

‘LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION’

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in early childhood education settings is receiving an increasing amount of attention from both a theoretical and empirical point of view. According to the findings of this study, the majority of the existing literature on educational leadership fails to take into account the specific issues that are encountered by leaders in preschools and kindergartens. Furthermore, the significance of context is completely disregarded. It is the purpose of this article to describe the findings of a qualitative study that was conducted with the intention of examining leadership from the perspectives of five individuals who were all acknowledged as being competent and qualified early childhood educators. Despite the fact that the participants were aware of the fact that effective leadership is necessary for the delivery of high-quality care and education, the results revealed that a significant number of them were uncertain about what leadership truly involved and how it differed from management in this particular context. The contextual issues that were present in the early childhood education sector had a considerable influence on the opportunities that participants had to learn and put leadership concepts into action. It has been determined that there is a need for early childhood educators and leaders to have access to leadership training that is not just creative but also adapted to their particular learning environment.

Keywords: leadership ,early childhood, education

INTRODUCTION

According to the findings of Abel et al. (2018), the complexity and multi-layering of an effective and comprehensive system of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services has an effect on the quality of the programmes and services that are provided to families and young children. In the United States, there are a great number of organisations and initiatives that collaborate in order to provide programmes and services to families who have young children. In order to achieve this degree of integration, it is necessary to coordinate the organisations of infrastructure, money, and government policy. The establishment of a powerful and diverse

leadership team that is capable of driving forward continuous growth while also allowing creative and game-changing improvements is one of the potential benefits that might result from the successful completion of such an integration. This demonstrates how essential it is to make a comprehensive commitment to the idea that initiatives aiming at delivering early childhood education and care of a high standard must have strong leadership. On the other hand, in contrast to a great number of other prosperous countries, the United States of America has not completely acknowledged early childhood education and care as a public service, much like elementary and secondary education.

As a consequence of this, early childhood education and care professionals, especially those who hold positions of authority, do not get the level of help that is necessary in our nation. Despite the many potential benefits of the project, the fragmented infrastructure that offers early childhood education and care continues to exist. There is a wide range of prices, quality, and availability of services, and the workforce is not as close together as it ought to be in terms of its compensation. The results of previous research endeavours, in addition to a full literature review of the relevant literature, served as the foundation for this study on leadership theory. As an additional activity, we studied critiques of contemporary literature that were published by a wide range of authors. These papers covered a wide range of issues, including worldwide research on early childhood education (EC) leadership and the impact that ECEC leaders have on the quality of ECEC practices. This article investigates the value of strong leadership development and system building via state and local system efforts in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes that are located in the United States. The research focuses on initiatives that are carried out at the regional level. We begin by adopting an ecological perspective on leadership, and then we proceed to investigate ecological leadership as a transformative process that is brought about by the interaction of a number of different systems.

The implications that this technique has for the future of ecosystems that cultivate leadership in United States programmes for preschoolers and other young children are another aspect that we investigate. We will now present some recommendations for the development of local systems in order to work towards the goal of achieving adequately integrated alignment and coordination between the state and local levels. In the context of this article, the term "early childhood" refers to children (defined as those between the ages of 0 and five) who get support from sources other than their families or community organisations. There is currently no information available on whether or whether these youngsters have any disabilities. The early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems are detailed, which includes the specific professional credentials that are necessary for each setting. Additionally, the programmes, services, regulations, rules, and funding that control these systems are also stated.

Leadership Matters

The "Leadership Matters" research by the McCormick Centre for Early Childhood Leadership focuses on the following programme heads in early childhood: "Our country has committed to provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of early learning and development to guarantee that children are ready for school and to assist in preparing them for effective involvement in both the workforce and in civic life." As a result of the proliferation

of community-based programmes that provide preschool that is sponsored by the government, there is a severe lack of competent early childhood educators. Further evidence of the significance of leadership may be found in two initiatives that extend beyond the confines of the preschool setting: It has been reported that the National Association of Elementary School Administrators has released a study with the title "Leading Pre-K-Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice." The P-3 Executive Leadership Institute at the University of Washington Seattle, where Kristie Kauerz is now employed, is the location where this paper may be found.

High-Quality Early Childhood Education

When it comes to providing students with meaningful results within the context of a high-quality education, one of the essential components is leadership that is both strong and thoughtful. Early childhood programmes that combine evidence-based curriculum, highly-trained educators, and leadership support have been found to produce positive effects on multiple domains of learning and school readiness. These domains include language, literacy, mathematics, and emotional development, as well as executive function skills such as working memory, inhibitory control, and attention shifting. Recent research has found that these programmes produce positive effects on these domains. It is abundantly obvious that working with young children is both a vital and challenging endeavor, as shown by the scientific study of child development and early learning. Despite the fact that this is the case, the professionals who are responsible for the care and education of children from birth up to the age of eight are often not recognised as a coherent workforce that is organised by the knowledge and skills that they have in common in order to execute their duties effectively. There is a large gap between the expectations placed on early childhood educators and the evidence that reveals what children need in order to flourish and learn. Furthermore, many of the policies that are now in place do not put sufficient value on the substantial contributions that these professionals make to the long-term development and success of children. Leaders in the field of early childhood education and the Institute of Medicine are required to enable a change in perspective and practice that will make it possible for all children to get an early childhood education of the best possible quality. This is the sort of education that will assist children in accomplishing their educational objectives and reaching their limits.

OBJECTIVE

1. to research the topic of Early Childhood Education Leadership Development.
2. to research early childhood education and care system construction and leadership development

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

When it comes to enhancing outcomes for children, early childhood programme directors play a crucial role. They do this by assisting teachers in strengthening their core competencies and by providing work conditions in which these educators may fully apply and enhance their knowledge and abilities. In terms of professional growth, leaders have a significant amount of influence. When it comes to professional learning, for instance, principals and directors often choose the structure, content, and activities that will be used. According to the Early Childhood

Education Leadership Statement 4, leaders are also accountable for setting workforce-hiring methods and for the mechanisms that are used to assess early childhood professionals. In addition, leaders are responsible for facilitating the required communication and coordination among diverse specialists in order to achieve the objective of enhancing consistency not only inside the care and education sector for children, but also outside of it, such as in the fields of health and social services, for instance. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council (NRC) have brought together a group of specialists who have been tasked with investigating the scientific aspects of child development, with a particular focus on the consequences for professionals who interact with children starting at birth and continuing until the age of eight. In the study that they produced, which was titled "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation," they included a blueprint of proposed activities with the ultimate objective of establishing coherent and consistent support for the development of young learners. In addition, the committee suggests certain activities, such as leadership that is both knowledgeable and competent, that may make the planned improvements to the workforce in the early childhood sector viable.

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework that would serve as a unifying basis for early childhood leadership was one of the initial techniques that was executed by the Early Childhood Leadership Development Consortium. This framework was created in order to serve as a foundation for early childhood leadership. The first meeting of the Consortium was held in September of 2014, and the objective of the gathering was to investigate a conceptual framework known as Leadership by Design. This framework was developed by Deloitte Consulting LLP. In order to build its framework, Deloitte carried out an extensive study project that included the participation of over 10,000 outstanding top executives from both the public and private sectors. For the purpose of providing an all-encompassing view on leadership, their framework identifies four distinct styles of leadership, each of which is related with a distinct collection of traits:

- People Leadership - Inspirational Leadership and Execution.
- Business Leadership - Direction and Business Judgment
- Relationship Leadership - Influence and Collaboration
- Entrepreneurial Leadership - Competitive Edge and Building Talent

In order to reflect the specialised knowledge and abilities of effective early childhood leaders, the Deloitte Framework was reviewed, amended, and modified by the Partnership for Early Childhood Development. The connections with teachers and families, knowledge that spans both subject matter and grade levels, and cooperation amongst a wide variety of interested parties are all included in this provision.

Leadership from an ecological lens: recommendations for the future

The study of childhood and friendship patterns carried out by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1940s serves as the basis for Ecological Systems Theory. This model depicted the ecological environment as a collection of tiered structures, with overlapping domains of influence on children's development, such as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. The roles, participants, and environmental elements that are part of an individual's immediate context are represented by their microsystem. All of the other systems and the connections between them that this person often interacts with make up their mesosystem. Individuals may also be affected by situations that fall under the exosystem or that are a component of the macrosystem, a bigger cultural system that specifies specific traits for all linked systems. Lastly, the chronosystem determines how much a human's identity will be impacted by environmental changes by accounting for the various reactions that people have to such changes. Every system is composed of interdependent parts that may influence one another from the left as well as the right. The networks that develop leadership within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system are interrelated systems that are mostly made up of families, communities, society, and subsystems related to each domain.

The idea that individuals may influence other people and organisations in their ecosystem to the same degree as they are influenced by those entities has significant implications for children's growth and development. According to the ecological systems theory, children's development occurs as a consequence of their interactions with other members of their surroundings and the connections that exist between the various levels of the world they live in. When considering leadership from an ecological point of view, it is less likely that leaders who have had excellent leadership training would be able to retain effectiveness and efficiency in settings that are not their home. More precisely, in order to oversee the interpretation of macro policies, measure them against the multilevel contexts they oversee, carefully consider the innovations they wish to develop, translate them into micro implementations, compile the insights that emerge from the processes, and rethink how to diffuse innovation to other contexts, the leaders act as a layer of mediation. In order to promote change, leadership, which is founded on ecological system theory, emphasises both hierarchical and non-hierarchical systems. In order to achieve this, disparities in the allocation of power across the levels must be eliminated, and relationships must be built via cooperative and group connections. In early childhood education and care, networking and cooperative possibilities with allies are crucial, and this kind of leadership creates the foundation for professionalism and capacity development. In order to improve outcomes in the section that follows, we will apply an ecological lens to consider how the leadership development opportunities in early childhood education and care (ECEC) might be used to synthesise, integrate, and connect system-building activities. Similarly, contextual leadership frameworks for early childhood education and care use the ecological model of leadership.

Current trends in ECEC leadership conceptualization

Leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC), according to the ecological paradigm, is characterised by a collaborative relationship rather than a one-way influence from the leader to the followers. Understanding leadership requires situating it within the ecological subsystems that comprise ECEC. The family, the neighborhood, and the nation as a whole are the main components of these subsystems. Leadership here is

different from that at other US universities. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) leadership is distinct. Many people think that the core principles of preschool curricula are at odds with a corporate or conventional approach to leadership. Being able to plan, organise, lead, control, and direct activities requires a distinct set of management and administrative abilities. Leadership abilities are also required for the provision of organisational vision, direction, and acculturation. The company strategy often prioritises competition over collaboration, limiting the chances for the EC staff to feel like they're leading the charge in their daily job. Prioritising the development of models that function from a set of assumptions apart from business is an important goal for the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The early childhood education and care profession may not have settled on a common operational definition of leadership, but it does draw on ideas about leadership from other fields to guide its practice. Several professional organisations have produced leadership definitions and standards tailored to early childhood education and care (ECEC), such as the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC). These groups have taken these measures so that future experts in our area may draw on a more up-to-date body of information. A prominent US organisation that seeks to enhance evidence-based policies and practices that support families and encourage the optimal development of young children is the Developmental Education Commission (DEC). One description offered by the Division for Early Childhood is that leaders are "individuals who are in positions of programme authority and leadership related to the provision of services to families with young children." This kind of leader is exemplified by, among others, state, regional, and municipal administrators; early childhood programme coordinators; building principals; assistant directors; and coordinators. The DEC drafted a leadership position statement to promote the cultivation of exceptional leadership throughout all EC and ECSE service systems.

"The proactive process of influencing others to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations, the wants and needs, aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers," states the Department of Education's (DEC) policy statement on leadership. Some have said that there are three parts to effective ECEC leadership: The technical knowledge and skills consist of three parts: conceptual capacity, which includes the ability to think critically and advocate on behalf of others, interpersonal skills, and pedagogical and curricular leadership abilities. made use of a structure that was similar to the one that Rodd (2014) used when she divided these abilities into four groups: (a) interpersonal skills, (b) communication skills, (c) decision-making and problem-solving abilities, and (d) organisational skills. Because ECEC is fundamentally complicated and based on people and their relationships, it necessitates a concept of leadership as an interpretive and contextual phenomenon that is context sensitive. The obligations of the child, parents, staff, and community at large are complex and multi-tiered in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings since they deal with human connections. This is due to the fact that there are several financing mechanisms, each including a unique set of regulations and standards imposed by various state and federal bodies as well as professional groups. The interplay of these interactions may cast doubt on the best approach to completing certain tasks.

Leadership development ecosystems

Leaders, according to ecological theory, should not rely just on executive orders and choices to bring about change, but should instead foster the development of new leaders. Leadership ecosystems are one approach. A community network of interactions between species and their environs is what makes up an ecosystem, according to Douglass and Austin (2017). Ecosystems, as they pertain to education, may be defined as networks of varied players working together towards a common goal, with the goal of creating and implementing novel solutions to pressing social and educational problems. By viewing educational communities and environments through the lens of ecosystemic actors and their interconnections, educational ecosystems may provide fresh light on these topics. Further characteristics of such ecosystems include: social capital derived from systemic and cross-sectoral cooperation; pursuit of systemic effect; and a challenge to conventional organisational boundaries via a place-based emphasis on local education centres or transnational networks.

Applying the ecosystem framework to the expansion of the early childhood education and care workforce will pave the way for the development and integration of ecosystems centred on place-based learning, as well as the challenge of conventional monoculture via eco-systemic thought and action. In addition to facilitating meaningful and collaborative interactions that induce systemic impact and improve existing practices and learning opportunities, the ecosystem framework can lead to the development of trustworthy, purpose-driven, and empathic relations among the many actors within and outside of ECEC stakeholders, organisations, and communities. The best way to ensure long-term success in early childhood education and care (ECEC) leadership development and improvement is to establish a leadership development ecosystem that brings together various ECEC programmes, fosters cooperation and networking among them, and encourages agencies to work together to coordinate services and build capacity. By creating a supportive environment, local leaders may gain knowledge, rise through the ranks of the ECEC system's leadership, have their voices heard, and have an effect on choices that affect many different types of ECEC services. Senior leaders may also play a role in building a leadership development ecosystem by learning more about their local counterparts and the contexts in which they work.

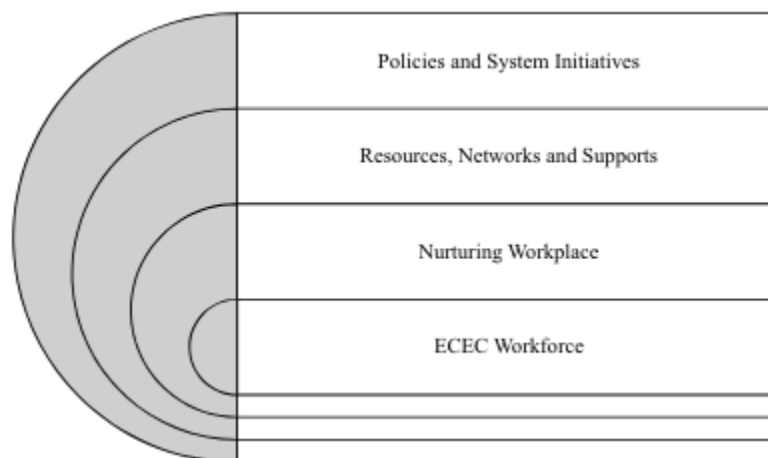


Figure 1. Early childhood leadership development ecosystem.

Five functions of leadership in ECEC

The groundbreaking work of Kagan and Bowman eloquently identified the five 'functions' of leadership that are widespread in early childhood education and care (ECEC) scenarios. These 'functions' are what are known as "leadership functions." When it comes to administrative leadership, two common roles that are often assigned to individuals are those of a manager and a leader. An early childhood education and care (ECEC) programme manager is responsible for a variety of tasks that go beyond the day-to-day operations of the programme. These tasks include motivating and directing programme participants, developing a strategic plan, and keeping track of how well the programme is progressing towards its objectives. Research and practice might potentially be integrated in a number of ways, one of which is via pedagogical leadership. The application of research-based knowledge in classrooms is something that pedagogical leaders do in addition to interpreting research and theory and communicating new information to both teachers and parents. Educational leaders have the ability to exert influence on the research agenda if they ensure that researchers are kept up to date on the most important issues and challenges that are occurring in the classroom and within the programme. Community leaders are individuals who go out into the community and spread the word about how essential early childhood education and care (ECEC) is for families and children. These individuals are examples of community leaders. In order to build early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes that are of a high quality, strong community leaders must first determine the necessary steps, and then they must obtain the financial and human resources necessary to make those steps a reality. Children, families, and programmes are the beneficiaries of leadership that advocates for them. This kind of leadership is typified by leaders whose vision leads to good change. When formulating their plans, visionaries in the advocacy sector engage in forward-looking thinking that extends far into the future. In addition to this, these leaders are well-versed in the legislative process and often work together with specialists from a variety of sectors. When leaders engage in conceptual leadership, they take a holistic perspective of the field, rather than focusing solely on specific programmes within it. They are also open to other points of view, possess a long-term vision, are agents of change, and are committed to improving early childhood education and care (ECEC) in order to create a society that is more equitable and equitable for all.

Additionally, the positions are in accordance with the ecological leadership model, which depicts the leadership of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system as being emergent and dependent upon the interaction and links between the many subsystems and stakeholders. This, in turn, may contribute to the program's effectiveness and sustainability. In the field of early childhood education and care, the McCormick Centre for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University created a critical leadership approach known as the Whole Leadership Framework in Early Childhood (EC). The Department of Education's position statement on leadership has also given its approval to these five leadership responsibilities, which demonstrates how essential it is for all early childhood education and care delivery systems to cultivate leadership capability. The shared responsibility and reciprocal influence are further highlighted by this typology, which may be applied to any leadership role. The complexities of early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems need cross-programmatic engagement between programme leaders and stakeholders. This collaboration is necessary in order to discover the attributes that are most essential in a leader, as well as the kind of work environments that are conducive to the development and maintenance of great leadership.

Leadership in ECEC: current issues and challenges

Today, the majority of children in the United States who are under the age of five are cared for in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings for forty to fifty hours per week, often over the course of many years. More teachers are employed in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in the United States than in the K-12 phase, making up thirty percent of the total instructional workforce from birth to postsecondary education. When it comes to attaining great educational and developmental results via Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes for young children and their families, the role that strong leadership plays becomes even more crucial. Numerous calls for leadership development in early childhood education and care have been made over the course of the last two decades. These calls have placed an emphasis on the need of constructing and maintaining leadership capital, human capabilities, and organisational cultures that encourage active participation in leadership responsibilities at all levels of practice and all areas of practice. Nevertheless, there is a lack of leadership development in the area of early childhood education and care. There is a lack of focus dedicated to leadership development and sustainability in early childhood education and care in the United States, which diminishes the field's capability and potential to design and provide education and care that makes a difference for children and their families. Some of the factors that contribute to the lack of effective and efficient leadership development and sustainability efforts in the United States include the following: (a) the lack of research in leadership in early childhood education and care; (b) the fluid and evolving definition of leadership in the field, as well as the absence of operationalized conceptualization of leadership; and (c) the variations in state and federal requirements for leaders, which result in the fields' lack of unders. These characteristics also have an effect on the ability of the field to construct, cultivate, and retain leadership capital, as well as to enhance the working knowledge of the field and to maintain an ethic that allows leaders to bring about better results for children and families. In the long run, being able to achieve such results would lead to more uniformity, less fragmentation across programmes, and better sustainability of early childhood education and care programmes. Convincingly contends that over the course of the last several decades, the area of early childhood education and care has seen a significant increase in both public awareness and public criticism. Despite great advancements, early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes continue to be heavily influenced by external policy pressures, and they lack clarity about their aims and bounds. makes the case that there is a need for leadership within the sector in order to turn early childhood education and care into professions that are cohesive, competent, and responsible.

CONCLUSION

When compared to a schooling setting with learning stages that are more advanced than the ECE stages, the people, the location, and the practices that he or she is responsible for managing and leading contain sophisticated structural and cultural dynamics. It is clearer to us now that an early childhood education (ECE) environment is not the same as any other school setting. In addition to having a distinct appearance, it also entails various tasks, and the leader is required to carry out functions that are notably different from those that are performed in a primary school, secondary school, or higher institution. The ECE leader is in a league of their own because of their ability to successfully navigate the synergies that are inherent in the structures, roles, and tasks that they are responsible for. When the ECE leader is able to successfully navigate the dynamics of these synergies, they are

able to provide for the systematic and sustainable transformation of the ECE setting. This allows the people who are employed in the ECE place to perform their roles in an efficient and effective manner, which in turn enables the children to achieve learning and growing up outcomes that are beneficial to their wellbeing. Therefore, leadership in an early childhood education (ECE) context entails not only the provision of a transformational vision and the establishment of governance that is conducive to its implementation, but also the formulation of organisational strategies, educational outcomes, pedagogy, and curriculum that are designed to facilitate the education and well-being of the children who are enrolled in the ECE setting.

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