



Practitioner Researcher

Thoughts on leadership

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Leadership is not something we always seek but as teachers in early childhood, there is a need to take up this mantle while being true to one's own personal and professional philosophy. In this paper, I reflect on my journey as an early childhood teacher and how my personal and professional philosophy has guided me to my present understanding of authentic leadership. I will also consider how this learning can be put into action in an early childhood setting.

Māori have a saying, *you cannot go forward without looking back* meaning learn from the past as the future is still an unknown (Hemera, 2000). The belief is life is a continuum and that your ancestors are part of your journey forward. I am a result of my social cultural journey which has molded my beliefs and values. I have always known I was loved and feel secure in my identity of who I am. Palmer (1997) believes "self-knowledge" was important and that good teachers are willing to share their own identity and let their values and beliefs guide their work. I am of mixed Māori and Pakeha cultures and from a line of hard working women who believed children were gifts to be treasured. I retain the traditional Māori values that were passed on to me.

My personal philosophy is that my culture is an integral part of who I am. I know it is important in helping create authenticity (Starratt, 2004). Although I was raised in an era when the role of women in Aotearoa/New Zealand was limited that was not the story in my world. The females of my family influenced my beliefs in social justice. I was always encouraged to walk the talk of what I believed. In an age where women did not have many networks to support them, my household would take in and care for women and their families if they were in an abusive relationship. I often had the responsibility of looking after their children. I now understand how my upbringing had a strong effect on who I am today.

My professional philosophy has been influenced by my studies and has elements of Maslow's theory - the need to take care of basic needs before a child can move to higher learning (Berk, 2003). This probably relates back to childhood experiences. In my world it was about whānau and local community. It was affirming to find Taylor (as cited in Starratt, 2004) backs this with the view that relationships are what the community is made of and embedded in these relationships is authenticity. Another strong aspect of my professional philosophy is inclusiveness and the need for teachers to advocate in this area. Teachers need to speak for those who cannot, thus my philosophy includes elements of activism.

Early childhood is not a static sector and historically we have seen changes especially in getting many parents more involved and educated. There has been a parallel development of "working with parents, to partnership with parents, to the current call for collaboration with parents" (Duncan, 2006, p. 14). Collaborative partnerships are about reciprocal communication (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2015). It is a place where through negotiation those involved use strategies to achieve a common end. Today the expectation of parents and centres is that they will work together as collaborative partners in the education and care of young children attending their early learning centres. Thus any discussion about leadership in early childhood needs to include the community attached to the setting.

There are four main core characteristics when looking at authentic leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) name these as being honest, forward-looking, inspiring and competent. Others feel these four characteristics are too narrow. They add moral and ethical aspects and the person being true to themselves and their actions (Evans, 2000; Palmer, 1997; Starratt, 2004). However, in being myself I had not considered taking into account my



emotions to any great extent in the requirements of leadership. I had to explore the concept of emotional leadership and how my state of emotion would affect my leadership of others who also have moods (George, 2000). I reflected how I had changed with time and developed strategies that helped me cope with my emotions and issues. I now realise as an authentic leader I need to be aware not only of how my emotions influence my decisions but also be aware of how others are feeling and how this is affecting their performance. This is something I can utilise in the future by being proactive and checking with team members when I have concerns about their emotional state. George's (2000) assertion that leading is also about caring for the whole person including their emotional intelligence made me aware that the basis for strong communities of learners is emotional intelligent leaders and that they are necessary in our changing world.

My own approach is a distributed or shared approach. It is not one person's responsibility but the collective through collaboration with the community which will bring about the most effective changes (Harris, 2002 as cited in Clarkin- Phillips, 2009). This fits well with *Te Whāriki He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* which aims for "competent and confident learners" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). This will be achieved by a competent and confident team working with the community. It is similar to dispersed leadership also known as the ternary approach (Katene, 2010). Here the community as a collective has a common goal and I noted that an authentic leader would have an approach that included these sentiments. This has similarities to the servant approach where the leader and follower are both servants. When you achieve common goals and mutual understandings it results in humility and real power sharing (Katene, 2010, p. 13). The community would not only include children and teachers but the wider society of the children.

The Māori perspective of whanaungatanga can help provide positive relationships in the community. Whanaungatanga includes aroha (love), a spiritual dimension and bonds that acknowledge heritage (Pere, 1997). Cheryl Rau (2002) acknowledged whanaungatanga as a pedagogy that suited Māori and empowered leadership through collaboration. When team members are allowed to hold on to their heritage and work in a respectful workplace it allows new meanings to evolve around a shared goal. Durie (2003) finds these are important aspects of any leadership where it is about the health of the whole community.

The importance of this community is not a new concept. *Te Whāriki* arose out of the early childhood sector's desire to have control of what was in their curriculum. Whānua tangata is an important concept in this document, which recognises the interdependency of those involved in the children's care and education. Hammer and Adams (2003) understand this principle as giving guidance to make connections and parties sharing of knowledge, which leads to shared understanding. Similarly, Hemara (2000) describes this principle as "reciprocity is the fuel of interdependence" (p. 76). He sees this notion as embedding those concerned into the community.

Leadership is also about accountability and aligns with the four aspects in Māori responsibility of leadership (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha & whanau of Te Kōpae Piripono, 2008). I was able to see how these responsibilities could be translated into actions in an early childhood setting. By fostering tukana/teina and ako amongst the children, we are passing this on to them at an early age that they are part of a collective and have a responsibility. When we mentor students, we also are recognising this is our responsibility not only to the centre but to the early childhood sector to help with the learning of future teachers. When centres set strategic plans, the team has the accountability to be responsible. When we teach children, the social competence part of that is being responsible for their own wellbeing and that of others. In early childhood, we often have to take on responsibility in day-to-day teaching. It may be as simple as making sure we do what is planned for a child.

I find George, Sims, Mclean and Mayer (2007) reinforces this with their belief that authentic leaders have a passion and their hearts as well as heads are important to being authentic. It is no use having a passion if you take no action about the passion. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the early childhood sector has a proud history of advocacy from teachers and academics for quality education. Thus, we have had authentic leadership modeled to us. May (2003) confirms advocacy has its roots in "political change, social reform, indigenous Maori concerns and women's rights" (p.245).



I am now aware of how it is critical in my professional life where I want to be a motivating leader especially to the employees I am responsible for. I noted how important communication was in a journal and this has since been reinforced by my readings of other scholars. Marotz and Lawson (2007) states that better communication would lead to better connections and relationships between staff and management as they would understand the perspective from the others point of view. I still feel there is a need to keep the relationship within professional boundaries and I have yet to be happy with achieving a balance. However, I do realise the importance of connections with all members of my team.

These connections are likely to develop trust of each other. I assert that relationships have to be reciprocal to build trust. Cloud (2013) certainly made me reflect more on this issue and how a real important part of authentic leadership is developing the team. Having worked in a centre, which was just starting and all the staff were new and did not know each other, the hardest part was to get them to come together as a team. I would use strategies suggested by Cloud (2013) but first adjust them to be more appropriate to the early childhood setting. Trust is important and to gain this in any setting one has to be honest and competent (Evans, 2000). Communication with your team will allow them to know that some situations cannot be changed due to regulations and policies. Having a mutual vision within the team would not stop intellectual autonomy, which gives the members freedom to expand their own achievements (Fry, 2003). There is a strong need to make sure the leader's behaviour matches the vision to maintain credibility (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A transformative approach "encouraging others to participate in important decisions" is an approach mooted by Marotz and Lawson (2007, p.65). To foster this one needs to listen to the team with empathy which is an attribute of a servant leader (Smith, 2005). Being competent is important but so is the need to accept when you have situations beyond your control.

Clarkin-Phillips (2009) proposes that pedagogical leadership "commands particular interest because it is pedagogy that impacts most immediately on children" (p. 22). This is very relevant for early childhood settings and for teachers. Lee (2010) gives guidance on four areas that can help teachers become strong in pedagogical leadership in an early childhood setting. The first aspect is how relationships, especially collaborative ones can create "magic" and are instrumental in improving what happens in the setting. Teachers need to be "fully engaged with their community" for this magic to happen" (Lee, 2010, p.2). This suggests a deeper relationship than is often accepted as being appropriate.

The main pedagogy for any teaching is forming the relationship. Building such partnerships is not easy because just as each child is an individual, similarly each family also has the characteristics that are unique. Stonehouse (2011) reiterates that there is no one set way for the partnership to develop and work. This is why it is important to have a variety of ways to make these connections, which will result in the relationship forming. Gibbs (2006) feels that spiritually aware teachers understand it is not just about the transmission of knowledge but about relationships and connecting with people. However, it needs to include other ideologies thus being culturally responsive and having interconnectivity. Gibbs (2006) finds that a spiritual connection is important and that "inter-connectedness is about forming deep, meaningful connections with others and with the world around us, including time and place" (p.78).

There are many theoretical concepts that can be used in practice in an early childhood setting but there is also a need to be aware that some concepts will be viewed differently. Spirituality and spiritual leadership are concepts that are seen differently by members of our academic community. Fry (2003) emphasises that spiritual leadership is about the team and the leader needs to generate a communal visualisation that agrees with all the members. Lee (2010) in her discussion on the need for merriment uses an example of a shared vision by a group who worked in a fish market. They wanted their workplace to be a better place to be at. The Fish philosophy evolved, based on four principles, which are easily adapted to other settings and contain the spirituality of the heart and soul that Lee (2010) feels is so important. The principles of "play", "make their day", "be there" and "choose your attitude" in some way seem so simple but are very powerful and this is definitely something I could bring to any team in the future.



Lee (2010) also brought up morals coupled with ethics as an important aspect of pedagogical leadership. I noted the difference between morals and ethics and reflected on how they affect our practice in the workplace. Morals and ethics are both important and both relate to integrity. Evans (2000) finds integrity paramount and he uses examples that show how a leader can be effective by using this. The example of proclaiming the need for respect struck a chord with me. I note in my own practice that in the future there is a need to be consistent in what I do and what I say. However, within this constraint there is still a need to be oneself otherwise one would have no authentic purpose in one's life (Starratt, 2004).

Every teacher needs to be their own person but also to understand the importance of using their voice (Lee, 2010). Lee's (2009) last point is probably the most relevant to pedagogical leadership as it asks professional teachers to be able to explain their practice and share with the wider learning community associated with their workplace. This is something teachers should be able to do and I would implement the opportunity for teachers to do this in the appraisal system. Newly trained teachers are often still coming to grips with the reality of the profession and will need experience and thus giving them the opportunity will increase confidence. Pedagogical leadership is about service and awareness of the responsibility that goes with this position. It is also about working with the strengths of the team. If an authentic leader has the majority of these characteristics already mentioned, I feel they would know what the strengths of their team were.

I have gained some valuable insights on this journey of looking into authentic leadership in more depth. I have noted it is ongoing and I need to pick challenges and do more research in certain areas. However, throughout this journey the one thing that stands out and comforts me is the need to *thy self be true*.



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