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978-1-107-66918-5 - Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings: Inspiring People, Places and Practices

Nadine Louise McCrea

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Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings

Inspiring people, places
and practices

Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings: Inspiring people, places and practices examines what it means to be a leader, manager and administrator across the early childhood education field.

The first section of the book introduces readers to a number of core concepts, including self-understanding through professional reflection and consideration of people's beliefs and values. These chapters explore the challenges of working within various early childhood settings and the importance of connecting and communicating with families and the broader community. The second section considers four key roles that early childhood professionals often undertake – team stakeholder, policy designer, pedagogy creator and rights advocate.

This book challenges readers to make links across research, theories and everyday practices by thinking, reflecting, sharing with others and writing stories. The storytelling approach guides readers through the chapters and explores the themes of embodiment and sustainability. Written in an engaging and dynamic style, *Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings* is an invaluable resource for pre- and in-service educators alike.

Additional resources for instructors are available online at www.cambridge.edu.au/leadingandmanaging.

Nadine Louise McCrea is Associate Professor of Early Childhood Teacher Education in the School of Education at the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales.

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To Doug and Mister

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Foreword

Like the author I am approaching retirement, so I have also been reflecting deeply on my own professional journey and how the field of early childhood education has changed since I landed my first teaching position in 1968. In my teaching and writing, I use the overarching term ‘early childhood administrator’ to describe both the leadership and management functions of directors of center-based programs. I was delighted to see how Nadine has embraced the unifying role descriptor *leader-manager* throughout this book. In my thinking, *leadership* functions relate to the broad view of helping an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course of action to achieve that vision. *Management* functions relate to the actual orchestration of tasks and the setting up of systems to carry out the organizational mission (Bloom, 2014; Talan & Bloom 2011). In the day-to-day world of early childhood administrators, leadership and management functions are really two sides of the same coin.

How appropriate then that this book begins with an opportunity for the reader to dive deep into an exploration of core values and to gain an understanding of how background and dispositions impact one’s effectiveness as a leader-manager. The capacity to reflect and engage in candid introspection is at the heart of achieving self-awareness. Having a better understanding of oneself is the first step to having a better relationship with others, because self-awareness provides a window to expand our understanding about other points of view and perspectives. The goal of this kind of reflection is not merely to see who we are and better understand ourselves today, but to envision what we might become tomorrow (Bloom, 2007). As one who is stepping down the ladder and nearing retirement, I can attest that it is a lifelong process – a journey of self-discovery, meaning making, and identity shaping.

Reviewing this book was also a gift because I have always been intrigued by the cross-cultural nuances of early childhood program administration. Despite contextual differences in licensing and regulations, the actual job of leading-managing a program in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States is remarkably similar. The leader-manager’s role is multifaceted and complex. They are the gatekeepers to quality. Teachers may impact children’s experiences directly, but leader-managers impact children’s developmental outcomes by structuring the conditions that support teacher effectiveness. There is no getting around it – virtually everything leader-managers do directly or indirectly

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influences the reputation and success of a program (Bloom, Hentschel & Bella, 2013). My guess is if you are the leader-manager of an early childhood program you'll identify with these different aspects of your role:

- As **pedagogical leader** you ask the deep philosophical questions that get to the heart of your center's mission. What is the purpose of education? What traits do you want children to have as a result of their experiences in your program?
- As **vision builder** you work with staff to translate your center's core values into a clear roadmap for reflective and ethical practice. Creating a vision is really about shaping expectations, both individual and collective.
- As **talent developer** you make sure everyone has the time and resources for, and access to, professional development opportunities.
- As **data manager** you collect and organize information for accountability. More than ever before, programs need to document the outcomes of their work to funders, regulators, parents, and community partners.
- As **knowledge broker** you structure opportunities for people to share their experience and expertise with one another. This means being intentional about providing the time and the emotional climate that encourage teachers to become active partners in each other's learning.
- As **systems engineer** you implement the policies and procedures needed for continuous quality improvement. Keeping track of scheduled meetings, assessment data, professional development opportunities, and resources to support learning requires big-picture thinking and well-thought-out systems to ensure smooth operations.
- As **idea igniter** you stimulate and encourage teachers to look at their classroom and organizational practices in new and creative ways. By regularly asking 'What if . . .' and creating the spaces and places for ideas to flourish, you can rev up your center's creativity quotient.
- As **cheerleader** you work to maintain a positive energy that encourages efforts and celebrates accomplishments.
- As **change agent** you monitor carefully how much 'new stuff' people can absorb at any one time. This means being mindful of workload and the changes in relationships people experience as new ideas are implemented.

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- As **CEO (Chief Example to Others)** you serve as an inspiring role model of lifelong learning and professional renewal. This means willingly acknowledging areas of your own practice that need to be strengthened, actively participating in your own professional development, and eagerly sharing what you have learned with others.

I am confident that the Travel Guide template provided in this book will help you to achieve a deeper understanding of the importance of your leader-manager role and your unique gifts which can make that role a vibrant force for achieving program excellence.

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The author

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(See 'Dear Nadine' letters)

Jan Carr has worked in the Australian early childhood education field for a number of years. She is a director of a preschool in the rural, regional town of Inverell, NSW. In 2014, the preschool was awarded a National Quality Standard rating of 'Excellent'. Aspects of Jan's childhood and professional life appear in each chapter.

(See 'Feature professional reflection: Jan's story')

Lavinia Tausere-Tiko is a PhD candidate and part-time lecturer at the University of New England. At the time of writing this book, she was on special study leave from an ECE lecturing role at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

(See 'Professional reflection: Lavinia's story' in Chapters 5, 6 and 7)

Lisa Sonter has recently completed her PhD studies at the University of New England. Lisa teaches kindergarten children at Mitchelton Pre-Schooling Centre in Brisbane and is co-partner of Consultants at Play, a play-based-curriculum consultancy. (And thanks to *Alice Sonter*, Lisa's daughter, for the 'blue figure-8 knot' in the photograph in Chapter 2.)

(See 'Professional reflection: Lisa's story' in Chapters 2 and 6)

Leo Prendergast is a Director-teacher who has worked in community-based children's services since 1980. He lives on the north coast of NSW and is an active participant in the broader Early Childhood Education sector and profession.

(See 'Professional reflection: Leo's story' in Chapter 4)

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Dianne O'Malley is a longstanding early childhood educator. Her early childhood career began as a volunteer in a rural remote preschool, where her eldest child was enrolled. Dianne has worked in numerous roles and diverse communities. She has continually upgraded her qualifications, including a BEd(EC) from the University of New England.

(See 'Professional reflection: Dianne's story' in Chapter 7)

Ivan Thornton is the Graphic Designer within the University of New England's Learning Innovations Hub. He has a diverse role. He willingly created two figures for this book, working from rough scratching on bits of paper!

(See Introduction, Figure 0.1, and Chapter 1, Figure 1.1)

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Several other people have been directly involved in the creation of this book and each one appears as a contributor on the two previous pages. My deep thanks to Diane Nailon and Jan Carr, who wrote passionately for each of the seven chapters. A big thank you to the cameo writers for their professional stories: Lavinia, Lisa, Leo and Dianne. Thanks also to Ivan Thornton for preparing Figures 0.1 and 1.1. Finally, a special expression of gratitude to Paula Jorde Bloom for agreeing to write the foreword, which is a challenging and time consuming task. All these contributors helped create inspiring ECE stories and ideas about people, places and practices, for which I am grateful.

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