

My experiences of leadership

Business, Management



Knowledge sharing, I message and questions for learning. The act of sharing knowledge has been found to be an indicator to superior team performance (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke 2006). In both the positive experience, team leaders displayed expertise in the knowledge and skills of planning an activity for children and also confronting others on their mistakes. Sharing their knowledge allows the possibility in potential problem that may arise (Lee, Gillespie, Mann, & Wearing, 2010) due to the lack of understanding of certain field. As a result of the knowledge sharing, there is a positive outcome to the team performance, the learning activity went smoothly and the overall compliance team performance was improved. In addition, the communication style used in the knowledge sharing was influential in preventing contempt or shame. Both leaders used the ' I ' message, which allows for the appropriate expression of feelings in a professional context (Rodd, 2006). For example, ' I am worried if we ... it may ... ' instead of ' You have to change your plan because... ' In this case, the conversation was respectful and constructive, my personal feelings were not affected, and it prevented the leader being seen as accusing me of being inexperienced. The team leaders also pose their ideas, knowledge and skills to me in a form of a question, which fosters self-evaluation.

Taking responsibility. Even when someone has extensive experience in a field, making mistakes can sometimes be an inevitable occurrence. A good leader typically understands what went wrong, avoid making the same mistakes and accept the responsibility. My mentor understood that my learning activity is dependent on the number of children present on the day, she immediately took responsibility and apologize. In addition she displayed

accountability skills by being an effective problem solver and collaborating with me to come up with relevant strategies to rectify the mistake.

Provision of support and feedback. An effective leader provides assistance to team member to develop their skills and uses constructive feedback and evaluation to ensure positive performance (Rodd, 2006). The leaders in my experiences highly value the provision of support in the situations that I was in and provided extensive feedback subsequently. This has fostered my reflective thinking and also helps develop confidence in providing quality care and early education for young children.

Conflict Avoidance. Rahim, Garrett, and Buntzman (1992) suggest that avoidance includes, withdrawing or sidestepping situations. In the first negative experience, the leader attempted to work with A to resolve the issue to improve team performance in the group presentation. As the leader lost patience when dealing with A, the leader engaged in conflict avoidance strategy and let the presentation fail. The leader misused the avoidance strategy as the benefit of confrontation would result in a better group presentation than avoiding the conflict and letting the group presentation fail. The leader viewed conflict as a negative when it should be seen as an opportunity for learning, growth, development and change and when handles effectively can increase performance and strengthened the relationship within the group. Consistent with Rodd's view (2006) the conflict avoidance in this group has re-emerge as tension within the group.

Leading change. In the first negative experience, there was a desperate need for change in Member A's presentation. The leader attempted to lead a

' crisis change' which means responding to an unexpected occurrence and time constraints is a major part of this type of change (Rodd, 2006). Rodd (2006) identified factors that may be a source to the resistance to change. In this case, member A may have resisted to change as there was fear about personal future (inability to perform in the presentation), lack of knowledge or difference in point of views (Rodd, 2012). An effective leader would be able to deal with the resistance to change in order to have a positive outcome for the group.

Aggression, power and dominance. When one perceived oneself as dominant and superior to those of others, aggressive behaviour can occur (Rodd, 2006). An aggressive individual typically believes that the use of power and dominance can achieve their desired goals (Rodd, 2006). In the second negative experience, the leader used aggressive communication style by voicing out her opinions and disregarding the team members'. It allows the leaders' opinions to become the focus of the group's opinion as there is a perceived idea that leader's opinion is superior than those of the group members' and would bring about greater group performance. In addition, the leader showed lack of respect for the team members' ability to contribute to group outcome. This aggressive style can consequently cause loss of relationship, diminish members' motivation to work hard, develop the desire to take revenge or get even and retaliation can occur (Rodd, 2006).

Characteristics to strengthen and /or develop in yourself in relation to being an effective educational leader

Knowledgeable. The characteristic of being knowledgeable in early childhood educational leader context means having the motivation to be well informed

about all aspects of early childhood education which may include theories and research in child learning and development and government initiatives (Rodd, 2006). In addition to knowing, an educational leader should be motivated for continual development of knowledge and skills in order to make rational expert decisions that will improve service provision (Rodd, 2006). Knowledge in this context means both pedagogical and practical understanding. Possessing the right knowledge and skills fosters a commitment and interest in ongoing child development, the ability to affect change and respond to family and community needs (Rodd, 2006).

Waniganayake, Morda, and Kapsalakis (2000) believe that knowledge forms a foundation for an early childhood educator's ability to be a leader. Being an early childhood education student, I am privileged to be equipped with the right knowledge that is required in the professional setting. However, there is a need for me to engage in continuous knowledge development in the future to become an effective educational leader.

Reflective. The ability to reflect is connected to how effectively one can learn from own experience and as a result allows a meaningful way for leaders to gain genuine understanding (Densten, & Gray, 2001). Bookfield claims that the absence of reflection in practice can increase the risk of making poor decisions and bad judgment (1995). The process of being reflective involves the ability to questioning an earlier practice, assessing the effectiveness and developing a plan to improve the practice in the future (Rodd, 2006). Being reflective assists educators to gain a better understanding of their environment, become more open in their thinking and more flexible and adaptable in their practice (Rodd, 2012). In addition, it fosters the culture of

continuous inquiry and learning in the early childhood setting that can improve the overall setting's practice. During my placement, I engaged in reflective practice in the aim to personal development. In an effort to becoming an effective educational leader, I need to engage in deeper reflective thinking that not only aims at personal development but also positive development of the children and the early childhood settings as a whole.

Relationship and partnership. In early childhood education context, being an educational leader consists of building respectful, trusting, nurturing and equitable relationship to the children, families and communities. A large part of building a relationship and partnership involves communication. Being able to communicate with children at their level and being aware of different strengths of each child can make you a provides a sense of trust in children and assist in developing relationship. My experience in of communication was only significant to children and the staff that I regularly interact with. There is a further need for me to communicate with other professionals, the community and the families in order to build relationship and partnerships. Leaders creating partnership with others involved in children's social context provide an avenue of sharing power and responsibility in achieving a common goal (Rodd, 2006).

Confidence. The personal style of leaders greatly influences how they are perceived in the view of the children, family, community, other staffs and professionals (Rodd, 2006). A leader has to believe in their own capability to undertake the job and tasks in order to convey their attitudes and beliefs to

those they communicate with (Rodd, 2006). When leaders develop a sense of confidence in their practice in early childhood settings, it will attract followers who are willing to be guided in the direction taken by the leader. A confident leader also bring reassurance to parents of their children's wellbeing in the centre. Confidence in early childhood education context can stem from the development of appropriate knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and most importantly experience. Presently, I am still developing the level of confidence and the exposure to more theoretical learning in university and practical learning during placement will extend my level of confidence.

In conclusion, the characteristics that I perceive would be useful to strengthen or develop to become an effective educational leader are knowledgeableness, reflective, relationship and partnership building and confidence.