LIFE IS GOOD FOR BABIES: THE PEDAGOGICAL AND MANAGEMENT DECISIONS ENABLING A TEACHER TO BE EMPLOYED IN A RURAL INFANT-TODDLER PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW) makes it possible for children aged between birth and two years to be without a university qualified teacher in a centre-based long day care service. However, research demonstrates important links between caregivers' formal training and the quality of early childhood education.

This case study, about a rural children's service which successfully employs a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddler room, highlights the role of strong pedagogical beliefs, sound management strategies and a commitment to rural community capacity building as important organisational contributions to the employment of a teacher. The research has implications for leadership in the provision of high quality infant-toddler education.

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the findings of a research project designed to address four key research questions: What were the decisions which led to the children's service employing a university qualified teacher in the infants-toddlers' room?; What were the pedagogical beliefs which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?; What were the management strategies (e.g. budgeting, staffing) which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?; And what were the benefits and constraints of employing a university qualified teacher in the infant- toddler age group? While the research involved three case studies from children's services across New South Wales, this paper will concentrate on the findings and discussion drawn from data collected from a rural children's service in a regional city. For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to 'rural' as "areas which are not part of any "Urban" area"(ABS, 2003) including regional and remote areas. The term 'regional' is used to describe the city in which the service is located as it is the description used in the City Council's documentation.

BACKGROUND

Teachers in early childhood services - the current situation

> While a teacher's work is broad, multifaceted and complex, the Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW), herein called the Regulation, defines a teaching staff member as a member of staff who:
> a) has a degree or diploma in early childhood education from a university following a course with a duration (on a full-time basis) of not less than 3 years, or
> b) has some other approved qualification or
> c) has other approved training and other approved experience
> (Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW) r52).

The Regulation does not require a university qualified teacher for every group of children. Anecdotally, it is common practice to employ a university qualified teacher in the 3-5 year age group rather than for the children aged from birth to two or three years; that is the infants' and toddlers' group. Consequently, the younger children in the service are often staffed by less qualified staff than the older children. This situation is problematic, as evidence within the current early childhood education literature strongly suggests that the qualities of children's experiences are affected by the qualifications of the staff employed (Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990; Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990; Wangmann, 1995; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips & Grajek, 1985; Philips, 1987; Phillips & Adams, 2001).

It is difficult to determine which governmental body has final responsibility for determining the overall quality of children's services in Australia. The Commonwealth Government is responsible for Child Care Benefits and Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for all Australian children's services (except pre-schools), however there are state regulations which determine standards for each state or territory. The *minimum* admissible 'trained' staffing qualifications vary throughout Australia, from a two-year TAFE qualification (or a recognised training organisation) in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland, to a four-year education university degree for pre-schools in Western Australia (Press & Hayes, 2000). In NSW, teaching staff are required for centres with thirty or more children per day (Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW)), however licensees are not required to have a teacher as a primary contact for each group of children. It is recognised that the NSW Regulation does not exclude a teacher being employed in infant-toddler programs, but this is above the stipulated minimum standards. It is quite disturbing that across Australia, many children are in services where staff are not qualified to teach. "Of some 60,000 staff employed in Commonwealth-funded long day care centres in Australia [in 2000], … 12% held teaching qualifications" (Fleer & Udy, 2002, online).

Identifying high quality early childhood education

In identifying high quality early childhood service provision, two interrelated components are observable-structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to objective aspects that are often regulated by government which allow for optimal conditions for process conditions to occur in the setting (Helburn & Howes, 1996). Process quality refers to the interactions that occur in the child care environment and the child's daily experiences (Helburn & Howes, 1996). Extensive research supports staff training, which relates specifically to knowledge of child development, as the most identifiable contributing factor in producing good quality interactions (Fisher et al., 2004; Hayes et al., 1990; McCartney et al., 1985; Philips, 1987; Phillips & Adams, 2001; Wangmann, 1995; Whitebrook et al., 1990).

What are the barriers to providing university qualified teachers for infants and toddlers in rural communities?

In rural areas, it is often difficult to recruit and retain teachers across a range of educational contexts (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe & Noonan, 2003). Obtaining a teaching qualification for prospective Indigenous teachers from remote communities can now be provided by flexible training options but these may still lack relevance to the context of their community and/or cultural values and skills involving children and child rearing practices (Press & Hayes, 2000).

Added to the already difficult employment issues for rural communities, there are complex issues which are fundamental to the debate around affordable, high quality children's services across all of New South Wales. These issues, summarised briefly below, commonly impact on the ability of children's services to employ university qualified teachers for infants and toddlers.

There is a perceived dichotomy between care and education which continues to divide services into those that have been historically for education and those that are for child minding (Wangmann, 1995; Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997; Fleer, 2001). Press and Hayes (2000, p.58) describe early childhood education as "complex and fragmented" as different roles and responsibilities are allocated to each tier of government. Fragmentation of early childhood education comes from a political "lack of a shared philosophical underpinning which the OECD Country Note (2001, p.46) observed left ECEC in Australia 'open to influences from all sides' " (Woodrow & Press, 2005, p. 280). The limited ability of early childhood professionals to advocate for improved working conditions also proves to be a barrier in itself (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003).

Within the workforce, poor employment conditions are a disincentive for early childhood professionals to remain in the field. The OECD Thematic Review (Press & Hayes, 2000) cites industrial issues such as fragmented union representation for early childhood professionals, disparities between long day care, preschool and school teaching award wages (including leave

entitlements), and discrepancies between giving similar teaching and administrative responsibilities to workers with different qualifications and pay levels. Warrilow, Fisher, Cummings, Sumsion and a'Beckett (2004) cite education opportunities, graduates leaving the profession, work conditions, professional status and lack of support as added disincentives.

Tensions are evident among researchers, federal, state and territory governments, service providers, parents, and the wider community as to what level of care and education is necessary in the prior-to-school sector and who should be responsible for paying for its provision (Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004; Press & Hayes, 2000). Discussions around the "commodification and marketisation" (Woodrow & Press, 2005, p.278) of children and child care under the current policy are a growing concern for the field in Australia (Woodrow & Press, 2005; Goodfellow, 2005; Rodd, 2006). Infant-toddler centre-based programs are already more expensive to provide than centre-based programs for children aged three to five years (Press & Hayes, 2000) and so services often avoid the added expense of employing a teacher for this age group. Rodd (2006, p.247) prompts ethical early childhood education leaders to provide "quality and economically viable services that do not compromise children's rights".

Nevertheless, it is clear that elements of the profession are moving beyond the parameters set by policymakers to address the issue of improving the quality of education for infants and toddlers. There is emerging evidence that about 50% of services which provide infant–toddler education have already improved their ratio of adults to children (Department of Community Services, 2004; Fisher, Patulny & Cummings, 2004). Initial data collected from the Growing Up in Australia Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) suggests that of the 221 participating infants being cared for in long day care centres across Australia, 19.7% had a staff member who held a bachelor degree or above working in the infants-toddlers' room (Dr. L. Harrison, pers. comm., 1st February, 2006; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004).

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study methodology was selected so the researcher entered the research with few, if any, preconceptions of the ways in which the services would be able to employ a teacher in the infant-toddlers' room. A phenomenological approach (Wiersma, 2000, p.238) was used, hence this case study provides one way of employing a teacher in the infant-toddlers' room. It is not intended that the service selected represents of all community-based services. The project aimed to "increase understanding through the naturalistic generalisation that the readers do themselves" and thus "any generalisations should be reader-made ones" (Burns, 2000, p.474).

GATHERING AND ANALYSING THE DATA

Invitations seeking participants for the study were advertised at a conference and in a newsletter for an early childhood education association within NSW. Three interviews eventually proved useful to the study. Using a phenomenological approach, data was gathered via a detailed semi-structured interview for each participant, which was carried out by the researcher. This was followed up with further communications with the participant via email and phone after the interview.

The researcher travelled to the regional children's service where an interview was taped to accurately collect the data. Enrolment forms, parent handbook and other relevant documents were also gathered to provide some aspects of data which were more detailed than the interview could provide.

After the interview, the data was transcribed and interpreted. I approached the data from a holistic perspective, detailing the complexities of the case study (Wiersma, 2000). The data was analysed in response the four main research questions that I set out to answer.

To avoid the risk of over-interpreting the data, I was aware of the need to be carefully critical and reflexive of the data being analysed. Edwards (as cited in MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p.124) argues that "validity in qualitative research is a matter of being able to offer as sound a representation of the field of study as the research method allows". To achieve the desired integrity, I checked the interview data with the documents that had been collected from the participants. Finally, conversations with the participant continued until the participant was satisfied that the analysis adequately reflected the story of the service.

Findings and discussion

Blue Gum Children's service (a pseudonym) is located within a regional city in New South Wales which has a population ofapproximately 23,000. It is situated in a residential area, a few kilometres from the central business district. The service is an unaffiliated, community-based long day care centre which provides short day, long day, occasional care as well as before and after school care. It operates from 7am until 6pm for 49 weeks per year. The service draws on families from a radius of one hundred and fifty kilometres. "Bill" has been the Director for the past nineteen years.

Age group	No. of children	Staffing	Adult:child ratio	Fees per day (as at September, 2005)
Birth–two years	13	1 Early childhood teacher (Director) 1 qualified child care worker (studying B Teach) 2 advanced child care workers	1:3.25	Up to 8.5 hour per day: $47.00 per day or $223.25per week Over 8.5 hours per day: $49.00 per day or 232.75 per week
2-3 year olds	18-20	3 qualified child care workers (1 studying B Teach)	1:6- 1:6.67	Up to 8.5 hour per day: $44.00 per day or $209.00 per week Over 8.5 hours per day: $46.00 per day or $218.50 per week
3-5 year olds	30	Early childhood teacher (job-shared by 2 teachers) 1 qualified child care worker (studying B Teach) 1 unqualified child care worker (studying at TAFE)	1:10	Up to 8.5 hour per day: $37.00 per day or $175.75 per week Over 8.5 hours per day: $39.00 per day or $185.25 per week
TOTAL	**61**	**10**		

Table 3 *Staffing, qualifications and cost for Blue Gum Children's Service. Data gathered from transcript data, preliminary administration application and service's newsletter, 2004.*

Question One: *What were the decisions which led to the children's service employing a university qualified teacher in the infants-toddlers' room?*

The director at Blue Gum Children's Service spoke of the clear need for their service to prioritise their focus on education and care for high quality service provision. From Bill's experience:

> Not many people think the way we think about the quality of care and the quality of teaching of staff…we judge it against all these things here. What impact does this have on the child, what impact does it have on us what impact does it have on the community? What impact does it have on the family? If you judge every action that you do against all those different criteria, it challenges how you provide the service and everything that you actually do is guided by that whole thing which is the reason why we do the home visiting… I can do it from a government point of view. Or I can do it from the human side …" (transcript data).

Neuro-scientific research supports educational research by demonstrating that the first three years of life are critical to a child's learning (McCain & Mustard, 1999). However, this may not be so clear for other service providers and policy

makers where a paradox exists between 'the needs of families and the commercial/business orientations associated with the provision of childcare services within a socially responsible framework" (Goodfellow, 2005, p.54).

To achieve high quality services for children and families, this rural service had a commitment to offer well qualified staff as well as adult: child ratios that were above those stipulated in the Children's Services Regulation 2004 (NSW). Research identifies that higher numbers of adults to children improves process quality as it creates opportunities for staff to interact with children more often and for sustained periods of time (Harrison & Ungerer, 2000; Helburn & Howes, 1996; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Peiener-Feinberg et al., 2000). This is a similar rationale to the reasons for employing a university qualified teacher for infants and toddlers. Hence, the director seemed to be committed to improving both the process and structural quality in service provision by implementing more than one strategy.

Question Two: *What were the pedagogical beliefs which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?*

There has been a teacher employed in the infant-toddlers' room for most of the time that the service has operated, except for two years (2002 and 2003) when it "didn't work" due to a reorganisation of spaces and staffing teams. The director, Bill has been the teacher in the infant-toddler's room for the last two years. The director stated that employing a teacher was a philosophical and pedagogical decision rather than a financial one.

Group infant-toddler environments should mirror high quality home environments - rich, stimulating and safe spaces; a sense of belonging for the child and the family; caring, adults who are flexible, attentive and in tune to the needs of each child (Greenman & Stonehouse, 1997). The director discussed the significance of the relationships between adults, infants and toddlers. He reported that relationships improved in the room when a teacher was able to mentor staff members in how to build strong relationships with children. Howes (1991) observes that it is these more sensitive and responsive interactions which provide stronger attachments with children and, as a result, improve the quality of experiences for infants and toddlers. The focus is thus shifted from routines and schedules to responding to the pedagogical objective of extending upon the interests and developmental abilities of each child.

Through the experiences of being a teacher and working with other staff in the room, the director believed that the teacher's broad base of pedagogical knowledge and understanding in the infant-toddlers' room impacted on the professionalism of all staff. At Blue Gum Children's Service, the teacher sat "beside" the role of the other staff members, in a team that is led by the qualified child care worker rather than the teacher. The team leader had the ability to ask questions of the children's learning as well as manage the day to

day organisation of the room. The teacher's role contributed to this and asks "what's going on here, to really look at what's going on and say what do we know …?" (transcript data).

The director discussed the infants and toddlers experiencing an emergent curriculum as opposed to an activities-based curriculum. Emergent curriculum is less common in an infant-toddlers' room than in a preschoolers' room, where teachers normally reside. The *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* states that; "continual reflection and growth is the essence of being a professional" (Department of Community Services, 2002, p.18). This was a particularly desirable benefit of the teacher being employed in the infant-toddlers' room. Bill stated that "… while you are modelling something that you strongly believe in, it strengthens your service, your connections, the whole success of what you do" (transcript data, Blue Gum Children's Service).

Blue Gum Children's Service was seen as an integral part of the rural city. Bill did not want the service to be viewed by the community as a place that only takes from the community. People 'put in' just as much as the service 'puts out'. Community artists were invited to contribute to the children's learning spaces. The service has hosted a beer launch for a local winery. The service was organising to go camping in the national park "… that's just about the connections with families …" (transcript data). The service held an art exhibition of children's paintings at the local regional art gallery "…that is really just to generate good will so that when people think of us…it's not about asking people for money …" (transcript data). Bill accepted the fact that even though they do not own the building, they have spent a vast amount of money on capital improvements **"…** that's OK, because that's part of community…" (transcript data). The way a children's service operates as part of a larger community (NSW DOCS, 2002) models to young children ways that will enable them to live now and in the future. A strong sense of community is also commonly perceived as a positive contribution to rural living (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005). Being a part of a vibrant part of the community such as this makes this children's service an appealing place for families and staff to belong.

Bill spoke about meeting the needs of the families, explaining how he believed that a teacher was able to offer a range of valuable provisions to parents. This included providing a sense of security for the care of infants and toddlers through mature and knowledgeable staff, accurate information about child growth and development and best practices in early childhood education. This was especially significant when working with parents of babies and toddlers.

> …that is one of the really crucial things because I'm actually saying there is a difference in the way that we think and this is the difference…I see this vocation as a teacher as a facilitator, to facilitate families to grow... but that is as a teacher that I have to go and do that" (transcript data).

The *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* (Department of Community Services, 2002) identifies that the benefits which are achieved by staff and families working in partnerships such as these contribute to an enhanced sense of security for the child and more coherent, meaningful and appropriate learning experiences.

Question Three: *What were the management strategies (e.g. budgeting, staffing) which enable a university qualified teacher to be employed in an infant-toddlers' room?*

Staffing and Management

To accommodate the employment of a university qualified teacher where traditional staffing models do not usually cater for this, the management of staff more widely becomes an important administrational consideration. The strategy used by Blue Gum Children's Service was to have the director teaching in the infant-toddler's room. In this case, qualifications were fully utilised by appointing the room leader duties, for which the teacher has 'traditionally' been responsible, to the qualified childcare worker and allocating administrative tasks to the administrative manager. This prioritised the role of "teacher" and allowed him to spend more time on pedagogical issues as well as on duties required as the Director of the service.

Bill reconceptualised the role of staff members at all qualification levels by removing the power issues often evident when the teacher is the room leader. By positioning the qualified childcare worker as the team leader, the role of leader became shared between the teacher being the pedagogical leader and the qualified childcare worker being the person responsible for organisational aspects of the room such as routines, staffing and resources. Kagan and Bowman note that "it is not yet clear what constitutes a leader, whether leaders are defined by role or individual characteristics" (1997, p.6), and hence this reconceptualisation challenges the roles and responsibilities of early childhood professionals and may offer interesting leadership possibilities for staff with various levels of qualifications.

An increase in the effectiveness of the teacher being able to communicate with parents about early childhood education flowed through to ongoing and stable participation by parents and community members of the service's management committee. A well established management committee benefits the service by ensuring continuing knowledge of and commitment to the philosophy of the service as well as the development and retainment of substantial business management skills.

Expenditure

It was clear that while the director believed that well qualified staff should be employed, he also showed a concern that the service should be financially

viable. Bill reported that the service operated an annual budget that resulted in a surplus which was then reinvested into the service for ongoing service provision. Bill believed that a strong financial situation enabled the service to maintain the standards that they believed were necessary for good service provision. Decker and Decker state that "Budgets must be carefully made in keeping with program goals; that is, expenditures should reflect the goals of the program" (2005, p.231). This requires strong leadership by the director and the management committee to maintain their focus on achieving the service's philosophy.

The director, Bill, spoke of financial strategies that helped to keep fees affordable, and described efficiencies in staffing and resources in all aspects of service provision. The administrative assistant monitored the service's financial status regularly. Staffing was efficient when the skills and capabilities of each staff member are utilised to their full capacity and in the case of Blue Gum Children's Service, the use of the teacher/director position was as the pedagogical leader and service manager rather than daily administrator. Occasional staff absences were absorbed because existing staffing ratios are better than regulatory requirements. The size of the service was increased to positively impact on cost effectiveness by purchasing resources, consumables and food in bulk. Similarly, the Child Care Cost and Quality study undertaken in USA demonstrated how a larger size service "had lower expended costs per child per hour with no apparent ill effects on quality of care" (Helburn & Howes, 1996, ¶ 59).

Helburn and Howes (1996) indicate that staff that have higher wages and better working conditions are more likely to stay at their service. Bill perceived the service as having a culture of recognising the staff's ability to make a difference in the provision of services for children. This was evident in strategies such as encouraging staff to upgrade their qualifications, staff receiving appropriate pay for their qualifications and roles, and having a career structure within the service. Many cost efficiencies were also experienced by the service being able to retain staff eg, accumulation of expert knowledge acquired through experience and professional development, less costs associated with advertising positions and maximum efficiency of work output.

The strategies discussed above reflect a sound understanding of business management which is essential for the effective running of a large business operation such as a children's service (Rodd, 2006). This is a finely skilled process where "Cost efficiency is achieved when all program components are optimally used" (Decker & Decker, 2005, p.219).

Income

The majority of the income for the service was accrued through fees to families. Fees included the provision of sunscreen, disposable nappies, linen, laundering of linen, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. The handbook for parents asked

that, on commencement of enrolment, parents bring four boxes of tissues and parents of infants/toddlers are asked to supply a box of disposable nappies. Each year, parents informed the service of their enrolment needs and the service carefully organised enrolment patterns so that staff: child ratios were maximised and parents were able to be charged for either a short day (under 8.5 hours) or a longer day (over 8.5 hours). Parents did not pay fees for public holidays or when the service is closed- a small charge across all fees covers running costs of public holidays. This negated the tendency for parents to select an enrolment pattern which avoided being enrolled on public holidays. The service offered parents who used the service five days per week a five percent discount on their weekly fee. There were different fee schedules for each age group as the director acknowledged that "babies require more" (transcript data).

Blue Gum Children's Service did not ask parents to fundraise for service provision. The director was adept at supplementing the service's income by looking for other funding opportunities for specific projects.

> There is a lot of money out there. People think that the money only comes from DOCS, or it comes from FACS but there is money out there. All you have to do is look in the Saturday paper… It's about how you can make it spin. Spin the story so it works for you. Have realistic projects and realistic costings, it all works (transcript data).

While it is imperative that early childhood professionals continue to advocate strongly for increased government funding and support in the education of children prior to school, this research project has demonstrated that this rural, non-affiliated, community-based children's service was able to use a range of financial strategies to operate a financially viable children's service while employing a teacher in the infant-toddler's program.

Question Four: *What were the benefits and constraints of employing a university qualified teacher in the infant- toddler age group?*

The director was aware of the affordability of the service compared to their competitors. The director did not report any disadvantages of affordability because of the decision to employ a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers' room. Lengthy waiting lists indicated that Blue Gum Children's Service was in high demand and also indicated that the service is competitively priced in the local area. This was an interesting outcome for the research project as assumptions are often made that the overall costs of employing a university qualified teacher costs would mean that the service should charge much higher fees compared to services that are not employing a university qualified teacher in the infant-toddlers' room (Helburn & Howes, 1996, p.63).

It was evident Bill was a committed advocate within the wider professional community, undertaking committee positions in peak early childhood

organisations, positions on advisory committees, contributing to presentations at conferences and piloting the *NSW Curriculum Framework: The Practice of Relationships* (Department of Community Services, 2002). Kagan and Bowman (1997) reflect on the need for the role of advocacy leadership to develop state and national policy: "The face of early care and education will not be changed in this country solely through the efforts of the field. Good leaders move beyond their own colleagues to convince others of the importance of their case" (Kagan & Bowman 1997, p.40). Bill advocated for the working conditions of early childhood professionals by implementing award condition breaks, above award wages, relieving stress levels by having better than regulation ratios, relieving staff from face to face teaching for programming and providing career structure within the children's service. While he expected staff to be committed to their jobs, he did not expect staff to work harder or longer than their position statements specified. This is evidenced in statements such as "I want them to work smarter, not harder" (transcript data, Blue Gum Children's Service). If we are to depend upon and retain valuable early childhood staff in rural communities, it is critical to consider the working conditions for staff (Decker & Decker, 2005).

One of the many positive aspects of living in a rural communities is the ability for people to build relationships to support each other (Sutherns, McPedran & Howarth-Brockman, 2004). This service tries to address needs of the family and the child by offering home visits for every child who enrolled at the service. This is a sound practice which builds "a connection of trust between parent and teacher" (Johnston & Mermin, 1994); however the director had not experienced any other service which actually carried out this practice.

> The kids already know somebody, you have already made a connection and if you have made a connection with parents you have already solved most of your problems and that is my view. Working with families is one of the main things we miss out on; I think that we need to do that much better because families struggle. There are too many things in family's lives now which impact and allow them to do the best job that they can (transcript data).

Bill was applying for a grant to expand on the home visiting program by incorporating home visits for all enrolled children as a regular part of service provision.

> …So that's sort of a family building and a community building program that I can see because if I can create success for families … I can create families that are successful, then I have a better opportunity to build communities that are successful. And I think that early childhood is the best model for that to happen in … (transcript data).

Bill moved beyond meeting the needs of the 'average' population, to thinking about how to meet the needs of all families in the community:

> "…we are setting up a scholarship system so that we can actually target vulnerable families and say ' lets make a difference' for some people. So that will be in consultation with other agencies around town …" (transcript data).

The significant contribution that this teacher has made to building up the rural community suggests that high quality care and education of young children has public outcomes as well as outcomes for individuals and their families. This is a reflection of their "social mission to produce higher quality care for children" (Cleveland & Krashinsky,2005) and their not-for profit status.

CONCLUSION

This case study focused upon the ability of a rural regional community-based children's service to employ a teacher in the infant-toddler setting. The example of this case study has demonstrated that this service is able to effectively respond to industrial relations and rural issues within the limitations of the budget.

This has been underpinned by the service's strong philosophical belief that a university qualified teacher is essential for infant-toddler service provision and can be attained by developing efficient management strategies. There was strong evidence of positive interactions with the neighbourhood which contributed to the capacity building of this rural community.

This case study illuminates the need for a director to have well developed skills in leadership. It requires a leader who is able to focus on the 'big picture' of the service's philosophy and goals. This requires professionals to have a maturity to be able to deal with many complex and ethical decisions. This will only occur if we can attract qualified people into the field by improving work and pay conditions and retain them by providing a well-funded, sustainable education and care system.

There are many different factors which may present limitations for a particular service to respond in a similar way to the case study that has been detailed e.g. competency of the teacher, competency of the director, the structure of the decision making process, the locality of the service, financial constraints and teacher availability. While rural services such as Blue Gum Children's Services are providing innovative, high quality servicing to families, it is evident that further funding support and commitment by federal and state governments would better enable more services to achieve improved outcomes for children. Ongoing discussions about how children' services can ethically and viably provide high quality early childhood education in the current political climate are required by the field. It is possible to make life good for babies in rural children's services. This case study contributes to the ongoing discussions around the financial viability and the pedagogical outcomes when a qualified teacher is employed to teach infants and toddlers.

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