

Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding young children's leadership: A comparison between New Zealand and Honduras

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Abstract

Young children's leadership is an under-researched area. This article reports how teachers of 4 and 5 year old children in New Zealand and Honduras conceptualise and encourage children's leadership. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations of teaching practice. The findings suggest that there are differences between New Zealand and Honduran teachers' beliefs and practices regarding children's leadership. While teachers in New Zealand settings encouraged leadership by empowering children to assume leadership roles, teachers in the Honduran settings allocated leadership opportunities. In addition, New Zealand teachers viewed young leaders as sharing leadership and leading their learning, whereas Honduran teachers viewed them as influencing peers. These findings may encourage teachers to reflect on how their beliefs regarding children's leadership guide their teaching practice.

Keywords: *Children's leadership; teacher beliefs and practices; early childhood education*

Introduction

The encouragement of young children's leadership has the potential to lay a foundation for their future leadership capacity. Karnes and Stephens (1999) suggested that fostering leadership skills, such as self-awareness and problem solving, can help prepare children to influence change in their communities later in life. Several authors have argued that leadership development should start as early as preschool (Bisland, 2004; Karnes & Stephens, 1999), and the important role of early childhood teachers in nurturing children's leadership skills has been promoted (Owen, 2007). This article highlights ways in which teachers' beliefs and practices contribute to supporting leadership in young children in two different contexts. A comparison between teachers of 4 and 5 year old children in New Zealand and Honduras enabled the researchers to look at similarities and differences between these two countries, in order to have a better understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding children's leadership. Such comparisons can broaden our understanding of leadership (Puroila, Sarvela-Pikkaraine & Melnik, 2002). The first author, who is Honduran and has taught in the Honduran early childhood sector, carried out initial research for this article. The article begins with an explanation of the two contexts, followed by a review of relevant literature and an explanation of the study methodology. The study findings are then presented and differences and similarities between teacher beliefs and practices in the two countries discussed. The article concludes with implications for teacher practice and study limitations.

Context of the study

New Zealand and Honduras were chosen to compare teacher beliefs and practices about children's leadership. The first author, while studying in New Zealand, had the opportunity to visit early childhood education (ECE) centres and observe how teachers encouraged children's leadership through play. Her experience as an early childhood teacher in Honduras was that children's leadership was encouraged in different ways in that context.

On the one hand, The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education [NZMOE], 1996) is a child-centred play-based curriculum centred on four principles: holistic

development, empowerment, family and community, and relationships. This 1996 version of *Te Whāriki* was in use at the time of the research, rather than the later 2017 edition. *Te Whāriki* emphasises “the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things” (NZMOE, 1996, p. 9). It provides examples of teachers encouraging capabilities such as communication, decision-making, expression of ideas, and relationship building. These capabilities have been suggested in previous studies (Fu, 1979; Lee, Recchia & Shin, 2005) as characteristics of young leaders.

On the other hand, the Honduran Ministry of Education Early Childhood Curriculum, *Curriculo Nacional de Educación Prebásica* (CNPB) (Secretaría de Educación de Honduras [SEH], 2001) is a teacher-based curriculum, mainly focused on encouraging academic skills in children. Ten of its 14 objectives are to develop competencies in subjects such as maths and science. The remaining four main objectives include encouraging autonomy, self-esteem, communication, and problem solving, which have also been identified in previous literature as examples of leadership skills. The CNPB is more prescriptive than *Te Whāriki* and includes examples of games and activities teachers could organise in order to encourage these skills. Furthermore, the CNPB includes a time for self-choice play called “play-work time” when children play at “centres of learning”, such as art and science.

Review of literature

Children's leadership

Although studies of children's leadership were carried out as early as the 1930s, there is still a scarcity of research related to this topic (Mawson, 2011). Some early studies defined children's leadership as a series of individual attributes such as independence (Parten, 1933), being communicative (Fu, 1979), initiating and inspiring play (Hatch, 1990), and having cognitive abilities and a high level of social awareness (Fu, 1979). More recent research has described children's leadership as a relational construct (Shin, Recchia, Lee, Lee & Mullarkey, 2004), which may involve relationships with both peers and teachers. Mawson's (2011) research focusing on leadership during children's collaborative play in New Zealand ECE settings, found that there were gender differences in how boys and girls demonstrated leadership and that children's leadership was influenced by both cultural and contextual factors.

A study conducted in a New Zealand ECE service, Te Kōpae Piripono, (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha & the whānau of Te Kōpae Piripino, 2008) identified children's leadership alongside that of teachers and whānau. These authors suggested that leadership can be viewed according to four responsibilities: having responsibility; being responsible; taking responsibility and sharing responsibility. Having responsibility relates to having designated roles and positions of responsibility; being responsible is acting ethically and appropriately; taking responsibility is about having a go and trying new things; and sharing responsibility is about relationships, sharing power and assisting others (Tamati et al., 2008, p. 26). Evidence of children's leadership is provided within The Four Responsibilities framework, which has the potential to facilitate a broader exploration of children's leadership. This framework formed the initial conceptualisation of children's leadership in this study.

Teaching beliefs and practices related to children's leadership

There appears to be limited research focusing on teachers' beliefs regarding children's leadership. Two exceptions are studies conducted by Mullarkey, Recchia, Lee, Shin and Lee (2005) and Owen (2007). Mullarkey et al. researched teachers' perceptions regarding classroom leadership in a university-affiliated centre in the United States that provided childcare service for children between 6 months and 5 years of age.

These authors found that while teachers began describing leaders as having pro-social characteristics such as independence, initiation of play, and willingness to take risks, they encountered dilemmas when encouraging leadership. For example, a young leader who is often disruptive may influence others to mimic this behaviour, forcing teachers to choose between following their belief in the importance of fostering leadership and discouraging it for the sake of classroom management.

Owen (2007) conducted a project in schools in England and Wales with the purpose of creating leaders in the classroom. Participants included primary and secondary school teachers who were interviewed about their views on leadership and developing leadership in young people. The study found that teachers described leaders as showing initiative and responsibility; respecting others; delegating tasks to peers and listening. Teachers in this study also identified some main barriers for encouraging children's leadership abilities such as the need to comply with the topics demanded by the national curriculum and classroom ratios. Although this study was not focused specifically on early childhood, it provided insights into how educational experiences encourage leadership.

The significant influence that teachers' practice can have on encouraging children's leadership has been identified in previous studies. For example, teachers can support children's leadership by enabling decision-making about play materials and activities, and facilitating collaborative play with peers in order to develop leadership skills such as self-awareness and problem-solving capabilities (Karnes & Stephens, 1999; Lee et al., 2005; Whyte & Scanlan, 2017). In addition, studies have found play-based curriculum a key tool for teachers to support children in experiencing and developing their leadership skills through engaging in play with peers (Lee et al., 2005; Shin et al., 2004).

Factors influencing early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices

A number of studies have suggested that teachers' beliefs about children's learning affect their teaching practices (Alvestad & Duncan, 2006; Nuttall, 2005; Wang, Elicker, McMullen & Mao, 2008). Beliefs have been described as the "heart of teaching" (Vartulli, 2005), as teachers' principles, theories and belief systems about their practice, students, and subject-matter affect their behaviour in the classroom, and ultimately, influence students' learning (Vartulli, 2005). Factors that may influence early childhood teachers' beliefs about children's learning include the cultural context and school culture the teacher is part of, teaching experience, and qualifications (Einarsdottir, 2003; Vartulli, 2005).

Cross-cultural studies in ECE have also highlighted the role that teachers' culture plays in influencing personal beliefs (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson & Rogers, 2010; McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin & Sun, 2005). Such studies have looked at early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding a range of concepts, including that of Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) who focused on Japanese, American and Swedish teachers' perceptions regarding play; that of Wang et al. (2008) who focused on teachers' beliefs about Chinese and American preschool curriculum; and that of McMullen et al. (2005) who compared teachers' beliefs on developmentally appropriate practice in five nations. The present study aimed to contribute to the literature regarding children's leadership as well as to understanding how teachers translate their beliefs about leadership into practice.

The research study

This article emerged from a larger comparative study, undertaken by the first author, which explored how teachers of 4 and 5 year old children in New Zealand and Honduras translate their beliefs regarding children's leadership into practice. Three sub-questions: 1) how do teachers conceptualise children's leadership? 2) how do teachers encourage children's leadership? and 3) what are some enablers/barriers for teachers to encourage children's leadership? form the focus of this article.

Research design

This study was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm. It took the form of a multiple case study of teacher beliefs and practices, with the two contexts forming separate cases and the four teachers from each country being the units of analysis (Yin, 2014). The research used a qualitative approach as the researchers were interested in providing a rich description of teachers' conceptualisations and practices rather than quantifying children's leadership. A characteristic of the qualitative approach is the role of the researcher in collecting and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2009). In line with interpretivist research, the researcher (first author) encouraged the teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices and relied as much as possible on the participants' beliefs when interpreting the data (Creswell, 2009).

Mullarkey et al. (2005) pioneered the exploration of teachers' beliefs regarding children's leadership; however, a limitation of their study was that teacher interviews were the only data source. Merriam (1998) has suggested that observations enable the researcher to gather first-hand information of a phenomenon, which was not possible when one relied solely on data gathered through interviews. The present study sought to minimise this limitation by including observations as a secondary data source. The first author observed each teacher in their natural settings for a period of two hours on two separate days. This feature enabled data triangulation.

The setting and participants

Data gathering took place in two ECE centres in Wellington, New Zealand and in two ECE centres in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Conducting the study in specific early childhood settings enabled a "fence in" or "delimiting" of each case (Merriam, 1998). Two centres in each country were chosen in order to strengthen the platform of comparison. The same procedure for selecting the centres was followed in both countries: the researcher spoke with the supervisors/head teachers and gave them an information letter explaining the purpose of the study. They were then asked if they would be interested in their centres participating and, when they agreed, were given a consent form to sign.

Next, two teachers from each centre (eight teachers in total) were selected as participants. In New Zealand, the oldest children in ECE are aged 4 to 5 years. In Honduras, the oldest children in ECE are aged 5 to 6 years. In order to obtain the closest comparison possible, teachers of children from age 4 and 5 were asked to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all teachers and parents, and pseudonyms were used for teachers and children. The qualifications and experience of the teacher participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

| | | Qualifications | Teaching experience |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---|----------------------------|
| Honduran teachers | <i>Ana</i> | Bachelor's degree in teaching | 9 years |
| | <i>Blanca</i> | Pursuing a Bachelor's degree in education | 10 years |
| | <i>Carol</i> | Pursuing a Bachelor's degree in psychology | 6 years |
| | <i>Diana</i> | Secondary (High school) level teaching degree | 32 years |
| New Zealand teachers | <i>Erica</i> | Postgraduate Diploma in ECE | 3 years |
| | <i>Frances</i> | Diploma of teaching and undergraduate degree | 15 years |
| | <i>Grace</i> | Bachelor of teaching with major in ECE | 1 year |
| | <i>Jill</i> | Diploma of teaching and undergraduate degree | 28 years |

Data Analysis

In a multiple-case design, each individual case is analysed separately (Yin, 2014), followed by a cross-case analysis identifying similarities or differences between cases. The six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the themes, were used to analyse each teacher interview following transcription. Finally, data extracts that would provide an illustration of each theme were identified. The observations for each teacher were then analysed according to the sub-questions.

The second step of the analysis was an intra-country comparison where the common themes between the teachers from each country were identified. The analysis also included using concepts derived from the respective early childhood curricula, in order to determine how each document guided the teachers' beliefs and practices. The third step was an inter-country comparison or cross-case analysis where the themes from each country were compared and contrasted. The themes were then analysed against relevant literature.

Findings

This section discusses the findings regarding New Zealand and Honduran teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the research sub-questions. For each question, New Zealand findings are followed by Honduran findings. The emergent themes from each country are explained with examples from the interview data and, when relevant, examples from the observations. There was no relevant observation data for a number of the themes.

How do teachers conceptualise children's leadership?

New Zealand

A finding that came through in all the New Zealand teachers' interviews was the concept of children taking on a leadership role, which is being the leader during games or group activities. When asked in the interview, "What comes to your mind when you think about young children's leadership?" Jill said, "The children that have ideas, they are the children that can articulate, that inspire and organise games".

Frances gave this example: "I see it quite a lot at the family corner, there might be five or six children in there, and one person is taking the lead ... you often hear them telling you what to do".

Erica gave another example: "Being able to share ideas is a form of leadership ... like sharing news at mat time for example".

These statements suggest that teachers saw young leaders as confident and articulate children who take a leadership role in games or share ideas during mat time when teachers and children usually do activities together such as singing songs or playing games.

Another concept the New Zealand teachers highlighted in their interviews was the idea of leadership involving sharing and being aware of others - a form of collective leadership. Erica, for example, described children's leadership as: "Helping each other and working together, cause you've got that shared leadership. . . . Problem solving as part of that". Similarly, Grace said: "Being aware of other children . . . when children look at other children or consider other children". Young children were seen to demonstrate shared leadership by working with and assisting peers. The idea of "sharing with others" seems different from "sharing ideas" mentioned before, as the latter refers to children communicating their ideas to others, whereas sharing leadership involves an interaction with others.

The New Zealand teachers, Erica and Frances, also emphasised in their interviews the idea that leadership involved a child directing or leading their own learning. Children leading their learning were seen as involving them making decisions about the materials they played with and the activities they carried out through the session. Frances, for example, talked about: "Giving children the opportunity to direct their own

play; to make decisions about where they play, what materials they use, who is involved in their play". Erica described this as children "taking ownership of their learning".

Honduras

A common theme in all the Honduran teacher interviews was the idea that young leaders are the powerful children who take a leadership role in the early childhood setting. For example, when illustrating her belief about young leaders, Blanca gave the example of participative children: "They always want to be the first in everything . . . always want to participate and direct others". As Blanca's comment also illustrated, children taking a leadership role were often referred to as exerting some form of power over their peers. Ana described a young leader as being a "controller", stating: "They are children capable of controlling the group". Similarly Carol explained: "When role-playing, the voice of authority is demonstrated . . . they want to be the main person, they want to command others".

A further related point Ana, Carol, and Diana made in their interviews was that the child who takes a leadership role and exerts power over peers may have a negative or positive influence. Carol, for example, stated that: "Young leaders are the ones who influence positively or negatively over their peers". Children seen as positive leaders were those who followed the teachers' instructions, as apparent from Ana's example:

The crayons are placed on the middle of the table, the child who is considered a leader follows those instructions. Another child doesn't; he grabs them and takes them to his place . . . so that child goes and tells them to put them back because the teacher said so.

Carol, throughout her interview, referred to what she termed the "negative influence" child. This was a child seen as demonstrating leadership, but doing so by persuading other peers not to follow the teacher's instructions, "Maybe one as a teacher has given certain instructions and the children come and impose their own instructions. And sometimes the rest follow their instructions and not the teacher's".

In describing the negative child, Carol consistently used the pronouns "he" and "him". For example, when asked, "What are some indicators of children's leadership?" she replied: "He is not a shy child. He is not afraid of saying what he thinks".

Many of the examples and scenarios Carol gave of the "negative influence" child related to one particular child in her class, Kevin, who Carol had agreed to have transferred to her class when his previous teacher found his behaviour too challenging. Carol saw Kevin as a "negative influence" child as he persuaded other children to misbehave. As she explained in her interview, "Right now the children are a little bit out of control for the same reason; because I transferred that child to my class".

The Honduran teachers appeared to view "positive" and "negative" child leaders as powerful in similar ways as confident, controlling and participative. The difference appeared to be whether they induced other peers to comply or not to comply with the teachers' instructions.

How do teachers encourage children's leadership?

New Zealand

When asked in the interview how teachers encourage children's leadership, all of the New Zealand teachers referred to the notion of empowerment. Significantly this is one of the four principles of *Te Whāriki* (NZMOE, 1996). Examples of empowering practices of teachers were associated with encouraging children to make the choice about being the leader in games or sharing their ideas with others. For example, Frances explained how teachers empower children to decide on leading games: "We don't actually really get them to take charge formally. It's free play so they do it . . . it's sort of empowering them to make their own choices, therefore they start leading".

Grace gave an example of how they as teachers started by looking to empower all children to progress their ability to take a leadership role: “For children who are not articulate or don’t put their hands up, especially at group times, those are the times for teachers to empower that child to take charge as to give them the opportunity”.

A second teaching practice highlighted by Erica, Grace and Jill involved the notion of fostering leadership through relationships. Again this emphasis was one that was consistent with *Te Whāriki*, which is based on the notion of curriculum as relationships (NZMOE, 1996). Jill, for example, when asked in the interview “How do you encourage children’s leadership?” replied: “Me as a teacher, I think I probably focus on relationships”. The examples she gave were of developing leadership in power sharing ways: “Encouraging empathy with each other, helping and getting along with others”.

Similarly, Erica’s example was: “By encouraging them [the children] to work alongside each other”. One example of this was during the observations of Erica, when two girls, Eva and Natalie, were seen close to the art centre arguing over two feathers. Erica approached them and said:

Erica: *Excuse me. I have a purple feather and a pink one, what do we do? Sharing right? Which one do you want?*

Eva: *Purple.*

Erica: *Which one do you want?*

Natalie: *Pink and purple.*

Erica: *If she wants purple, which one can you have?*

Natalie: *Pink*

Each girl took one feather and continued playing. Erica left the centre and moments later, Natalie came to Erica.

Natalie: *Excuse me. We swapped because she wanted that one.*

Erica: *Well done, that’s a pretty good idea there.*

This example illustrates Erica’s practice of encouraging children to problem-solve as a part of learning to work together.

In the interview, Erica and Frances highlighted the practice of taking the role of facilitator. During the observations, this practice was noticed every fifteen to twenty minutes while the teachers remained at each play area of the centre supporting children’s self-initiated activities. Erica saw this as: “Stepping back and observing, responding to their interests”. Similarly, Frances said: “My role is just to support and extend children’s leadership . . . step back and let them lead their own play”.

An example of this was seen during the observations of Frances when two girls, Valerie and Emma, approached Frances to show her a painting they had decorated at the art centre.

Frances: *Oh, I like the sprinkles.*

Valerie: *It’s the chicken pox.*

Frances: *(Laughs) It’s the chickenpox.*

A while later the girls decorated a toy wooden house. Valerie ran up to Frances.

Valerie: *Frances, come and see our houses!*

Frances: *Oh, it’s lovely. That’s a good idea.*

The example illustrates the interest teachers took in child-initiated endeavours. The positive feedback Frances gave the children on their “good idea” can be seen as encouraging them to try out their own ideas.

Honduras

The Honduran findings suggest that teachers in this study encourage leadership by assigning responsibilities to children in relation to activities teachers have planned in advance. This practice is consistent with the CNPB

(SEH, 2001), which is based on teacher-oriented tasks to achieve students' competency on specific topics. For example, one teaching practice indicated in the interview by Blanca and Diana is that teachers allocated opportunities for the children to take a leadership role. When asked, "How do you encourage children's leadership?" Blanca replied: "I ask who wants to direct the prayer . . . When I'm teaching the class as well, and they are answering my questions or they are participating, they talk about the topic of the week".

Similarly, Diana said: "We have many activities that encourage leaders. The children present a topic in class. They stand out in art, choir, English".

Another teaching practice suggested in the interview by Ana, Carol and Diana is encouraging children's leadership by assigning tasks to the influential children. Those who positively influence peers may be assigned tasks to help the teachers in directing the group, as apparent in Diana's statement: "There are always two or three children who are going to take care of the line, helping the teacher".

On the other hand, those who negatively influence may be assigned tasks as a means of controlling their behaviour. For example, Ana stated that she assigned tasks to the negative influence child "so he can control the group for good". Similarly Carol said: "I assign him tasks, as a way of guiding him to change his behaviour". In this statement, Carol seemed to be referring to Kevin - the boy mentioned above. One observed example was when Carol was in front of the classroom explaining the worksheet the children had to do. She asked Kevin to hold the worksheets, saying, "Hold this, but you need to stay here," moments later instructing Kevin to give one worksheet to each child. The Honduran teachers in this study appeared to assign tasks to encourage "positive influence" and discourage "negative influence" of these young leaders.

Enablers/barriers to teachers encouraging leadership in children

New Zealand

The New Zealand findings suggest a play-based curriculum and teachers providing choices to the children as enablers to encourage children's leadership. For example, when asked in the interview, "In what ways does the early childhood curriculum encourage children's leadership?" Jill highlighted that the play-based curriculum followed in many New Zealand services enables the children to demonstrate their leadership qualities: "The play-based curriculum allows children lots of interactions . . . I think because they're free to mix in and out of groups . . . I think that allows leadership qualities".

While Jill's views were not echoed in other interviews, enactment of the play-based curriculum was apparent in both centres during the observations.

When asked in the interview, "In what ways does the centre support you in encouraging children's leadership?" Erica and Frances highlighted the use of *Te Manawa*, a resource booklet focusing on assessment and curriculum, which is produced by the Wellington Kindergarten Association (Wellington Kindergartens n.d.). Frances described this as a resource that promoted giving choices to children and gave this example of how it influenced their practice:

Our environment is set up now so that we don't set up the tables. And I think that's a great example of encouraging leadership in this kindergarten because they [the children] make decisions of what they want to do ... Now with Te Manawa they are choosing what they want to do rather than us deciding for them.

Since *Te Manawa* was mentioned by the teachers of only one of the centres, Erica and Frances, it was not clear whether or not both centres used it.

The interview findings indicate that Frances, Grace and Jill considered contextual factors as barriers for them to encourage children's leadership. Frances mentioned her disagreement with the routines in the kindergarten. She gave this example:

We've got one girl who is very interested in being a leader and she wants to do mat times every day. I would be happy to let her do it . . . but letting that child have more responsibility can be a bit difficult with the routines.

Similarly, Grace indicated lack of time as a barrier for teachers to follow up leadership behaviour: "I think the short length of the session to be able to see opportunities for leadership, to be able to follow and monitor behaviour".

Jill also mentioned teacher-child ratios as a barrier:

I just think the number of our ratios is too high. Because sometimes you are working with this person and you can't see it through and you're pulled away because somebody else got hurt or whatever.

At the time of the study, teacher-child ratios for children aged 4 to 5 were 10:1 in New Zealand centres.

Honduras

In the interview, Blanca and Diana suggested that one leadership enabler teachers can use is the centre's support for children to participate or stand out in activities. For example, Blanca said:

Generally in this kindergarten, where they give us the opportunity for the children to demonstrate their leadership is maybe when we make school assemblies, or when we go to activities outside kindergarten. For example, the science fair.

Similarly, Diana said: "The centre supports us in all the activities. For example, with the participation of the children inside and outside kindergarten. . . . The children stand out in Art, English".

These findings indicate that the centre programme supports teachers in allocating leadership opportunities for the children.

Honduran findings suggest lack of time and teacher-child ratios as barriers to providing all children the opportunity to participate in classroom activities. In the interview, Blanca was the only teacher who explicitly indicated the short time of each session as a barrier to children's participation, stating: "Sometimes we don't have time because some activities are longer". Diana also suggested time as a constraint, although this was not specifically articulated during the interview: "The children narrate a story in front of the group. Due to time issues some have a turn one day, and others the next day".

Although not mentioned by the Honduran teachers in the interview, it appeared from the observations of their practice that teacher-child ratios also impede teachers from giving all children the opportunity to participate during class on a daily basis. One observed example was while Blanca was reviewing "the geometric shapes" with her students, she called some children to come to the front of the classroom and asked them to identify the shapes, which were pasted on a wall. It was observed that only a few of the children were called to participate in the activity. The ratio was an average of 30:1 in both Honduran centres at the time of the study.

Discussion

The findings related to the sub-questions are discussed below with reference to relevant existing literature including the Four Responsibilities framework developed by Te Kōpae Piripono.

Factors influencing teachers' beliefs

The research findings show that New Zealand teachers appeared to use more child-initiated approaches and Honduran teachers more teacher-directed approaches to encourage children's leadership. There are a number of possible influences on the beliefs held by teachers in this study, including teaching qualifications and curriculum documents.

All the participant New Zealand teachers had at least a bachelor's degree, whereas one Honduran teacher had only a secondary school level teaching degree and two were pursuing bachelor's degrees. Differences in the level of teaching qualifications could have influenced New Zealand teachers' broader views, as compared to Honduran teachers' more traditional views, about children's leadership. Honduran teachers' views of young leaders, as the powerful children taking a leadership role in early childhood settings, are aligned with the traditional view of leadership as a power relationship between leaders and followers (Bennis, 2007). The New Zealand teachers described children's leadership as sharing leadership and leading their learning in addition to taking leadership roles. These beliefs are aligned with Te Kōpae Piripono framework views of leadership (Tamati et al., 2008), such as the notion of sharing responsibility and working collaboratively with others.

The differing curriculum approaches mentioned earlier, including national learning objectives and curricula, seemed to influence how the teachers in New Zealand and Honduras translate their beliefs into practice. *Te Whāriki*, (NZMOE, 1996), with its sociocultural underpinnings, encourages empowerment and the building of relationships. The emphasis on learning through play in the New Zealand curriculum is consistent with studies elsewhere (Lee et al., 2005; Shin et al., 2004), where play is seen as a key avenue for supporting children to develop their leadership capabilities. The Honduran Early Childhood Curriculum (SEH, 2001), focused more on developing academic skills in children, may encourage teachers to mainly assign children's leadership responsibilities.

Differences between child-initiated and teacher-directed practice

Practices in the New Zealand centres in this study were identified as more child-initiated than in the Honduran centres. Although the teachers from both countries encouraged children to take a leadership role by providing opportunities to lead games or group activities, there appears to be a difference in how those opportunities are provided. New Zealand teachers tended to encourage children to decide which activities they wanted to lead and saw all children as having leadership capacity; whereas the Honduran teachers tended to allocate leadership roles to children they viewed as leaders. The perspectives of the New Zealand teachers reflect the view expressed in The Four Responsibilities leadership framework (Tamati et al., 2008) that everyone is a leader whether they realise it or not.

Besides empowering the children to take a leadership role, New Zealand teachers fostered relationships between children and facilitated children's learning. These strategies are consistent with Lee et al.'s (2005) emphasis on teaching strategies that support children's leadership, such as facilitating decision-making about play materials or activities, and helping them engage in play with peers. Whyte and Scanlan (2017) have suggested that where teachers work alongside children they enrich the curriculum and support children to take leadership of their own learning. Mawson (2011) has suggested that when teachers delay interventions, children are often able to solve conflicts themselves and hence develop leadership skills. These strategies, however, appear not to be used in the Honduran context where teachers assigned tasks to the influential children. These findings are similar to those of Mullarkey et al. (2005) who found that the teachers in their study encounter the dilemma of encouraging leadership in "highly verbal", positive, influential children while also trying to discourage the "disruptive behaviour" of certain student leaders in order to maintain classroom order. However, assigning tasks to the influential child was only identified in the Honduran context.

The New Zealand play-based and the Honduran teacher-based curriculum models in this study offer both advantages and disadvantages to encouraging children's leadership. The teacher-based curriculum seems to foster leadership skills such as cognitive and communication abilities in some children, identified in previous studies (Fu, 1979). An advantage of this approach is that teachers may start recognising children with these skills more tangibly than in a child-based curriculum, allowing for their further development. Conversely, an advantage of the play-based curriculum is allowing all children to develop leadership skills such as decision

making and relationships with others rather than just a few, again reflecting the view that leadership is not only about having responsibility but also about being responsible, taking responsibility and sharing responsibility (Tamati et al., 2008).

Contextual factors as barriers for teachers to encourage children's leadership

New Zealand and Honduran teachers both experienced barriers related to centre routines, lack of time, and teacher-child ratios. In the New Zealand context, teachers lamented not being able to monitor leadership behaviour and enable children to share their ideas during mat time. In Honduras, teachers commented on not having the time to provide more leadership opportunities through self-choice play. These New Zealand and Honduran findings align with previous studies (e.g. Owen, 2007), which found contextual factors such as external / curriculum pressures and class size as barriers for teachers to provide more leadership opportunities for children.

Implications and limitations

Children's leadership is a topic underexplored in the literature, as is the role teachers play in supporting it (Shin et al., 2004). This study contributes insights into how teachers' beliefs and practices influence the way they encourage children's leadership. An implication for teachers is to consider children's leadership, identify their own beliefs and understandings, and reflect on how their beliefs guide their teaching practice. The study offered an analysis of the influence of curricula in encouraging children's leadership. An implication is for stakeholders to reflect on how they can support teachers in providing leadership opportunities for young children.

A limitation of the study was its small sample size. Clearly, the findings cannot be generalised to all New Zealand and Honduran teachers. Making this cross-cultural study manageable also meant the time available at each site was somewhat limited which restricted opportunities for examining the consistency between teacher's actual and self-reported practices - something future studies could include. The case-study design in this study enabled the findings to serve as examples of teachers' beliefs and practices about children's leadership. The findings could potentially be used as a starting point for broader studies involving other countries that could examine teachers' beliefs and practices, and how these influence children's leadership.

Conclusion

This article has explored how teachers of 4 and 5 year old children in New Zealand and Honduras view and encourage children's leadership. The findings suggested some differences between the beliefs and practices of teachers in the two countries. Teachers in the New Zealand settings tended to focus on fostering leadership in all children through more child-initiated activities and encouraging shared leadership, whereas teachers in the Honduran settings tended to rely on teacher-determined and teacher-allocated activities to help foster children's leadership.

Differences in the national curricula also appeared to play a role. This was most clearly illustrated in the way the New Zealand teachers drew on the *Te Whāriki* curriculum principles of empowerment and relationships in their ideas about children's leadership. The beliefs and practices of New Zealand teachers for the most part fitted with The Four Responsibilities framework (Tamati et al., 2008) in that while teachers held designated roles (having responsibility), children were encouraged to: be responsible (acting appropriately), take responsibility (trying new things) and share responsibility (sharing power and assisting others). For Honduran teachers, their beliefs and practices were guided by the CNPB's focus on developing children's competency in subject-matter. Leadership in the Honduran system was seen to be linked to particular roles (having responsibility) and less emphasis was put on the taking and sharing of responsibility.

This study highlights the value of teachers reflecting on their own understandings and beliefs about children's leadership and how this influences their teaching practices. The comparison between New Zealand and

Honduras suggests further research would be useful if we are to gain a deeper understanding of diverse views on children's leadership and how it is to be fostered.

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