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978-1-107-66918-5 — Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings

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Excerpt

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Introduction

There are many things we can trust people to do, but speaking the truth is one of the most important. Think of all the things you know about the world around you, about the past, about distant lands, and about how other people feel and think. Now think about how much of that knowledge depends on trusting what other people have told you ...

Katherine Hawley (2012, p. 7)

Introduction

Opening ideas

This book is about *people*. It focuses on being a leader, manager and administrator within a diverse range of early childhood settings. It will also touch on being a member of a management committee or board of directors and similar positions. Additionally, this book is about the *places* where early childhood education professionals do their work, and the professional *practices* (or roles and responsibilities) in those settings. These roles encompass interactions, everyday tasks and advocacy. In this book, the notion of leader can represent positional roles (an established or ongoing job) as well as situational or distributed roles (an intermittent or changeable job). Leadership is firmly linked with management, which is why you will encounter the double-word terms *leader-manager* and *leading-managing* throughout this book.

The fundamental philosophy underpinning this book is that you should be encouraged to be actively engaged with making connections between the contents and your own lived experiences, rather than being a passive or distant reader of the pages. This approach is about starting from where you are now and actively developing yourself from there. A key aim is to help you flourish as a thinker so that you become a more capable leader-manager of early childhood settings. Figure 0.1

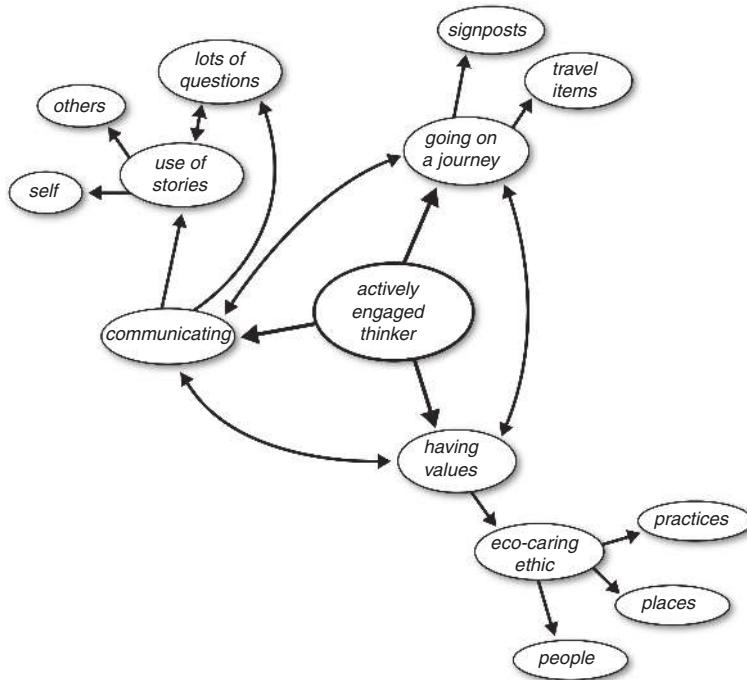


Figure 0.1 Philosophical positioning of readers with key ideas that underpin this book

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represents the essence of being such a thinker. This aim also means that big ideas and issues are paramount for authentic leading-managing. While everyday ‘bits and pieces’ and ordinary ‘how to’ practices are essential, they are not sufficient for creating a holistic and ethical framework for early childhood settings or leading-managing them. As such, a number of ‘Steps’ frame your engagement with this book. These are noted early in each chapter as a list of questions. Pedagogical features, or signposts, support these steps; they include:

- Lots of questions for you to think about and write about
- Various inspiring stories for you to contemplate and relate to
- An overarching ethic of eco-care for you to reflect on and aspire to
- Recurring engagement tasks that support your self-study
- Professional challenges to guide your story documentation of personal–professional thoughts, feelings, inspirations, aspirations and forward plans
- The metaphor of you being a traveller on a journey stepping along a particular professional path.

Taking a journey

Engaging with this book is like taking a leader’s journey, and this introduction serves as a map that broadly charts your way. Your starting point and various destinations along the way can be checked against this map. Leading-managing ideas might represent a traveller’s nourishment or sustenance, with these broadly grouped as *people*, *places* and *practices*. Taking this whole leading-managing journey involves readers in moving conceptually back and forth from *people* (self and others) to *places* (early childhood settings and beyond) and to relational *practices* (roles and responsibilities). When making professional choices and decisions about each of these contributors to leading-managing, it will be necessary for you to move beyond today and also consider the future. Our thinking and decision-making now, may have either joyful or regrettable influences (Arnold, 2005, pp. 121–2) on our lives tomorrow. This idea is implied in Robert Frost’s (1920) poem ‘The Road Not Taken’. For these travels, a few provisions can help set the scene for your explorations and interactions. As this professional journey unfolds, you decide when and where to re-visit and re-explore the travel guide below. Overall, this literary and metaphorical engagement of travellers who are going on a leader-manager journey encompasses two key travel items or provisions:

- A professional path with signposts
- A travel guide.

Introduction

A quick Travel Guide for a leader's journey

These icons support travellers on a journey along a professional path for leading-managing various early childhood settings. The ‘journal’ appears most often in the margins of chapters to highlight links between the text and your thinking and writing. The ‘compass’ as a guiding concept and tool also appears in places.



The compass represents one’s ‘ethic of eco-caring’. Consulting and watching the needle will help you to check your position and stay on track. It helps guide a traveller’s philosophical orientation or direction. In this book, this broad ethic encompasses two main orientations: embodiment and sustainability. Embodiment encompasses people’s bodies, attributes and other human features, with gender being a key consideration. Embracing sustainability means taking a holistic view of every aspect of the Earth and also committing to act in eco-responsible ways. Both embodiment and sustainability appear across the following chapters; they are also considered fully in an e-resource included in the companion website (available at: www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/leadingandmanaging). The compass can guide decisions about ‘near and far’ influences – people, places and practices. It can help readers to clarify and enlarge near ideas as they encounter them, with ‘near ideas’ usually representing micro and meso layers of society. The compass can signify the self and considering issues which are more personal or close to home; yet, it may also signify others beyond self and the act of looking outwards. Big ideas and the ‘big picture’ are usually represented in the exo and macro layers of society. Whole settings and beyond-the-fence people and places are encompassed within such bigger views. Another aspect of ‘looking beyond’ means looking beyond people to the more-than-human aspects of the world (Martusewicz, Edmundson & Khan, 2012, p. 54).



A professional journal provides the space for you as traveller to record and document your leader-manager’s journey along the way. This is also a space for noting the passage of time, which relates to Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) chronosystem. Your considerations and reflections are written here, as well as your musings and self-questions for later consideration. Let’s call this: ‘My professional leading-managing journal’. It is where you think about various questions and the chapter Steps, as well as personally extend the stories and storytelling throughout the book to your current perspective and background. We will discuss storytelling and story writing further, both below and in Chapter 2.

Telling stories



Autobiographical storytelling and professional communicating further support your leader-manager journey, as early childhood education leaders revisit and reflect on their own professional paths and career journeys. Across the chapters, these people reflect on and share their life influences and their professional journeys. These stories will prompt you as reader to share your own stories as you regularly stop along the professional path to write or draw in your journal. You are also encouraged to record your stories with a broader awareness of world ecology (Kaza, 2008; Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005). For example, Lindholdt (1999) encouraged university students to go

Introduction

outdoors for ‘writing from a sense of place’. Such communications, interactions and storytelling are explored further in Chapter 2.

Walking a pathway

The professional path laid out here chapter by chapter is dotted with leading-managing ‘Steps’, presented as questions. The Steps relate to leading-managing early childhood settings in terms of *people*, *places* and *practices*. People and settings are the focus of Part 1: ‘Thinking about people and places’, while the meanings of professionals’ everyday interactions and their work responsibilities are the focus of Part 2: ‘Thinking about practices as roles’. The ideas within this collection of chapters challenge you to be a clear thinker (revisit Figure 0.1).

With an *eco-caring compass* in hand, one’s walking pace may vary during the journey from slow, which allows for serious sightseeing and interactive engagement, to more quickly when small or limited views of scenes are snatched. These ‘quick’ scenes may be returned to for more in-depth consideration at other times. However, for deeper thinking and fuller engagement, I recommend strolling, ambling and sauntering. To prepare for this journey, you need a planned but flexible approach. So, let’s get ready to walk along a professional path filled with leading and managing concepts about early childhood settings and related professional issues. To assist your leader-manager’s journey, a number of signposts are placed alongside this path.



Encountering signposts

To support your journey, particular learning or pedagogical features have been created. These features are called ‘signposts’ and they guide your thinking, engaging and understanding. The signposts that appear in each chapter are explained and described here.

Chapter inspirational quotes

Quotes appear below the title of each chapter. They are samples of fine writing by various authors that are relevant to aspects of early childhood education leadership and management. Sometimes additional quotes are provided within chapters as new Steps begin. Each quote is presented to further spark your engagement as a traveller who is actively thinking about yourself, others and the surrounding Earth. This thinking ought to involve purposely using your eco-caring compass.



Broad concepts

This feature represents a brief overview of each chapter, with an introduction and a few key concepts in question format. These questions form ‘Steps’ along the whole professional path. Using questions encourages your thinking about various possibilities or perspectives. In each overview, you are initially asked to engage with the questions and identify your current position and aims.

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Pause and reflect



These signposts encourage you as reader to stop during your journey and ‘think about’ ideas and issues. You are encouraged to think by exploring, investigating, interrogating, reflecting and much more. At times you are encouraged to share your findings and impressions. There will be challenging opportunities to consider issues such as plans for actions and being an advocate. When you reach this signpost, it will be a time and place for you to pause, pull out *My professional leading-managing journal* and do lots of thinking before documenting key thoughts and reflections which may relate to professional inspirations and aspirations.

Feature professional reflection: Jan’s story

In each chapter, a reflection about Jan Carr’s professional lived experiences links with the broad concepts. Her stories appear with provocations for you to think about, reflect on in comparison with your own work life, and then write about.

Professional reflection: XXX’s story

Additional reflections from early childhood professionals appear in various chapters, particularly Part 2. ECE leaders from Australia and across the Asia Pacific Rim have written these stories. They are extended with provocations.

‘Dear Nadine’

For this feature, my friend and academic colleague Diane Nailon models the use of letter writing and correspondence. At the end of each chapter, Di includes her professional story of related experiences, theories and frameworks that link with leading-managing concepts and issues. These letters are both personal and professional; they reflect the past and the present. In essence, Di’s letters are a form of chapter synthesis. For a detailed example of such letter writing, readers are referred to the book *Dear Nel: Opening the circles of care (Letters to Nel Noddings)* (Lake, 2012).

A companion website

Additional resources relevant to this book are available online at: www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/leadingandmanaging.

Closing ideas

To recap, your engagement with this book has been likened to taking a leader-manager journey step by step. This Introduction has established a broad map of the book and outlined how to engage chapter-by-chapter, as you follow this professional path. Your journey has now reached one milestone – the end of this map. But first, before moving to Chapter 1, create your personal–professional journal for carrying with you during your journey!

