# The Production and Performance of Workplace Hierarchies in Australian Outside School Hours Care

Bruce Hurst*, Kylie Brannelly**, Jennifer Cartmel***

**Abstract:** Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) provides play, leisure, care and education for significant numbers of Australian children. As government has become increasingly involved in the regulation of OSHC, the sector has become increasingly professionalised. OSHC practitioners are active participants in quality improvement processes and increasingly likely to have qualifications. Despite its growing social importance, there is little research about the OSHC workforce. This article draws on a research project conducted with OSHC practitioners who participated in a professional development program that introduced a set of professional standards for practitioners. The research investigated how participants engaged with the standards after completion of the program and demonstrated that uptake of the professional standards was complicated by workplace and sector hierarchies. Participants were less likely to use the standards for service leaders and short-term, casualised workers. These hierarchies formed in complex ways around dominant discourses that underestimate care and leisure work and position OSHC as a secondary consideration for school management. The findings in this research have important implications for the sustainability of the OSHC workforce, how it is perceived and how it engages with professional development programs.

**Keywords:** Outside School Hours Care, School Age Care, Extended Education, Workforce, Foucault

## Introduction

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services play a critical role for Australian society and increasing numbers of families. Whilst OSHC has mostly served a care function since the early 1980's, its other purposes have changed over time (Cartmel, 2007; Hurst, 2019). The Australian Government currently sees OSHC as having multiple purposes, providing children and their families with play, leisure and custodial care that contributes to children's learning and development (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021; AGDE, 2022). As the social functions of OSHC have changed, so too have the tasks that OSHC workers perform and therefore how they are perceived as professionals. This paper concerns itself with the professional roles available to OSHC workers and their workplaces. It draws on recent research conducted by Cartmel et al (2020) with a group of OSHC workers from Queensland, Australia who participated in a professional development program that introduced a set of professional standards for workers (The Standards) developed by the Queensland Children's Activities Network (QCAN). The purpose of the research was to investigate how participants had engaged with the program and

* **Corresponding author:** University of Melbourne, ian.hurst@unimelb.edu.au
** Queensland Children's Activities Network
*** Griffith University

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The Standards. As well as providing insights into the effectiveness of the program, the analysis of the research data provided fascinating insights into workplace hierarchies that form around dominant discourses in OSHC. This purpose of this article is to investigate these hierarchies, which appear unique to OSHC and consider their implications for how workers engage with The Standards and their investment in staff development and training.

## Changing Contexts in Outside School Hours Care in Australia

OSHC is a significant site of care, play and learning for large numbers of Australian children. In June 2017, 363,700 per day attended OSHC. Attendances favour children in the lower age range. Approximately 20.5 % of 6 to 8-year-old children attended OSHC in 2017, compared to only 9 % of 9 to 12 year-olds (ABS, 2018). Irrespective of its importance there is little peer-reviewed research investigating OSHC (Moir & Bunker, 2022; Simoncini, Cartmel & Young, 2015; Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014).

OSHC provision has undergone constant change. Recreational after school activities in Australia have existed for over 100 years (Cartmel, 2007), but growth in the amount and importance of OSHC began in the 1970 s and 1980 s with increasing participation of women in the workforce (Cartmel, 2007; Brennan, 1994; Simoncini, Cartmel & Young, 2016). OSHC provision has increased substantially over the last 30 years, driven by increasing workforce participation (Baxter et al., 2014; Winefield et al., 2011). The size of the OSHC workforce more than doubled between 1997 and 2013 and grew another 52 % between 2013 and 2016 (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014; Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017).

OSHC serves multiple purposes that have shifted over time and is valued differently by a range of stakeholders (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). Parents primarily use OSHC for the custodial care it provides in the hours after school. Similarly, Government places significant value on the custodial care function of OSHC and its role in supporting workforce participation (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). Whilst adult perspectives dominate considerations about the purpose of OSHC, it is critical also to consider the perspectives of children. A growing body of research suggests that children value OSHC primarily for providing play, leisure and friendships (Bell & Cartmel, 2019; Cartmel & Hayes, 2014; Hurst, 2020, 2019, 2015). Since the Australian Government's regulatory reforms of early childhood education and OSHC in 2009, OSHC has increasingly been understood as a complementary site of education that supports children's development (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). The Australian focus on play, leisure, care and education is most similar to the forms of extended education provided in Nordic countries (Bae, 2018).

These changing purposes have likely been informed by the increasing regulation of OSHC, which has been subject to a succession of regulatory programs over the last 25 years, beginning with the voluntary National Standards in 1995, which were focused on health and safety. In 2004, OSHC joined early childhood education and care services in the national quality assurance scheme and then the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2009. The NQF encompasses a suite of reforms including national benchmarks provided by the National Quality Standard (NQS), national health and safety laws and also a curriculum framework, My Time, Our Place Framework for School Age Care in Australia, which is specific to OSHC provision (ACECQA, 2019). My Time Our Place in particular marks OSHC's shift in purpose

towards education, with the document having an identifiable focus on children's learning and development. My Time Our Place also introduced the use of the term 'educator' to describe people who work in OSHC (AGDE, 2022). This is a significant shift from previous regimes where workers were more likely to be known as 'carers' or 'nice ladies' who look after the children (Cartmel, 2007).

The increasing regulation and changing purposes of OSHC has direct implications for workers, who are subject to increasing administrative workloads to satisfy regulatory requirements (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). No longer just responsible for providing activities and a safe environment, educators are required to provide substantial documentation as part of their regulatory obligations. In addition, the NQF also mandates minimum qualifications for staff. These factors inevitably lead to changes in how the role is understood not just by workers but also others associated with the service. It suggests that there has been an increasing professionalisation of OSHC over the last 25 years. However, the realities of how educators see themselves as professionals, or if others see them in this way are likely more complex. It is important to note that this discussion needs to be considered in light of the absence of research into professionalism in OSHC.

OSHC is commonly regarded as a low status occupation with a range of factors that contribute to its status (Cartmel et al, 2020). There is a dominant view in the community that OSHC merely provides care (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). It is possible that the use of the word 'care' in the name of the service contributes to this perception (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016). Moss (2006) argues similarly suggesting that early childhood workers, who are also seen mostly as care providers, are seen merely as 'technicians' rather than teachers. This evidenced in particular by how OSHC is perceived within schools. There is often a hierarchy within schools where other school staff sit above OSHC workers (Cartmel, 2007; Pálsdóttir, 2012). This can also contribute to power imbalances between school principals and OSHC coordinators that marginalise OSHC services (Cartmel, 2007). How OSHC is valued by principals is critical in governing access to space and resources (Gammage as cited in, Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014) and the quality of programs for children (Haglund and Boström, 2020). Many services operate in spaces shared with other school activities, which also speaks to their low status. The low status of OSHC is also exemplified by a workforce that is subject to poor pay, insecure work arrangements and limited prospects for career advancement (Simoncini and Lasen, 2012). There is little evidence that the policy reforms centred around the NQS have resulted in early childhood, and by extension, OSHC becoming more desired occupations (Gibson et al., 2020).

This combination of factors and the rapid expansion in the number of services are implicated in OSHC's difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified workers. OSHC services have to compete with other forms of early childhood education and care for workers, which typically pay more than OSHC for similar roles (Education Services Australia, 2021). Whilst the expansion of OSHC has resulted in an increase in the number and diversity of roles, OSHC still struggles to be attractive to workers. These challenges have been made worse by the COVID19 pandemic (Education Services Australia, 2021). Australia's national, state and territory governments have developed in partnership with sector representatives a 10-year National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (Education Services Australia, 2021). The strategy is a long-term plan that seeks to address staff shortages in OSHC and early childhood education and care services. The strategy highlights the significant staffing challenges in OSHC and reinforces the importance of studies like the one described in this article.

This paper reveals some of the complexities that trouble OSHC's status as a profession. It is increasingly accepted that qualified, supported staff are important in providing high quality care and education for children and meeting regulatory demands (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). However, the realities and history of OSHC in Australia contribute to a situation where professional roles in OSHC have little status.

## Project and Methodology

A full day professional development program was conducted with a group of OSHC workers employed as service leaders in 2018. The program sought to introduce the leaders to an initiative called The Professional Standards for Educators (The Standards) (QCAN, n.d.; Cartmel et al, 2020). The Standards were developed by the Queensland Children's Activity Network (QCAN), the peak representative body for OSHC in the Australian state of Queensland. QCAN developed The Standards to try and capture what professional practice looked like for OSHC practitioners at 4 different career stages, commencing with 'Foundation' for new educators and culminating with 'Lead' for service leaders. The Standards were developed in consultation with sector representatives to better represent what contemporary professional practices look like in an Australian context (QCAN, n.d.). It was hoped that the service leaders who participated in the program would return to their workplaces and use The Standards as a resource to guide professional development of all members of their teams, including themselves and others in leadership roles.

A previous QCAN program, the *Core Knowledge and Competency Framework*, suggested that competent, knowledgeable and committed leaders are needed for successful introduction of new professional frameworks in OSHC (Cartmel & Brannelly, 2016). It was also hoped that The Standards would contribute to a clearer, shared understanding of what professional practice in OSHC looks like and therefore improved OSHC for children.

A small, qualitative research project was conducted to gain an insight into participants' engagement with The Standards after the program (Cartmel et al, 2020) that answered the following questions:

1. How did participants use The Standards in their work?
2. What factors impacted on participants' ability to use The Standards

The project was based on a methodology proposed by Guskey (2016), which uses a combination of qualitative methods to try and provide deep understandings of the effects of professional development in educational settings. Guskey's model consists of 5 phases of increasing complexity and duration beginning with learning about participants' first responses to the professional development and the knowledge they gained. The latter phases seek more detailed knowledge about how knowledge was applied in the education setting, and ultimately what benefits resulted for children (Guskey, 2016). In the first phase of this project, all training participants completed a survey on the day of the training to share their initial impressions. This article reports on the second phase, which occurred approximately 12 months after the training, with a smaller sample of 9 service leaders who participated in an

online semi-structured interview to provide insights into their initial engagement with The Standards (Guskey, 2016). Phases 3 to 5 have yet to be undertaken.

Interviews were conducted and recorded via the web application Zoom. Zoom was selected on the basis of convenience for the participants who sometimes lived and worked large distances from the researchers. Participants were asked how, or if they had used The Standards since the professional development, and what factors had helped or made it harder to implement them. Semi-structured interviews ensured that the researchers addressed the same topics with all participants whilst also allowing the flexibility to pursue topics that appeared significant but were unexpected (Patton, 2015). The 83 leaders who participated in phase one of the research were invited to do an interview, with 9 agreeing. This approach to sampling was taken to provide participants would be information-rich sources who could provide deep understandings of engagement with The Standards after the original professional development program (Emmel, 2013; Patton, 2015).

The analysis presented in this paper draws upon the interview data from phase 2. Each interview was transcribed, coded and subject to inductive thematic analysis, an approach suited to analysis of qualitative interviews to identify the major topics of concern to participants (Terry et al., 2017). Interview questions focused on if and how The Standards had been used, any effects resulting from their use, and any factors that helped or hindered with implementation. Coding was conducted in phases like those proposed by Terry et al. (2017). The initial, familiarisation phase involved reading transcripts to form an overall impression of interviews and how participants had engaged with The Standards. Initial coding involved labelling statements relevant to the research question. Codes were refined over repeated engagement with transcripts and then grouped into themes that captured a shared concept or concern. These themes were constructed and refined through repeated engagement with the transcripts and discussion across members of the research team (Terry et al, 2017). This approach facilitated analysis that reflected the concerns of participants, whilst highlighting any unexpected themes. It is an unexpected theme that will be explored in the remainder of this paper, that being the presence of workplace hierarchies. These hierarchies were a significant factor in how practitioners took up and implemented The Standards.

## Power, Knowledge and the Formation of Workplace Hierarchies

The analysis that follows in this paper draws on the theories of Michel Foucault, which helped to understand the hierarchies that participants described and how they experienced them. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1977) addresses social hierarchies in a number of ways. He details how hierarchical structures have emerged as a way of governing the activities of individual subjects in social institutions like schools. Hierarchies are disciplinary technologies that distribute disciplinary power and maintain workers in sanctioned activities and productive states (Foucault, 1977). One feature important to this analysis is Foucault's conception of power, which he sees not as top-down but as distributed throughout the social body and its institutions. Under a Foucauldian conception, workers' discipline is maintained not just by supervisors but also by the worker themselves (Foucault, 1977). Self-disciplining by workers was one of the dominant themes in this analysis.

Foucault's theories also provided a way of understanding how the hierarchies described in this analysis might have formed. Hierarchical structures are formed around dominant dis-

courses and social norms that reflect what a society both values and problematises (Foucault, 1977). This allowed connections to be made between Australian cultural understandings about OSHC and caring professions more broadly and the lived realities of OSHC workplaces. The multiplicity implicit in these theories was also valuable. Foucault (1980) describes how truth can shift across time and contexts. This permitted contemplation that the hierarchies described could be unique to OSHC in a contemporary Australian context and differ across services. This theoretical orientation also makes possible a transformation. Davis et al. (2015) argue that examining discourse and power using poststructural theories make possible a rethinking of early childhood education and care. Given the similarities between how OSHC and early childhood are conceptualised in Australia, it seems reasonable to consider discourse and power when investigating OSHC leadership. Foucault's theories permit contemplation that OSHC workplace hierarchies and their implications are not inevitable, but able to re-imagined in ways that support better outcomes for children and workers.

## Results and Discussion

This research investigated participants' responses to questions about how they had engaged with The Standards and what factors impacted on their capacity to implement them. The most significant factor that emerged in participants' interviews related to workplace hierarchies. Participants spoke of themselves and colleagues in ways that suggested hierarchical organisation of roles within their services, with some attracting greater cultural capital and power. This research revealed two different types of hierarchies that operated in the participants' OSHC settings.

The first type of hierarchy related to the sorts of formal organisation structures within participants' OSHC settings. It is unsurprising that organisational hierarchies would be a factor in participants' accounts. Hierarchies are a taken for granted structure in Australian workplaces. Employment conditions for OSHC and other children's education and care settings, reward workers with higher status with greater levels of responsibility and pay (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2021). The majority of OSHC settings have a more highly paid Coordinator or Director responsible for the overall conduct of the service including supervision of other staff members, typically known as educators. In organisations that operate multiple services there can exist other higher-level roles such as regional managers and supervisors with responsibility for multiple services. The terminology for these various roles can vary across services. In this analysis, workers in leadership roles with responsibility for staff supervision and service direction will be referred to as 'leaders'. Other workers who do mostly contact work with children will be referred to as 'educators', consistent with Australian terminology. It is important to recognise that positions have diverse structures. In addition to management responsibilities, some leaders may also have contact work with children. All 9 participants were classified as leaders and described how they implemented The Standards in hierarchical ways.

This research also revealed a second type of hierarchy was not as expected as the first. This second hierarchy related to workers who are employed on a part-time and casual basis.

The majority of OSHC workers are part-time and casual. Six participants described how employment status was a factor in how they used The Standards.

The following discussion explores these two hierarchies in more detail. It aims to describe these hierarchies and the complex forms they take, but also provide insights into their implications for implementation of a professional development program like The Standards.

## Hierarchies based upon Leadership Responsibilities

The first hierarchy was one based on the allocation of leadership responsibilities. In one of the clearest trends, leaders were inclined to see The Standards as most relevant to educators rather than themselves. Only two participants indicated that The Standards were used to guide the performance of leaders. This speaks to a hierarchical division within these services, where the Standards are only considered necessary for workers in the least powerful roles, which in early childhood education and care settings and therefore OSHC are likely the educators (Urban, 2008). This resonates with Foucault's (1977; 2001) proposition that the formation of categories falls mostly on subjects who are least powerful. Assigning The Standards only to educators marks them as a group who require greater monitoring and governance. It positions educators as the least skilled, least experienced and most in need of improvement.

Hierarchised social categories make possible the ranking and production of knowledge about the least powerful workers (Foucault, 1977) and was a feature of leaders' practices. All nine participants described techniques like professional development plans and mapping documents, all of which involve the production of detailed knowledge of educator's performance mapped against prescribed benchmarks. The practices described were not entirely 'top down' where leaders have control over educators. Both educators and leaders participated in their categorisation and positioning within hierarchies. The interview data contained multiple examples of all workers participating in the ranking and production of knowledge about themselves and others.

> We're going to be brave too with our educators and everybody that is in the service and tell them straight in a non-judgmental room where they're learning and say, 'Hey, we think that this would be a good opportunity for you to focus in this area and improve yourself, one bit by one bit(Participant 5).

> We got the staff to go away and to reflect on themselves and their practices and decide where they thought they might sit on the scale within The Standards. They then have a one-on-one interview with myself where I asked them to explain to me why they think that they're sitting there and how they going. Prior to that, I will also sit down and read through and make some decisions around where I think the staff are sitting on that scale(Participant 1).

Participants 1 and 5 describe processes where leaders and educators actively produce knowledge about educator performance. The most common practice was self-reflection, employed by all participants, where educators were required to measure their own performances against The Standards and place themselves on the rating scale provided. The techniques described by participants are not surprising. Individualised performance management techniques like this where workers and their supervisor assess against a central set of benchmarks like The Standards is common in other types of early childhood education and care services (Sims & Waniganayake, 2015; Osgood, 2006). It also makes possible the self-

discipline of workers and monitoring of output (Foucault, 1977). The processes described by educators were also expected as they are a design feature of The Standards. The participants' accounts do not really provide any insights into whether the hierarchical self-assessment built into The Standards is an effective way to improve educator performance. In early childhood education and leadership, despite their prevalence, there is yet no demonstrated benefit from such approaches (Nuttall et al., 2018). The value of self assessment is an important question that requires further consideration and research.

That leaders applied The Standards to educators but not themselves was somewhat unexpected. The Standards were designed to provide benchmarks for service leaders as well as educators, which prompts consideration of why participants did not apply them to themselves. Whilst it is possible that leaders considered themselves 'above' educators and not in need of the Standards, it needs to be considered that there might be other reasons. One possibility might relate to the question of who might perform the work of assessing leaders? The answer might lie in something has long been accepted in Australian OSHC but is rarely researched, that being that OSHC is of little concern to management entities like school principals and parish priests, those to whom leaders commonly report. As Cartmel (2007) explains, OSHC leaders often have problematic relationships with school principals and management entities who dismiss OSHC as low status and a minor concern. This suggests an additional hierarchical relationship between management body and leader, but one underpinned by different assumptions and therefore judged differently. If a management body conceptualises OSHC as of low importance it makes it less likely they would take interest in The Standards or use them as a performance management tool.

This suggests the possibility of two distinct hierarchies within OSHC services. In one, leaders sit above educators requiring them to engage with The Standards using self-governance to produce effective workers. In the other, service leaders sit below a school principal or other management entity and governed not by The Standards but some other means not identified in this research. As proposed by Davis et al. (2015), leaders in early childhood education and care settings are just as constrained by power and discourse as educators, just in different ways.

Foucault's theories help to understand how these two hierarchies can sit alongside each other within a single setting. The low status of OSHC is a dominant discourse in Australian culture (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021, Cartmel, 2007), However, the way that this discourse is enacted in the use of The Standards by educators, leaders and school and service management can be multiple and contextual. This research suggests it was considered appropriate for leaders to know about and use The Standards to measure and monitor educator's professionalism. In contrast, school management, who commonly sit outside the OSHC service, might instead prefer to remain distanced from a tool designed for a low-status occupation and minor concern.

## Hierarchies based on Employment Status

The other important hierarchy revealed by the analysis related to part-time and casual educators. Part time and casual educators make up the greater proportion of the OSHC workforce. In 2016, the majority of OSHC workers were employed part time with 68 % working 19 hours or less per week. Only 10.3 % of workers were employed for 36 or more hours per week

(Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017). Similarly, a decade earlier in 2006, over 50% of OSHC workers were employed for 10 hours or less per week, and only 4% of employees worked full-time hours (McNamara and Cassells, 2010). Whilst statistics such as these have only been collected intermittently, the composition of the OSHC workforce and its reliance on part-time workers appears to have changed little over the last decade.

In the previous section, it was detailed how The Standards were used mostly be leaders to govern the performance of educators. However, not all leaders believed The Standards to have value for all types of educators. Six leaders proposed that part time employment was a barrier to successful implementation of The Standards.

> The career educators, the career childcare people, they get it, they want to be here, they are keen to improve, they understand and acknowledge the philosophies behind The Standards, they are prepared to come in for that extra hour to work out, go through programming in great detail and so forth, but then, you get another cohort who will look at us almost cross-eyed when we talk about this sort of thing, but you know. They rank after school care. So look, afterschool care work equals playing handball for an hour, getting out all the outdoor equipment, playing madly in it, and then going home at five o'clock, before it all has to get put away (Participant 2).

In this quote, Participant 2 alludes to the existence of another hierarchy within their service that forms around an educators' employment status and corresponding views about OSHC. They suggest that educators fall into two categories, those that are 'career' educators and those who are just 'passing through'. These participants share a belief, that career educators see OSHC more positively, as providing more than just care. This is an act of positioning that establishes a hierarchy where 'true' OSHC people are valued more than 'outsiders'. For many interviewees, this hierarchy was expressed through their investment in staff development.

> I'd probably wait to the see if that educator would be coming back in a more, you know, long term permanent capacity and then I would put that extra work in (Participant 6).

Participant 6 explains that it may not be worth investing time and money in the development of casual educators. Social categories and knowledge about them form in localised settings around dominant discourses (Foucault, 1977). Participants 2 and 6 provide examples of how, acting on a shared understanding that short-term staff are less committed to OSHC, positioning long-term staff ahead of others to privilege access to organisation resources and The Standards. This finding resonates with research into casual workers more broadly outside OSHC. Being a casual worker can have implications for the quality of professional relationships individuals can form (Allen, 2011). Casual workers can also be less visible in work settings and perceived as lower status and less deserving of the same conditions as other workers (Tweedie, 2013).

However, as proposed in earlier discussion about a leader/educator hierarchy, it is suspected that the long/short term worker hierarchy is also more complex than first appears and similarly informed by a broader cultural discourse that understands OSHC as 'just care' (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). This is made clear in the earlier quote from Participant 2 and also the following quote from Participant 6.

> I thought long and hard about implementing the Standards, but as they're uni (university) students with all their uni stuff and their prac (practical placements) and all of that and because they do professional standards as part of their university training it… I wasn't sure that they would actually see the value and the extra time and effort to be able to do that. Two of them are leaving in a few week's time, another lot will be leaving in 12 months time. So I think it depends on the makeup of your workforce, that you have at your centre.

If they're going to be long term employees, then it would be much more practical and useful than those that are just sort of filling in. Well, they're still doing their job and doing the right thing, but it's not their career (Participant 6).

Participant 6 explains their belief that many of their short-term, casual educators do not regard OSHC as their primary concern. This view was expressed by 6 of the participants. Casual workers are often young and undertaking study that prepares them for other careers in teaching or related disciplines. In 2016, 17.4% of OSHC workers were studying towards a bachelors degree (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017). Working in OSHC and child care carries less cultural status than working in other educational settings such as school teaching (Cartmel, 2007). This complicates what appears to be a simple hierarchical relationship that values long-term over short-term, casual workers. Leaders like Participant 6 believe short-term educators to be a group who are destined for work in higher status professional roles such as school teachers. A similar dynamic operates in early childhood education and care where workers use early childhood roles as a path to more highly paid jobs (Gibson, 2013; Moss, 2006; Cumming et al., 2015). Therefore, whilst assigned a lower status within an OSHC setting, short-term educators can have greater cultural capital in the future outside OSHC. Views such as that expressed by Participant 6 seem to be that young, casualised educators are seen as future, high-status workers biding their time in OSHC until their 'real' careers start. As such they might be treated with suspicion that they do not share the belief that OSHC is an important setting for children, a foundational principle of The Standards. This results in a contradictory hierarchical arrangement where short-term educators can be simultaneously seen as having high cultural status but also problematic and less worthy of investment. This is complicated further by the realities that casual workers are often the most vulnerable (Kelly, 2016).

## Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper shows that there are multiple hierarchies in operation in some Australian OSHC settings that influenced use of QCAN's Professional Standards for Educators. In one hierarchy, service leaders used The Standards to monitor and improve the performance of educators but not for themselves despite The Standards being designed for those in leadership roles. The reasons that leaders exempted themselves were not revealed by this analysis. It is possible that some leaders are in a different hierarchical relationship with management bodies, commonly school principals, who dismiss OSHC as secondary and therefore might perceive little value in The Standards (Cartmel, 2007). These hierarchies were further complicated by revealing that many leaders position short-term educators as 'less' than long-term educators, justifying a lack of investment on the belief that short-term educators will inevitably move on to other roles. Similarly, the low social status of OSHC described by Cartmel & Hurst (2021) also complicates this hierarchy by suggesting that seemingly low-status short-term workers might simultaneously enjoy higher cultural status by virtue of future careers in teaching and other professions.

This raises the question of what this means and why it might be important. QCAN developed The Standards on the basis that they had benefit for OSHC settings and particularly for the children who attend them, by providing aspirational, measurable benchmarks for

workers of different levels. The hierarchies described here acted as barriers to implementation of The Standards, resulting in under-utilisation for service leaders and short-term staff. Recently, QCAN developed a new, separate set of standards, specifically for service leaders. It seems reasonable to expect that these complex hierarchies could also influence engagement with these new standards and other forms of professional development. Further research would help to understand whether workplace hierarchies act as a barrier to their uptake and implementation. This has potential implications for the play, leisure, care and education provided for children. Further research into workplace hierarchies in OSHC would help to understand these complex relationships and how they might be disrupted.

The long/short term worker hierarchy also has implications for the sustainability of the OSHC workforce. The OSHC sector has grappled with shortages of qualified workers since the implementation of the NQF in 2007, which is reflected in its reliance on students and other transient worker. Staffing shortages have been exacerbated further by the COVID19 pandemic (Education Services Australia, 2021). It is reasonable to contemplate whether the reluctance to invest time and resources in short-term workers documented in this article makes it less likely that workers studying to work in other fields will remain to build careers in OSHC. If so, this would be a lost opportunity. Many of these students will ultimately gain degree-level qualifications with the potential to make valuable contributions to OSHC.

When considering the findings of this research, there is a tension that needs to be grappled with. The Foucauldian stance taken in this analysis troubles social hierarchies and the applications of power that produce them. However, the focus of this research, The Standards are by design, normalising. They provide benchmarks and standards against which OSHC workers are asked to discipline themselves and others. Whilst there are problematic aspects to systems of 'quality' like The Standards (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007) it would be simplistic to dismiss The Standards for those reasons. The Standards are a rare attempt to capture what pedagogical practice looks like in Australian OSHC, something that potentially benefits workers, children and families. Although hierarchical in their conception, The Standards are not solely responsible for the hierarchies explored in this article. Drawing on Foucault (1977), The Standards are an expression of broader cultural norms and hierarchical structures that circulate Australian culture. They are also reflective of a sector that is increasingly governed by neoliberal systems of regulation and self-assessment (Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). It does however prompt consideration of whether there might be other ways to understand and express the complex and important work OSHC educators and leaders do, something that would help to disrupt that cultural discourses that problematically position OSHC and all of its workers as low-status.

This was a small research project that only provided glimpses into the operation of power in OSHC workplaces and how they are structured and function. The sample size was small and only drew on the views of service leaders, which limits the transferability of the findings. It ignores the perspectives of other significant actors, in particular educators, short-term educators and management bodies. There would be great value in seeking multiple perspectives on how OSHC is both understood and managed. Additionally, this analysis on hierarchies emerged as something of a surprise in research into the use of a professional development tool. This highlights a need for future research directly addressing workplace structures. Deeper knowledge of this sort might assist representative organisations like QCAN in supporting OSHC workers navigate complex workplaces and power relationships to implement improvement more effectively.

We believe that the benefits of the poststructural analysis conducted in this paper should extend beyond academic researchers and readers. Davis et al. (2015: 144) argue that poststructural theories empower early childhood leaders to "make visible how power, knowledge and truth intersect to limit and/or provide opportunities for early childhood educational leaders and recognize, engage with and challenge the gendered and raced social and political construction of knowledge and identity". My Time Our Place, the curriculum framework for OSHC in Australia also explicitly identifies poststructural theories as being of importance for OSHC workers (AGDE, 2022). Consideration should be given to how OSHC leaders and educators can be supported to also deploy these ideas in their work. Doing so would allow them to do the work of unmasking the hierarchies in operation in their service, the discourses that inform them and how they constrain their opportunities to work in the best interests of school age children in the hours before and after school.

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