

**BOOK REVIEW****Leading and Managing Early Childhood Settings: Inspiring People, Places and Practices.**

by Nadine Louise McCrea

2015. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. 208 pp. ISBN 978-1-107-66918-5

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The author, Nadine Louise McCrea, is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Teacher Education in the School of Education, at the University of New England in Australia. In writing this book, the author draws from her own wealth of personal experiences, as well as, from some of the experiences of her highly valued colleagues, such as Diane Nailon and Jan Carr.

The book's purpose is to explore what it means to be a leader, manager and administrator in Early Childhood Education (ECE) within the Australian and New Zealand contexts. To do so, the author, has unified the specific roles, by coining the descriptor 'leader-manager'. McCrea, by adopting, Michael Fullan's (2001a) concept of "managerial leadership", examines how core values, underground rules, norms and beliefs, influence "managerial leadership". As importantly, she emphasises the need for reflective managerial leadership as being essential in the development of better stakeholder relationships within ECE.

By adopting a storytelling approach, the author traces connections between research, theorisation, conceptual themes, and daily practices in ECE. The author engages readers as active thinkers who seek to make connections between the contents of her book and their lived experiences. To do so, she creates an organizational trilogy, the 3 Ps: *people*, *places* and *practices*. She maps the structural and cultural dynamics of interrelationships and interconnectedness among the 3Ps within the contexts of ECE managerial leadership.

The book is organised into seven chapters. The first three chapters focus on the first 2 Ps, people and places. Chapters 4 to 7 concentrate on discussing practices in managerial leadership roles. The first two chapters give the reader the opportunity to actively develop a deeper understanding of one's self, and to consider how to communicate more effectively with others in ECE settings. Chapter 1 asks questions about the relevance of knowing oneself personally and professionally, and how the self informs managerial leadership. Chapter 2 highlights the importance of effective communication within ECE settings while chapter 3 considers what constitutes ECE workplaces.

The last four chapters focus on the 3<sup>rd</sup> P, *practices* in terms of people's roles in ECE. The author makes the analysis more concrete by assigning four analogical professional roles: namely, (i) team stakeholder, (ii) policy designer, (iii) pedagogy creator and, (iv) rights advocate. Each chapter deals in considerable detail with how ECE settings function with regard to the particular, managerial roles. In chapter 4, Nadine McCrea casts the roles of an early childhood leader, manager, and administrator as being that of a team stakeholder. She invokes the team stakeholder analogy to emphasise that the day-to-day managerial leadership involves having a personal interest in the structural and cultural dynamics within the ECE settings. The twin emphasis on 'team' and 'stakeholder' helps to crystallise the synergy needed among all staff involved in ECE daily activities.

In chapter 5, Nadine utilises the analogy of a policy designer to conceptualise an ECE managerial leader as some kind of organisational bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) whose role involves operational strategies that are multi-functional, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Working within the bricoleur metaphor, the teacher develops a vision, drawing

on inspiration, insights and ideals to be inculcated among ECE members, in order to produce policies that guide the implementation process of ECE activities in a successful and sustainable ways.

Chapter 6 presents the role of an ECE managerial leader as that of a pedagogy creator (Pollard, 2005). The author broadens the managerial role to include enhancing “children’s educational experiences beginning with adults philosophical ideas, moving to other learning steps and teaching processes, and finally to the everyday interactions and experiences within early childhood settings” (p. 121). This broadening of the role shows that there is more to pedagogy than just teaching. It includes “teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum which produce superior results among learners” (Kivunja, 2015, p. 3).

The final chapter discusses the role of a managerial leader using the analogy of a strong rights advocate who puts the interests of children in her care above the rights of others. This analogy enables the author to explore managerial leadership in terms of the dynamics of power and politics. Arguing that “rights with advocacy ought to be the first and last thing that we do as ECE professionals” (p. 147), she stresses the vital significance of protecting the interests of children and of those involved in ECE. McCrea further encourages educators to carefully reflect on whatever they say, when they engage in verbal interactions in professional and positive ways.

Through the critical lens of how leadership impacts on the structural and cultural dynamics that influence not only teaching and learning but also on life of all participants in that organization (Kivunja, 2006), this book stands on its own in its contribution towards an understanding of managerial leadership in ECE settings. Whereas, she used the hyphenated term leader-manager, it appears that in daily dynamics in the lives of people in ECE settings, leading and managing are so highly intertwined as to be best defined as a single composite of managerial leadership. This is consistent with Yukl (1998) who used the term ‘managerial leadership’ to emphasise the overlap that exists between these two roles.

The book is unique in its treatment of the key concepts of managerial leadership, along with concepts of embodiment and sustainability. It is also distinctive in having links to e-resources that can be accessed by people who buy the book. The complex role of leading, managing and administering the daily occurrences in ECE settings are captured well in the blended role of managerial leadership. Efficient leadership, in tandem with competent management, needs to be embodied in a managerial leader if ECE is to be sustainable. This embodiment requires that today’s ECE managerial leader have human, financial and resource management skills, a sound knowledge of accountability and a well-informed understanding of the changes that are occurring in the local, national and international developments in the ECE landscape in order to achieve sustainability for an ECE setting.

The embodiment of managerial leadership requires an authentic vision for ECE that places children’s learning and operations of ECE settings within the international arena. Furthermore, leaders need to be able to identify strategies necessary to ensure that their ECE setting has a pedagogically and ethically, socially, economically and ecologically sustainable future. The role therefore calls for managerial leadership that have a 21<sup>st</sup> century futurist vision to manage external and internal stakeholders’ interests, and sustain their ECE settings in a very fluid environment of the digital age.

This managerial leader role therefore, calls for the cultivation of relationships which build 4 behavioural Rs of respect, responsibility, rights, and reciprocity within ECE. Nadine McCrea unpacks the four managerial leadership roles that she sees as essential for effective and sustainable ECE settings. The critique is an excellent way to evaluate the significance of this book and the extent to which it achieves its objectives regarding what happens among *people*, *places* and *practices* in ECE settings using the metaphors of a team stakeholder, a policy designer, a pedagogy creator, and a rights advocate. I refer to them as metaphors

because by their very nature metaphors give us “an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another” (Holman, 1980, p. 264).

In the metaphor of a team stakeholder, Nadine successfully configured a conceptually duopolistic image that comprises two sub-metaphors: that of a team and a stakeholder. When unpacked, the power of each of these components highlights the significant role of the ECE managerial leader, its embodiment and sustainability requirements. For example, as a team player, the managerial leader is one of many people who must work collaboratively if the ECE setting is to be sustainable. S/he therefore needs to take on the role of a team builder and team player who: captains the team and creates opportunities for positive interdependence; encourages each member to play their role constructively; gives every member an equal opportunity to help children while building their professional careers; creates opportunities for the team to evaluate and reflect on their ECE performance; and as champion player, s/he leads by example. As a stakeholder, the ECE managerial leader needs to show that s/he has a personal interest in the efficient functioning of the ECE setting and takes steps to ensure that the interests of all the stakeholders are catered for in fulfilment of the 4Rs identified above.

The metaphor of an ECE managerial leader as a policy designer is a very effective one. It conjures up images of one who has the leadership vision for the big picture for the ECE and the managerial ability to creatively influence children and staff to engage positively in the learning, teaching and education that take place during ECE. As a policy designer, the ECE managerial leader needs to be a constantly, critical reflective learner so that s/he can see where the setting is, how it has performed and what policies and practices need to change to improve its efficacy. As a designer, the ECE managerial leader needs to have the patience, resilient demeanour, intellectual fortitude and organisational calm to allow any slow changes and challenges to take effect. All these are essential for the sustainability of ECE.

With the metaphor of the ECE managerial leader's role as a pedagogy creator, Nadine captures very well the understanding that if an ECE setting is to be successful, the person in charge must prioritise “best practice pedagogy” (Kivunja, 2015, p. 3). The creation component in this role helps readers to appreciate that the role requires the leader to have insights and new ideas to effect novel ways of learning and teaching. This metaphor emphasises that the leader needs to adopt child-centric strategies which ensure sovereignty of the children's learning. I invoke the term sovereignty here as a further defining metaphor to emphasise that in the creation of a pedagogy for ECE, children's interests must be the prime factor which influences what is created.

Nadine's final metaphor of a rights advocate is an excellent way to crystallise the understanding that the ECE managerial leader must champion the cause of ECE, and for his or her colleagues at the particular ECE site, in the field and the community at large. As an advocate, s/he needs to ensure that staff members are given every opportunity for professional development and career advancement. S/he also needs to support the development of the ECE setting as part of a learning community, thus creating mutually symbiotic relationships between ECE settings and communities to make ECE settings learning resources for communities. In this role, the ECE leader needs to adopt a servant leadership style so that s/he can be seen exercising a ‘giving service’ approach within professional interactions. For this role to be authentic, the managerial leader needs to publicly demonstrate a personal commitment to expressive storytelling and story writing in favour of ECE and providing opportunities to support professional development and life-long learning.

In following the four metaphorical roles proposed for the ECE managerial leader, leaders would be able to lead *people*, *places* and *practices* in a manner that would facilitate the provision of quality service within ECE settings which would meet the high standards stipulated, for instance, by the *Early Years Learning Framework* for Australia (DEEWR, 2009) or the *Te Whariki Framework* of the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE, 1996).

This would ensure its efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. In commenting on the quality of service stipulated in the Australian document, Sims and Hutchins (2011) explain well that “The framework views children’s lives as characterised by belonging, being and becoming” (p. 19). They identify five values as requiring, “1) secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; 2) partnerships; 3) high expectations and equity; 4) respect for diversity; and 5) ongoing learning and reflective practice” (p. 19).

As for the New Zealand national ECE curriculum document, it emphasises “1) empowerment; 2) holistic development; 3) family; and 4) community and relationships” (p. 19). From both these documents, Sims and Hutchins (2011) highlight five strands relating to quality of ECE services, namely: “wellbeing – Mana Atua, belonging – Mana Whenua, contribution – Mana Tangata, communication – Mana Reo, and exploration – Mana Aoturoa. In concluding this critique, I use these strands as the framework for my proposition that Nadine’s book has succeeded in providing a prism of what it means to be a leader, manager and administrator in an ECE setting. In my view, the book provides a high quality document that can enhance high quality ECE service provision that is efficient, effective, and sustainable for *people, places and practices*. In conclusion, it would appear that the book achieves what it sets out to do by articulating very well that managerial leadership in an ECE setting involves the four metaphorical roles, summarized above.

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