PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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OVERLAPPING REALITIES

Exploring how the culture and management of an early childhood education centre provides teachers with opportunities for professional dialogue
Adaptation of Engeström’s (1999) analytical framework

Subject:  

Rules:  

Community:  

Mediating Artifacts:  

Object:  

Outcome  

Roles
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative case study

Constructivist-interpretive paradigm

Field work included interviews, and observations during the day and at staff meetings

Mediating artifacts included staff meeting notes, teachers’ journals and physical features such as the staff room,

Trustworthiness and triangulation provided validation of the research findings
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is Early Childhood teachers’ understanding of the purpose for professional dialogue?

How does the culture of the Early Childhood Education centre support early childhood teachers’ engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?

How does the organisation of the Early Childhood Education centre support the early childhood teacher’s engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?
Dialogue is an interactive act with others. Meaning is constructed through interpretation of others utterances. Resonance occurs at the reflective moment where one person’s understandings and experiences are connected with another’s.
“Dialogue….It is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result. And it goes to infinity, it goes to the universe, you can get lost. And for human beings nowadays and for woman in particular, to get lost is a possibility and a risk, you know” (Rinaldi, 2006, p.184).
PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE

“Dialogue with a purpose, as it provides opportunities for teachers to engage in analytical discussions about teaching that extend on conversations about daily routines” (Grey, 2011, p.23).
“...the talk...about practice, your practice in the classroom, the children’s learning and I guess teachers’ own professional development....so it’s [professional dialogue] a mixture of all sorts of different talking that happens during the day and at night at meetings” (Rachael, senior teacher, over 2’s).

“opportunities to talk with other teachers at any time...covers everything to do with the work environment. I think if you’re talking about anything, timetables, what’s happening with one teacher or another teacher, that sort of thing to me that would be professional dialogue” (Daisy, Manager).
“…discussion of our practice really... about what we are doing at the moment and why and maybe...questioning what we’re doing and seeing looking at ways to improve it and...I guess gaining an understanding of ourselves as teachers and reflecting on how things are.” (Julia).
“professional dialogue leads to change...that’s my interpretation of it...often I begin talking about things because I think that we might need to change something and so the professional dialogue starts with an idea or something you’ve read and it grows like it spirals from there so I think it leads to change.” (Daisy, interview)
I read this reading and it was about understanding Asian parents and their families and it was quite relevant because we had just had a new...child start and she had just come from... Hong Kong...and she didn’t speak a word of English...and her family hardly spoke any English either...and it was quite confusing...We found it hard to try and understand the way they did things...So this reading was quite interesting. So I brought it to share with the other teachers just to see what they thought...it was really helpful to train [teachers] how to include them [Chinese family] more and us to have a better understanding...kind of shifted my whole thinking of understanding of cultures as well...I’ve always been quite open to things like that...kind of helped a lot...promoted professional dialogue with my colleagues...We discussed it quite a lot and we discussed if there were strategies we could use to try and help them [Chinese family]...we built a really good relationship in the end. (Roimata)
“like…disposition thing…it was explained quite clearly to me one day [at university]…[then] I was able to see it at work so then I’d talk to them [teachers] about that” (Zara)

“[Zara] would bring in her assignment a lot and talk about it a lot on the floor and we would do group things together and link it with what she was doing.” (April)
“I find when you’ve got students in the centre there’s a lot more academic talk, ’cause of course it is fresh on top of their minds and they are always talking to you about it. …it’s mainly the…student teachers who are still at university that have all these bubbling ideas that they want to do things all the time and they’ll come and say ’hey can I do this?’ and I’m like ’yeah go for it’…so that’s really cool yeah.” (Rachael).
‘I think it’s more the ones that are studying at the moment who kind of bring in the theorists more because they are currently reading these articles and, and things but if you are not studying that tends to be seen as kind of frivolous extra stuff. …..when you’re a bit more removed from studying you sort of lose touch with all of that a bit and you sort of need to be refreshed and kind of somehow have an avenue to be more critical about what you’re doing.” (Julia).

“It [learning] shouldn’t really…stop and the more…you learn the more professional you are and the professional you can feel because you know you’ve got the knowledge as well. And to me if you just stop talking about it where’s the knowledge gone…because it’s not been shared.” (Kerry).
Anagnostopoulos, Smith & Nystrand (2008) suggest dialogic space is "sites of interaction where the practices and resources that participants bring with them from a range of settings intersect and provide openings for new, hybrid understandings and practices to emerge" (p. 4).
“we rely on our staff meetings for the planning side...for keeping in touch...it’s a good chance to keep up with what the other teachers’ [are] doing with that child...Although we do it on the hop sometimes. They [the teachers] might have written four or five learning stories that they haven’t shared. So the staff meetings is a good chance for everyone to pull out what they have observed,...photo,...stories...so we can all share...so we make connections that we might have missed.” (April).
“The time of the day and length of the day. The amount of information which needed to be shared. Often everyone’s tired especially if you’ve woken up at 5.30am to do the early shift. You go right through the day and it [staff meeting] starts at 5.30pm to 7.30pm and by that time I am pretty brain dead. You do your best and have lots of coffee...you do have a rest. Occasionally if I’m feeling really motivated usually I go home to have a shower, get changed, having something to eat and then go back. That’s my normal routine...But if you’re doing the 9am to 5.30pm shift I find that very challenging too cause you’re basically going straight onto the meeting...so no break in between.” (Julia).

“I find our staff meetings...it’s like a race. Like you have a race in which you have to fit all these things into that small two hour period to talk to staff and...it’s quite tricky I find and often you only get a moment of time to talk about something that...was quite important.” (Daisy).
“If we took a topic to table at a meeting and started talking professionally about theory or something I could see the teachers would become more skilled at expressing…articulating…If you did it at a staff meeting I think it would be…a good tool for learning about participating or articulating.” (Daisy).

“A centre] that was very theoretical…we’d be given like articles to read before the meeting, not that you always had time to do that, then you’d discuss the articles and you’d be like reflecting on the philosophy…it was more kind of high level thinking.” (Julia).
AD HOC CONVERSATIONS

“I’ll sometimes come out with a question that I’ve got...cause it’s quite quiet on the floor when you sort of start thinking about things that you can ask....so...yesterday I asked them a question and I was able to discuss it with them what they thought and I was able to have a bit of a discussion...Sometimes in the staff room for like morning tea breaks or like lunch breaks you have a bit of a [discussion]...I did that again yesterday.” (Zara).

“I find when I am down in the under-two’s I get more chance to talk to the teachers about different ideas we’ve had, different ways we could look at running things, different practices. You get a lot more space to do that.” (Rachael).

“I try not to [do] that [talk with teachers] so much because I’m conscious of the kids...you’ve got to be really careful of what you say...I’ll try not to go off into too much adult conversation...you’re conscious all the time of them [children] listening...I’m always aware of my surroundings.” (Pip).
KERRY, A STUDENT TEACHER SUGGESTED:

“the ad hoc conversations are quite important because...they’re usually topical and relevant...and adds to something you haven’t noticed or seen or you’re sharing something with someone else that they may not have noticed or seen...So they are important to still be able to have.”

Daisy the manager said:

“I never think negatively about the teachers taking that opportunity because I know myself I have to do it as well but I’m annoyed that have to do it, that’s the way it has to happen...for communication to happen you have to have it there and then on the floor rather than in the staff room two or three hours later.”
The importance of social talk:

“I might have heard a casual conversation which had a clue in it as to what the person was thinking...or feeling and...often it is the more casual conversation that actually holds the key to the bigger issues...a lot of it comes back to that casual chit chat.” (April).

“I think...it’s good to have the freedom just to talk. On a Monday morning you want...[to] ask the teacher how was your weekend kind of thing. What did you get up to? I mean its just I think...part of the conversation you do have with the teachers...so I think the freedom is also needed.” (Zara)
IMPLICATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH

1. Time for professional dialogue
2. The emphasis on using professional time for documenting children’s learning.
3. The benefits of having students teachers working in ECE centres whilst also training
4. Ad hoc conversations and social talk are important precursors for professional dialogue.
QUESTIONS