Investigating Emotional, Sensory and Social Learning in Early Years Practice

Chapter 6 – Leadership for learning

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Overview of chapter

This chapter is about leadership for learning. The following topics are explored:

- The landscape of educational leadership in England
- Complex work in early childhood: the need for highly skilled leaders to support teams to do this work
- Making space for teams to talk about different aspects of their work
- Difficult decisions to be made about practice based on leaders'
  a) knowledge and understanding of theory
  b) experience in practice
- Effective leadership: findings from big research
- Emotional labour in early childhood
- Sensitive leadership: dispositions needed
- Leadership for the future

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Introduction

In Chapter 2 we emphasised the need for highly reflective leaders. We looked at some national frameworks and considered how these helped leaders to conceptualise their work. Thinking leaders were needed to critique and adapt these frameworks to fit their specific contexts. In Chapter 3 we said that practitioners need knowledge and understanding about emotional development in order to support children in their play and think about appropriate interventions. Reflective practitioners were needed to offer respectful guidance to parents, and provide learning experiences that allow every child to feel positive about their learning. In Chapter 4 we said leaders had responsibility for achieving successful inclusion. Early years leaders must have high expectations for all children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities. In Chapter 5 we looked at some challenges faced by early years practitioners when implementing social learning, particularly in diverse socio-cultural

contexts and with children for whom social learning is challenging. Skilled and knowledgeable leaders are needed to motivate and guide their teams through this complex work with very young children and families.

In this chapter we consider what sorts of people are needed for this broad and intricate work in early years. What does research say about leadership? What are some of the specific dilemmas and issues that early years leaders face? What sorts of leaders are needed in a rapidly changing, highly digitised world? What sorts of leaders are needed for the future? This chapter attempts to explore these questions.

Effective early years leadership

Strong leadership is essential in the early years, especially to support young children's healthy emotional, sensory and social learning. The word 'strong', however, does not imply a tough, hard or detached approach. Strong leadership in this context goes hand in hand with sensitivity, self-knowledge, reflection, and imagination. Leaders with these qualities have a clear vision, but remain flexible and open to change. They communicate well with children, families and colleagues, as well as with local and regional leaders within the field of early years and from other disciplines. These sensitive and skilled leaders are committed to collaboration.

Aubrey (2010) emphasised the importance of strong collaboration in the early years. Early years leaders 'collaborate across the community to provide joined-up high quality services for babies, children and families' (Aubrey, 2010:221). A joined-up approach is necessary to support healthy emotional, sensory and social learning in the early years. Leaders need to connect up with relevant bodies to support individual children and model healthy, positive relationships in their work.

Teams under strong leadership communicate well and are committed to their work with young children and families. Strong, sensitive leaders establish trust within teams. They build resilience in the face of continuous change. In this chapter we construct effective early years leaders as

1. Excellent communicators,
2. Trusting of their teams,
3. Highly reflective,
4. Open to change, viewing it as an opportunity for learning and growth, and

5. Committed to helping children develop well through their emotions, senses and social encounters.

Early years leaders to navigate changing political landscapes

Early years leaders work within an ever-changing political landscape in England. Policies change with every new government. The Labour Government (1997-2010), for example, invested a lot of money in the early years. It launched the Sure Start programme in 1998 to give children the best possible start in life through quality childcare, early education, health and family support. In 2003 it introduced the Every Child Matters policy. The main aims of the policy were for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to:

1. stay safe;
2. be healthy;
3. enjoy and achieve;
4. make a positive contribution; and
5. achieve economic well-being.

There was an emphasis on multi-agency partnerships so that leaders worked together to achieve these outcomes. The aim was for different professionals to adopt a joined-up approach to their work so as to reduce unnecessary repetition and ensure that the needs of every child were fully met. The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2016) that followed the Labour government promoted the notion of 'school readiness' (DfE, 2014). The government was concerned that children did not make rapid enough progress and suggested that this was because many settings passed on unreliable assessments. Accordingly, the coalition government promoted such practices as baseline assessments and younger children in school. This government reduced the expansive, principled framework launched by the previous government to a slim, more subject-focused document. It introduced a phonics test in 2015, whereby children aged 5 and 6 must read pseudo-words, e.g. 'jigh', 'rird' 'phope'.

It could be argued that keeping up with international league tables was the political driver behind these moves, and 'school readiness' the lever through which parents and other parties were persuaded that these developments were positive. In any case, regardless of whether or

not a phonetic approach to teaching reading suits some children, professionals and researchers (Rose, 2006) agree that this is not the case for all children.

New statutory frameworks and non-statutory guidance materials are launched by successive political parties, and new governance, funding and regulatory systems replace old ones along similar forward and backward trajectories. This aspect of ongoing change poses both a challenge and an opportunity for early years leaders. It is challenging in the sense that leaders need to draw up new setting policies to meet new government requirements, provide appropriate training and change their systems as necessary. It is an opportunity in the sense that teams are inevitably brought together to reflect on their practices and systems. For example, when teaching children reading through phonics became enshrined in law (DfES, 2007), teachers and other people involved in the teaching of reading needed to balance what they understood as important for early literacy development with new policy requirements. Inevitably this led to talk about people's professional understanding on the topic, and how people could marry up their principles with new policies. If they believed that a range of approaches was needed to support early reading, for example, how could they continue to offer this while meeting the new government requirements for daily phonics sessions? People engaged in professional talk.

We suggest that effective early years leaders are needed to facilitate such discussions and make decisions. Such leaders are able to build up strong, flexible teams made up of people who welcome change and are mutually supportive and understanding of each other in turbulent times. Elfer and Page (2015:1778) found that when strong leaders embraced uncertainty and had 'the courage to reflect openly' with others, their ogranisations appeared strengthened as well. Strong leaders, from these perspectives, support teams to navigate their way through successive new requirements. This is difficult work.

In the 2016 White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere', the Department for Education in England made a connection between school leadership and the quality of education a child receives. The message the government put forward was that highly effective leaders make a positive impact in the setting where they work and raise the achievement of children. The government set out to widen the impact of effective leadership by directing strong leaders to where they were most needed. The driver behind this paper was to raise standards and improve outcomes for children. Strong leaders were needed not only to support individual

children to develop and learn, but to drive up standards more broadly. Leaders would be 'to account' (DfE, 2016:40) if outcomes were not good.

To achieve this *educational excellence everywhere*, the government wanted strong leaders across the breadth of the country and, in particular, in challenging areas. Accordingly, the government expressed a commitment to train more high quality leaders and create more opportunities for them to work in the areas where they would create the most difference. The government wanted to create 'a strong and sustainable pipeline of talented, motivated leaders working in challenging areas' (DfE, 2016:40).   This was a big ambition to drive up outcomes across all areas of the country.

And yet, government resources for training early years leaders in England have been gradually eroded. The acclaimed National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership programme, for example, no longer operates. Additionally, despite recommendations from a national review of qualifications (Nutbrown, 2013) and report about the quality of early childhood education and care for children under three (Matthers et al, 2015) that a highly qualified, graduate-led workforce was needed in early years, no legislation is yet in place to support this ambition.

In this section we considered how early years leaders in England work in a continually changing political landscape. We talked about the challenges this posed but also emphasised the increased opportunities for professional talk. In the next section we consider what sort of leaders are needed for the complex work involved in early years.

Leaders for complex work

The work of early years leaders in relation to children's emotional, sensory and social learning is highly complex. As has been explored in other chapters in this book, young children need to feel cherished and experience closeness. In Chapter 1, we suggested that young children's earliest emotional and sensory experiences shape their brain architecture for life (Lebedeva, 2015) and contribute to who they become as older children, and as adults. Drawing on Dowling (2010), we emphasised the importance of helping children to build up a bank of happy memories to nourish them throughout life, and to draw on in difficult times. In Chapter 2 we suggested that there are no simple explanations about how children learn. We constructed the world as messy and in flux, with multiple challenges and possible interpretations, and no clear solutions. In Chapter 3, we argued that children need love and

emphasised the importance of establishing loving encounters in the workplace. Early years professionals, as Noddings (2007:223) proposed, need to consider how to respond to each child as if they were a member of their family, or 'inner circle'. In the Chapter about sensory learning we explored the notion of inclusion and suggested that the responsibility for achieving inclusive practice lay with early years leaders. Early years leaders carry significant responsibility for the health, education and social, emotional well-being of all children in their care.

Early years practitioners face issues and dilemmas in relation to affective matters of their work. For example, practitioners need to consider whether close and intimate relationships are appropriate in non-familial contexts, whether it is advisable for them to show children they are loved through the expression of touch, or how they should address parental concerns in different areas. Some leaders may adopt the view that settings provide a very different sort of experience for children, and that a familial style of love is inappropriate in their settings. Accordingly, they may seek to prevent any possible allegations against members of staff by establishing highly restrictive policies in respect of how adults are allowed to communicate affection to children.

Reflection: appropriate touch

- How do leaders at your setting support you to build up children's self-esteem and healthy emotional, social development?
- What do policies at your setting say about appropriate touch with children?

In this section we explored some of the dilemmas faced by leaders in early years contexts, particularly in relation to affective matters between adults and children. In the section below we consider the issue of touch and the need to make difficult decisions that are both beneficial for children and attentive to what might go wrong.

Leaders to decide how adults should show children they are loved

The subject of touching young children is a dilemma that early years practitioners face. Touch has become associated with paedophilia in England and sometimes seen as sexual, which, we would argue, is not generally the case. Owen and Gillentine (2011) highlighted the importance of touching children as a means of communicating love. The authors

described cultural barriers that prevent this ethical approach, particularly fear and moral panic in relation to child abuse allegations, and pointed to a wide gap between what professionals believe, namely that touch is important, and what they practise.

Early years practitioners in England work within a wider cultural context of fear in which, according to Sikes and Piper (2010:20), adults are sometimes regarded with suspicion, as if they may be 'sexual predators' and children as sexual victims. Early years practitioners, suggested Sikes and Piper, may not always feel able to enter into loving exchanges with children that involve touch since, 'for a professional adopting the status of *in loco parentis* is a dangerous thing to do' (Sikes and Piper, 2010:22). Early years leaders play an important role in supporting teams in the face of these dilemmas.

So, on the one hand it is argued that touch is important for young children's emotional development (Noddings, 2001, 2007, Gerhardt, 2004, Manning-Morton, 2006, Owen and Gillentine, 2011), and on the other hand, some researchers (Piper and Smith, 2003, Sikes and Piper, 2010) argue that any form of physical contact between adults and children is dangerous. Early years leaders need to be clear about where they stand in relation to this issue so that they can provide encouragement, direction and support as needed. Is it or is it not right for practitioners to show love to children through the expression of touch? Leaders need to adopt a clear stance in relation to this aspect of emotional, sensory and social learning.

Powell and Goouch (2012) emphasised a professional conflict of interests in relation to safety in baby rooms. Participants in their Baby Room study said it was important to love children in their care. They also said that child protection concerns influenced their day-to-day approach with the children. Thus, there were unwritten restrictions on the extent to which these practitioners felt they could be demonstrative in their affections for children.

It is not appropriate for leaders to avoid this tricky issue and simply establish stringent policies, for example, whereby teams are not allowed to put children on their laps when they need comfort, or kiss them when they awake from their sleeps. If touch becomes too restricted, calculated or controlled in early years contexts, Piper and Smith (2003) argued, it could lose some of its positive effects and risk becoming dangerously sterile, overly safe and sanitised. Restrictive policies in relation to touch, Piper and Smith suggested, while established to protect adults and children, offer an impoverished experience for children and

recommended a more flexible stance with opportunities for practitioners to talk about fears and explore contradictions. Sensitive and astute leaders are needed to establish these opportunities.

Vignette: showing love to children

How does Jordan, deputy manager at a private, voluntary and independent setting, navigate what she considers natural ways to show children they are loved and setting policies and norms?

"This is quite a difficult thing to answer. I feel as though it is all about finding the balance between right and wrong. After all, we are not their parents but we do still feel love towards children and have a natural instinct to love and protect them.

I am lucky enough to work within a setting that promotes a homely atmosphere and the love of a child. My setting does not have policies that restrict things such as cuddles or sitting on an adults' laps, etc…, although this cannot be said for some other settings. However, it does still safeguard the children, through our safeguarding and whistleblowing policies and procedures.

I am not a parent but I am aware through my own private, work and educational experiences that children need love and affection in order to flourish and develop appropriately. Physical touch, such as cuddles, a pat on the back, a rub on the cheek etc… are all necessary, especially for babies.

I know the limits and I know the difference between what is right a wrong. This helps my colleagues and me to balance out how much love to show towards a child.

Whilst a child is within the setting, we are their main carers. We are the people children turn to for love and comfort. Therefore, as long as the restrictions and boundaries are made clear within a setting, who are we to restrict a child from love?

Balance and clear boundaries are key in ensuring children are shown love and affection in an appropriate way. It is also important that all practitioners in a setting are aware of the

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safeguarding boundaries and never overstep them. A clear understanding of what love and affection mean and what they mean for a child are also key."

- How does Jordan know what is appropriate in relation to showing children they are loved through expressions of touch?
- What helps Jordan and her colleagues to feel confident in this area?

Cultural fears about touching children impose limits on professionals. For example, in the context of the Baby Room research project, practitioners were unable to act fully in accordance with their beliefs about the need to show children affection. The research demonstrated that restrictions on what practitioners felt they could do, arising out of cultural concerns with child protection matters, inevitably had an impact on the quality of care offered in early years settings. And, as we have argued, since children need feel loved, this is not a desirable situation.

In this section we explored the issue of touch. We said that early years leaders must draw up appropriate safeguarding policies. And yet policies can be over-restrictive. Such over-restrictive policies in relation to touch may inhibit the intuitive side of people's professionalism and create a tension between what they consider privately, as ethical people, and what they are prescribed to do as public professionals. The issue of touch, then, adds complexity of the role of early years leaders, particularly in supporting children's healthy emotional and social development. In the next Section we emphasise the value of professional talk and discuss how leaders can facilitate this.

Leaders to establish time for talk within teams

We have argued that there is a need for an acute awareness about the complexity of the work, particularly in the area of close relationships with children. It is possible that some practitioners, for example, may establish loving relationships with some children, feel a sense of loss when children leave their care, be unable to talk freely about affective matters in the workplace, or be worried about touching children as an expression of love.

One form of support is for leaders to provide opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their own practice. Manning-Morton (2006:48) emphasised the importance of practitioners

developing as mature, emotionally intelligent, self-aware adults, and 'becom[ing] experts in themselves'. She recommended that leaders offer support to their teams to help them meet day-to-day challenges, including instances when they may be rejected by children. Manning-Morton emphasised that work with very young children involves practitioners' hearts as much as their minds.

Similarly, Osgood (2011:131) argued that practitioners need 'improved support' in order to mitigate the human cost of this 'emotionally demanding work'. Osgood (2011:130) proposed that leaders should encourage practitioners to draw on their 'life experience and wisdom', as indicated within her concept of 'professionalism from within', so that they might develop an even 'deeper-level appreciation for the work (i.e. professionalism)'. The complexity of the role was also emphasised by Harwood et al (2013). They found, in their international study, that love was very important in practitioners' constructions about professionalism in early years, and proposed that leaders provide more opportunities for practitioners to talk about the emotional aspects of their roles.

Page and Elfer (2013:564) found that practitioners sometimes relied on their intuition or simply translated their own experiences of being in close relationships to their nursery contexts, and proposed, instead, that there should be a clear distinction between close and intimate relationships experienced in the family and in early years settings. They found that staff often adopted 'a largely intuitive approach' in relation to their work, 'drawing on personal experience rather than a body of theoretical knowledge'. They proposed that leaders should facilitate opportunities for staff to talk about complex aspects of their work, and allow issues to be brought into the open. Leaders, they proposed, should establish a climate in which it is acceptable for there to be no clear answers to questions, problems and issues may be raised, uncertainty can prevail, and practitioners are able to talk about their feelings and concerns. This accords with the theoretical stances outlined in Chapter 2, whereby practitioners accept uncertainty and contradictions, especially in relation to affective aspects of their work.

Goouch and Powell (2013:83) found that the baby room practitioners were very willing to engage in their Baby Room project and learn from each other. The 'critical spaces' they established for talking and thinking helped practitioners 'to develop a sense of their own worth in their work and to develop a 'voice'' (2013:87). 'Time for talk' (2013:84) helped them to think about their practice and gain a better understanding about their work.

Opportunities for 'professional talk' (2013:83), according to Goouch and Powell, helped the participants in their research to interpret their experiences in the baby room, value particular aspects of their work, make links with their own life experiences, reflect, think about their practice, and consider other possibilities. 'Talk through narrative constructions' (2013:85), they found, was a powerful learning experience.

Vignette: time to talk about issues

A child found it difficult to settle at the nursery. She arrived with her mother every day but clung onto her when it was time for her mother to go. The key person learned how to say 'Mummy is coming back' in the child's home language, Polish, and sang the refrain repeatedly and soothingly. The key person remained with the child for extended periods every morning, and comforted her with her constant presence, gestures and facial expressions, but the child continued to show signs of distress. The team talked with each other about the situation and how it made them feel. They talked in passing, informally at the end of the day and at formal team meetings. They explored different strategies drawing on their different perspectives and experiences with other children. These opportunities for talk served to reduce their tension about the issue, share any sense of responsibility and focus on solutions. Talk helped them to feel they were not alone. After a period the child came to nursery happily and parted from her mother with ease.

- How did practitioners help the child to settle at nursery?
- What helped the key person to develop strategies and feel supported?

In this section we talked about the complexity of the role of early years practitioners. We said that on the one hand it is important to form close relationship with children in early years contexts, while on the other, this carries complexities, often unspoken and unacknowledged. Osgood (2011) called for more space to be made for people to draw on their subjective experiences to enhance their professional practice. Goouch and Powell (2013) emphasised the value of talk. In the next section we consider some large scale research findings on the topic of leadership. What does research say about quality leadership?

Leadership qualities – some findings from big research

Matthews, Rea, Hill and Gu (2014) carried out research for the National College of Teaching and Leadership. They identified the conditions that must lie behind such successful outcomes in the early years. These optimum conditions included consistently good teaching, a stimulating and well-designed curriculum, a culture of empowering children to become capable and self-aware learners, high expectations and close attention to the needs of individual children (Matthews et al, 2014:18).

The researchers set out to find out what sort of people effective leaders were, what they did, how they did it and how they capitalised on national and local policies for education. They found that strong leaders were driven by a commitment to do the best for every child. Children remained at the heart of everything they did. These committed leaders also had a strong sense of social justice, seeking to remove barriers to achievement, such as disadvantage and low parental aspirations. Matthews et al (2014) found that leaders committed to social justice developed close links with families and communities, and were able to address any gaps children had and make up the difference.

Strong leaders, Matthews et al (2014) found, maintained a single-minded focus on teaching and learning, in order to maximise the achievement of all. From a sample of 50 primary school leaders in 2013, Matthews et al (2014) found that effective leaders were:

- Resilient
- Passionate
- Focused
- Visionary and inspiring
- Clear and communicative
- Relentless and tenacious
- Reflective
- Courageous
- Challenging, with high expectations

They found that these leaders were motivated and driven by their desire to do well for children. They also had attributes associated with moral purpose, including:

- Honesty
- Openness

- Emotional intelligence
- Belief

Matthews et al found that leaders were good at problem solving and willing to take risks. They were energetic, engaged, organised, encouraging and motivating.

Reflection: leadership qualities

- Why might it be important for leaders to be honest, open and emotionally intelligent?
- What other qualities do leaders need to support children in the early years?
- How do effective leaders in your workplace help children to feel happy and be ready to grow as caring, strong individuals?
- What are leaders' responsibilities in relation to legislation? How do they incorporate the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (DoH and DfE, 2015)?

The researchers found that good leaders focused all their actions on the effect they would have on children and their learning. Importantly, they were strong communicators. They consulted with colleagues and were determined to lead by example. Crucially, good leaders trusted their teams. They knew when to take control and when to delegate. At the same time, however, they never let go completely. They took risks, did not ascribe blame and always looked for the positive in others and in different situations.

Good leaders, Matthews et al (2014) found, led by example and respected each individual. They faced up to difficult conversations or hard decisions. They trusted colleagues and empowered them to develop their own careers. In settings run by effective leaders, researchers found that staff felt trusted to lead, innovate, experiment and take risks. Indeed, they were encouraged to do so. Additionally, children were also encouraged to lead, to learn with and from their peers, and to take responsibility for their learning – seeking out and rising to new or harder challenges.

Outstanding leaders, they found, had a propensity for seizing new opportunities. Rather than being dominated by external ideologies, they were driven by their beliefs and values. They built up structures and cultures which took account of national policies but which remained in

line with identified improvement priorities. Importantly, these researchers concluded that leaders with vision took advantage of the opportunities presented, not in order to enhance their reputation or career prospects, but for the benefit of the children in their care.

So, in contrast to the political focus on outcomes, effective leaders work according to a strong ethical code. They want the best for the children and families in their care, and motivate their teams to work with them towards the same goals.

In this section we explored what research shows in relation to quality leadership. In the next section we turn to practice, and consider how these findings can support people's work with very young children and their families.

From big research to local practice

How can these findings from large-scale research support leadership for emotional, sensory and social learning in the early years? As Matthews et al (2014) found, effective leaders have a commitment to do the best for every child. Accordingly, they attend closely to children's social and emotional needs. They establish close relationship with children. They support them in a range of social contexts to grow as self-confident, considerate and aware human beings, able to negotiate meanings with others and express their creativity with confidence. Good leaders lead by example, so are able to model the excellent dispositions and qualities they foster in their teams. They trust their colleagues to be people of feeling, self-aware, with a strong sense of what is right and just. Good leaders encourage children to take the lead and take responsibility for their learning. For example, a good leader will plan unhurried opportunities for teams to talk about new policies and practices rather than impose them without consultation. Similarly, they will induct new staff members slowly, allowing them to shadow an experienced key person over time, and ask questions about their practice in relation to particular children.

Having considered how big research might relate to different work contexts, we now introduce the notion of emotional labour and how this can help us to frame thinking about leadership in early years.

Leaders for work that involves emotional labour

Hochschild's (1983) notion of emotional labour was developed in the 1980s with reference to studies of air-hostesses. She wrote about the negative aspects of working with the emotions based on her findings whereby air-hostesses felt drained after a day of being nice to strangers, and were unable to switch off easily. For Hochschild, emotional labour was about emotion management within the workplace. So, in cases where employers require workers to produce an emotional state in another person, the workers need to block out what they really feel.

The work of early years practitioners, we argue, like the work carried out by air-hostesses in Hochschild's study, 'calls for coordination of mind and feeling' (Hochschild, 1983:194), is carried out by people, very often female, and involves their emotions. Early years practitioners may draw on their emotions, in that they enter into relationships with the children they care for, and these relationships may sometimes touch their emotions. However, a more positive understanding has emerged more recently in relation to emotional labour (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009), and more specifically in the context of early years (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012), and we will discuss these perspectives in turn.

Lynch, Baker and Lyons (2009:45) wrote about 'love labour' instead of emotional labour. They argued that love labour, like emotional labour, 'involves physical and mental work as well as emotional work'. They also emphasised that their conceptualisation of care work as love labour incorporated both the negative and positive aspects of the work. They wrote that, although love labour may be heavy at times, it was also 'pure pleasure'.

Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012:529), too, identified positive feelings in relation to early years practitioners' 'emotional investments' with children. Some of the practitioner leaders in five nurseries where they conducted their research said that the fact they could develop close relationships with children was a feature they liked about their role. The research showed that developing 'emotional bonds' (2012:535) with children in nurseries could be rewarding and 'deeply gratifying'. Accordingly, the authors argued that the affective work carried out by early years practitioners was not the same as the 'emotional labour associated with other forms of waged care work' (2012:525).

Cousins (2016), in her small-scale research about love in out-of-home contexts, found that practitioners liked the emotional aspect of their work. Yes, they may have admitted that they felt sad when certain children left their settings, or faced dilemmas, for example when children expressed a desire, in front of their parents, to remain in their company at the end of

the day. However, participants in Cousins' research said that they loved their work despite such difficulties. Their work could be classified as emotional labour, but the pleasures of doing it far outweighed any emotional costs.

Accordingly, we support the view that presents emotional labour in a positive frame (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009, Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012, Cousins, 2016). These different understandings of emotional labour, however, from undesirable and burdensome at one end of the continuum to desirable and pleasurable at the other, are also helpful, in our view, in that they serve to remind us of the intensely personal nature of work in early years.

Early years leaders, as opposed to practitioners, including teachers, nursery nurses, learning support assistants, classroom assistants, sole childminders and others, enter a further layer of emotional space. Not only does work with very young children carry complexities and dilemmas, as has been discussed, but the leadership role itself establishes new dimensions and creates potential tensions. Mitchell, Riley and Loughran (2010:543) proposed that there are emotional dimensions to leadership, as well as tensions associated with leading colleagues. They suggested that leadership is at once 'a deeply personal experience' as well as highly complex work. In their research, educational leaders talked about the emotional, personal and relational components of leading colleagues in diverse contexts, particularly in the area of professional learning. Leaders used emotional language to talk about their work as leaders. They said they felt anxiety, frustration, elation, despair, confidence, and, relief. Leaders also admitted to feeling vulnerable at times. Responses from team members to their professional learning initiatives affected their own emotions as people and leaders.

According to Mitchell, Riley and Loughran, then, there are additional emotional costs to being a leader. Educational leaders engage in emotional labour. Not only is teaching and learning highly relational work, so is their own work as leaders of teams. Leaders talk about 'the intensity of feeling when working with colleagues while assuming leadership responsibilities' (Mitchell, Riley and Loughran, 2010:540).

John (2010: 64) explored the advantages of mentoring for leaders. According to John, mentoring opportunities for leaders open up spaces where leaders feel cared for both as professionals and people. When leaders are well mentored and cared for, they can take time to explore particularly complex aspects of their work, for example, aspects relating to working with children, families and other professionals in an integrated way. Mentoring

opportunities, John found, helped leaders feel 'valued, respected and encouraged'. These feelings, in turn, can help leaders to support the people they serve to feel valued, respected and encouraged.

In this section we explored the notion of emotional labour and suggested that, in early years contexts, this aspect of people's work is often what they like about it. Although the emotional side of the work may be difficult, or even painful, at times, it is more frequently pleasurable. People talk about it in teams. In the next section we move to research that suggests leaders might benefit from reflecting on their own life experiences alongside their complex work.

Leadership dispositions – some findings from small, qualitative research

The best leaders are outstanding people and professionals. They do not emerge in the field of early childhood by good luck or accident, but by hard work, commitment, passion and determination. The best leaders have a strong moral purpose. It is true that some people may be 'natural' leaders, but this in itself does not imply that they will be effective as early years leaders. On the contrary, strong leaders develop their skills over time, through training, learning in the workplace, strong teamwork and reflection. Strong leaders are also highly intuitive and in touch with themselves as people. They are self-aware, and have done some work on themselves.

Layen (2015), in her in-depth study of early years leaders, found that leaders gained much by relating their work to their personal life stories. She discovered that when leaders reflect on their personal autobiographies, in the form of narrated life-stories, their self-concept, self-awareness and self-belief were enhanced. When leaders made links between personal and leadership narratives, Layen found, they developed a clearer vision and a clearer moral purpose, and became more motivated.

Leaders' own emotional stories, from this perspective, play a part in how well they are able to support children's emotional development. Leaders' own sensitivities for the arts, for example, affect the extent to which they priorities the arts in their settings. Their ability to communicate effectively with the teams and communities they serve also help children to develop strong social skills. Children benefit from sensitive, emotionally resilient and socially competent leaders. There is a correlation between these skills and sensitivities in

early years leaders and the opportunities available to children in relation to their emotional, sensory and social learning.

In this section we considered how leaders might benefit from relating their work to their own life stories. In the next and final section we ask what sort of leaders might be needed for the future.

Leadership for the future

As the world evolves and new policies emerge on the early years landscape, so new pressures and priorities become more prominent for leaders of early years settings. Advances in digital technologies, for example, open up new opportunities as well as create challenges for early years leaders and the children and families they serve. Leaders need to consider how technologies might support children in their learning. For example, how can assistive technologies help children with special educational needs and disabilities in their learning? How can tablets help children to develop their literacy skills? At the same time, leaders face new challenges in relation to digital advances. They must consider ways to ensure their children remain safe in online environments. Leaders need to begin from the premise that online predators and child exploiters roam freely. To this end, they must consider a range of potential dangers. For example, should parents and carers be allowed to take pictures of their children at school celebrations? Similarly, should children be allowed to use mobile technology at the setting? Should leaders block out the outside world to keep children safe? Conversely, should they help children to recognise danger, understand the need to avoid it and know how to remain safe?

Vignette: teaching children to stay safe in online environments

Donna, a teaching assistant in a Year 1 class at a primary school, shares her approach to teaching children about online safety. Consider how effective such a strategy might be in your context.

It can be a challenge to discuss the topic of online safety with 5 and 6 year olds without raising panic and alarm, or causing anxiety. In accordance with the school's e-safety policy, circle time sessions serve as opportunities to teach children how to stay safe online.

At a recent circle time I led, I began by asking the children what technology they had at home and whether they used the internet. I then asked the children if they knew what to do if they saw something that upset them or made them feel uncomfortable. They responded with phrases such as "Tell a teacher" and "Tell my mum". We went on to discuss what to do if they were worried about something they had seen on the internet.

I used puppets to discuss and emphasise the importance of staying safe. We discussed the importance of not sharing any personal information such as names and addresses, and of only using the internet with an adult's permission and when a grown-up was nearby. We discussed how important it was not to download anything without permission from an adult. Finally, I sought confirmation from every child that they had a safe person they could talk to if they were worried about anything they had seen or used on the internet.

A child ended the session with the comment "I would tell my mummy and she would call the policeman and he would take the bad iPad man away because he's a stranger danger".

- How do you keep children safe online?
- What sorts of issues you face in relation to online safety?

Inevitably, new priorities and potential hazards create new opportunities for ongoing training and development. What sorts of knowledge and skills must early years teams have? How can leaders help their teams to meet the relevant professional standards in ever-changing contexts?

In this book we have emphasised the importance of research. Research about brain architecture, for example, informs new guidance on early emotional, sensory and social learning. Sensitive, attuned interactions between key adults and children, for example, are key for healthy brain development. Accordingly, we suggest that leaders for the future are research informed. It is not enough, we propose, that leaders study child development as part of their initial training. Rather, it is desirable that they perceive themselves as lifelong learners, with always more to learn. Leaders in the future are future proof. They make it their business to find out what is happening, remain informed about new research, discuss possibilities with their teams and effect change as needed.

Perhaps, however, it is the enduring people to people qualities in settings that help children thrive in difficult situations. This description of practice from 1946 about support for children who had lived through the Second World War remains relevant today:

> Teachers save children from the stresses and strains of their early life through their daily relations with children and through the kind of experiences they make it possible for children to have in the daily school program. Sensitive teachers have long done it. They start with a faith in children and with a conviction that all children want to be good if they can. They know in their hearts that, when something goes wrong, there is a reason why. With these attitudes to build on, teachers have found their own ways to make their schools friendly places. They have worked so that children, each and every one of them, get *in* and belong. (Hymes, 1946:191)

So, sensitivity and close relationships between adults and children are at the heart of effective practice. Leaders must build places where children feel valued by the people who care for them, and are nurtured through whatever difficulties they may encounter or experience.

This section explored some considerations for leadership in the future. The conclusion draws the discussions on leadership to a close and reiterates the key dispositions and qualities of effective early years leaders.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2 we argued that a pragmatic, post-modern stance might be a helpful position to adopt in order to counter-balance the current emphasis on pre-specified goals, certain outcomes, and strict accountability. We said that the world is uncertain and unpredictable, and that a flexible approach was therefore needed to navigate ongoing change. In this chapter we have suggested that knowledgeable, sensitive and intuitive early years leaders are needed for this highly complex work set in every-shifting contexts. Effective early year leaders communicate well with their teams and foster a culture where there is time for talk, team members fell encouraged to explore difficult options, and parents and children contribute to the decision-making process. These leaders value creativity and openness in the context of careful planning and self-evaluation.

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