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research, making the research more than a technical exercise, with the purpose of understanding the world from the participants world view (Cohen et al., 2011).

### **Interpretive Qualitative Methodology**

This study used an interpretive paradigm, which is founded on the premise that the social world is complex and people define their own meanings (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2005). This post-positivist lens seeks to understand the subjective world of participant's perspectives from within (Cohen et al., 2011; Scotland, 2012). To understand the lived reality of team disharmony and people's perceptions on the sources of disharmony, as the researcher I need to have an understanding of the lived experience of participants, to enable me to make sense of their world as well as their situations and interpret their perceptions (Cohen et al., 2011; Lincoln et al., 2005).

The ontological position of the interpretive paradigm is that interpretivism is relativism. Meaning, reality is subjective, mediated by our senses and naturally

differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Only those that have lived that experience, can understand that experience. Thus, reality is individually constructed, through the interplay of experience in the form of specific mental constructions (cognition) and is expressed through language that actively shapes and moulds the reality (Krauss, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2005; Scotland, 2012; Thorpe, 2008).

Interpretive epistemology, the nature and forms of knowledge, is subjectivism based on real life experiences. The real world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Grix, 2004), hence meaning is not discovered but is constructed through our experience of, and the ways in which we mould and encounter the world through our consciousness of it (Scotland, 2012). Knowledge is idiosyncratic, culturally derived and historically situated; in the social world different people will construct meaning in different ways on the same phenomena (Cohen et al., 2011; Krauss, 2005).

Interpretivism is predicated on the reasoning that there can be no understanding of the social world and human behaviour without interpretation (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010). The goal of this interpretive qualitative study is to understand the complex world of the participants experience and behaviour, by uncovering their reality and constructed meanings, through gathering thick rich descriptions of the actual events from their real life context and point of view (Cohen, et al., 2011; Krauss, 2005; Mutch, 2013). The exploration and generation of knowledge illuminates aspects of the social, educational and cultural life previously unknown, except for those who lived the experience (Erickson & Roth, 2006; Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina, 2006). Interpretive qualitative research does not assume a single reality; rather understands that there are multiple realities. However, the interpretive paradigm is sensitive to the individual meanings, grounded (inductive) theory is generated from the data gathered, not preceding it (Cohen et al., 2011). The theory becomes sets of meaning which yield insight and understanding of people's behaviour.

### **Research Questions**

The research question is the driving force of the research design and theoretical framework applied (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2013). The overall research

question needs to be clear and logical, otherwise it will be unlikely that the researcher will be able to generate useful information on and answers to the phenomena being studied (Herbert, 1990). This study is motivated by the researcher's curiosity and frustration with the level and consistency of team disharmony within teaching teams in the early childhood sector of education. In my role within early childhood education (ECE) I am frequently challenged with teams experiencing disharmony, not only is it damaging to the team but also to outcomes for children's learning. My big query is when a team is experiencing disharmony, minor or more serious, what role does the leader play in ameliorating the situation.

### **My research question**

The question in this study is influenced by qualitative research and is underpinned by an interpretive paradigm.

When an early education team becomes professionally estranged how do leaders successfully re-culture relationships to restore collaboration and collegial team work?

### **Supplementary Questions**

1. What are the underlying factors that contribute to team disharmony?
2. What strategies are used to restore team harmony, collaboration and collegiality?
3. What successful outcomes are directly applicable to these strategies?

An online survey was used to gather initial data on people's perceptions, influences and behaviours that underpin team disharmony. Themes derived from this data were used to formulate the categories of enquiry for the semi-structured interviews in answering the over arching research question.

### **Qualitative data gathering methods**

This study used two forms of data gathering, an on-line survey using survey monkey (see Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). The aim of an online survey is to obtain information which can be analysed, extracting patterns, comparisons and themes (Bell, 1999). In this study the small scale anonymous online survey was used for two reasons. First, the survey questions

were designed to scan a wide field of possible sources of disharmony and gather baseline data, thorough multiple choice and open questions relating to the what, why and how of team disharmony. The second reason for the on-line survey was to find participants for the semi-structured interviews. The on-line survey participants had opportunity to self-nominate, should they so desire to be further involved in the research by way of the semi-structured interviews. Themes for the semi-structured interviews were drawn from the data gathered from the on-line survey.

The research interview is a dialogue between the researcher and participant on a central topic (Kvale, 2006). Through the interview process, rich data is gathered from the participants situated accounts, perspective and lived reality of the phenomena being examined (Cohen et al., 2011; Menter et al., 2011; Rowley, 2012). The researcher has the ability to find out what people are thinking and elicit information that can't be directly observed (Hannabuss, 1996). The popularity of interviews is that they afford the researcher flexibility to probe and search deeply into participant's perspectives going beyond the descriptive, which allows the researcher to understand why people think and act in certain ways in social situations (Menter et al., 2011).

Interviews are seen as one of the most important qualitative data collection methods and on a continuum, range from structured to unstructured (Qu, 2011). The structured interview utilises a set of prescribed questions frequently used in qualitative studies. The unstructured interviews are prompted by a broad theme with the conversation taking on an exploratory approach where questions can be generated spontaneously from the interaction (Menter et al., 2011).

This study used face to face semi-structured interviews, which sit in the middle of the structured-unstructured continuum, to explore more deeply notions of team disharmony that had been generated from the prior survey and to discover strategies used to restore collaborative and collegial team work. I felt this was the most appropriate method to probe and search deeply into participant's perspectives, going beyond the descriptive, to evoke the fullest responses from interviewees in their own terms and in a way that they think and use language (Qu, 2011). The prepared questioning guide was interposed with sub questions,

prompts and probes to help guide the conversation (Menter et al., 2011). The prompts and probes elicited deeper meaning and detailed stories, often revealing further hidden facets of human behaviour (Whiting, 2008). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allows the conversation to flow in line with the interviewees thinking as they disclosed important information, as well as allowing the researcher to accommodate and adapt to the flow of the interchange with the interviewee (Mutch, 2013). The on-line survey and semi-structured questions fulfilled both the ontological and epistemological position of this interpretive qualitative study as discussed above. Reality is subjective, belonging to the individual. The nature and form of this subjective knowledge can only be based on real life experiences. These methods gave the researcher the ability to interpret the social world of teachers and ensuing disharmony from the individual lived experience.

The social nature of a semi-structured interview is potentially subjective, discrepancies can occur between what is said and what is intended by the interviewee, and what is understood by the researcher (Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2011; Polkinghorne, 2007). Academic language can be a barrier to understanding and the interpretation of the questions. In order to generate rich descriptive data the researcher needs to use the everyday language of the interviewee. The social nature of the interview raises the potential for important and salient topics that may be missed by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011).

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis is like putting a giant jigsaw puzzle together, with the identification of themes, reoccurring ideas and patterns of thinking being the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis (LeCompte, 2010; Mutch, 2013). In order to answer the research question an interpretive philosophy of going beyond simple descriptions of the rich data was used (Menter et al., 2011), drawing on literature and the researchers knowledge and experiences. In keeping with an interpretive paradigm, naive reading occurred several times to grasp meanings (Flood, 2010). Audio files from the interview were listened to several times to become familiar with content. Notes were taken each time to elicit salient points. Transcriptions of the audio files were read several times as well, with key themes from individual participants again highlighted. Notes from both the audio files and transcripts

were compared and contrasted for each individual to elicit their key themes. Reflexivity (a critical perspective) afforded the researcher the opportunity to ask what the respondents meant by what they said throughout the individual analysis process (Mutch, 2013). The individual perspectives on team disharmony and strategies used to restore harmony were documented as individual vignettes. A thematic analysis of all the vignettes resulted in the identification of major and minor themes. The themes were utilised as headings for Chapter 5, Research Findings Discussion. The themes are; relationships and team work; relationships and communication; relationships and personality; and relationships and leadership.

The interpretation was guided by the literature and the researchers pre-understanding based on experience of disharmony within ECE as well as knowledge of other research within the field (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, & Sixmith, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are integral to the credibility and reliability of the study. Researchers are in a position of power and enter into the lives of the participants in their quest to gather personal information in order to find answers to their questions (Mutch, 2011). Thus, the researcher needs to act morally upholding the participant's rights and mana. The ethical considerations within this study are underpinned by the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations* as set and approved by the University of Waikato ethics committee (University of Waikato, 2008). This study recognises the importance of the trust and relationship between participant and researcher as well as the overall premise of the *Regulations* that no harm will come to participants.

### **Participant selection**

As the researcher is employed by a multi centre early childhood education service, a random selection of participants was made by the New Zealand Education Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI) on my behalf. Emails were sent to NZEI members within the wider geographic region where I live, to initially gauge the breadth of the phenomena being researched and to get a variety of participants free from personal preference and prejudice, thus negating any bias (LeCompte & Goetz,

1982). I stayed within my larger geographic region as it is far reaching, I was confident that I would be able to attract enough respondents for both the survey and for interest in the semi-structured interview without having to go farther afield which would add extra complication to the study in terms of time and distance.

Invitations by email to participate in the anonymous survey (see Appendix C) were sent to fifty (50) early childhood teachers, twenty five (25) leaders and twenty five (25) teachers. I requested NZEI make the random selection on my behalf for three reasons. First, to maintain internal validity of the research, eliminating selection bias and insider power (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Second, to ensure there was complete anonymity for survey participants as I wanted them to be open and honest in their responses (Mentor et al., 2011). Third, if any respondents to the random selection happened to be from my employing organisation, their participation was with free will and without coercion from me, especially if they chose to participate further in the research project through engaging in the face to face semi-structured interview. At the end of the survey participants had the opportunity to self-nominate if they wished to be involved in the semi-structured interview by adding their email address. Of the twenty (20) survey respondents eight people responded positively to engaging in the semi-structured interviews, five leaders and three teachers.

### **Informed consent**

Social research requires the researcher to obtain consent and co-operation of participants who free from coercion have willingly agreed to participate in the research project (Cohen et al., 2011). Once participants had self identified to continue in the study by way of the semi-structured interview, a letter of acknowledgement (see Appendix D) was sent requesting details of their employer, should I need to seek permission from them first for their employee to be involved (see Appendix E). Once permission was granted (if needed), participants were sent an information sheet (see Appendix F) clearly outlining ethical considerations, their rights and expectations. Attached was a consent form should they desire to engage in the semi-structured interview (see Appendix G and H for those who may be from my organisation).

### **Anonymity and confidentiality**

Social research involves some form of interaction with people, with the outcomes of the research often reaching far and wide. Ethical issues and considerations are integral to the trust, openness and transparency of the research (Menter et al., 2011). In this study a commitment to anonymity was taken very seriously, as participants rely on the trusting relationship that develops between them and the researcher (Menter et al., 2011). Each participant was given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym to preserve their anonymity. In light of the fact that research can be disseminated through multiple avenues and that the world of early childhood education (ECE) is relatively small and intimate, I chose to replace these names with numbers to preserve the gender for all participants. To further protect all participants anonymity there will be no geographical reference as to where the research took place. All identifying features of the ECE services the participants came from have been eliminated (Mutch, 2013). They are generically called the service, services or centre.

All digital information regarding participants will be kept on a password protected computer under a pseudonym. Any paper information such as signed consent will be referenced by the pseudonym and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. This data will be held securely for five years.

### **Limitations of the study**

Three factors contribute to the limitations of this study;

1. The study was on a small scale and limited to one geographic region within New Zealand. To get a wider view of the phenomena studied it would be useful for all regions within the country to be involved, however this was not a feasible expectation of this small study.
2. The sample does not cover the diversity of centres within New Zealand (such as kohanga reo, play centre) or the diversity of cultures within New Zealand, making the research very mono-cultural. This combined with point one, limits the scope of the study for generalisation. As the researcher in this study I was reliant on NZEI and their random selection of survey participants on my behalf, and on those who self selected to

further engage in the research by way of the face to face semi-structured interviews.

3. The researcher is an inexperienced researcher, this being the first formal research study that the researcher has undertaken.

However, given the limitations, the study does contribute to and build on prior research that has investigated team's negative behaviours, by identifying potential contributing factors to team disharmony and strategies used by leaders to restore collegiality and collaboration.

### **Researcher reflexivity**

Researcher reflexivity is an integral element in research with the goal to improve the quality and validity of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Reflexivity involves the researcher's ability to "take a step back and take a critical look at their role in the research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275.). The 'critical look' requires interrogating yourself as the researcher by asking questions such as, who am I? What are my influences? Where do I stand theoretically within the research and how does this impact on what I interpret from the data? (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2013). Researcher reflexivity is a way of ensuring rigour throughout the research process by critically reflecting on the research question, the design, the scrutiny of data and the individual contexts (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

In this research, reflexive practice alerted the researcher to micro ethical issues which sit outside the procedural ethics that were encountered along the way. It became apparent that to keep complete anonymity and non-traceability of participants, particularly male participants, a pseudonym may not have met this end (Mutch, 2013). Giving the participants a number and removing the pseudonym offered another layer of anonymity.

### **Researcher Bias**

Researcher bias is a major challenge for interviews; their manner can influence how the interviewee may respond, and such interviewees may unwittingly misrepresent things or situations, as a result of subtle influence. There is potential for the researcher to influence and bias responses in deciding which answers to follow up and probe more deeply (Hannabuss, 1996).

The interview encounter, by its very nature is hierarchical and holds an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer defines the topic, the questions, the flow and the prompts of the questioning, the termination of the interview as well as the interpretation of data gathered (Kvale, 2006). To a large degree interviewees are under scrutiny (Cohen et al., 2011). It is the researchers responsibility to mitigate limitations, by first being acutely aware of possible miscommunications, bias and power issues. Well thought-through methodology of the semi-structured interview schedule, has the potential to cut limitations to a minimum (Hannabuss, 1996). To eliminate issues of bias and validity, clarification of points were sought during the interview, plus interviewees had opportunity to read their interview transcription for errors. They had opportunity to add anything else they deemed necessary to bring clarity to their thoughts.

### **Triangulation and reliability**

Qualitative research needs to be both credible and trustworthy. To achieve this, use of multiple data gathering methods is one way of ensuring increased validity of the research (Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2013; Searle, 1999). Triangulation in this way can deepen understanding of different aspects and realities of the issue, and help cancel out bias that any one method alone may have created (Cohen et al., 2011). Menter et al. (2011) and Searle (1999) suggest triangulation is at the heart of qualitative research. Triangulation in this research was achieved by using two methods of data collection, literature as well as my own experience and knowledge. The survey was to identify possible contributing factors to team disharmony, strategies used to restore harmony and the success of these strategies. The semi-structured interview explored more deeply the points identified in the survey. The thick rich data from participants enabled me to compare and contrast perceptions. I overlapped perceptions with multiple sources of literature and my own experiences to produce a full and balanced study as possible (Bell, 1999; Onwuegbuzie, 2002). The overlapping of information with the data gathered, allowed me to triangulate and confirm the reliability of results (Mentor et al., 2011).

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored literature relevant to the interpretive qualitative, framework that underpins this study. An account of the qualitative methods used to gather data, in keeping with interpretive framework, has been provided. As well as an overview of research processes used, ethical considerations have been discussed. Ethical issues encountered and managed have been provided to bring rigour and reliability to the process and findings. Limitations of the study along with researcher bias have been discussed to bring an objective perspective to the study.

The following chapter, Chapter Four, will discuss the research findings. These are in the form of individual vignettes and highlight the key perceptions of team disharmony from the individual's perspective.

## Chapter Four: Findings Vignettes

### Introduction

This chapter identifies the underlying sources of team disharmony and strategies used to re-culture professional relationships from individual participant's perspectives. Data were gathered from two sources; first, anonymous surveys via Survey Monkey elicited possible contributing factors and gauged the level of disharmony. The survey identified communication as the major source of disharmony with three quarters of survey respondents noting this. Within this broad theme, survey respondents particularly highlighted defensiveness to feedback as prime cause of disharmony. Personality traits and leadership were also seen as significant factors by the 20 respondents. Within the leadership realm about half the survey respondents felt that a lack of clear values contributed strongly to disharmony.

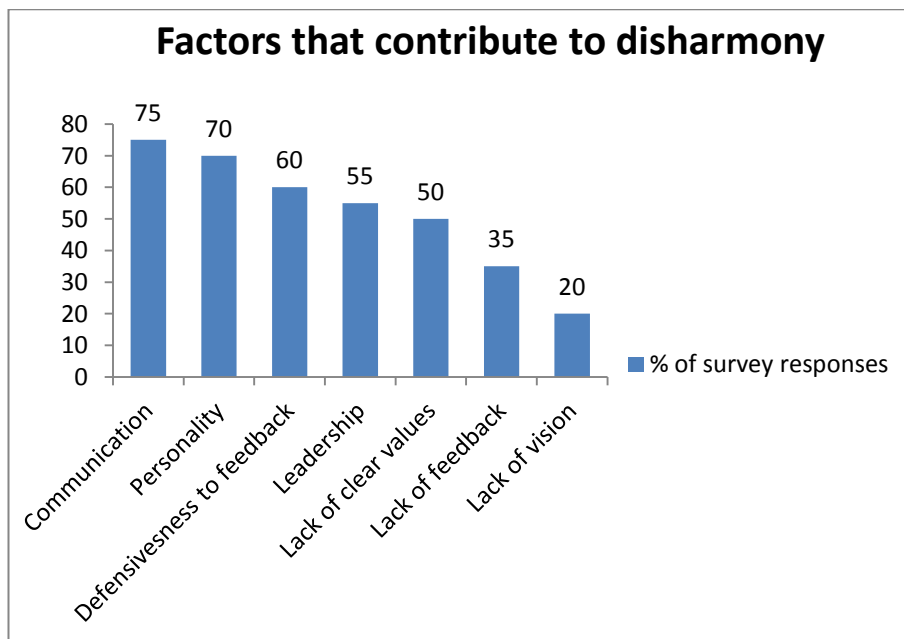


Figure 1: Summary of survey responses

The second source of data came from semi-structured interviews. The use of open-ended questions afforded participants time to share their experiences of team disharmony and strategies used to restore collegiality and collaboration. Through an interpretive framework, themes were elicited and analysed from the qualitative

information gathered (Mentor et al., 2012), to answer the question: When an early childhood team become professionally estranged how do leaders successfully re-culture professional relationships to restore collaboration and collegial teamwork? Through analysis of the data four broad themes emerged:

- communication
- emotional intelligence/personality
- leadership
- teamwork

Within the broad themes, sub themes have also been identified. What the analysis has taught me is the broad themes are not discreet themes but interlink in many different ways. They are bound together by relationships and the relational nature of early childhood education (ECE) teaching. The themes, and sub themes that sit under them, are the underpinning factors that give the perception of disharmony within relationships in ECE settings that this research identified.

The beliefs of some of the participants were very strong and were woven throughout the interview, others held multiple beliefs. To capture and give credence to these views, the findings are presented as vignettes to highlight key ideas from individual participants. The individual ideas contributed to the overall themes that emerged.

**Vignette 1:  
Teacher #1**

**Poor leadership, ineffective communication and personality**

Teacher #1 came into ECE teaching as a mature graduate after a career in the health industry and entered a team with a leader who would be considered experienced.

Personality, lack of good leadership and poor communication skills were the major barriers Teacher #1 reported that prevented the team working effectively. However, they cannot be discussed singularly because in this story they are inextricably linked together as they collided, illuminating poor leadership and leaving Teacher #1 with a “skewed view” on how things are done in ECE settings.

It could be surmised that perhaps the personality traits drove the poor leadership and the poor leadership was underpinned by a lack of communication skills.

Teacher #1 describes their personality as one that values making people feel at home in the centre environment. This strength allows her to build strong relationships with families. Instead of being encouraged and affirmed, this ability put them at odds with her leader who “got quite offended because they weren’t the favourite”, resulting in a more judgemental attitude. What Teacher #1 expected from her leader was to be recognised as a junior teacher and be supported in her practice, not judged.

From Teacher #1’s perspective, her leader put emphasis on friendship over professionalism and team work:

*There was an expectation that you worked together and played together to build a good team, which didn’t really work because when you are looking at different personalities it needs to be professional.*

For Teacher #1, building a good team was not about “playing together”, it’s was about connecting together on a professional level. Teacher #1 insinuated that the playing together was feigned collegiality to the outside world.

### **Shared Values**

Teacher #1’s experiences in developing shared values left them frustrated with a clear lack of respect for her leader. She described how creating shared values was enacted:

*Values were stored on the computer; they had been copied and pasted from lots of other things, the words sounded good, so the leader thought that would be good for the centre. They were read in staff meetings. It was pretty much this is how it is; there wasn’t room to start again with a clean piece of paper. The disharmony would have been different if the leader had facilitated a collaborative process.*

What frustrated Teacher #1 was she understood the words:

*I knew what the words meant, they were just words, they were not lived; my leader did not walk the talk.*

Given this experience Teacher #1 is firmly of the opinion that relational trust within a team needs to be build before you can embark on unpacking individual values that will contribute to team values.

The lack of leadership knowledge and ability to build shared values collectively from the ground up fuelled anger and resentment as well as Teacher #1's growing notion of "grey areas" around relationships and communication in ECE teaching.

Teacher #1 spoke angrily at the lack of leadership modelled:

*In staff meetings we were told, well it was printed, we had to copy it and take turns reading something (the values) it was absolutely not shown on the floor, you have close relationships with the family and it benefits the child, but that didn't happen from my leader ... quite clearly if she didn't like a family, if it didn't suit her it wasn't the same for everybody, so as my leader I expected to see great teaching, I expected to see great relationships.*

Teacher #1 reflected her disappointed at not being supported in her strengths and passions, aligning the leader's behaviour to personality, she explained:

*I had to be incredibly careful that I didn't offend (the leader), it's really exhausting to try and be really careful all the time and not upsetting someone, it's around personalities I think.*

### **Feedback**

Teacher #1's disappointment and disillusionment with ECE increased when she was given feedback:

*Feedback was typed up and read to me about where I was at, I was a provisionally registered teacher and it was feedback I didn't feel was true, and it was the way it was given ... I think because it wasn't true made it all the sadder that someone in that position would choose to do it that way. I had no clue before hand and that*

*was the biggest thing about receiving bad feedback – I had no idea no idea at all.*

What frustrated Teacher #1 was the lack of ‘presence’ her leader demonstrated, she felt if her leader had been present (in body, mind and spirit) she would have noticed where she was on her journey and been more supportive. Teacher #1’s experience of poor leadership and the leader’s lack of skill in critical aspects of communication led her to leave her place of work.

### **Strategies used to restore harmony and outcomes**

Teacher #1 worked in a multi service corporation and as a strong self advocate she went higher in her organisation to gain support and mentoring. On discussing her situation with her professional services manager she felt her concerns weren’t taken seriously, she commented, “The professional services manager was new and didn’t have the skills in that area”. Feeling unsupported she went higher; again she felt she wasn’t taken seriously enough. She felt the organisation’s professional leader also lacked the skills to work to a positive resolution, “There should have been the skills there, I had an expectation that it would have been dealt differently by them”. This lack of leadership only reinforced the necessity for Teacher #1 to leave the service.

### **Vignette 2: Teacher #2**

#### **Cultural background and values**

As a teacher of many years experience, Teacher #2 believes cultural backgrounds, and the way people have been brought up, cultivate the values and perceptions people hold. The values and perceptions, meshed with life’s experiences, influence personality and how people read situations and communicate with others:

*We are who we are because of our culture, values, and the experiences we have create the lens through which we view things both negative and positive.*

For team harmony and transparency Teacher #2 believes it is essential that the team identifies values and that these be formally documented for accountability, “If everybody accepts those things (values) then there’s permission for anyone to

be made accountable”. Teacher #2 believes that espoused values that are not lived values cause inconsistencies in practice which lead to tensions in the team relationships. Where the values are lived values relational trust is built within the team.

Teacher #2 believes it is the negative experience through our upbringing that influences our relationships and how we see others and was open in explaining how their family culture impacted on them as a younger teacher, resulting in defensiveness when receiving feedback:

*I have been aware that as I was growing up, the relationship that I had with my Dad, there was like defensiveness with him, and I think I took some of that on board in certain things.*

However, understanding the power of reflection, Teacher #2 has reflected consciously of this experience, and consequently is now open to feedback without being defensive, taking it as constructive rather than personal.

### **Past Experience**

From experience, Teacher #2 has come to the conclusion that past team negative experiences impacts on team culture, strongly influencing how people perceive and respond, communicate and build relationships with new team members. As a new teacher to a team Teacher #2 felt they were judged on the teams past negative experiences. These perceptions and lack of effective communication skills to understand and clarify perceptions added confusion to the developing relationship. Communication became difficult as the past experience left people reading more into what was being said rather than “take on board what is said”.

### **Feedback and Mindset**

Teacher #2 felt team members can become extremely sensitive if their philosophy or a different understanding is challenged. Without an open mindset, and an ability to listen, putting your own biases and value judgements aside, the opportunity for open two way communication (especially during feedback) is minimised. Perceptions on both sides remain unexplored giving rise to talking past each other, which fosters further misunderstanding, resulting in conflict, thus creating a vicious cycle of misunderstanding, building a negative team culture.

Teacher #2 contends that personality and how secure or insecure a person is impacts on how they receive feedback, with past experiences influencing how they understand feedback processes. The lack of skill and understanding creates fear and a closed mindset to possibilities and improvement. However, even when feedback has been given sensitively and fairly Teacher #2 claimed people with a closed mindset still received it negatively. Openness and transparency seem to be the key for receiving feedback the way it is intended:

*I've found it's the people in the team that are really open and transparent, are the ones that are easier to give feedback to.*  
(Teacher #2)

### **Age and experience**

Teacher #2 cited age and experience as a potential cause of disharmony, having noticed how the more experienced teachers attitude impacts on how a graduate may be viewed especially if they are young, “Someone fresh and green from training has a lot of innovative ideas but lacking in the experience, this can be taken as “*they’ve got a lot to learn*”. Teacher #2 believes this attitude is about resistance to change.

### **Strategies used to restore disharmony**

#### **Open communication**

Teacher #2 favours clear and open communication to manage cultural differences and perception. Being open and “up front” about the intent of the conversation, as well as coming from an exploratory lens, keeps the communication transparent and honest. These communication strategies have enabled Teacher #2 to pick up on and address different perceptions, developing shared understandings through the open conversation. Teacher #2 puts the success down to:

*People have valued the transparency, and they have really listened deeply. They have come with an open mindset, where you are putting any of your own biases or value judgements aside, finding out where a person is coming from. People who are open and transparent are easier to connect with.*

However, strategies like this still have their frustrations for Teacher #2:

*There are conversations within the team about putting up front intentions, the ideas are in place, but the practical part of it doesn't match the theory.*

Teacher #2 puts the mismatch of theory and practice down to how secure or insecure a colleague may be and relates this back to family culture:

*Security and insecurity can come from the way a person has grown up, the type of family they were in, yeah the way they were raised ... the emotional side is very big, like if a person had grown up in a family and they were getting a lot of negative talk, or being talked down to, as we become adults we carry things through.*

In discussing team disharmony, Teacher#2 described how active listening skills are essential to really understand what the other person is saying. However the timing of deep conversations is critical. Understanding a person's emotional state can impact on how they respond to discussion,

*If a person is feeling a bit stressed out, or maybe having a bad day, sometimes that can have an impact.*

### **Professional learning**

Teacher #2 has engaged in professional learning on personality types, enabling a good understanding of different temperaments and how people take on and process information. This awareness has helped Teacher #2 to be more balanced in responses to the individual, "In different situations you can be calmer, or you can be a bit bolder depending on what's needed".

### **Vignette 3: Teacher #3**

#### **Power struggles and misuse of power**

Teacher #3 has been a teacher in the ECE sector for many years. In the past she has held leadership positions. Power struggles were a reoccurring theme through Teacher #3's interview. She has witnessed some people in positional power positions (this could be the owner, supervisor or leader), create negative attitudes toward team members, especially if they were younger than the person with positional power. Teacher #3 explains:

*They seem to have this attitude of I know more than you, which gives the feeling of 'well you don't know anything and what knowledge you have is not worth anything and what I say so goes attitude.*

Teacher #3 described how she felt that the misuse of positional power denied people their basic rights, and promoted favouritism, creating unfairness and awkwardness within the team environment:

*It was not uncommon for one person to have more non contact than someone else with no particular reason for it.*

Power and autocratic decisions created other situations such as not being given your basic rights of having morning breaks:

*If you asked it was like you would ask them to walk on hot coals or something. You got the idea that it was a bad question to ask, creating an environment where you didn't feel comfortable.*

Teacher #3 was proactive and addressed the issue of breaks, going as far as giving a solution that would create the least disruption, whilst the leadership seemed amenable to the idea nothing happened.

In another situation Teacher #3 again saw how misuse of positional power, where favouritism and a lack of skills in dealing with difficult situations, put a wedge between team and centre owner:

*It became very disharmonious between the team because we didn't know what to do and even when we voiced things it was like we weren't being heard ... the owner couldn't separate themselves from the fact that they really liked this person. It became very much if you go against my way of thinking, that's it you're gone.*

Teacher #3 got a sense from her experiences with positional power or “that power complex” as she described it, that (some) people in power positions feel justified in having that “personality trait of its my way or the highway”. She considered that a fear of change sat behind misuse of positional power. However, the results have a negative impact on people, people feel trapped and powerless.

What Teacher #3 desired from her leaders was trust, flexibility, an open mindset and the ability to actually listen to others viewpoints and ideas. Above all she desired leadership that empowered the team, knowing how to capitalise on their strengths and stretch them as teachers.

### **Lack of feedback**

Feedback was another issue Teacher #3 believed sat behind team disharmony. She felt that people don't take their feedback as constructive criticism and can be revengeful if you do give constructive feedback, silencing future feedback:

*They seem to hold a grudge and a week or two later you are dealt with the consequences.*

Teacher #3 felt that some environments foster negative attitudes and consequently negative feedback is the norm creating disharmony within the team:

*There's nothing worse than being in an environment where you feel like you're constantly being dragged down, you're given feedback but it's negative or you feel it's negative, that no matter how hard you try and make things better it's always the negative that are put into light, and that can be very disconcerting, disempowering for anybody and I guess the minute that sort of starts, that's when you don't feel like you want to even contribute into a team.*

However she believes not enough positive feedback is given in the “industry”, feedback that is motivating, affirming and inspiring:

*There's nothing more rewarding than having positive feedback, you can't get enough, I don't think it's given enough in our industry, it's a very demanding job that doesn't you know, you don't get a lot of instant positive feedback saying oh you know that was amazing.*

### **Strategies used to restore team harmony.**

As a teacher in these situations, strategies Teacher #3 used were unsuccessful leaving her with a strong feeling of disempowerment. When she held leadership positions her experiences had taught her “what you don't want to have in a team”.

### **Fish philosophy**

The fish philosophy is a book based on a series of behavioural changes implemented at the famous Pike Fish Market, to inspire an otherwise unpleasant working environment and to create a sense of purpose, unity and belonging between the fish market employees. In her first leadership role Teacher #3 implemented strategies presented in the Fish Philosophy as a platform for building a positive team environment, getting everybody on the “same page” about why they were there, what their goals were, creating an environment of collaborative teamwork. She stressed the importance of working together utilising each other’s strengths.

### **Outcomes**

Teacher #3 beamed at the success:

*I found that amazing, it gave the team amazing strength and it opened the door for communication. It gave the team a sense of wellbeing and belonging, they really felt like they were respected in their input and ideas ... it brought enjoyment and fun back into the work environment. Team work was strengthened as people felt comfortable to share ideas, one idea from somebody would stem off something else for somebody, and everybody sparked off the ideas. People had an openness to say yeah let’s give it a go.*

Teacher #3 also saw that the Fish Philosophy strategies broke down the barriers to a fear of change. Taking risks encouraged the team to explore and become critical thinkers.

### **Vignette 4: Leader#1**

#### **Cultural and family back ground**

Leader #1 has been a teacher for many years and is currently in a team leader position. Leader #1 expressed cultural and family cultural background as a cause for disharmony. Individual backgrounds bring with them differences in values, beliefs and expectations which are strongly woven with how people communicate. As a leader she has had challenges connecting with the diversity that exists within her team, especially in creating trust and shared understandings through

communication. She firmly believes she is who she is because of her family culture, ethics and morals. From experience she has found diverse individual cultural backgrounds, ethics and morals of a person cause conflict and misunderstanding. Leader #1 compares herself to another colleague:

*I am a person I guess who is middle class white and my colleague is from a totally different back ground, so because of where I come from and my family's way of doing things, I am very rigid and very rules orientated, whereas her culture from her family is more relaxed, more flexible and more casual.*

These differences have been at the heart of conflict. In addition Leader #1 believes that our personalities are driven from our culture ethics and morals. The personality that Leader #1 brings to the team, borne out of her family culture, at times creates resentment within her team:

*The girls see me as pedantic because I am ... and I am, one of those people who knows how something should be done, because of that they sometimes resent it I guess.*

Leader #1 discussed how misunderstandings in communication are attributed to cultural differences:

*... because of our cultural differences, she reads me, well one of my team may read me in a different way than I'm coming across, and vice versa.*

These communication difficulties have transcended expectations and trust, creating situations where the teams distrust leads them to expect that Leader #1 will have an unfavourable response to something that they have said. The distrust blurred feedback even though Leader #1 believed she was fair and respectful:

*She thought I was criticising her as an associate, she expected me to give her negative feedback, and that wasn't my intention.*

## **Strategies used to restore disharmony**

### **Learning conversations**

Initially, stemming from family culture and upbringing, Leader #1 had the view that power based autocratic methods was the right way to motivate her team. Leader #1 acknowledges communication is critical in team work, hence over time she has engaged in professional learning to strengthen her leadership and communication. The most successful tool she has learnt from her professional learning is ‘open to learning conversations’. This is how she sees open learning conversations support her:

*It's about being open and being brave enough to speak rather than having hidden agendas; it's about being forward; it's about listening, I use them all the time now.*

### **Time**

Time, from Leader #1's perspective is an important strategy for understanding others:

*If there is conflict sometimes you need time to just reflection it, and then come back to that person.*

### **Outcomes**

Learning conversations have changed the way Leader #1 views and communicates with her team. This strategy gives opportunity for both parties to clarify and understand the issue, coming to a shared understanding about ways they could work to move forward. She pointed out that learning conversations were not only used for issues but were also used in giving positive feedback. She believes they have moved her from an autocratic mindset; reflecting on her past methods she commented, “I would rather see, instead of a power base, a respect base”. Leader #1's professional learning has made her realise that leadership and communication are about understanding the other person.

## **Vignette 5**

### **Leader #2**

#### **Effective communication**

Leader #2 is an experienced leader having held multiple leadership positions in varying services throughout their career. Her overriding theme of team

disharmony was a lack of effective communication skill and confidence to communicate professionally and effectively. Her meaning of effective communication is:

*Being open and honest with each other, which requires trust that is built through developing strong responsive and reciprocal relationships.*

However, Leader #2 saw the fear of upsetting someone as a barrier for people not saying what they want to say or need to say. This fear can result in creating alliances with other team members who appear to be more sympathetic or with whom they have a stronger relationship. The alliances can be damaging to the whole team, as perceptions are created and reinforced, rather than engaging in whole team communication that unpack different understandings that get to the facts of the matter. Alliances also indicate a lack of trust and effective communication skills to bring the matter to the surface as Leader #2 experienced. The situation involved a relatively new teacher to the team with a quiet disposition, however due to past experience and the newness of the relationship she found Leader #2 “intimidating and quite confronting”:

*I remember talking vividly to the team about how it was from my perspective and how they were actually enabling her in that position of dependency, it wasn't helping anybody. I was incredibly frustrated because she would not talk to me, you cannot be team teaching when someone isn't talking to you. She wasn't talking to me because I was scary. She articulated “you make me nervous” and I would be making her nervous by then because I would be completely irritated that she wasn't talking to me, so it became a vicious cycle.*

### **Feedback**

Leader #2 also saw the fear, as discussed above, as a lack of personal skill in giving and receiving feedback. She sees that good teaching and team work is also about ongoing improvement, with feedback being an essential element that opens people to new ideas and ways of doing things. In saying this, it is not so much what is said but how it is said that makes the difference to how the feedback is

perceived. Lacking the skill of effective communication leads to unnecessary disharmony as demonstrated.

### **Immature behaviour**

Leader #2 discussed the notion of immature behaviour that demonstrates someone hasn't grown enough in their knowledge and understanding in the expectations of effective communication. She raised four behaviours that she saw as immature that impacted on team causing disharmony:

1. Talking to somebody else about somebody, putting a negative cloud over that person.
2. The personality trait of dishonesty and not fronting up to mistakes.
3. Manipulating other people by putting ideas in their head.
4. Privilege around knowledge that you keep from the team, for example, "I know why she is upset but I can't talk about it".

### **Strategies used to restore disharmony**

#### **Professional facilitation**

To overcome barriers to effective communication and enhance positive team work, Leader #2 used a range of strategies. She has found an outside facilitator that is neutral to all the team, an effective way of assessing an issue and getting communication flowing.

#### **Building relationships**

Building a relationship so that the team have respect for your opinion is what she classed as her biggest strategy. Actions or practices that foster this are; being open and listening to others perspectives, developing a united set of shared values, and giving regular and pertinent feedback. When giving feedback Leader #2 is mindful whether it is an open discussion for team growth, or is it for the individual that needs to be dealt with sensitively to save embarrassment. She subscribes strongly to the sandwich philosophy, "which is you give a little of the positive feedback (I really like the way you), then you might put in a bit of constructive feedback (have you thought about ...), but you finish on a high (I love the way you ...)".

### **Clear expectations**

In relationship building Leader #2 sees having clear expectations and being confident as critical:

*If you're a bit waffly you're leaving yourself open to people not taking you seriously ... people need positive leaders that know where they're going and what they are doing. It makes people think they are in the back of a bus with a driver who doesn't have a license and doesn't really know where they are going. I think as women we want to get along with people we work with, but you sometimes think oh well I'll let that go just to keep things harmonious, but at some point I am the leader and I still need to be confident enough to say well we do need to deal with this.*

### **Shared values**

Leader #2 and her team have been together for many years and as a review process she is currently taking the team on an re-exploration of shared values and what they mean in practice, to get a deeper understanding of each other, “we have found this a really good exercise because it was very positive, they [team] were able to re-identify things they value”.

### **Managing emotions**

A very personal strategy Leader #2 has learnt from experience, if she is going into a difficult conversation, she takes the emotional journey first. This enables her to lead the communication from an objective point of view, “I can come into the conversation dealing with what's really happening, the facts and the issues”.

### **Outcomes**

The strategies used have brought Leader #2's team together. Outside facilitation fostered openness within the team which illuminated barriers to team harmony. Managing emotions, clear expectations and values have united the team; their relationships are harmonious, flexible and adaptive to meet the strengths and interests of the teachers and children.

## **Vignette 6: Leader #3**

### **Leadership Leadership Leadership**

Leader #3 is an experienced leader, having led six different teams over the past 21 years. She believes disharmony occurs because everyone is different; holding different perceptions on the way things should be done. For her, leadership is the critical factor between team harmony and disharmony, and navigating the differences and perceptions people hold. She was unequivocal in her belief that **all** team disharmony stems from a lack of leadership skill. Leader#3 did not concur with other participants that personality traits contributed to team disharmony, she claimed:

*If leaders are determined to effectively work with others they must realise it is easier to blame the personalities of their colleagues as a barrier to effective communication than it is to recognise a need to strengthen their own leadership skill.*

To combat ills of conflict, again Leader #3 saw the problem as a lack of leadership skill:

*It's a leader's inability to understand the nature of conflict, and how to use it within an effective framework to enhance communication; a leader must have a clear understanding of how she/he views conflict, and how he/she expects to use it on order to grow professional relationships.*

She further stated:

*Leaders need to have a highly developed set of conflict resolutions skills ... teachers need to feel they have a voice and are 'heard' and are valued for their contribution.*

She believed it is ultimately the leader's responsibility to ensure he/she and team focus is on professional relationships.

Defensiveness to feedback was cited by survey respondents and a key cause of disharmony. Whilst understanding the "sting" of feedback Leader #3, again cites leadership skill as the critical factor,

*It is the leaders skill in facilitating feedback, feed forward, which either reduces or increases defensiveness to him/herself or his/her colleagues.*

She elaborated further on a tool she uses:

*When a leader empowers herself/himself and their colleagues with a tool of open to learning conversations, and understands and shares with their colleagues the positive and beneficial nature of conflict, a reduction in defensiveness can improve rather than damage professional relationships.*

### **Essential skills of a leader**

Leader #3 was very descriptive about the attitudes and skills she thought a good leader required. Her focus was strong interpersonal relationship skills, describing this as:

*A strong interest in the colleagues you are working with, a desire to work effectively together, understand that working as a team is about professional relationships, active listening skills and an effective ability to engage in dialogue.*

### **Strategies Used**

#### **Clear values**

Leader #3 shared a range of strategies she uses to keep the team harmonious, collegial and collaborative. To draw a team together and minimise conflict through differing perceptions, Leader #3 was emphatic that a clear set of values must be established in the early stages of a team forming. She keeps the values “alive” by continuously developing and understanding them on a daily basis through conversation and dialogue with the team.

#### **Adaptive style**

Leader#3 demonstrated an adaptive style to meet the needs of the individuals within her team; she uses regular monthly meetings with one team member to keep communication open:

*The meetings are to ensure that my colleague who finds it challenging to express her dissatisfaction in what's going on and what's bothering her, finds it difficult to come to me until she is in such a state, this is a mechanism that I can use to support her and meet her needs.*

### **Listening skills**

Listening skills and time are fundamental to Leader #3's, leadership strategies in keeping the team harmonious. This is reflected in how compromise happens:

*That's done by really listening to what each colleague is saying and understanding that sometimes it takes time to reach compromise, sometimes that time means waiting not only days or weeks but months and revisiting that same conversation in order to come to an agreement, in order to move forward.*

### **Professional learning**

Leader #3, proactive in her own learning to continually up skill as a leader, utilises learned tools to support her in managing conflict. Two tools she has had success with are “learning conversations” (a model of effective communication), and Judy Ringers Step by Step for Difficult Conversations:

*She (Judy Ringer) suggests that you envisage the outcome that you're hoping for, cultivate an attitude of discovery and curiosity, don't take things personally, try and understand the other person. The outcome of the process is your colleague will not change unless she/he sees that you see where she/he stands.*

### **Outcomes**

The outcomes of Leader #3's varied communication strategies, especially open to learning conversations, has enabled her ways to check and improve the quality of thinking and decision-making, debate and co-construction, within the team. Furthermore it has supported feedback processes of giving and receiving, as well as positive and constructive, enabling her to manage difficult issues in a respectful way. Open to learning conversations has enhanced her and the teams learning capacity, by increasing their ability to detect, listen and challenge their own and

each other's views as well as invite consideration of alternative views. Leader #3 ultimately believes, her communication strategies, have provided the motivation to keep both parties working together.

### **Vignette 7: Leader #4**

#### **Time**

Leader #4 is the centre manager for two centres and is the resident manager and leader in one of them.

Time to communicate effectively was a key theme for Leader #4. The biggest impediment of time was the structural issues where people were in teaching contact for the full eight hours per day; individual non contact time of two hours per week created issues for full team communication. Collective non contact occurred once a month outside working hours, with daily meaningful communication, including essential feedback, missed or put off as:

*Teachers were tired and just wanted to go home at the end of the day.*

An essential part of a teacher's day is assessing young children's learning. Leader #4 felt that the lack of time (i.e. two hours non contact per week) meant there was not enough time to put into quality assessment.

A further frustration, given 38 hours contact time a week, was the ability to induct new staff effectively so they know exactly how the centre works and what is expected of them:

*It's really important they get time. Often they will come in the door and you throw them in the deep end.*

#### **Age and experience**

As a young teacher, Leader#4 felt age, experience and attitude to change impacted on effective communication:

*It was very difficult to communicate with people that have been working for a long time and thought they knew everything that there was to know and not open for any new ideas.*

She encountered a lot of defensiveness if older teachers were challenged on their practice, they would respond with comments such as, “we’ve been doing this for years”, “this is how it works” or “we’ve known that for years”. These comments would close the communication completely, because “they weren’t open to new ideas”.

Due to her experiences Leader #4 holds certain empathy for young teachers and recently witnessed that the lack of respect and attitude she encountered still exists. Leader #4 works over two centres; she is based in one and manages the other. She had to step in and manage a situation in one centre where there was a young student who was keen to learn, “she was curious and wanted answers for everything”. This resulted in the team becoming very defensive because they felt their practice was being challenged:

*I didn’t think their attitude was fair at all as it is about learning; the three qualified teachers really got their backs up at being challenged.*

Leader #4 felt miscommunication lay at the heart of this disharmony.

### **Lack of feedback**

Leader #4 shared another example of how miscommunication can cause disharmony. She was challenged by a teacher for never giving her any praise. Leader #4 explained:

*This was a girl who I thought was amazing, I have praised her to everybody but I’d never sat her down and told her.*

Through lack of communication the teacher never knew how she was doing and felt she wasn’t any good.

### **Differing Values**

Leader #4 felt a lot of disharmony was caused by not understanding each other’s personality, especially cultural differences and norms each team member holds. She recognised everybody’s life is so different and everybody’s understanding of what is right, wrong, good or bad is different. She gave a good example of how cultural differences cause disharmony:

*One teacher was from New Zealand the other England, you would think they would be very similar, the teacher from England referred to the New Zealand teacher as 'scatty'. She became highly offended as her interpretation of 'scatty was immature and stupid.*

An ensuing conversation revealed that 'scatty' meant different things to each of them.

A lack of understanding of shared values and expectations between the team and service owner caused disharmony. The service owner had her set of values and expectations that differed from the team and community. To create a harmonious team, understanding everyone's values in order to create a set of values that the team live and work by was essential. Leader #4 engaged a professional facilitator to support her in drawing all the different values together so there was a united voice from the service owner, team and community. Leader #4 saw that the service owner understood the need for a united approach, everybody felt their opinion was valued and there was an agreed philosophy and values everybody worked by.

### **New Owners**

Leader #4's experiences of new ownership of a service and how this process happens pose many issues and stress for established teams. When the centre she was managing was sold, the first she or the team knew about it was when the new owners "arrived and changed everything". What perturbed her and the team was there was no input invited from the team. Changes in management practices, teaching expectations and limitations with strict rules attached, without consultation, were implemented causing disharmony. It was a radical change for the harmonious team that had been in place since the opening of the service. As centre manager/leader, Leader #4 explained "There was nothing spontaneous ... it was their way or no way". The change resulted in many resignations adding further stress. As service manager, Leader #4 was no longer involved in the employment of new staff, nor was she consulted on skills needed within the team, creating further disharmony. This overbearing stance was out of line with Leader #4 values and resulted in her resignation.

### **Strategies used**

Leader #4 discussed three strategies that minimised team disharmony.

#### **Induction**

Through robust induction Leader #4 felt she could teach new staff members everything about the centre and expectations, while at the same time begin to understand their teaching philosophy and what their qualities, strengths and weaknesses were. The importance of the induction process, for Leader #4, is to ensure that everyone understands each other. She sees it as time well spent.

#### **Whole team professional learning**

Leader #4 saw that team learning improved relationships and understandings when they had an opportunity to learn together. She saw power in being able to dialogue different thinking to create a team understanding with everybody heading in the same direction.

Leader #4 was very strategic in engaging an outside facilitator to support the team in developing a new team philosophy. Her rationale was that team members often don't listen to leaders:

*If you get someone who had got the knowledge and the credentials and they're well respected ... people will listen to them. I think if we are there all the time they don't listen as much as they do with someone else they see as a professional.*

She views the outside lens as a useful insight as she believes when you have been in a place for a long time you "don't see it all".

#### **Outcomes**

The outcomes of the team's professional learning through facilitated development of the services philosophy and the accompanying values along with a rigorous induction process has meant that the teams understand each other better. They understand expectations, raising people's confidence to freely express how they feel as well raise issues as they arise. These processes have facilitated team harmony; there is a strong sense of collegiality within the team, with a renewed flexibility in teamwork to meet the needs of team members. Utilising an outside

facilitator to support philosophy development not only strengthened the team, but strengthened the relationship between service owner, community and team.

### **Vignette 8: Leader #5**

#### **Attitude and Emotional Intelligence**

Leader #5 came to ECE teaching as a mature student. After a period of time in teacher positions she became team leader several years ago.

Attitude and emotional intelligence (EI) were reoccurring themes throughout Leader #5 interview as a cause of disharmony. At times they were intertwined and other times quite distinct. She believes we all have different perceptions and see the world differently which creates our own reality. It is through being open to understanding others and reflecting on self that creates a positive dynamic within teams.

#### **Attitude**

A fixed mindset, not open to change and personal growth is a key cause of team disharmony for Leader #5 as fixed mindsets impact on team work:

*A fixed mindset where people are not open to change ... filters out into you're not respecting people, you're not respecting diversity, you're not actually committed to the team, it's a little bit egocentric so there is a lack of emotional intelligence there.*

One difficulty Leader #5 has encountered with fixed mindset stems from people who have been in position for a long time:

*They have just always done things their way and it's their place and what they decide to do is the right thing rather than it being about a team thing.*

Leader #5 highlighted how change of leadership can create closed mindsets and resistance to change, causing disharmony, especially if the new leader does not lead in the way that somebody wants them to. Her experience of closed mindset and strong resistance to a change in leadership left her feeling she was trying to be someone other than herself. She believes it comes down to respecting and accepting individual personalities:

*The choice is either I accept me, or I have to go, or they accept me or they have to change. It comes back to that disharmony about attitude, either you are going to accept people for who they are or not, that's why I think their attitude is about being disrespectful of who people are and diversity.*

### **Emotional Intelligence**

In terms of being part of a team, Leader #5's explanation of EI is:

*You acknowledge your feelings and other peoples feeling and be respectful of that, but actually not get hooked in to the emotional bit. Being able to step back and see it, it's all about being together as a team rather than each individual having their ego stoked.*

As she continued with her explanation, EI and attitude began to merge:

*If you are a reflective person you think about the impact of yourself on others and you're always willing to go away and change and grow, which goes back to your attitude, being open to change and to growing.*

Leader #5 strongly believes EI is the factor that moves us from fixed mindset to being open to change:

*If you are operating at reasonable to high level of EI and taking responsibility for yourself then you're either going to stay fixed and then the team will change in which case there will be a natural leaving, or you will have to change to fit the team.*

Leader#5 believes it is the individual's responsibility whether they choose to be emotionally intelligent enough to actually reflect and say:

*I could be a bit stuck in that and maybe if I give a little it will move, you have to be willing to embrace each other.*

## **Strategies used to combat closed mindset and grow EI**

### **Learning conversations**

Leader #5 found a series of books on “learning conversations”. The purpose of the books is to develop open mindset, with a positive view to change, along with increasing ones EI. Leader #5 facilitated workshops with the team on the series, which provided the team an opportunity to understand how each other communicates along with identifying their strengths and weakness within communication. The workshops also supported the team in developing strategies to develop greater levels of emotional intelligence, enhanced team work and breaking down negative attitude toward change.

### **Shared values**

The development of shared values and exactly what they looked like in practice supported an open mindset. Times when the behaviours did not reflect team values, offered opportunity to reopen the dialogue and explore where the mismatch lay. Leader #5 described herself as persistent and was confident in pursuing the tension until an understanding is clear for all.

### **Outcomes**

This process has had a powerful affect on the harmony of the team, enabling the team to talk more openly and honestly. Leader #5 has noticed:

*People are sharing personal journeys or experiences and that to me is something that builds trust in our team and helps us to be relational, people are quite committed to the idea of being open to change.*

There has been a shift in how connected the team is, resulting in the confidence to bring up topics they wouldn't have felt confident to broach in the past. The team are able to give and receive feedback in a climate of openness without getting their feelings hurt. Leader #5 commented, “The day flows better and our relationships with children are better because we're in a better space”.

The growth in confidence and team commitment has led to a professional learning group where Leader #5 feels shared understandings and the shared growing of knowledge has changed people:

*I think through becoming more confident a willingness to learn new strategies and skills to do things differently ... it's a positive snowball instead of a negative snow ball. The team's just lovely, everybody's happy they, come to work happy and there's really no conflict, it's not that there's not disagreements but there's no conflict and disharmony, so the team is able to communicate really well together.*

## **Summary**

This chapter synthesised individual perspectives of team disharmony and strategies used to re-culture relationships to restore collaboration and collegial teamwork. Participants' experiences were varied giving the researcher a deeper understanding of the phenomena. From the individual vignettes, broad themes have emerged; communication, emotional intelligence and personality, leadership and teamwork Relationships are the inherent factor that runs through these themes. The themes identified will form the structure of the next chapter, Chapter Five Discussion on Findings.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion on Findings**

### **Introduction**

Responsive and reciprocal relationships are at the heart of an early childhood education (ECE) team. The data from this research suggests that this notion is frequently not enacted by adults in the ECE environment. For teachers, responsive and reciprocal relationships are dependent on each person's interpersonal skills. As demonstrated by the voice of the participants, survey and interviewees, the catalyst for harmonious relationships sits within leadership.

The ECE context is reliant on team teaching, collaboration and collegial relationships. How leaders respond to conflict sets the culture of the service. The culture is underpinned by the vision, mission and clear shared values the organisation holds. How the leader personally enacts these values ensures they are the foundation of all practice, despite the difference in personalities that make up the collective unit of the teaching team. Values unite the individuals in the service into a cohesive, synergetic and harmonious team.

Leadership within the ECE sector is predominantly women leading a near all women workforce. Research suggests that women work from a democratic lens founded on an ethic of care (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; de la Rey, 2005). Data from this study challenges this notion. Relationships can readily become fraught; power can manifest in destructive ways between the team or the team and leader contrary to the values held, negatively impacting on team morale (Waniganayaki et al., 2012). The research data in this study indicates that disharmony is frequent, ranging from minor issues, remedied through dialogue, to very serious events where a complete breakdown in the relationship occurs. Four major influences on team relationships became apparent, during the individual vignette analysis that underpinned disharmony. These were: relationships and team work; relationships and communication; relationships and personality; and relationships and leadership.

### **Relationships and teamwork**

Responsive and reciprocal relationships that build effective teams are fundamental to ECE practice (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). For the team to function

collegially and collaboratively there needs to be a deep and meaningful connectedness with each other. The relational connectedness within an ECE teaching team needs to be transactional, where the team interacts with deep appreciation of each other's sense of 'personhood' (Gibb, 2006).

The notion of team work can be problematic as it makes assumptions everyone is on the same playing field. Complexity sits within any team environment, as individuals come with their own way of being, beliefs, and expectations. Seeking to know each other as unique individuals and communicating genuine reciprocity needs to be at the heart of team work to allow the meaningful connectedness to develop. Working as a team is a process grounded in the ideology of empowerment (Whalley, 2001), where the creation of interpersonal relationships, collegial and collaborative teamwork is the responsibility of the leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The intentional leader will consider how to build a team with diverse abilities, personalities, values and expectations. They will listen and hear the various points of view and encourage everyone to contribute to democratic decision making (Waniganayaki et al., 2012).

The data from the survey respondents and interviewees illuminated critical aspects of relationships, teamwork and behaviour that influenced disharmony. Their stories are congruent with the literature (Cardno & Reynolds, 2009; Hard, 2006; Reynolds, 2011; Waniganayaki et al., 2012). Whilst perceptions of disharmony will be discussed separately it must be noted that they intertwine and impact on each other like the warp and weft of a whāriki.

### **Relational Trust**

Relational trust sits at the heart of a healthy and productive relationship where harmony, collegiality and collaboration reign. Trust, a key element in team work, is a powerful form of motivation that is influenced by both our character and competence (Covey & Merrill, 2006). It was clear from Leader #3, Teacher #1 and Teacher #2 that trust is built when; the leader lives espoused values, has and can articulate clear expectations, is present, recognises and affirms practice, celebrates achievements and is flexible and leads by example. These leaderful attributes are supported by several researchers, for example, Fullan (2001), Ebbeck and Waniganayaki (2003), Kouzes and Posner (2012), and Rodd (2006).

Being trusted and giving trust changes the quality and trajectories of relationships (Covey & Merrill, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). From my experience of working with teams, trust is an ongoing issue.

Building relational trust does not appear to come naturally when you join a team. It takes time to build trusting relationships, as Leader #2 described, “There is a period of checking each other out while relationships are being established”. She felt trust is further developed by clarity and consistency of open communication. Leader #4 extended on communication, claiming attention to an induction process where the new team member has an opportunity to understand the values that underpin the team and clarity on expectations, is a foundation for building relational trust.

Trust is built by consistency of self management, empowerment, openness, transparency and honesty. The research data suggests trust is also about the confidence you have in the people you work with, especially the leader. If trust and confidence are lacking, team members can be very suspicious of intent, as noted in vignette 4, Leader #1. Mahatma Ghandi once said, “The moment there is suspicion about a person’s motives, everything he does becomes tainted” (as cited in Covey & Merrill, 2006).

This appeared to be the case for Leader #1, whilst she saw trust as critical within the team dynamics; she grappled with building trusting relationships within her team. Their lack of trust was influenced by past conflict which impacted on how they perceived her actions,

*I know that I do trust and what I do has no hidden agenda, and what I do is for the best for everybody ... I don't know if they have that ... my mentoring programme for example, they see me as giving more work, that's not my aim. The aim is to lessen their workload and make it easier for them, but until they trust that that's why I am doing it they don't see me as being proactive I guess.*

Suspicion of intent driven by low trust and confidence saw the team expecting negative responses,

*The trust is not quite there, so they expect that I am going to have unfavourable response to something they have said. (Leader #1)*

Unresolved conflict compounded issues, rigidity and demands led to disempowerment of team members, “I have had to say this is how it is, and that’s that”. Disempowerment brought out the negative forces impacting on team morale. These findings exemplify Ghandi’s prophecy, and Covey and Merrill’s (2006) claims on the outcomes of low trust; the slowing of relationships through interpersonal conflict, win-lose thinking, defensive and protective communication. Leaders are more likely to be trusted when they have clear values and leadership philosophy (Kouzes & Posner, 2102).

Teams struggle with inflexible leadership, Teacher #3 believed if team members feel they are not ‘listened to’ or their ideas are squashed without further exploration, the result is a lack of trust where people feel trapped and powerless. Under these conditions team members feel disempowered and disillusioned, frequently getting on and doing their work in silos which compounds the issues of trust. Teams thrive when there is flexibility to accommodate and assimilate their ideas, and bring their dreams alive, (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Ebbeck & Waniganayaki, 2003).

Leader #5’s story of uniting the team through ‘joint work’ (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) built trust and confidence not only in the leader but between all the team, changing the trajectory of the relationships:

*It’s enabling us to talk more openly and more honestly ... we feel a lot more connected. Our day flows better, our relationships with the children are better because we are in a better space.*

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) affirm trust can be formed through interactions of sharing and talking that creates understandings and new definitions. Leader #5 enabled the team to raise their social capital and by doing so increased the trust, cooperation and overall team motivation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

In the data analysis low trust and a darker side of leadership are hidden factors behind many of the participant’s perceptions of disharmony; however these were guised as other interpersonal shortcomings such as power and control, resistance

to change, personality, poor communication and leadership. These behaviours are in contention with Covey and Merrill's (2006) two critical functions of trust; character and capabilities. Character includes your competence, your integrity, motives and intent with people. Capabilities are the skills you have, your results and track record (Covey & Merrill, 2006, p.30).

### **Structural issues -Time**

Leader #4 indicated managerial tasks takes leaders away from the time needed to develop trusting relationships, the core business of leadership. Leader participants were in teaching contact with children between six and eight hours a day, this created time issues to engage in collective and meaningful conversations that investigates people's motives, develop shared understandings, induct new team members, and give vital feedback. Leader #4 explained:

*Time is that we don't get, the girls that work with me get two hours a week non-contact, two hours to do all their learning stories, plan, do all that stuff, they don't get any other time so it's their own time if they have to do anything else ... there's not enough time to put quality into it. People were tired, very tired and exhausted by always trying to get things done ... they just want to go home at the end of the day.*

Lack of time minimised the team's ability to work as collaborative and professional learning community where teachers inquire into practice and plan together, raising the social capital of the team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Structural conditions, such as time to inquire into practice, features prominently in professional learning community literature (Thornton & Cherrington, 2015). Insufficient time to complete the diverse of responsibilities especially that of the leaders, is one of ECE's most pressing problems (Rodd, 2006).

### **Relationships and Communication**

Communication is complex and central to the relationships and outcomes of an ECE service. Teams need a formidable array of effective communication skills to navigate the highs and lows that come with team teaching (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999; Pinner & Pinner, 1998). Communication is humanities greatest achievement; however, people find it difficult to communicate face to

face, with “80% of people who fail at work do so because they do not relate well to other people” (Bolton, 1987, p. 5). The effect of a lack of effective communication or exposure to poor communication diminishes one's selfhood emotionally and physically (Bolton, 1987). Lack of communication skills was noted as a cause of team disharmony by three quarters of survey respondents. All interview participants noted some form of communication as a cause of disharmony, however they saw effective communication requiring trust and being open and honest with each other. Three interview participants cited communication as the main cause of disharmony.

Teacher #1's story mirrored Bolton's (1987) claims, the disharmony she experienced was due to her leader's lack of relational skill and her lack of understanding of effective communication. Being able to relate to others in an ECE environment is critical, effective communication is the glue that binds the team together. The stronger the relationships and the more effective the communication, the more we can trust that other people will understand us as intended (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). The data highlighted three areas in particular where lack of confidence in effective communication leads to team disharmony, integrity of the communication, feedback and perception.

### **Integrity of the communication**

Honesty and integrity, within communication, builds relational trust and respect. Honesty is telling the truth and leaving the right impression. Integrity is the congruence between intent and behaviour, acting in harmony with values (Covey, 1994). Thus people with integrity walk the talk.

Leader #2 and Teacher #1's stories reflect Bolton's (1987) contention that the lack of effective communication or exposure to poor communication diminishes one's selfhood emotionally and physically. It was the lack of integrity and unethical behaviour in communication from Teacher #1's leader that saw her 'selfhood diminished' to the point she felt no option but to leave her employment in that service. The communication practices exhibited by the leader negated opportunity for team dialogue around critical elements such as team values. Whilst her leader had the words, she lacked the integrity to marry them with her behaviours reflecting their true meaning, “She had the words but she did not walk the talk,

they were only words". The leader lived Bolton's (1987, p. 13), prophecy that "most people do not communicate well".

Talking about somebody and not representing them fairly to others highlighted another aspect of lack of integrity within communication in Leader #2's story. This behaviour suggests it will create some kind of camaraderie or an alliance on an issue. However the opposite occurs, it creates a sense of distrust within the team damaging relationships. In my experience this is not only an issue of integrity but highlights the lack of skill to confront a disagreement or bring an issue to the table for team discussion. The distrust creates more communication issues.

### **Feedback:**

In the research survey over a third of respondents cited lack of feedback as a cause of disharmony, with two thirds citing defensiveness to feedback as a cause. Analysis of the data suggests the lack of feedback and defensiveness are driven by the absence of an understanding of the importance of feedback and the necessary communication skills required in giving essential feedback, as suggested by Leader #3. Teacher #1 and Teacher #3 reaffirmed that feedback was neither timely, nor skilfully managed with the lack of skill damaging peoples mana, they felt blamed and disempowered. The notions of effective interpersonal communication, empowerment and continual improvement are supported by ongoing and pertinent feedback on what people are doing well and what requires modification (Pritchard, 1995). This builds teacher's positive self concept as a capable and competent valued teacher. Ongoing feedback to teachers is as important as vitamins are to the body.

Knowing how to manage and present difficult and sensitive topics, whilst still maintaining the relationships became apparent. One's self-concept created 'blind spots' making it hard for people to give feedback as the other is unable to hear (Goleman, 1998). Leader #1 stated accepting feedback was hard for her because she likes to think she was 'perfect'. Her self-concept and 'blind spot' led her to become defensive and unable to accept feedback unless she thought it was constructive. This further exemplifies that giving and receiving negative feedback is one of the most difficult communications (Goleman, 1998).

Leader #3 and Leader #5 both spoke of how they understood the ‘sting’ of feedback and how it can rock your world. However they recognised that feedback is crucial information if we wish to grow and improve as teachers and as a team. It can be seen that giving and receiving feedback is like walking a tight rope, as the giver you may feel that the feedback is diplomatic and non judgemental, however you never know how it is going to be received and the ensuing consequences on the relationship. Teacher #2 felt that even though they gave feedback in a very open and caring manner, it still wasn’t taken well. How people receive feedback was a source of frustration for Leaders #3 and Teacher #2, as they were acutely aware that feedback is a catalyst growth. Mayer (2014), Glaser (2014) and Goleman (1998) support the finding that feedback is critical for growth. Both survey respondents and interviewees highlighted four barriers that limited feedback for growth. These will now be discussed.

### ***Barrier 1: How feedback is delivered***

The critical factor participants discussed, if feedback was to be successful, was how it was said or delivered, not necessarily what is said. As leader #2 described, “To be open to new ways of thinking or new ideas, it’s not what you say but how you say it that matters”. For Teacher #1 it was the how, being written with no opportunity to discuss her leaders reasoning. Teacher #3 highlighted the impact if the ‘negative’ is always put into light, “it can be disconcerting and disempowering, and you feel you don’t want to contribute”. If the feedback feels judgemental distrust occurs clouding the message and future interactions. A broken relationship is the consequence of feedback not given effectively, or if it’s not perceived in the same way it is given. Participants concurred that skills in giving fair, honest and encouraging feedback is imperative for all team members to develop. Kegan and Lahey (2001) support these findings; it is the way we talk that creates dissonance or change.

### ***Barrier 2: Not enough positive feedback***

Teacher #3 discussed the amount of negative feedback that is given disillusions people and claimed, “There is nothing more rewarding than positive feedback, you can’t get enough ... there is not enough positive feedback on our industry”.

Pritchard (1995) concurs with Teacher #3, in most organisations there is not enough feedback given - unless it is negative.

Leader #3 felt feedback needs to be a balance of positive and constructive for growth. People need to know how they are doing and be affirmed. Positive feedback lets people know how they are performing, filling teacher's emotional bank, increasing relational trust, motivation and optimism (Goleman, 1998).

Feedback is critical for an organisation (or team) that believe in empowerment and self-renewal. People cannot grow and change if they do not receive timely feedback for what they are doing well or what requires change (Pritchard, 1995). The lack of expectation around regular feedback, especially feedback that ignites deep open to learning conversations where people share their thinking, not only limits ones understanding on how they are doing but also fills people with self doubt, as was noted in Leader #4's vignette. Pritchard (1995) warns lack of appropriate feedback can result in stagnation; people feel like they are working in the dark and make the same mistakes over because their minds weren't opened to alternative thinking or ways of doing things.

### ***Barrier 3: Fear***

The purpose of feedback is to provide constructive information to increase self-awareness of both your behaviours and practice (Senge, 1990). However, fear was a concept participant's spoke of that prevented people from engaging in feedback. From experience, Leader #2 believed it was the lack of personal skill that created fear which inhibited team members to be open and honest and say what needed to be said, "People worry about what they can and can't say. The fear is possibly about the consequences". Teacher #3 noted there was a darker side to the fear, validating Leaders #2's notion of potential fear of consequences. As Teacher #3's experiences demonstrated, revenge was sought if you gave constructive feedback:

*They seem to hold a grudge and a week or two later you are dealt with the consequences.*

Leader #3 highlighted the notion of a building a culture of feedback, where positive and constructive feedback was part of embedded practice and valued by team members as a beneficial process. The fear of feedback was reduced. Strong

interpersonal relationship skills was a key element both leader and teacher participants claimed the leader required to be a ‘good leader’ and manage feedback processes. Rodd’s (2006) research on ECE leadership supports this claim; leaders need strong interpersonal skills to lead and guide the team.

#### ***Barrier 4: Trust***

When we trust and experience trust we are more positive, motivated and empowered to accommodate new challenges and open ourselves to new learning (Glaser, 2014). The data indicated trust in your team member is essential if you are going to ‘hear’ feedback in the way it is intended. This is evidenced in Leader #1’s story where her team members thought she was going to give negative feedback. Leaders #2 and #3 and Teacher #2 all concurred that success in feedback was reliant on the trusting and reciprocal relationships they had with team members. They felt when there was trust people were more open. As we have seen above in Barrier 1 how feedback is delivered can either create trust or distrust, with the distrust creating fear. Fear to engage in giving feedback or fear of receiving feedback raises our defensive mechanisms. Skilful feedback enhances relational trust, affording opportunity to understand the meaning others are bringing to the relationship (Goleman, 1998) as was evident in Leader #5’s story where regular feedback, improved relationships, “People are more open and honest, with a willingness to share stories of themselves”. Trust is at the heart of strong harmonious and collegial relationships.

#### **Ladder of perception and selective attention**

Within communication, perception of intent and understanding can distort communication, leaving people talking past ‘each other’ getting the wrong meaning from the communication interlude (Metge, 2001). The data analysis indicates there is a correlation between perception and trust. Leader #1 and Teacher #2’s stories lead to the notion that negative experiences increase people’s hypo-sensitivity to others personalities, behaviours, and communications, where past experience appears to be more influential than the current reality (Senge et al., 1994). As a consequence what emerged was the ‘selective attention’ people gave to events, consciously influenced their anticipation of what might happen in the future, pre-empting emotional, behavioural and attitudinal responses as a protective barrier (McShane & Travaglione, 2007). In Leader #1’s vignette, the

teacher's perceptions, based on past experience, spoke loudly when she claimed, "They expected me to be negative".

Selective attention of past experiences created perceptions that became individuals 'truth', had a big impact on how leaders and teachers read new situations. In Leader #2's story a teacher new to the team had a previous 'bad experience'. Distrust of her new leader was driven by her past experience. It transpired, due to the teacher's vulnerability and 'own truth' about leaders, the more pathways to open communication the new leader created, the stronger the perception that this new leader was intimidating and confronting. The teacher's perception and distrust were so entwined, her 'mental model' built from prior experience, affected how she interpreted her leaders actions, determining how she made sense of the situation and responded (Senge, 1990). Her perception (or mental model) undermined her leader's attempts to seek clarity on what was happening.

Sensitivity to past experience came through very strongly for Teacher #2, particularly around their arrival as a new team member. Anticipation of what might be, resulted in hasty judgement and presumption that they had the same traits as the previous team member, clouding the teams (or individuals) ability to understand them as a new team member. When we can't trust we rely on our own perceptions and interpretations to create our own truth and meaning, as both a protective and defensive mechanism Glaser (2014).

The stories of perception as a cause of disharmony, raises two issues. First one's ability to be reflective and open minded, to look inward and become aware of biases and limitations in thinking. I question is it fear based? Fear of the unknown, fear of what might be, culminating in the fear of what do I do about it. Fear of not knowing how to manage a situation has its roots in a lack of effective communication skills; effective skills to be bold enough to show our vulnerabilities and engage in meaningful dialogue that perhaps exposes this, at the same time creating an opportunity within the team to develop shared understandings between theory espoused by the team and the actual theory in use (Senge, 1990).

The second issue from the data raises the question; are teachers working from predominantly an emotional lens? It appears perceptions created are mostly

gained from emotional events, and consequently their responses are emotional. This suggests that team members are essentially I-centric, working from their “inner state” limiting their ability to being aware of others and their situations, rather than being we-centric that requires a more highly cognitive level to understand the dynamics of working as a team in an ECE environment Glaser (2014).

### **Relationships and Personality**

Survey participants rated personality traits or clashes as the second highest cause of disharmony within ECE teams. Leader #1 and Teacher #2 believe personality is driven from ones upbringing and the values developed from the familial environment. The data suggested personality is interwoven with our attitudes and emotional intelligence and governs patterns of behaviour and our natural reactions to people and events. How we view the other person, build relationships and communicate with each other is dependent on our personality, Leader #5 explained:

*People who are more relational are more accepting of people's personalities and are willing to be committed to building whole team relationship.*

Personality clashes appeared to be most frequent when strong assertive people worked with softer gentle types. The strong and assertive personalities often engaged in what could be termed as ‘power over’ and bullying behaviour. There was a correlation between strong and assertive personalities and an inability to compromise and explore ideas for meaning and understanding, resulting in conflict. As Teacher #3 explained, “It was my way or the highway approach”.

Teacher #1 believed that it is important to understand the varying personality types, knowing the different types increases your understanding of that person and makes a difference to how you communicate and how the communication is received. However Teacher #3 went further to explain that:

*You must also understand what a particular trait looks like in action. The recognition, understanding and making the whole team aware why a particular person behaves in a particular way,*

*enables proactive responses that increases team harmony”, for example, “we all know Sarah’s a ‘square’ so to speak, so you know she is going to find change hard, so how can we get her to a point where she is going to be accepting of this and talk about it openly and honestly, and that way Sarah knows where she’s at.*

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI), an outcome of personality, was an overt theme for Leader #5 and Teacher #1 and from deeper analysis of the data, a discrete theme for many other participants. Leader #5 described EI as, understanding and managing one’s own feelings, working from a rational level as opposed to an emotional level, being open to understanding others and their feelings. Being self-aware, knowing what motivates you, why you think and respond the way you do, as well as knowing your strengths and weaknesses was alluded to by other participants. In referencing personality, Leader #3 believes

*We don’t always understand or appreciate the difference within others, those personalities different from ‘self’ are problematic due to a lack of effective communication skills to explore the differences and thus get a deeper understanding of the person. Instead of leaders taking responsibility for communication it is easier to lay the blame with the other person than reflect on self.*

This suggests that personality conflicts are also driven by the lack of EI and ones inability to understand ‘self’, to take on others perspectives, recognise how ones reactions will impact on the other person and being able to empathetically view a situation from the others lens (Goleman, 1998). Teacher #2 bought up the notion of people being secure or insecure, believing people’s emotional states and timing are critical factors in how people respond, and reinforcing a lack of EI as a factor in team disharmony. Hence, teachers require the fundamentals of emotional intelligence; self-awareness, confidence and skill to engage with the complexity of team relationships.

### **Fixed mindset**

A fixed mindset, not open to change and personal growth, was a personality trait that participants spoke of (Dweck, 2008). Interestingly, Teachers #2 and #3

referenced older leaders as the grouping most 'stuck in their ways and not open to new ideas and research'. Teacher #3 identified that the autocratic mindset from leaders lead to team disharmony, disempowerment, distrust and resistant behaviours. In her research Dweck (2008) found that two thirds of leaders studied had gargantuan egos and were more concerned for their personal greatness through operating on a fixed mindset. She contends these leaders didn't want great teams nor did they want to look at their deficiencies; they wanted to be the big fish so they could feel a cut above the rest. This thinking typifies the closed mindsets and responses participants spoke of, closing communication and limiting collaborative team work. Ultimately these mindsets have an effect on the quality of the service.

Leader #5 saw a fixed mindset as a lack of emotional intelligence, respect for others, diversity and the team. A fixed mindset was mostly in relation resistance to change, new ways of doing things and or taking on new practices in relation to latest research, leaving motivated teachers frustrated and disempowered. Fullan (1993) and Dweck (2008) both acknowledge change is hard; however the ability to identify and recognise one's emotional states and to understand the link between emotions and performance is critical for both leader and followers (Goleman, 1995).

Longevity in position and having always done things "their way", posed a mindset hard to change for Leader #5, who came with high expectations. Resistant behaviours flourished under the new leadership and style, causing self doubt within the leader. This highlights the need for leaders to perhaps have a mentor to reinvigorate confidence that they are on the right path and to keep their resolve of high expectations. Nolan (2007) affirms mentoring can help staff become more comfortable with each other. As one becomes to feel valued self esteem is enhanced.

### **Relationships and Leadership**

The data findings suggest leadership has a critical role in the disharmony, creating either a positive or negative impact. Teacher participants concurred; good leadership understands the importance of relationships and relational practice. All the teacher participants spoke strongly about the need for leaders to know them

well, their strengths, weaknesses and situations. They desired leaders who supported them in their goals, were reflective and open to change. In addition, they believed good leaders need to be confident, professional, have clear expectations and an array of complex interpersonal skills to meet the daily demands of teamwork. Leader #3 focused strongly on leadership, claiming it is the lack of leadership skill that is the root of all team conflict.

### **Factors that impacted on good leadership**

Both leader and teacher participants discussed essential skills they thought leaders required, that impacted on a leader's ability to manage team disharmony. These skills will now be discussed.

### **Conflict resolution**

Conflict appears to be a constant feature within the cultural climate of the service, manifesting in many forms, from petty disputes to aggressive disagreements (Rodd, 2006; Reynolds, 2011). Good leadership is reliant on the leader having well honed effective communication and relationship building skills to navigate the complexity of individuals within the team if they are determined to be an effective leader. Leader #3 acknowledged it was the leader's responsibility to develop the skills if they were lacking, rather than blame team members and or different personalities for their shortcomings. She was adamant:

*Leaders need to have a healthy awareness of the nature of conflict and how to use it to its best effect to enhance communication, team relationships and growth.*

Teacher #1 desired a leader who had clear expectations, was consistent and a strong role model. This positive leader behaviour creates confidence in the leadership, supporting harmony, collaboration and general good will within the team. These findings are consistent with Senge et al. (1999) who believe effective leadership depends on the leader's ability to endure feelings in times of conflict and learn from them instead of reacting with immediate sentiment.

Conflict is often difficult for teams, however Leader #3 deems this is because "conflict is often not seen as a normal part of working within a team". Where conflict was ignored, Leader #3 believed it indicated a lack of skill on the leader's

part, fuelling the team's resentment, confusion, frustration and loss of confidence in their leader. For Teacher #1 it went deeper, because of her experiences she lost respect. Leader #4 theorised it was more than lack of skills:

*People don't want to face any issues they just want it to go away, they don't want to work towards solving a problem; they're probably too tired.*

This suggests the heavy work load on ECE leaders, diminishes their resilience and ability to manage the complexity of relationships.

### **Listening**

Listening skills is key element of effective communication, Teacher #1 also saw it as a key disposition that leaders need to have to enable them to 'hear' and understand their colleagues. Teacher #2 expanded this idea by suggesting that through effective listening, it gave others the impression "people wanted to understand". This gives rise to Senge's (1990) notion that listening needs to be intentional and focused to understand others viewpoints. Teacher #3 highlighted an interesting aspect of effective listening; she reflected that active listening also meant being open to new research.

Listening has a positive effect on relationship building, however time was a critical factor linked to listening. Leaders #4 and #5 claimed there was very little or no time to engage in the vital conversations, this reflected the structure of the day and the complexity and scope of the leader's role. Reflecting on the scope of her position Leader #5 lamented, "Oh the time to have that awesome dialogue that grows those shared understandings".

Leader #4 held similar feelings, "Not having enough time for the teaching team to get together and communicate". However this comment reflects structural barriers such as long teaching hours with little daily collective non contact time, preventing the team from engaging in conversations together.

Learning together starts when we actually listen, however listening isn't easy as we have the noise of life's experience in our heads filtering what we are hearing through our own assumptions, values and limitations in our thinking (Senge, 1990). Leader #3 contends that a leader who has active listening skills will have

an “effective ability to engage in dialogue”. The discipline of listening to learn starts with dialogue, “the capacity to suspend assumptions giving full and unbiased attention to the content” (Senge, 1990, p. 10).

Leader #2 and Teacher #1 raised the concept of being present. For them, being present meant being there physically, mentally and emotionally with the ability to actively listen. There is a deep connection between being present or ‘in tune with’ (Goodfellow, 2008) and effective active listening skills, Active listening requires levels of empathy that can only be gained by being present physically, mentally and emotionally. Teacher #1 commented, “She didn't notice, she wasn't present, being present is being in the time and the space”. This lack of presence clearly impacted on the quality of the interaction, highlighting the lack of connectedness between the two people and the interaction.

### **Values and Expectations**

Values are the bedrock of teamwork, as Teacher #1 described, “They are the glue that keeps us together”. Teacher #2 revealed that values impact on all aspects of team life in an ECE service, especially how the teachers are relationally. Values set the ethical and moral code, Leader #1 expressed, “Values underpin the culture that you want to foster in the service”. The writings of scholars such as Branson (2007), Kouzes and Posner (2012), and Senge (1990), concur with this finding.

There was a difference of opinion on when the values should be developed. Leader #3 thought they should be formed in the early stages of team formation, where as Teacher #1 felt you needed to know the team first and develop relational trust before you can explore deeply the values people hold. Teacher #1's belief is in contention with theorists perceptions on when values should be developed (Branson, 2007; Rodd, 2006; Senge, 1990). The belief is that an authentic and cohesive set of values developed in the early stages of team development sets expectations and the culture desired, enhances the interconnectedness of the team fostering trust, collaboration and collegiality.

However, experiences from Leader #1 and Teacher #2 indicate that getting to the space of interconnectedness and collaboration has its ups and downs as people are driven by their cultural back grounds and values held. It takes astute leadership to

recognise and navigate these differences. Often differences in values reveal themselves over time. To counteract this, Leader #3 asserts that values need to be “Continuously developed over time through dialogue and transcend all conversations to ensure they are shared within the collegial relationships”.

Not all participants witnessed positive role modelling in the way team values were developed and lived. When teacher #1 arrived at her service she found the values had been copied and pasted from books. For her they were words, they were not lived values. Consequently she claimed her leader did not walk the talk.

These actions are in conflict with the practices of a credible leader. Kouzes and Posner (2012) espouse to be a credible leader you have to “first fully comprehend the deeply held values and beliefs that drive you ... consistency between values and actions build credibility” (p.45).

Teacher #2 expressed similar sentiments to Teacher #1. Negative team experiences where values were not lived values drew them to the conclusion that values needed to be written down as formal documentation:

*It's so important that accountability is kept to those things, so if everybody accepts those things then there's permission for anyone to be made accountable.*

The writings of Branson (2007), Kouzes and Posner (2012), Senge (1990), Mayer (2014), McShane and Travaglione (2007), Rodd (2006), Waniganayaki et al. (2012) and Goleman et al. (2013) would suggest that such disharmony as already discussed in this writing can be attributed to a lack of or misalignment of values. Services where there are misaligned values struggle with relationships, decision making and being open to and managing change. Leaders living the espoused values act morally, ethically, and justly, being accountable to those they serve (Branson, 2007).

### **Leadership Emotional Intelligence**

Team work is posited in the notion of ‘we’. However data reveals that this is not always how teachers see their leaders behave. Teacher #1’s perspective indicated that leaders felt the need to be competitive, wanting to stand apart from teachers. When teachers excelled, leaders reactions took on a jealous tone. The ‘we’ of

team work is about celebrating each other's strengths, believing in the idea that we can't be good at all things, hence the collaborative nature of a harmonious team. One would expect leaders to be role models celebrating the positive outcomes of the team unit. The findings illustrate a lack of emotional self-awareness and self control (Goleman, 1998), indicating leaders were not always able to control their impulses and respond in a leaderful way. For Teacher #1 in place of acknowledgement and encouragement for strengths, judgemental behaviours prevailed to keep teachers 'in check', eroding their spirits, pride and satisfaction in their work. The tragedy of this is that teachers look to their leaders for support, to "be noticed and not judged" as well as an expectation that their leader is there for them, not for "self" needs (Teacher #1).

### **Attitude, Change and Power**

The most disturbing finding from the data analysis was negative attitudes of leaders that manifested in entrenched authority and control, often resulting in bullying behaviour by owner/managers, service leaders and older long serving teachers. Teacher #3 spoke of service owner/managers engaging in bullying and power over tactics when the team requested change, particularly if they were changes to the functioning of the service that included teacher's rights. When requested to make change, responses were to the effect of, "it's my way or the highway". Sometimes agreements would be made, however they were never followed through into action.

Leader #4's experiences of attitude, change and power took on a differing aspect; her experiences were driven by the new right neoliberal trends of education as a business - publically funded and privately provided (Duhn, 2010). A business approach negated the human factor and excluded teachers from decision making in the change processes. A lack of empathy and an ineffective transition of change saw high stress levels and resignations from staff as changes were implemented without consultation, to meet the demands of a business model. There appeared to be little cognisance of the relational dimension of ECE, that is expected of teams, leaders and owners. In situations like this, where managers, leaders and teams are powerless, gives people the feeling of 'done to' as opposed to 'done with'.

Leaders attitudes of 'I know it all' built barriers between them and teachers who wanted to be innovative and engage in best practice. Leader #4, Teacher's #2 and #3 spoke of a pervading 'power over' attitude they had experienced from some leaders and older teachers toward newly trained teachers. The attitude of 'I know more than you' kept people in their place, especially newly trained teachers full of enthusiasm, latest theory and practice. When questioning aspects of practice or making suggestions to improve practice, new teachers were rebuffed with comments like, 'we've known that for years' or 'we don't do that here'. Teacher #3 felt that if you responded with constructive feedback you paid for it later.

These behaviours suggest five differing theories. First, ego and arrogance gets in the way of rational relational behaviour, creating dissonance between employer/leader and teachers, leaving them negative, resentful and feeling they have no place to contribute (Goleman et al., 2013). This behaviour suggests a lack of emotional intelligence and such rebuffs were a mechanism to hide their own inadequacies (Goleman, 1998). Second, their leadership is not guided by a compelling vision underpinned by clear values that are the foundation of a harmonious team. They are leading without moral purpose; the espoused values are not the lived values (Branson, 2007). Third, the lack of essential communication skills to actively listen and engage in dialogue, that creates joint understandings (Senge, 1990). Fourth, their personality is just plain awkward (possibly due to low EI). Fifth, is it the effects of tiredness and exhaustion bought on by the rigours of the demanding role as suggested by Leader #4?

What was highlighted in the data was teachers want managers, leaders and colleagues to act morally and professionally, be relational, open to new ideas and have a happy place to work in. Given the stories told, ineffective communication skills blended with a resistance to change appears to incite bullying and power over behaviours.

One has to question the motives of power, is it really about change and communication skills or it is an entrenched arrogance, low trust, and a lack of relational understanding that is required for collaborative and harmonious teamwork. These affective behavioural attitudes (Oreg, 2007) are anti the caring

ethos ECE holds. Good teamwork is based on trust, respect and collaboration, where teachers trust power will not be exploited (Sergiovanni, 1984, p13).

### **Strategies used to restore harmony**

Both leader and teacher participants engaged in an range of strategies to restore and maintain harmony, collegiality and collaboration within the team, the most common strategy used was open to learning conversations.

**Table 2: Strategies used to restore harmony**

Strategy	Descriptor	Outcome
Open to learning conversations	Conversations focused on learning about what people think and why judgments are made about what is happening, why and what to do about it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A change in leadership enactment</li> <li>• Ability to check and improve the quality of thinking and decision making, debate and co-construction within the team.</li> <li>• Has built harmony, trust and confidence within the team.</li> <li>• Shared growing of knowledge has changed team.</li> <li>• Team's emotional intelligence has been raised.</li> </ul>
Fish Philosophy	Team commitment through four central ideas; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choosing your attitude,</li> <li>• playing at work,</li> <li>• making someone's day, and</li> <li>• being present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved communication in teamwork, raising team harmony, collaboration and collegiality.</li> </ul>
Understanding personalities	Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholy and Phlegmatic, how they take on and process information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding these personality types brought out the best in relationships.</li> </ul>
Professional facilitation	Neutral facilitator working team through issues. Support for professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported trust and dialogue - positive change occurred quickly.</li> <li>• United front from team, centre owner and community.</li> </ul>
Philosophy development	Development of a set of values the team lives and works by.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helped understand the individual, their culture and personal philosophy.</li> <li>• Supported the team in understanding what the team values looked like in practice.</li> </ul>
Building relationships	Building relationships so team have respect for your opinion through clear communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team has clear expectations and confidence in leader</li> </ul>

### **Open to learning conversations**

Open to learning conversations are those in which we are 'open to learning' about the quality of thinking and information that we use when making judgments about what is happening, why and what to do about it. They are conversations where participants remain open to learning about the validity of each other's point of view (Hargreaves & Robinson, 2011). This process of inquiry into practice through dialogue, unpacks an individual's ladder of inference as assumptions are

probed and tested for accuracy through questioning that delves deeply into what and why you think the way you do, with the interpretation of the data creating joint understandings and decisions. The process is founded on trust, respect for self and others, in the joint pursuit of realising valid information with the end product being an internal commitment of decisions made (Hargreaves & Robinson, 2011).

### ***Outcomes***

Leader #1 believes understanding the tool of open to learning conversations has supported a transformative change in her concept of leadership enactment. Prior to this learning she had an autocratic mindset which caused friction with her team. It has given her the means to move from a power base to a respect base, by developing the understanding that leadership and communication is about understanding the other person. The power of this tool is that it allows both parties to clarify and understand the issue or point, enabling them to come to a shared understanding about ways they could move forward.

From Leader #3's perspective, open to learning conversations has enabled her ways to check and improve the quality of thinking and decision making, debate and co-construction within the team. This tool has given her an objective framework which supports her to deal with difficult situations in a respectful manner. The teams learning capacity has been enhanced through their ability to detect, listen, and challenge their own and each other's views as well as invite consideration of alternative views.

Leader #5 led her team through a rigorous team process to develop an understanding of open to learning conversations and their application to their everyday work. She believes this process has resulted in three critical outcomes. First, harmony within the team has enabled them to build trust and confidence to engage openly and honestly. Second, the growth in confidence has strengthened team commitment, where shared understandings and the shared growing of knowledge has changed people. Third, the team's emotional intelligence has been raised and people are more readily moving from fixed mindsets, to openness to change. There is minimal conflict or disharmony as the team communicate well. The writings of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest these outcomes contribute

to raising the professional capital of the team as they constantly improve the quality practice through the collective engagement and shared understandings.

### **Fish philosophy**

Teacher #3 has used the 'Fish Philosophy' with great effect to build a culture of collaboration and collegiality. Fish philosophy is a platform to bring renewed energy and commitment to a team work through four central ideas:

- choosing your attitude,
- playing at work,
- making someone's day, and
- being present.

The outcomes of these practices is to provide an amazing service by building a culture where teams want to give the best and build effective leaders who inspire by example, improve teamwork and build trust. The fish philosophy focuses on harmony, collaboration and collegiality within the team.

### ***Outcomes***

Key outcomes for Teacher #3, when she implemented this strategy in a leadership position were; it opened the door to clear communication, the team got a clear sense of why they were there and the goals they were working toward. People's strengths were more readily used giving a feeling of equal partnership within the team fostering their wellbeing and belonging. The team felt respected in their input and ideas they brought for discussion, it put fun and enjoyment back into the working environment. A "give it a go" attitude prevailed breaking down the barriers to the fear of change. It provided the team the skills and dispositions to be critical thinkers.

### **Understanding Personality Types**

Personality and personality traits rated highly as a cause of disharmony, both Teachers #1 and #2, had considerable knowledge and experience in understanding personality types from the work of Littauer and Sweet (2011) who have created personality types, based on the four personalities according to Hippocrates (ca.400 BC), Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholy and Phlegmatic. Understanding these four personality types and their temperaments gave Teachers #1 and #2 insights into

how the different temperaments take on and process information, giving them the ability to choose the right response. The understanding of how individual team members acted and reacted minimised team disharmony.

### ***Outcomes***

With an understanding of personality types, Teacher #2, has witnessed leaders think about their communication, for example they may respond more sensitively to the melancholic type who can be deep and thoughtful, but negative and often depressed. Knowing these types has encouraged Teacher #2 to be reflective before communication, thus, increasing the flow and understanding of the interaction. Teacher #1 felt similarly, knowing the personality types, gave her insight in how to bring out the best for the relationships.

### **Professional Facilitation**

Professional facilitation was used by leaders for two main reasons. First, when there was team disharmony. Leader #2 felt professional facilitators offer a neutral and objective lens as they are not emotionally involved with the team and the ensuing disharmony. The process provided the means for people to articulate what they were thinking and why, uncovering the roots of the disharmony. Second, the process secured professional learning for the whole team.

### ***Outcomes***

For Leader #2 the outcome of professional facilitation in a time of disharmony resulted in a team commitment to start trusting and talking. Changes happened rapidly, with relationships strengthening to the place where there is a lot of support for each other and respect for each other's knowledge and abilities.

Leader #4 has used professional facilitation for both disharmony and whole team professional learning. She employed the services of a professional facilitator to support the development of a teaching philosophy and values. The team, service owner and the community all had differing opinions. The facilitated programme, over twelve weeks, resulted in a united front from the team, service owner and community. They were in agreement on the philosophy and values they would live and work by. Leader #4 claimed, "The team now really understand each other ... the team and service owner have been able to reach a compromise on different aspects". As a strong advocate for whole team learning, Leader #4 believes it

keeps the team in harmony, opens them to new thinking and creates the space for dialogue on the individual ideas gained. Joint work has led to a strengthening of teamwork, with the team up to date with current theory and practice. There is more team flexibility, they have moved away from rigid routines and rosters. (See example below, facilitation of philosophy, for further outcomes).

### **Philosophy and values**

To minimise team disharmony and support clear expectations a range of participants saw a set of shared values was the “glue” that supported teams to be harmonious and connected. Values are the foundation of the culture and tone of the service the leader wants to foster, giving the team clear ethical and moral guidelines for the behaviour required to meet expectations of teamwork. To ensure they are lived values as opposed to espoused values Leader #3 keeps them “alive” by continuously developing and understanding them on a daily basis through dialogue.

Leader #4 used induction as a strategy to make sure that new team members “know what the service philosophy is, what the expectations are of the service and the other staff working there”.

### ***Outcomes***

For Leader #4, shared values developed over time through a facilitated process supported an understanding of the individual differences within the team. For her, facilitation of shared values helped in understanding each other’s personalities rising from individual philosophies developed from their culture and how they were raised.

Outcomes of induction enabled the new team member understand the values and culture of the service. Furthermore, the process enabled the new team member and the existing team to understand each other, their qualities, strengths and weaknesses, all of which supported collaborative teamwork.

Success for Leader #5 lay in the unpacking of the value language so that there was joint understanding on what the value words meant in practice. Having a clear set of values also offered a platform to revisit and reopen the dialogue when behaviour did not match the values.

## **Building relationships**

As described in the introduction relationships are at the heart of ECE teamwork. To counter the negative effects of feedback, Leader #2's key strategy was to "build a relationship so that they have respect for your opinion". She felt knowing your team and what they value in terms of relationships, such as, effective communications skills, showing appreciation and respect, all go toward building the relationship. To counter the possible effects of feedback she subscribes to the sandwich philosophy which she describes as:

*You give a little bit of positive feedback, and then you might put a bit of constructive feedback but you finish on a high, I really like the way you, I think maybe have you thought about looking at this, but you know overall I actually think what happened the other day was really cool, I love the way you etc so you know there's a sandwich, so you're putting it in there, some people might think that's PC (politically correct) but you know it's like you do, you have to know your teachers, I mean some people you need to be quite direct because that's what they like, and other people are a bit sensitive you know you might use a different approach.*

## **Outcomes**

Team members are open to this approach and able to receive feedback without getting defensive. They know what's going well and what needs further understanding and or learning. The team have clear expectations and confidence in their leader that she knows what she is doing.

## **Future Directions and Further Study**

This study has highlighted multiple perceptions of team disharmony, which together demonstrate the complexity of team teaching in ECE services. This complexity needs more extrapolation through research, to understand the tensions and influences of a full time teaching leader, who is also the centre manager, and the structural barriers that prevent teams having collective time to plan, inquire and discuss pertinent pedagogical and philosophical matters. Studies indicate that time for "joint work" raises the social and professional capital of the team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rosenholtz, 1989). Healy (2006) endorses research

of this nature is timely in order to determine the impact of government policy and the implications on teachers working conditions and effective ECE in New Zealand (p. 121).

I suggest the disharmony within ECE is partly created by the past actions of cutting significant professional learning money from budgets and empty promises of the current government to focus on leadership programmes within ECE. Leadership programmes in the primary and secondary sectors have proved to be successful (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). If ECE was afforded the same opportunity, leaders in the sector would be more prepared and supported for the demands of the complex and varied role.

I further suggest that teachers new to the profession are discouraged from taking on formal leadership roles until they have attained full teacher registration status and have had several years of practice to hone their skills and understand the complexity of leadership in ECE. Without the necessary leadership skills, disharmony within teams is compounded. Previous research has indicated that the practice of graduates taking on, or being pressured to take on leadership positions too soon, may be repelling teachers from leadership roles (Thornton et al., 2009). ECE needs strong talented pedagogical leaders to maintain the quality of ECE services in the current competitive and accountable climate. Support for this is vital to maintain quality outcomes for children.

This research suggests lack of self-awareness and emotional intelligence impacts on teamwork. There seems to be a distinct tension between what sound literature professes and what actually happens in teams. If teams are engaging with the literature, what are the barriers for implementing strategies put forward that increase self-awareness and emotional intelligence? Further research, exploring how leaders and teachers build self-awareness skills and emotional intelligence within teams, would be useful for the sector as understanding self and others is a key to responsive and reciprocal relationships.

## **Conclusion**

This research has attempted to identify contributing factors to team disharmony in early childhood education (ECE) services which are dominated by women leading women. The team teaching nature of ECE requires teams to work collaboratively

and collegially for the benefit of children's learning and team unity. However despite the fact that research contends women in leadership work from an ethic of care and democracy, this research suggests this is not always the case.

Relational trust has been highlighted in both the research and the literature review as the critical thread that connects individuals within teams. Without high levels of relational trust between all partners of a service, whether they are the owner/operator and team or service manager/ leader and the team, disharmony will pervade the service. Defensive behaviours will increase, replacing collaboration and collegiality with a culture of blame, suspicion and manipulation.

This research contends that poor leadership and the intricacies of ineffective communication and emotional intelligence were also major contributors to team disharmony. A dark side of leadership was indicated where a lack of self-awareness and leadership skill resulted in narcissistic type behaviour, which lead to teachers failing to thrive as they felt undervalued, belittled and disillusioned.

This small scale research is not indicative of the whole sector, however other research supports the findings that disharmony in ECE services is frequent (Cardno & Reynolds, 2009; Hard, 2005; Reynolds 2011). There is a myriad of generic research on effective leadership and teamwork; though this is not early childhood specific. Regardless, given the perceived contributing factors to team disharmony identified in this research, there appears to be a lack of connection between literature on best practice in leadership and team work and the practices in ECE services. This gives rise to the question; is there congruence between disharmony and the under conceptualisation of leadership in ECE (Thornton et al., 2009), the lack of understanding of moral values based leadership and team work, and the paucity of leadership training ECE specific?

The research and the literature indicate leadership is the critical factor of team harmony, with relational trust within the team the essential element that connects individuals. However, this begins with a self-aware leader, who possesses a positive attitude, effective communication knowledge and the skills/ability to develop a collective vision, mission and values that underpin the culture and work of the service.

This research has highlighted the benefit of pertinent team professional learning within a collaborative culture. The power of the collaborative culture, where teams plan, inquire and enact together, is empowering for individuals and teams. Through cooperation, teams are able to be adaptable, flexible and creative, with the ability to debate and discover new ideas enabling innovation. The social and emotional intelligence of the team is raised by the collaborative learning.

However this research highlights there is real challenge for collaborative learning to occur, especially for long day services where teachers may be in contact time with children for eight hours a day. For these services collective non contact time may only occur once a fortnight after work hours. Most of this time is taken up with managerial tasks. If the collective time was to focus on learning and inquiry, with an emphasis on relationships and the services high priority philosophical goals, teams may experience fewer episodes of disharmony.

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX A - Survey questions:

1. What is your role Leader/Teacher?
2. Please rate team disharmony you have experienced.
  - a. Disharmony resolved through open dialogue
  - b. Disharmony resolved with support
  - c. Disharmony developed or continued despite the use of effective communication strategies
  - d. Disharmony dominated teamwork
  - e. Disharmony: caused a complete breakdown in relationships
3. What do you think caused the disharmony, (you may select more than one)
  - Communication
    - Lack of ongoing feedback
    - Defensiveness when receiving feedback
  - Leadership
    - Lack of clear vision
    - Lack of clear values the team hold and work by
  - Personality difficulties
  - Other Please describe
4. What successful strategies did you use to re-culture the team to a state of collegiality and collaboration?
5. Why do you think they were successful?
6. What strategies were unsuccessful?
7. Why do you think they were unsuccessful?
8. What professional learning has the team undertaken to improve teamwork?
9. Describe the impact (positive or negative) that professional learning had on team disharmony.
10. As an individual describe the personal professional learning that has informed your practice to create a harmonious working environment.
11. If you would like to participate further in this research by engaging in a semi-structured face to face interview, please add your email address here:

## **APPENDIX B - Guiding questions for semi-structured interview**

1. In teaching team relationships you have experienced, what do you see as the barrier(s) to effective communication that prevent working effectively with others
2. In Te Whāriki feedback is an integral element of communication, however, in the survey defensiveness when receiving feedback rated highly as a cause of team disharmony. Can you share what experiences you have had in your work place as a giver and receiver of feedback?
3. I got a sense from head teacher respondents to the survey that personality plays a big role in team disharmony, from your experience what aspects of 'personality' or personality traits contribute to team disharmony?
4. The survey indicates that a lack of clear values that the team hold and work by, strongly contribute to team disharmony. From a leaders perspective what are the barriers in developing and then living the shared values of the team?
5. The survey noted seven potential sources of team disharmony, communication, leadership, personality, lack of feedback, defensiveness when receiving feedback, lack of clear vision and values. From your experience are there any other source of team disharmony have you experienced or heard about?
6. As a leader what Professional Learning have you engaged in to develop your leadership skills? Was any of this inclusive of the potential factors of disharmony noted in the survey?
7. From the survey I got a sense that disharmony tends to get ignored – hoping it will resolve itself – why do you think this is?

## **APPENDIX C - On line survey information**

Online survey information sheet and invitation to participate in online survey

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

Kia ora,

My name is Annette Sheehy and this year I am undertaking study for my Masters of Educational Leadership Thesis through the University of Waikato. I am excited to be embarking on this research and I believe the content of the study will be relevant and of interest to all those who work in early childhood education.

You have received this email and invitation to participate in an anonymous online survey via the New Zealand Education Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI), who has randomly selected 25 head teachers and 25 teachers on my behalf. The random selection via NZEI is to keep your identity anonymous.

This letter provides you with some information about the intent and how the research will be carried out, and an invitation for you to complete an anonymous online survey. I am also seeking participants to be involved in an interview up to one hour in length. At the end of the survey there will be an opportunity for you to submit your email address, should you wish to be involved further in this exciting research.

**Research Purpose:** To investigate the underlying causes of team disharmony in early childhood centres first hand, seeking teachers and head teachers perspectives on the causes and success (or not) of actions taken to ameliorate the situation.

**Research background and interest:** Early childhood teachers are positioned as a professional group who, unlike other education sectors, team teach in the one open environment. Early childhood teaching in New Zealand requires teachers to engage as professionals in caring and nurturing relationships, and work as a unified and collaborative team (Thornton &

Wansborough, 2012), for the benefit of children's learning and their families (Thomas, 2012).

As a leader in a multi centre early childhood service, working with team disharmony is an ongoing and sensitive part of my role. There is a abundance of research and literature on what constitutes good leadership and effective team work in ECE services (Rodd 2006, Thornton & Wansborough, 2011), however there is a dearth of research from teachers perspectives, on what actually causes team disharmony and what ECE service leaders actually do to ameliorate the situation, re-culture the professional relationships and restore collaborative team work (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). For some teams this literature seems to have little effect on the team and how it operates. My interest is to seek teachers and head teachers perspectives first hand, on the causes, strategies that leaders used that were both successful and unsuccessful and why, in an effort to re-culture the team to one of collaboration and harmony. If there is a disjunction between practice and espoused theory, what is it?

**Research Question:** When an ECE team become professionally estranged how do leaders re-culture professional relationships in order to restore collaborative and collegial teamwork?

**Data Gathering:**

Data gathering for the research will be twofold:

An anonymous survey using survey monkey, to get a broad understanding of causation of team disharmony and the range of strategies used to re-culture the team. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

Up to an hour long interview (for those who self nominate to participate in the interview), exploring themes that arose from the survey.

Information gained from the survey and interviews will be used in the following ways:

- Completion of Masters Thesis
- Inform the researchers own work
- Presentations at conferences

- Workshops
- Journal articles in relevant publications

The outcomes of the study can be accessed through Research Commons University of Waikato in late 2015.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

All survey participants are guaranteed of anonymity as the researcher will not know who has received the survey.

For those who are selected for the interview, a process of informed consent will be undertaken, to ensure interview participants have full understanding of what they are agreeing to and their rights within the research process.

This project has been given the approval by The University of Waikato Ethics Committee.

I am thrilled to be finally at the point where I am able to carry out this research and hope that you will share my enthusiasm by considering and completing this survey.

Many thanks. I appreciate your support and involvement in my research. Please click on the link below and follow the prompts.

Survey monkey link

Annette Sheehy

### **APPENDIX D - Initial response to participation via survey**

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings

Kia ora,

Thank you for responding to my request to participate in the research interview up to one hour long. I am very excited to be at this stage of my research project and look forward to meeting you in the near future

Can you please send me the following details.

Name:

Phone:

To enable me to seek permission from your employer can you please supply the following details:

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Once I have permission I will contact you with full information about the next phase and seek your signed consent to participate in the research interview. This will include your rights as a participant. Once this is completed we can set a time and venue suitable to you in which to conduct the interview.

Kind regards

Annette Sheehy

## **APPENDIX E - Employer Information and Consent**

Research project: United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

Kia ora,

My name is Annette Sheehy and I am currently under taking my masters thesis as part of the programme to obtain a Masters of Educational Leadership through the University of Waikato.

### **Research Purpose:**

To investigate the contributing factors to team disharmony in early childhood centres first hand, seeking teachers and head teacher's perspectives on the contributing factors to team disharmony and outcome of strategies taken to ameliorate the situation.

### **Research background and interest:**

As an education leader in a multi centre early childhood service (ECE), working with team disharmony is an ongoing and sensitive part of my role. There is an abundance of research and literature on what constitutes good leadership and effective team. However there is a dearth of research from ECE teachers perspectives, on what actually contributes to team disharmony and what ECE service leaders actually do to ameliorate the situation. My interest is to seek teachers and head teacher's perspectives first hand, on contributing factors to disharmony and the successful strategies leaders used in re-culturing the team to one of collaboration and harmony.

### **Anonymity/ Confidentiality**

To protect participants against possible risk, the participants will have the right to anonymity. Pseudonyms will replace the real names of the participants throughout the research, in the final document and any associated publications or conference dissemination. The research will not name the geographic area or the name of the centre's that participants are from.

Whilst participant's identities will be protected, the data shared will not remain confidential as it will be used in the following ways:

- Completion of masters thesis
- Inform the researchers own work
- Presentations at conferences
- Workshops
- Journal articles in relevant publications

**Data Gathering and storage:**

Participants will engage in up to an hour long audio recorded interview exploring themes that arose from the initial anonymous survey.

The audio data will be stored on a password protected computer. Any identifying data from consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home.

**Research Associates:**

I (Annette Sheehy), will hold the role of research investigator under the supervision of Dr Bill Ussher – chairperson of Professional Studies in Education department. The research has been given approval by The University of Waikato Ethics Committee.

Contact details:

Annette Sheehy

Dr Bill Ussher

0275675726

0274869169

[annettesheehy1954@gmail.com](mailto:annettesheehy1954@gmail.com)

[bussher@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:bussher@waikato.ac.nz)

Ngā mihi, and thank you for considering this request

Annette Sheehy

Masters Student, University of Waikato

## **Employer Consent**

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

I have read the information and fully understand what it means for my employee to participate in the research interview and therefore give the researcher, Annette Sheehy, permission to proceed with interviewing my employee.

Signed.....Date.....

## **APPENDIX F - Information Sheet for Teacher Interviews**

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

Kia ora.....

Thank you for responding to my request to participate in the interview phase for my research project via the anonymous survey.

As explained in my covering information for the survey the research purpose is to investigate the contributing factors to team disharmony in early childhood centres first hand, seeking teachers and head teacher's perspectives on the sources and outcome of strategies taken to ameliorate the situation.

### **Associates:**

I (Annette Sheehy) will hold the role of research investigator under the supervision of Dr Bill Ussher – chairperson of Professional Studies in Education department. The research has been given approval by The University of Waikato Ethics Committee.

Contact details:

Annette Sheehy            0275675726    [annettesheehy1954@gmail.com](mailto:annettesheehy1954@gmail.com)

Dr Bill Ussher            0274869169    [bussher@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:bussher@waikato.ac.nz)

### **Research Question:**

When an ECE team become professionally estranged how do leaders successfully re-culture professional relationships in order to restore collaboration and collegial teamwork?

### **Participant Involvement:**

Participants will engage in a semi-structured audio-recorded face to face interview that should take no longer than one hour to share their experiences of working in an environment of team disharmony and steps they took /or the leader took to ameliorate the situation to re-culture the team to a space of collaboration and

collegiality. The interview questions will be based on the themes highlighted in the survey.

Participants will be requested to sign a consent form (see attachment: Consent form for Interview participants) which outlines that you understand the details of the research, your right to withdraw at any time and agree to the information and conditions set within this information sheet. Participants will have this information restated and open to questions at the beginning of the interview process to ensure participants have a full understanding of what they are agreeing to and their rights within the research process.

Participants will have the opportunity to check transcripts of their interview for accuracy and clarify or elaborate on points made if desired.

Each participant will sign off their transcript when s/he is satisfied that the transcript truly reflects her/his thinking.

The key questions that will create the frame work for the interview (*derived from themes apparent in the survey*) will be sent to the participants prior to the interview for reflection and consideration.

### **Participant data and Material**

Recorded interviews will be kept on a password protected computer. Interview transcriptions will carry pseudonyms to protect participant's identities. Any identifying data, such as consent forms, will be stored in a locked drawer at the researcher's home office. The data will be held securely for five years. Access to the data will be restricted to the researcher and her supervisor.

The researcher (Annette Sheehy) will own the data gathered and the interpretation of the data, the final thesis and any scholarly publications and/or presentations that arise from it. The research findings will be used in such a way that it respects the rights of the research participants.

Participants have the right to decline to participate in the research interview and will in no way be disadvantaged by declining. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime and the right to withdraw their data up until

they have approved their transcripts by contacting the researcher and specifying the withdrawal.

On completion, each participant will be offered an electronic version of the final document. The outcomes of the study can be accessed through Research Commons, University of Waikato.

### **Anonymity/ Confidentiality**

Participants will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms to ensure any judgments made about team disharmony does not negatively impact on them as a person or as a professional. The geographic location and centre's participants belong to will not be named to eliminate participants' risk of being recognized and to maintain anonymity of the centre's they are employed in.

While participant's identities will be protected, the data shared cannot remain confidential as the information gained from this research will be used in the following ways:

- Completion of masters thesis
- Inform the researchers own work
- Presentations at conferences
- Work shops
- Journal articles in relevant publication

Nga mihi and thank you for your participation.

Annette Sheehy

**APPENDIX G - Teacher consent to participate in semi-structured interview**

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

I, (please print your name).....have read and fully understand the information and conditions set within the information sheet and what it means to be involved in the research interview.

I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I may withdraw, totally, or partially at any time.

I accept that information generated during this project will belong to Annette Sheehy as researcher, and will be retained securely and anonymously after the research is completed and archived for five years as per *University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008*.

Accordingly, I am willing to participate in this research project and have my interview audio recorded.

Signed..... Date.....

Name.....Preferred pseudonym.....

Email/postal address.....

(For final report)

**APPENDIX H - Consent for employees in my organisation**

**Research project:** United we stand: An exploration of team re-culturing in early childhood education settings.

I, (please print your name).....have read and fully understand the information and conditions set within the information sheet and what it means to be involved in the research interview.

I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I may withdraw, totally, or partially at any time.

I accept that information generated during this project will belong to Annette Sheehy as researcher, and will be retained securely and anonymously after the research is completed and archived for five years as per *University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008*.

I understand that information gained in the interview will remain confidential to the researcher and her supervisor and will not be used against me in the future. However if there is a disclosure that involves risk or harm to a child or teacher, then the code of conduct for the Tauranga Regional Kindergartens will prevail.

Accordingly, I am willing to participate in this research project and have my interview audio recorded.

Signed..... Date.....

Name.....Preferred  
pseudonym.....

Email/postal address.....

(For final report)