

The continuing evolution of leadership theory



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The articles and the book chapters chosen identify varying leadership perspectives, dynamics, and leader follower characteristics in the educational contexts. Kellerman in “ what every leader needs to know about followers” suggests that “ every leader has at least one follower” and good followers make informed decisions about their leaders and what they espouse. Based on their judgments about the leaders, they take appropriate actions. This article was chosen due to its insightfulness of leader follower relationships, and how closely these can be linked with the early childhood contexts

Hard (2006), in “ Horizontal violence in early childhood education and care” (ECEC) explores the relationship between the leadership in ECEC, and the internal and external factors inhibiting leadership development of early childhood professionals. This article also provides an insight into the lack of leadership, and complexities between the management and leadership within the early childhood field.

Rodd (2006) identifies the need for the early childhood profession to become more active in up skilling early childhood professionals with leadership skills. Rodd stresses the importance of leadership development by saying “ It is necessary to nurture and train leaders within the early childhood profession and to empower the early childhood field from grass roots up”. Rodd also suggest that early childhood professionals need to see themselves as leaders and to take the challenges in facilitating high quality early childhood services for children and the families. Leadership in early childhood is an insightful book which provides a field specific knowledge and understanding of what is leadership within the early childhood context.

Critical summaries and application

The typology of the 'leader follower' relationship proposed by Kellerman allows the leaders to identify, to determine, and to appreciate the differences of their followers. Kellerman (2007) uses leader follower engagement as the defining factor and identifies five types of followers: followers who are completely detached as "isolates"; "bystanders" as free riders, "participants" who are willing to make an impact by some level of participation, "activists" who are very much engaged in what is happening; and "diehards" who are very much engaged that "they are willing to go down with the ship or throw the captain overboard". Perhaps this is very much true in early childhood contexts where identifying people who would fit into any one of these categories is easy to find. Although Kellerman's emphasis on leaders having to know the followers could have positive impact on leadership success, it could be suggested that the followers too need to know their leaders and their expectation in becoming effective group members. Warren Bennis cited in Dubrin, Dalglish, Miller (2006) suggest that a key role of the followers is to collaborate with their leaders to achieve organisational goals through team work: a new kind of alliance between the leaders and the led (pp. 472-473)

Hard (2006), identifies the lack of understanding of what leadership is within the early childhood field, and states that until recently, leadership had not been widely researched in early childhood education and care. According to Hard(2006), , leadership involves influencing people, situations and role responsibilities and relationships specific to each context within which they operate. Leadership also requires meeting the needs of the people, and

managing the resources and power in a profitable manner. Hard also suggests that: “ management and leadership are interrelated concepts and a clear separation is not necessarily possible or desirable”. Management positions often do incorporate some leadership skills however; most often leadership in early childhood involves management duties. Hard suggest perhaps the essence of the term leadership articulates the notion of creating positive change in organisations.

Rodd (2006), identifies that the “ development of leadership skills continues to be a vital and critical challenge for early childhood practitioners” in providing culturally and socially responsive early childhood contexts for young children and their families. Rodd unpicks the leadership in early childhood contexts and encapsulates the uniqueness of each early childhood setting and how it makes it difficult to specifically define leadership broadly and exclusively. According to Rodd, developing relationships and teamwork seems to be enhancing affective leaders within the early childhood settings. Trust, sharing collaboration and empowerment are believed to be contributing factors in developing leadership in early childhood settings. Rodd also explores who the leaders are in the early childhood contexts; functions of leaders in the early childhood field and many other factors unique and significant to early childhood contexts. An important point made by Rodd includes the need for early childhood professional to have leadership dispositions as they are required to implement and ensure Regulatory and Quality Assurance expectations within the early childhood contexts. This requires all early childhood educators to possess an understanding of essentials of leadership skills specific to the early childhood

field. Another important point Rodd makes is that leadership skills are to be necessary and equally important as the curriculum knowledge pursued by the early childhood practitioners.

Reviewing leadership theories and literature provides an understanding that earlier leadership theories lack the significance and the applicability to the early childhood contexts. Early childhood contexts are mainly occupied and managed by women and often the management and leadership involves joint and shared leadership approaches and characteristics uniquely preferred by women. Women often feel the need for intimacy, flexibility, individualised organisational strategies and processes, and the ethos of collaboration and collective success for all within the environment (Rodd, 2006, Dubrin, Dalglish, Miller2006). Early childhood leadership focuses on influencing people rather than using power and authority. These characteristics are seen as more suited, and perhaps unique to the early childhood field (Rodd, 2006)

Looking from Keller's (2007) point of view, it is important for leaders to know who they are leading and their aspirations, in becoming better leaders. The relationship between leaders and the people they are leading is not single sided and not all followers are the same. Followers like leaders too, act upon individual self interests, and therefore, should not be treated as one. Although the followers may lack authority like their leaders, they possess power and influence to make change happen.

Perhaps it would be beneficial to look at educational leadership from a different perspective. Looking from Senge (1990) and Argris and Schon

(1996) and other learning organisation perspectives, educational leadership requires leaders to create an environment where the individuals have the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogues to reflect, expose and to test and improve mental models in achieving better organisational outcomes for all involved.

Leading educational contexts therefore requires leaders to be able to manage and to lead the most valuable asset of the organisation which is its " people". People's skills and knowledge: the knowledge economy, is the value of the organisation. People are not just the cogwheels of machines anymore, and they are seen as active participants who contribute to the organisational goals and outcomes through participative and distributive leadership. The implication of this knowledge economy seems to be that it requires the managers and the leaders to take the leadership stance where they are to define and provide the purpose and value for the tasks assigned. Managers need to focus on nurturing and in developing skills of the work force and inspire positive outcomes for the individuals, the organisation, and the community within which they operate (Dubrin, Dalglish, Miller 2006). Peter Drucker states: " The most valuable assets of a 20th-century company were its production equipment. The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution, whether business or non-business, will be its knowledgeable workers and their productivity." (Drucker 1999) [URL].

As mentioned above, the purpose of an early childhood service is to provide quality care and education for young children. Developing leadership for reflective practice and change is a key role for the early childhood professionals. Change is constant and is one of the few uncertainties in <https://assignbuster.com/the-continuing-evolution-of-leadership-theory/>

everyone's life (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). In early childhood contexts, reflective practice allows individuals: to adapt; respond to problems and difficulties; to be flexible; to question traditional or established practices; to question individual practices; and to question ideas or methods in order to develop new understandings, and then to apply them. It is important for the leaders to remember that the actions and styles of a leader, interactions, values and beliefs influence the people they lead and determine how they respond to the leader. Leadership in early childhood also involves transforming the mind sets and responding to change required by both internal and external constraints. (Rodd, 2006). Effective change is the ability to adapt to the changing circumstances. The planning for and implementation of the change is one of the major challenges that face the early childhood leaders (Saracho, 1992). The four frameworks: Structural, Symbolic, Human Resources and Political Frames, as described by Bowman and Deal (2008) encourage leaders to look at situations differently and to effectively manage change.

Traditional leadership theories have provided with multiple lenses to view varying aspects of management and leadership characteristics people use in different situations and institutions. It has contributed to the understanding of management and leadership perspectives, the roles and the responsibilities of leaders, and to be able to apply theoretical knowledge appropriately in achieving better outcomes in educational contexts.

Theoretical understanding enables the leaders to use it wisely as a guiding factor in approaches to management and leadership within the educational contexts.