‘You have to be a leader but don’t want to come across as taking over’: Leading Practice in Early Childhood Education and Care.

Samantha McMahon
BERA September 2016
Contact: s.mcmanhon@hud.ac.uk
The study

- Qualitative study, narrative approach to explore the experiences and perspectives of practitioners as they undertook a programme of study to become an Early Years Professional (EYP)
- EYP introduced in 2006 to lead practice and be a ‘change agent’ (CWDC 2010 p.17) specifically to improve quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.
  - Sector-overwhelmingly female workforce (97%)
  - Low status
  - Low pay
  - Qualified at level 3 (EYP at level 6)
methodology

- Narrative approach to collecting, interpreting and presenting the data
- Sample-4 participants enrolled on the Undergraduate Practitioner Programme (UPP) for EYPS- all practitioners, had to ‘top up’ FD to BA and meet EYPS standards, 12 month programme (2012-2013)
  - 4 interviews
analysis

• 3 layers of analysis, 1) presentation of the narratives as monologues, 2) Thematic narrative analysis (gender/class, performativity, professional mandate), 3) Thematic narrative analysis drawing on work of Bolman and Deal (2013), a multiframe approach to understanding organisational structures and practices and to reframing leadership.

• Exploratory study-emerged from the data that organisational practices and structures significant in shaping the participants’ experiences of becoming a professional.
Bolman and Deal (2013)

- 4 frames
- Structural frame: views the organisation as a factory, focus on organisational architecture- individuals need clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Human resource frame: views the organisation as a family-focus on motivation- individuals want things that go ‘beyond money’ (p120.) from their work.
- Political frame: views the organisation as a jungle-focus on power (allocation of scarce resources)-individuals need political skills.
- Symbolic frame : views the organisation as irrational- focus on cultural glue-individuals bound to the organisation by stories, values and rituals etc.
findings

- EYP undermined traditional structural blueprint of the organisation, particularly when more qualified than the manager. Manager threatened, EYP unable to endorse their authority.
  - *She’s not even a level 4, I might have had a bit more respect for her if she had done her level 4’*
- EYP developed reflective skills and political skills of negotiation, alliance building and agenda setting. Power can be exercised at all levels.
  - *On that day I needed to go to Uni my manager wanted annual leave and there is not enough staff. She blamed it on the head so I e-mailed the head and put it out there ‘what’s the deal with this?’. My manager is really supportive now, it came from that little blow out*
- Moral leadership possible which supports and protects the workforce and is child centred.
- Leader should attend to the symbolic frame and aligning the needs of the individual with the organisation.
Relevance of findings

• Emerging models of leadership in ECEC suggest leader must rely on influence rather than authority to bring about change (Hadfield et al 2012)

• Challenges to this approach
  – Little has been written about how to lead through influence (this study)
  – Traditional associations of leadership with authority difficult to shift (Rodd 2006)
  – Individuals resist change (Bolman and Deal 2013, Hadfield et al 2012)
  – Leaders lack training and skills (this study, Bolman and Deal 2013)
Contribution of this study

- Integrated model combining Change Curve Model (Kubler-Ross 1989), (stages of change: denial, anger, bargaining and acceptance) with Bolman and Deal’s multiframe approach:
  - to help the leader exert influence through anticipating how individuals might react to change
    - RESULT
  - The change curve four frame model of leadership
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Curve Model: stages of change</th>
<th>Structural frame</th>
<th>Human resource frame</th>
<th>Political frame</th>
<th>Symbolic frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Identify what the existing structures are. Reflect and Identify what changes may be needed.</td>
<td>Communicate little and often. Engage in reflective dialogue Allow time to adapt. Avoid overwhelming individuals.</td>
<td>Network with colleagues and stakeholders. Build coalitions</td>
<td>Tell a compelling story to colleagues and stakeholders. Co-create a vision. Communicate this vision to colleagues and stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Create structures to support the process. Identify who does what and when.</td>
<td>Hold meetings with colleagues and stakeholders encourage collaborative reflections and gather feedback.</td>
<td>Build alliances with colleagues and stakeholders. Diffuse opposition, and confront conflict</td>
<td>Be a visible leader. Continue to communicate the vision to colleagues and stakeholders. Continue to reflect on practice and provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>Alter structures that do not support change. Plan for short term successes</td>
<td>Provide training for colleagues. Hold meetings and get feedback. Engage in collaborative reflection. Build involvement with colleagues and stakeholders.</td>
<td>Empower individuals. Continue to build alliances with colleagues and stakeholders.</td>
<td>Communicate progress and celebrate success. Create new symbols and rituals which colleagues can share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Align the operational structure to the new culture</td>
<td>Continue to build broad involvement. Communicate and get feedback from colleagues and stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate progress, celebrate success. Share stories of the journey and continue to develop the new culture, continue to reflect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References