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In the period 1993 to 2005 I held three newly created and rather challenging leadership positions. The first of these was the position as Head of School for the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC), Macquarie University. The IEC had just moved from a College of Advanced Education into a university environment. From this position I later moved on to set up two offices for the New South Wales government: the NSW Office of Child Care and then the NSW Parenting and Research Centre.

Each leadership position takes place within a unique context and while an understanding of this context provides an essential framework for one's work, I have found there have been certain similar elements that have underpinned my general approach to leadership. In each of these positions I first needed to understand the use of power within each organisation and use that understanding to inform and strengthen my own leadership strategies. All leadership positions involved elements of power at various levels within the organisational structures.

Within this context I have always seen power existing as a reciprocal relationship between myself and the people and organisations I worked with. I have always tried to share power through being consultative, listening, communicating and creating opportunities for individuals to build on their own strengths. The core element that has formed the framework for all my work has been an understanding of the political context. In Australia, EC services have been and continue to be developed within an intensely political environment. This has meant my focus has been on the 'big picture' of EC provision rather than single issues. Taking account of where things will probably move in the future means that people can create change and shape the future, rather than have the future created for them and policies thrust upon them.

From the big picture I have had a vision of what I wanted to achieve and put in place processes whereby others get to share and have input into this vision. All strategies/initiatives, to be successful, need to involve the team in all aspects of the process. The relationships that then develop are the glue that holds an organisation together and provide the platform for the distribution of power.

It is important to emphasise that with initiatives that create change, the process is not always easy. I learnt very early on in my work that there are times when things did not happen as I had planned or expected—some things just don't work. It has always been important to be able to reflect/analyse on what went wrong, get feedback from staff/colleagues on what could be done differently, then pick myself up and go on to put in place some new strategies.