



## Practice leadership in the early years. Becoming, being and developing as a leader by Mark Hadfield, Michael Jopling and Martin Needham

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The authors' aim is to share insights from their research into leadership to assist new and existing leaders to bring about change and make improvements in practice. Drawing on their work over three years of talking to and observing 40 early years leaders in England, the book presents activities which enhance quality of provision: practice leadership. The authors conclude that as well as following certain principles of practice, effective leaders adapt approaches in response to the context and changes in capacity as new leaders emerge in their settings.

The book is in three parts. Part one explores the nature of leadership in the early years, defines practice leadership and explores the development of practice leaders through the intersection of professional growth, social recognition, identity and agency as leaders.

Part two sees practice leadership in action and presents four practice leadership case studies. While interesting, they are contextualised to English policies, conditions and approaches.

Part three, though, focuses on improving quality and where to begin in your own context, so appears to be the most valuable and transferable section. It begins by outlining the four basic principles of practice leadership discovered through the case studies:

- Assessing the gaps between existing quality of provision and what they wanted to achieve
- Using these gaps as a means of establishing common understandings of what requires improvement and what counts as improved practice
- Designing a professional development program to enhance practice leadership in key areas of improvement
- Supporting the development of this emergent leadership capacity by linking individuals and building teams.

The case studies showed that practice leadership requires a collaborative effort based on situational awareness of the context. Chapters six and seven therefore present a series of reflective tasks to develop "contextual literacy". The first activity, building a learning platform, surfaces value positions, principles and general beliefs which are the building blocks of a professional identity, which shapes what practitioners believe they should be doing and what they actually do. The second suggested activity assesses capacity for improvement, and the third develops capacity for improvement through including children's perspectives in planning. Subsequent suggestions are aimed at assessing and growing practice leadership capacity through mapping activities which reveal strengths, patterns of informal leadership and networks of support.

Chapter seven tackles change in practice through professional learning processes based on **observation** (examining practice and reflecting on how it might be changed) and **co-construction** (collaborative planning,



teaching and evaluation, and reflection on its successes and failures). These two processes are focussed on improving the quality of professional judgements through a focus on both the **what** and the **how** of improvement by all involved. Their example - the enquiry walkthrough - although linked to English standards, is easily adapted to New Zealand's self-review process as it utilises purpose, people and process aspects. The co-construction approach too sits easily inside a distributed leadership model.

This book is for New Zealand early childhood education leaders at any level of the organisation looking for different strategies to strengthen quality through improved practice. The last two chapters particularly provide practical approaches to experiment with.

### **Reference**

Hadfield, M., Jopling, M., & Needham, M. (2015). *Practice leadership in the early years. Becoming, being and developing as a leader*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press