

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS' AGENDA

This chapter explains the main purpose of this book, its rationale and its structure. It identifies the starting points and key questions to be addressed: what do we know already; what leadership research applies; and what do we need to know? It also outlines what each chapter seeks to do.

1.1 Introduction

This book is about early childhood leadership in England at a time of great change, with young children and their families a high priority within national debate and plans in train for high-quality integrated children's services at national, local authority and community level. Our hope is that it will also make a contribution to the international debate about new constructs of early childhood leadership. By introducing new and emerging forms of interprofessional leadership, new realities for the field will emerge and the knowledge base will expand. The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003a) and the subsequent *Children Act* (DfES, 2004a) had the overall aim to improve outcomes for all children through the reconfiguration of mainstream services around children and families. Key themes included strong foundations in the early years; a stronger focus on parenting and families; earlier interventions and effective

8 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS

protection for vulnerable and 'at risk' children; better accountability and integration of services locally, regionally and nationally; and reform of the workforce. The five outcomes for children that services should help them to achieve were:

- being healthy, that is enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle;
- staying safe, that is being protected from harm and neglect;
- enjoying and achieving, that is getting the most out of life and developing skills for adulthood;
- making a positive contribution to the community and society and not engaging in antisocial or offending behaviour; and
- economic well-being, that is, being protected from economic disadvantage that might jeopardize life chances and achieving full potential.

The 10-year childcare strategy *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (HMT, 2004) and the *Childcare Act* (DfES, 2006a) to implement this policy built upon the Green Paper (DfES, 2003a) and *Children Act* (DfES, 2004a) with the aim to help deliver the outcomes by providing long-term goals and clear direction. Indeed, as the research that underpins this book was being carried out, local authorities were reforming their education and social services to create integrated children's services, with children's centres and extended schools being introduced by the leaders taking part in this study, a common assessment framework and an integrated workforce strategy, and a common core of training was being introduced together with a new integrated inspection framework for the early years developed by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

The Labour government had stated its commitment to eliminate child poverty by 2020 as a high priority. This led to a policy agenda from 1997 that has generated a national childcare strategy in 1998 (DfEE, 1998) that included expansion of nursery education and childcare from birth to 14 years and generated a programme of so-called Sure Start local programmes and early excellence centres, as well as a programme of neighbourhood nurseries. Also established was the 'foundation stage' as a distinct phase of early education for children aged from 3 years to the end of reception year in school (for 5-year-olds). As well as the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000), a *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES, 2003b) guidance framework had been introduced for all practitioners working with children under 3 years and now a single *Early Years Foundation Stage* framework (DfES, 2007) is unifying guidance from birth to 6 years, taking as a starting point the five outcomes set out above. The first ever *Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007b) was published, setting out the future for children's services, with a vision of change to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up in. The needs and wishes of families were to be placed first, with clear steps set out to make every child matter. This included an expansion of free early education places and an increase in the number of graduate early years professionals.

The agenda for change in early childhood services is complex and leadership across the sector, with children 3 to 5 years in private, voluntary and state

provision, is critical to the quality of children's experience. Key findings from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study (Sylva et al., 2004) indicated that settings integrating education with care provided the best quality and that there was a high correlation between well-qualified staff and better outcomes for children. All this argues for early childhood leaders who not only run effective, safe and caring environments, but who are also leaders of high-quality early education, care and development.

1.2 Context

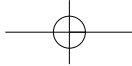
Our focus is on early childhood leadership practice that is intended to make education, care and development more effective. To be useful, it will be both practical, in giving concrete details and examples of leadership practice, and principled, in the sense of providing a basis in both evidence and theory to underpin the practicalities. The endeavour arose from skilled early childhood leaders collaborating with researchers working in a university, with expertise in the area of gathering evidence and theory. The experiences, evidence and analysis provided by these leaders was an essential resource for this work. For this reason, we are assured that other leaders will take seriously and benefit from our leaders' experience. We have also benefited from the wisdom of Professor Viviane Robinson who reminded us of the need to redirect attention to effective educational leadership research so that we made stronger connections with learning, pedagogy and assessment and fewer links to 'generic' leadership skills. As she pointed out (Robinson, 2006: 63), generic leadership research provides important guidance about the influences and processes involved in leadership, and about the character and dispositions required to exercise the particular influence we call leadership:

it provides little or none of the knowledge-base needed to answer questions about the direction or purpose of the influence attempt. In short, while generic leadership research can inform us about *how* to influence, and about the values that should inform the influence process (e.g. democratic, authoritative, emancipatory), it is silent about *what* the focus of the influence attempt should be.

She cited Firestone and Riehl (2005: 2) who recalled that:

in the past educational leaders were judged routinely on their effectiveness in managing fiscal, organizational and political conditions ... New leaders are increasingly being held accountable for the actual performance of those under their charge with a growing expectation that leaders can and should influence learning. Hence it is important to understand how leadership, learning and equity are linked.

This indicates the clear need to identify what effective early childhood practices and outcomes are – a theme to which we shall return.



10 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS

1.3 What do we know already?

As Anne Nelson noted in the Foreword, the collaboration to be described here grew out of a leadership seminar jointly planned and presented by the University of Warwick and the local authority, that brought together researchers and 25 local early childhood leaders, identified by Anne, the local early childhood adviser, as exemplifying effective practitioners. These represented the full range of foundation stage provision thus involving private day nurseries, through voluntary daycare and foundation stage units in primary schools, to Sure Start programmes and an early excellence centre (now all designated as integrated children's centres).

Our starting point crystallized around three questions – what do we know already; what existing leadership research applies; and what do we need to know? The first two questions allowed the practitioners and researchers to pool their current knowledge before considering what the next stage of their joint investigation should be. The first stage of the process was to gather views on early childhood leadership. In order to achieve this end, the leaders were invited to consider five key questions:

- What does leadership mean in your setting?
- What factors contribute to the effectiveness of this role?
- What factors hinder the effective fulfilment of this role?
- What are your staff training needs?
- How can we build knowledge, skills and capacity in the field?

Participants worked in groups that allowed leaders at a similar phase of professional development and relevant experience to collaborate. Each group provided a written record of their discussion and then these accounts were analysed in order to identify key themes, issues and surprises.

Leadership in your setting

First, in terms of what leadership meant to the variety of leaders present in the diversity of settings represented, was having a clear vision and working towards this. Thinking strategically was emphasized and this was described as understanding the foci and direction that early childhood education was taking as well as the issues involved, in other words, awareness of the wider political, social and educational context. It also meant raising the profile of early years education and care and developing a shared philosophy. Fundamental to this was the recognition of its multidisciplinary nature. A central goal was valuing learning and having a commitment to ongoing professional development was important to this aspiration. In terms of generic leadership skills, having appropriate role models who had the ability to inspire, to motivate and communicate was emphasized.

Factors contributing to the effectiveness of this role

Second, in terms of factors contributing to the effectiveness of the leadership role, the ability to promote early years across a range of agencies and interest groups – the senior management team, staff, parents, governors and the wider professional community – was prerequisite. Stability in leadership with a firm commitment to working towards specific outcomes was regarded as the basis for this. Commitment to continuing professional development and support of staff was thought to contribute to effective leadership. Moreover, it was felt that effective leadership was underpinned by a range of skills that included confidence to empower, enable and delegate, motivation and enthusiasm, willingness to celebrate existing achievements, communication and listening, mediation and negotiation skills.

Factors hindering the effective fulfilment of this role

Third, in respect of factors hindering fulfilment of the leadership role, it was felt that there was a real lack of clarity at the national level about the foundation stage that has been in a state of change and development over several years. It was believed that a lack of status for the early years led to education for this age group being generally regarded as 'easy' and something that any professional could do. Lack of knowledge about early childhood was characteristic at all levels, from senior management teams, governors, local authority advisers, inspectors and trainee teachers. It was felt that for early childhood staff working in school settings, this could also lead to isolation and low levels of responsibility. Lack of status, it was thought, was reflected in a general lack of resourcing in terms of staffing, lack of time for planning, management training and professional development.

Staff training needs

Fourth, a need for accreditation of early childhood leadership and management at varying levels with appropriate funding was identified. Training, it was thought, should comprise knowledge of the principles, capabilities and skills of leadership. Theory and knowledge about early childhood education and care, current legislation and initiatives was regarded as important. The development of skills in devising and writing policy and design of the curriculum was regarded as important, as well as development of staff appraisal in whatever form (selection, recruitment, training, one-to-one observation, mentoring and 'moving staff on'). Effective communication skills for a variety of audiences, building and maintaining positive relationships and effective conflict management were also thought essential.

12 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS

Building capacity in the field

Finally, how could new knowledge, skills and capacity be built in the field? National acknowledgement and recognition of the need for accreditation of training for early childhood leadership with identified funding streams for training and training the trainers was proposed. The need for trainers who knew the early childhood field in terms of knowledge and experience was emphasized. At the local level, cluster-group meetings with direct early childhood leadership training, support and advice was proposed, as was more time to reflect. Setting up networks and mentoring systems across the sector was also recommended. A need for an awareness of and links to existing National College of School Leadership (NCSL) programmes was indicated and, in particular, opportunities to have access to courses such as the new National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) programme (Whalley et al., 2004, together with the NCSL, DfES, 2007c) that was currently available only to children's centre leaders and deputies. It was clear that those present felt there were distinct training and development needs in the early childhood leadership field. The workshop also identified the need for a more systematic review of the formal knowledge base associated with early childhood leadership.

It seems clear from early childhood leaders' own accounts that they believed there to be generic leadership and management skills and practical applications that transferred across sectors. At the same time, valuing learning was at the heart of the process, with a related commitment to ongoing professional development. This highlights the need to move beyond theories, models and skills of leadership to test leadership impact on outcomes for children (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood and Louis, 1998; Silins and Mulford, 2002). Indeed, an evidence-based review (Bell et al., 2003) has revealed the limited evidence of links between leadership and the processes of teaching and learning. The challenge for early childhood leaders, moreover, is to manage the challenge of increasing provision available while ensuring that high quality is maintained. The *Childcare Act* (DfES, 2006a) requires additional services, promising a children's centre in every community but with no additional resources. The challenge of recruiting, training and 'moving staff on' by the very leaders who will have responsibility for driving forward the new agenda is underlined. These leaders have the major responsibility for promoting outcomes related to health and safety, personal, social and emotional well-being as well as learning from 3 to 6 years and increasingly from birth to 6 years. All this is to be achieved in centres that demand well-trained staff with a variety of professional backgrounds in order to meet the diverse needs of both young children and parents. For the private and voluntary sector leaders there is the added tension of balancing affordability and sustainability.

This section of the chapter has focused on what leaders knew already and it has begun to consider what sort of leadership research applies, which is the topic for the next section.

1.4 What leadership research applies?

A lack of research

Despite the apparent lack of evidence for impact of leadership on learning outcomes, the influence of leadership has been described by Hallinger and Heck (1998) and Leithwood et al. (2004) as modest, though by Marzano et al. (2005) as quite substantial. Moreover, effective leadership has been accepted as a key constituent for achieving organizational improvement (Harris et al., 2002; Van Velzen et al., 1985). That said, a review of the early childhood leadership literature by the research team (Muijs et al., 2004) identified a scarcity of early childhood leadership research despite the high potential for activity in the field. There is a clear need to identify what effective leadership practice is in terms of processes and outcomes within the field of early childhood education and care, and within integrated children's centres. Theoretically based studies that allow different models and characteristics to be empirically tested are long overdue. Apart from the new NPQICL, open only to children's centre leaders and deputies, there is a serious lack of leadership development highlighted in the literature, which means many early childhood leaders can be significantly under-prepared for their complex leadership role. A few early childhood leaders with senior management responsibilities within the school as a whole may, if they wish, be able to pursue the National Professional Qualification for Head Teachers.

The nature of existing research

Overall, research on early childhood leadership is dominated by a relatively small number of researchers (for instance, Bloom, 1997; 2000; Rodd, 1996; 1997; 1999). Much of the literature is anecdotal and in some cases barely rises above the level of 'tips for leaders'. There may be reluctance to engage with concepts of leadership (Bloom and Sheerer, 1992; Osgood, 2003; Rodd, 1996). In most English-speaking countries, relatively few people have both early childhood and leadership skills (Bricker, 2000). Australian studies (in Victoria) have found that early childhood leaders have a narrow view of their role and feel discomforted by the management aspect of work (Rodd, 1996). Increased accountability and financial constraints in the sector as well as increased competition and frequent government policy changes demand a sophisticated leadership response (Hayden, 1997; Rodd, 1997). Literature in this area is not well informed by theory and research. Such theorizing as occurs is limited in scope and mostly does not connect with key concepts in educational, public sector or business leadership (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). One reason may be the complexity of the field, characterized by a great diversity of institutions, state, private and voluntary. Rodd (1999) suggested that many women have difficulty in identifying with the concept of and need for leadership in the sector and that leadership styles used are very different from those used by male leaders. Other studies (Coleman, 2001; Evetts, 1994), however, offer no evidence for sex differences in leadership style.

14 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS

Leadership is associated with quality provision

Leadership has been identified as a key element of quality provision (Hayden, 1997; Rodd, 1997; Stipek and Ogana, 2000). A number of studies have found that organizational climate is strongly influenced by the quality of leadership (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000), with lower levels of staff turnover being associated with their involvement in decision-making (Whelan, 1993). In the early childhood field, job satisfaction levels have been found to be higher in settings with an open climate (Bloom, 1997). A high-quality work environment has been found to be related to lower levels of staff turnover, which in turn have been related to children's scores on child development and social and emotional scales in an Australian study (Hayden, 1997). In one US evaluation of Head Start programmes, committed, competent and respected leadership was found to exert a powerful influence on programme effectiveness. Leaders with less experience, less skill at training and supervising staff, in working with schools and the community, and less involved and committed, were associated with less successful programmes (Ramey et al., 2000). Indeed, leaders' experience has been related to centre quality in a number of studies (Kontos and Fine, 1989; Philips et al., 1987) as has the educational level of directors (Bloom and Sheerer, 1992; Sylva et al., 2004). A New Zealand study found that managers were often older and had worked for longer in the organization than other staff with a relatively low level of higher-education qualifications (Croll, 1993).

Roles and responsibilities of leaders

Much of the existing literature on early childhood leaders has focused on the multiplicity of roles they assume and their context-specific nature (Bloom, 2000). One English study of 79 early childhood managers identified the most common roles (Rodd, 1997). Of note was the focus on maintenance rather than development, that is, management rather than leadership function. A New Zealand early childhood project, defined leadership as having a vision, being able to articulate this vision in practice, strengthening links between the centre and the community, developing a community of learners, community advocacy and giving children leadership (Hatherley and Lee, 2003). Rodd (1999) noted that as well as influencing the behaviour of staff and planning and implementing change, a strong emphasis on working with and guiding parents was important in early childhood leadership. While Kagan and Hallmark (2001) suggested a number of early childhood leadership forms: community leadership; pedagogical leadership; administrative leadership; advocacy leadership; and conceptual leadership. Thus, many types of leadership and training may be required. Mitchell (1989) suggested that effective early childhood leaders needed to focus on the entire family, be strong communicators with parents and be able to liaise with a variety of organizations. Kunesh and Farley (1993) recognized the importance of the co-ordination role between family and community.

A lack of effectiveness studies

There appear to be few case studies of effective leaders or quantitative analyses of characteristics against effectiveness measures. Bloom (2000) suggested that early childhood leaders needed to be competent in the knowledge of group dynamics, organizational theory, child development and teaching strategies; technical, human and conceptual skills; and attitudes, including moral purpose. Rodd (1996) noted that professionals' views of early childhood leadership had become more mainstream in comparison with earlier studies. It should be noted, however, that a large number of these studies are not recent and, as such, might anyway have limited relevance in the present English context. A New Zealand study of early childhood managers identified a discrepancy between the managerial tasks carried out and the leadership tasks thought important (Bloom, 1997). Managers reported that staff were provided with a great deal of feedback on relationships and communication though they felt that this was not reciprocated. A more recent study by Carter (2000), however, suggested that teachers did not regard such support from their managers as important.

A lack of leadership development

The lack of early childhood leadership development programmes contrasts with counterparts in primary and secondary schools (Freeman and Brown, 2000). Interviews with professionals in Victoria indicated that most felt that leadership development and training would be useful (Rodd, 1996). A survey of 257 early childhood directors reported that they had received no prior development on leadership and management with 70 per cent feeling ill-prepared (Bloom and Sheerer, 1997). Other US studies have reported a lack of training (Caruso, 1991). Many English early childhood leaders have likewise received little management development and feel uncomfortable with professional development aspects of their role (Kagan and Bowman, 1997). A survey of 201 Australian early childhood directors found that less than half had received any management subjects in initial development and, although 49 per cent had done some in-service training related to leadership and management, 20 per cent felt that they were not prepared at all (Hayden, 1997). Early childhood directors claimed training was best delivered once they were already working in the job and were positive about its benefits (Rodd, 1997). Peer support was also seen as crucial in promoting growth and maintaining motivation (Poster and Neugebauer, 1998).

To date most reported early childhood development programmes have been small scale and localized (Bloom and Sheerer, 1992; Eisenberg and Rafanello, 1998; Mitchell and Serranen, 2000). Bloom (1997) identified a three-phase model of career stages, as beginning, competent and 'master' directors. This suggests that while there should be dedicated programmes incorporating basic elements of early childhood leadership and management at the beginning level, more differentiated programmes are needed at the competent level with coaching, mentoring and emphasis on transfer of knowledge and expertise at the 'master' level.

16 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS

This section has examined existing early childhood leadership research and theory and the limited extent to which it provides high-quality information on how to raise the impact of leadership on child outcomes. This paved the way for addressing the third question – what do we need to know or find out?

1.5 What do we need to know?

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 form the heart of this book. Chapter 2 surveys the perspectives on early childhood leadership of nearly 200 practitioners. These were not only notions that leaders themselves held, but represented the views of staff throughout the organization, thus taking into account implicit models of leadership that existed at all levels within the setting and indeed the sector. It has been noted by Alban-Metcalf and Alimo-Metcalf (2000) that, where leaders' notions of leadership dominate, these notions may have no face validity with the population of practitioners in those settings. Chapter 3 then drills in more depth into the nature of day-to-day roles, responsibilities and characteristics of leaders and staff, their culture and collaborative team decision-making, the internal and external facilitators and barriers to their work. Chapter 4 then considers what precisely early childhood leaders do and what their daily tasks actually comprise. It follows leaders into their settings drawing on video records and diary reports. It introduces the major dimensions of leadership, management and administration in the context of roles, responsibilities, skills, qualities and dispositions, and uncovers the marked differences across the early childhood sector in the deployment of these key elements. Chapter 5 examines in more depth leaders' mixed and contradictory attitudes towards business and entrepreneurial skills.

Chapter 6 considers the journeys of individual leaders into leadership and explores the development of competence from beginning to 'master' leader. Chapter 7 introduces the leader as mentor and guide. Chapter 8 focuses on the particular challenge of leading multidisciplinary teams. Chapter 9 concentrates on leading in the context of change and the type of leadership that may be required. Chapter 10 picks up on and amplifies the many references to reflective learning by considering the use of action research by leaders. Finally, Chapter 11 reviews our starting points and reflects on the outcomes. Those interested primarily in practical applications may want to start with the questions and activities in the appendices that serve to stimulate discussion and analysis of leadership in different early childhood contexts. The Introduction, this chapter, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 help the reader to see the developments of early childhood leadership from a more theoretical and research-based perspective, although all chapters draw upon leaders' work in their own settings.

► Our leaders were asked what topics they would like to have included in an early childhood leadership seminar series. The most frequently requested topics were leadership, mentoring and curriculum development.

Practitioners' views 1.1

With respect to leadership, suggestions were as follows:

- Provide a year-long programme for early years leadership similar to primary leadership.
- Modules for leadership from the university to gain a qualification.
- Strategies for good leadership.
- Leadership techniques and management styles.
- Look at ways to reassess the impact of leadership styles on quality services for children.
- More in-depth exploration around the leadership and management role.
- Team-building, positive staff relationships, managing conflict.
- Policy and procedures to improve and implement changes.
- Consider who leads the leaders, how do we get leadership support at all levels?
- Recruitment and retention.
- Leadership in the global context.
- Network meetings for senior staff to talk 'off the record' about any of their concerns.
- Reading groups, booklists, references to documents and studies would be useful.

Practitioners' views 1.2

With respect to mentoring, suggestions were as follows:

- Mentoring skills and knowledge.
- Mentoring and supervision reviews.
- Mentor training.
- Further information on mentoring.
- Working together, accessing contact numbers for services that can support and what services are available.
- Mentors ... more information please, we all need one!
- Where we can go for support and help.
- Counselling support.

18 LEADING AND MANAGING IN THE EARLY YEARS**Practitioners' views 1.3**

With respect to curriculum development, suggestions were as follows:

- 'Birth to five' ... what is it all about; how, when and why is it changing/how can we get the best out of this?
- The new foundation stage profile.
- Up-to-date legislation for the foundation stage.
- Changing standards, OFSTED regulations.
- New changes, current issues.
- Effective planning and experiences for young children.
- Improving standards in further education through working with colleges to increase quality of childcare students.
- Different approaches – Reggio Emilia, High Scope and Montessori.
- Starting a forum.
- Quick courses, bite-sized modules or courses for practitioners.
- Speakers from private and voluntary sectors.
- Less emphasis on schools.
- Playgroups, 'wrap-around' and 'after-school' clubs.

