

47th Annual NZCA Conference & AGM

Kōrero session notes

KŌRERO SESSION ONE - Leadership

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Definition of leadership:

The Teachers Council (TC) did an occasional paper and subsequently tried to define leadership; they previously had not defined it. The key elements of the TC definition was *'leadership in ECE creates dynamic and vibrant learning communities where children and adults become strong, confident and connected citizens of the world'*

It was agreed that this definition opens up the concept of leadership and allowed centres to develop their own take on it, recognising that everyone is different and that the focus is on the children, not just the adults.

A feeling of inspiration was generated by the panel discussion – we came away questioning why we are trying to define leadership.

Leadership doesn't always have to be collaborative; there are situations where if you stop and wait for collaboration a critical incident (i.e. death) might take place. People can't avoid making the hard decisions in leadership (i.e. 'the buck stops here'), but hopefully collaboration eases those times.

Leadership and trust:

You can make decisions on your own as a leader if you have trust.

A shared context and knowledge helps build that – understanding the philosophy helps with getting the decision right.

If you have common values together along with the common vision and practice, the leadership might be better than you'd see in a corporate environment.

Leaders and followers:

ECE is into thinking about everyone as leaders. I wouldn't identify everyone as followers – that's ok. It's about giving people the opportunities, the space and place for them to have the leadership opportunities. As a good leader - you have to keep your eye on the ball.

People want both opportunities (to lead and follow). They want to be led and they want the opportunity to be recognised for working in a 'leaderful' way.

Not everyone wants to be the leader – there is security in knowing there is someone who has a depth of knowledge who can support them.

Leadership and power:

Power is attached to leadership – a leader is a powerful person. In ECE it's all about empowerment: for children, for parents and for teachers.

Leadership is about facilitating powerful action.

Some people in ECE disassociate themselves from power, but actually it exists – it's about taking responsibility.

Discretionary commitment – it's the idea of working 'above the line'. Where people act in a responsible, autonomous ways and are in charge of their actions. They are happy to be part of a team and feel good about that. When they are in that mode they contribute at a higher level. As a leader it's our responsibility to make sure that state is achieved.

Leadership for staff should be similar to the empowerment that is actioned with children in centres.

'What happens for children is what happens for teachers'.

The principles of Te Whāriki - work for leadership just as well as they do as an aspiration statement for children. What we want for children is what we want for leaders.

It is interesting that we talk about leadership sitting with power and kudos. I think it can be onerous – leadership is about a commitment to community – you're part of the whole community you're serving.

Power is not a bad thing – it's about how you use it.

Why abdicate power when you can influence for good?

Lack of leadership in ECE:

We tend to 'fall upon' leadership roles in ECE – we aren't trained in it.

Or is it a case of what people see – some see leadership differently.

The intolerance of the leadership model in ECE comes from the corporate world who don't see what we do as leadership; they don't have the same respect for how things work in ECE.

This is all built on concepts in the mind of leadership – there needs to be coherence of what that is.

Not just what it is, but what it does. If the focus is on the outcomes then there is no confusion about what makes a good leader.

A good leader in one setting could be a bad leader in another.

In ECE we select people in or out through our training etc. That's why we can talk about everyone being a leader; because we are choosing them leaders to participate in our programmes.

When we say everyone is a leader it's like throwing a blanket over everyone – isn't that unfair?

A leader is a person that influences another – we all influence people in some way and that's why we are all leaders. Our perception of ourselves is that we don't take all the glory.

Leadership and loneliness:

The panel discussed the sense of loneliness that comes with being a leader – it is lonely being a leader.

Maori have a whakatauki that says you don't stand alone as we all have our strengths from our tipuna. We are never really alone.

You don't stand alone – in leadership you become a leader to serve first, that's how you learn and get the knowledge and experience to serve the community.

There are times as a director where the role requires me to stand alone and there is a feeling of isolation, sometimes decisions are made outside of other people and that's positional. Staff look differently at me because I'm the director.

You have to seek out other leaders to talk to and have conversations that you need to have when you feel on your own.

Women in leadership:

Interested in the concept of women in power and women in conflict. We are socialised to make things nice and sort out problems, to address hardness and to find solutions that are acceptable to the community. I think we often get quite fluffy. We talk about empowerment etc so we don't have to face the hard bits or make decisions people aren't going to like.

I'm always interested that we put the energy into how we work with kids and almost none into how we as women socialise ourselves and be really honest with each other – that allows us to be empowering.

Because we are a society that puts value on people being able to speak out – people who don't do that but are leaderful are often overlooked. I liked the comment about good leadership often being in the silence.

I get anxious about our big words and inability to be able to stand honestly to each other and resolve issues. Leadership doesn't happen if you don't let those things shape.

Developing leadership:

If there is a problem – you should let people solve it, give them the right conditions and they will solve it.

You have to have faith in people

How many of us have taken steps because someone else has said that we are really good at something?

As a leader you should always be looking out for the next person – succession planning. If you are a positional leader you are growing people – you have to find the space to let

them shine. It concerns me that the bright lights are the one who get all the attention – you don't see the ones who need growth.

There is complexity in roles. The benefit of having people in separate roles takes away the anxiety of conversations. If you take an educational leader without the blur of staff and sit that under management it looks different.

Trialling of a 'distributed leadership' model; a supervisor has left and those responsibilities have been moved out amongst staff with the corresponding strengths. This is new and still being worked through – it offers others the chance to shine. Has the potential to be difficult where there are 'people' issues to be dealt with.

Leadership in ECE:

If we in ECE – as adults in teams – apply the same things we say to children all the time 'think about your words', 'is it still your turn?'; imagine if we applied those same things.

One of the things that is sad is all the fantastic things happening with positive guidance for children while there are terrible things going on with the adults in the room.

There are so many stunning ECE teachers who know good principles and to apply those to each other would be very exciting.