

Leadership and Management in the Early Years

A practical guide to building confident leadership skills

by Jane Cook

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Effective leadership makes a difference

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other"
John F. Kennedy.

This book has been written for everyone with a leadership role, or thinking about a leadership role, within the early years sector. It has been inspired by all the creative, passionate, clever, hard-working, funny and determined leaders I have worked with during the past thirty years.

Working in the early years, we know that good quality education and care makes a difference to children's lives and that this continues to have positive impact many years after the child has left the setting. The role of the leader

in creating the quality to make that difference, is crucial. All the research is telling us that the quality of provision and children's outcomes almost never exceeds the quality of leadership and management.

"...there is no doubt that effective leadership and appropriate training for the leadership role is an increasingly important element in providing high quality provision for the early years" Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007).

Why leadership in the early years matters

"We must be the change we wish to see in the world"
Mahatma Gandhi.

Those of us working in early years have always known how important our work is. We know that a child is only a baby, a toddler, a young child once – and it's vital that we make that experience the very best possible for every child. We also know that early childhood is the foundation upon which all future development depends. We are rightly proud when our young children move to a primary school confident and excited about their own abilities and feeling secure about their place in the world.

The greater the change and uncertainty, the more important it is to hold on to your core values about early childhood education. These are expressed in the EYFS as:

Theme: A Unique Child

Principle: Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Theme: Positive Relationships



Every child is a competent learner from birth, who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured

Principle: Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Theme: Enabling Environments

Principle: The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

Theme: Learning and Development

Principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and interconnected.

Lasting impact

Since the beginning of the 21st Century there has been steadily increasing interest from outside the sector in what can be achieved through high quality early years education and care. For example, in the UK this has led to the introduction of free nursery education (initially for all three- and four-year-olds and most recently 40% of two-year-olds), Children's Centres (and the links this has helped to make with professionals in health and social care), the Early Years Professional Status, Graduate Leader Fund, Early Years Foundation Stage and a review of qualifications for the early years workforce.

Graham Allen, in his report on Early Intervention in 2011, put early years at the heart of his proposals to change the life chances of those most at risk of underachievement. The photograph on the front cover of the report shows the brains of two three-year-old children. The first brain is of a child who has had the support and love needed to thrive, and the second of a child who has already suffered from extreme neglect. The size of the second child's brain is significantly smaller than that of first child. The photograph was designed to shock, and it worked.

"The rationale is simple: many of the costly and damaging social problems in society are created because we are not giving children the right type of support in their earliest years, when they should achieve their most rapid development"

Graham Allen Report on Early Intervention 2011.

What happens in the early years is not only of vital importance for the well-being of our youngest children, it also has a profound and lasting impact on their ability to have a happy



As a leader in the early years you make a difference for children and their families

and fulfilling life. Your role as a leader in early years – working with your team, with parents and with other professionals to create the best possible provision for the children in your care, is therefore one of the most important jobs there is.

In this book we will look at the knowledge, skills and attributes you have as an early years practitioner and consider how you can develop them further to maximise your confidence, skills and impact as a leader. The ideas and concepts are all firmly rooted in research, but the approach is always practical.

We begin by looking at some different approaches to understanding leadership and leaders and the implications for leading in the early years sector.

Later chapters go into more detail about the knowing, doing and being of different aspects of leadership, including the importance of effective supervision.

Introducing the early years leader

"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader"

Margaret Fuller, 19th Century Women's Rights Activist.

Effective leadership practice

This is an exciting time to be working in early years, but it is also a challenging one for leaders and practitioners across the sector. With more attention, comes increased expectation and accountability. With more opportunity, comes increased complexity and demands on time. In an implicit acknowledgement of the range and scope of the leadership role in the early years, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Laura Manni

identified ten categories of 'effective leadership practice' (Institute of Education, 2007) as follows:

1. **Identifying and articulating a collective vision**
2. **Ensuring shared understanding, meanings and goals**
3. **Effective communication**
4. **Encouraging reflection**
5. **Monitoring and assessing practice**
6. **Commitment to ongoing, professional development**
7. **Distributed leadership**
8. **Building a learning community and team culture**
9. **Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships**
10. **Leading and managing: striking the balance.**



Observing children will have strengthened our empathy and reflective skills

This may look a daunting list, but the experience of an early years practitioner provides an excellent foundation for leadership. When practitioners move from working with children to leading adults, what is most often emphasised is the difference between the two roles. There are differences, which mean there will be areas for learning and development to explore throughout this book. But there are also huge similarities. From working with children and their families we will have developed a huge range of useful communication skills. In planning an environment we will have built up organisational and planning skills. Observing children will have strengthened our empathy and reflective skills. Above all, we will have carried with us a vision for quality that will continue to develop and inspire us throughout our professional lives.

How well do you know your strengths and weaknesses?



The benefits of feedback

Mina, a new foundation stage coordinator in a busy primary school. The previous coordinator was conscientious, but the curriculum planning and environment had been getting a little tired.

In Mina's Open area are her enthusiasm, her energy and her passion for making a difference for the children. This has helped her build up some positive relationships within the team who see her commitment and respect her knowledge and expertise. In Mina's Blind area is her tendency to talk over people in meetings as she gets carried away with her enthusiasm. Some of the team are beginning to see this as a lack of respect for their views – and they are starting to dig in their heels against some of the changes. She also talks very fast about things that she understands but can leave others behind, feeling nervous and unconfident about their ability to take forward the proposed changes. In Mina's Hidden area is her worry that if the school had an inspection at the moment they would have a very poor result. She's not very confident about giving negative feedback and had hoped to move quickly with the developments without having to upset anyone by appearing to be critical about

what had been there before. In Mina's Unknown area is her unconscious assumption that being honest about her concerns will turn everyone against her.

The result for Mina was that she and the staff were starting to drift further and further apart. They misunderstood her communication style and didn't tell her and so she thought that they were just ganging up against her and resistant to any change. What rescued the situation was feedback. The headteacher had observed a staff meeting and fed back to Mina what she had seen – that the staff did not understand her plans and that Mina wasn't giving them enough time to contribute to the discussions. Together, Mina and the headteacher planned the next staff meeting to ensure that everybody was involved and had time to think and reflect about Mina's suggestions – and make some of their own. The headteacher also encouraged Mina to be honest with the team about where she saw the quality of the setting at the moment – giving praise to what was going well, but explaining why they needed to make some changes to better meet the requirements of the EYFS.

Coaching skills for supervision

Describing feedback table

Feedback	Criticism
Where possible, builds on a strength	Always focuses on the negative
Looks to the future	Concentrates on what happened in the past
Solution-focused	Looks for someone to blame
About facts	Often generalises
Says "and"	Says "but"
Is two-way	Is one-way

LINKS WITH YOUR PRACTICE

Using the feedback column as a guide, think about how you could give feedback to these practitioners in the following scenarios.

How could you help to change their behaviour and motivate them to work towards achieving their full potential?

- You've just taken over from an outstanding room leader. Everyone is very confident and clear about what they do and how, but you would like them to tune-in a bit more to the children's play, have a bit more reflection time for adults **and** children.
- Your strongest practitioner has asked for feedback as she's thinking about promotion. She's very proud of her observations and wants to start with these. You've noticed that they are long and not always to the point...
- Your new team member is regularly late. She always has an excuse as she comes through the door...
- Your weak student doesn't seem to be making much progress in her planning. She's keen and willing and has a sensitive way of talking to the children but her file is almost empty and her ideas for focus experiences for the children are usually rather dull (although she always says that she's following the children's ideas).

For example: Jane is an experienced member of staff with a particular way of putting up displays. They are neat and attractive. You'd like them to be more interactive and child-centred. What feedback are you going to give her?

Feedback – Possible things to say

Where possible, builds on a strength: Thank you for putting up that new display in the entrance hall about the work we've been doing on children's speaking and listening. Your displays are always beautifully presented and show how you value the children's work.

Solution-focused: I'd like us to build on that to include more ideas from the children about how to display their work, perhaps with some captions using their own words.

Looks to the future: So, when we do the next display can we get together first and think of some more ideas about how this might work?

POINT FOR REFLECTION

Think of a time when you have received feedback that has been motivating.

Now think of a time when you have been given feedback that has demotivated you.

What did the person giving the feedback say or do? What did you feel? What did you say or do?