

Sutton-Smith Doctoral Award 2019



Maria Rose Cooper
University of Auckland

Maria Rose Cooper's thesis, *'Shifting the lens: Everyday collective leadership activity'* is highly significant in its contribution to new knowledge about leadership in the early childhood sector. Cooper presents a qualitative, interpretivist case study that aims to "explore the conceptualisation and potential enactment of an alternative form of leadership". Cooper's focus on the idea of "everyday teacher leadership (ETL)" in one high-quality early childhood setting, and her extensive scrutiny highlights the research gap on effective leadership in infant-toddler contexts in New Zealand.

In seeking to clarify her own concerns when seeking to practice an inclusive, collective form of leadership rather than the formal, individualised model of leadership, Cooper investigates the many definitions, forms and complexities of educational leadership. Her thorough research showed that there was no literature at all about the leadership of ECE teaching teams that share the caring of children in shared, open teaching spaces thus allowing Cooper space to explore leadership possibilities that sit apart from the dominant practice.

Cooper analysed the rich data using ETL and utilised cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to inform her methodology, analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings". Her findings have implications for practice, policy and teacher leadership and illustrate the possibilities for improving educational quality and care for children and their families in diverse ECE settings.