

Concurrent Paper Presentation Session (II)	July 6, 2007 1:50pm-3:00pm
Group31 (RmA 304)	English
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Preparing for Violence!
Understanding the Leadership Context in the Field of
Early Childhood Education and Care

Louise HARD

Head

Murray School of Education
Charles Sturt University

The notion of leadership is contentious particularly if one aims to define it as a stable concept applicable to multiple situations. It emerges as a concept very much defined by the context in which it occurs as well as the social and cultural expectations of those within that context. This presentation is based on a research project which explored how early childhood practitioners understand and enact leadership within the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia. Through the use of interviews and leadership artifacts (including documents, policies), data were collected and analysed using the framework of symbolic interactionism. Participants' understandings illustrate a complex interpretation of leadership heavily influenced by the social and cultural contexts of their workplace and the political contexts of the broader ECEC field. For some participants, aspects of horizontal violence, conformity and compliance define the context and subsequently constrain leadership aspirations. These understandings can also translate into various leadership behaviours such as need to retain field credibility, avoid notoriety and a strongly articulated team approach. In some cases participants' interpretations of the social and cultural context result in avoidance of leadership activity. This presentation will explore some of the challenges raised by this research and how undergraduate students can develop leadership skills and aspirations mindful of some strong cultural expectations in the field of ECEC. It suggests that an appreciation and understanding of the complex nature of the ECEC culture can better arm students for their future forays into leadership.