Reflective paper

While working within a group to undertake a staff meeting, it was evident that there was no clear leadership style. Although, some leadership styles that were identified included pedagogical, distributed and transactional. Some people focused more on children and their wellbeing, while others on distributing responsibilities, budgets and statistics.

Although there were different leadership styles, each member of the team had a democratic approach to leadership overall, as everyone asked for the opinions and suggestions of others and the group worked well as a team. Rodd (2013) states that having this particular leadership style overall within the early years is good as it allows for a more collaborative, rather than competitive, approach to leadership. Benefits of this collaboration and team work include, for example, productivity, which Lindon and Lindon (2011) states can help children achieve better outcomes, thus contributing to the quality of the provision.

Considering other leadership styles, perhaps other styles would have helped in maintaining the quality of provision discussed within the staff meeting. For example, there was little reflection on the previous staff meeting, which would not link to being reflective leaders. Rodd (2013) suggests that this reflective practice can allow leaders to fulfil their roles as change agents as it allows them to consider reflecting on what changes might be productive, sustainable and beneficial for improving the settings provision.

Therefore, on reflection, after considering the success of the staff meeting, further discussion and better communication could have allowed for a more reflective and directional style of leadership. Doing this would have allowed for more effective communication, allowing members of the group to discuss and improve upon the points raised in the previous meeting, whether it was felt that points discussed were being achieved or successful, thus allowing the group to consider alternatives with the ultimate aim to improve the quality of the setting for the children and stakeholders (Miller et al., 2012).

Looking at leadership in general, Kumar and Krishnaraj (2018) state that different styles can have great impact on employee's behaviour patterns, including their conviction and willingness to work under and abide by the settings strategies and practice. Therefore, Alameen et al. (2015) suggests that a good leadership style contributes to the setting's overall quality and the retention of staff. They state that having good leadership, which includes listening and supporting staff,

means that they feel valued and part of a team, which Alameen et al. states could link to having a pedagogical leadership style.

Similarly, according to Wakabi (2014), in any type of organisational setting, the role of a leader in retaining staff is crucial and states that their leadership style can impact directly on how employees feel about the organisation. Bush (2011) adds that the skills and knowledge that staff accumulate while working within a setting all contribute to the overall quality of the staff team, success of the organisation and impacts on the educational outcomes for the children.

Mistry and Sood (2012) suggests that leadership within the early years is more of a whole setting approach, whereby, there is more than one leader. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) states that although there is always a core leader, staff should recognise that they are all leaders in their own areas within the setting.

Here, there are links to Estyn's suggestions on leadership and collaborative team work, which suggests that leaders should demonstrate a democratic, distributed and collaborative style of leadership (Estyn, 2018a). This was evident within the group discussion as the leadership was shared and members worked more as a team.

Doing this, according to Mistry and Sood, allows early years practitioners to have a better understanding of their own practice when they have opportunities to observe various other leadership styles, which even include, for example, the different styles of men and women, or older and younger colleagues within the early years setting as each member has different skills, knowledge and experiences that can help to contribute to the development of the setting.

Critiquing this, Jogulu and Wood (2006) states that an autocratic and directive leadership style is strict and ensures adherence to, for example, policies and procedures. Therefore, suggesting that a more autocratic approach to leadership would ensure that the quality of the setting is maintained.

Although, more recent research according to Aubrey et al. (2012) agrees with Mistry and Sood, by suggesting that studies also emphasise a more distributed leadership style within early years settings. They state that it not only carries out core functions relating to leadership, such as management and administration, but also suggests that it widens the boundaries of leadership to consider individuals or groups of staff to contribute to the leadership and setting to help its overall quality and performance.

Linking to the group discussion, a distributed leadership style was evident as members of the group discussed and distributed responsibilities. Aubrey et al. adds that this supportive and trusting culture can lead to concretive action, again suggesting that its effects result in a high quality and successful service within the provision.

O'Sullivan (2009) believes that a leader can impact retention within settings, as a leader that recognises the need to influence, motivate, negotiate and create teams that can share ideas, can allow for higher staff retention, as staff feel more valued, listened to and part of a team. This type of leadership could link to a range of styles including democratic, transformational and distributed, as it allows for a more holistic approach, allowing for leaders to share ideas and power (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016).

On the contrary, staff performance and retention may be an effect of the leader themselves, their behaviour and style of leadership that they carry out. Braun (2017) states that destructive or narcissistic leadership styles mean that the quality of the setting is compromised, and these styles detract from the setting's main purpose. They are said to be poor leadership styles, thus not supporting and motivating staff to carry out a high-quality service.

Similarly, Barling and Frone (2017) states that leaders that are abusive or passive can have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of their staff and can contribute to stress among employees by creating a work environment that has lack of control and heavy workloads. Zwingmann et al. (2014) states that a Laissez faire style of leadership can also cause stress and conflict among colleagues as the leader is not meeting the expectations within the setting and the involvement, feedback and rewards for staff is not always a priority.

Therefore, linking back to the impact that leadership styles has on the quality of early years settings, research suggests that to enable quality provision and to sustain valuable staff members, leaders need to value and support their staff by working with them rather than through them and focus on sustaining the setting's improvement by building the staff and school's capacity (Heikka et al., 2012). Doing this, according to Heikka et al. and Kumar and Krishnaraj (2018), promotes staff retention as it allows them to feel valued and part of a team, which in effect, contributes to the overall success of the setting.

Notman (2011) and Cheng (2013) state that, although leadership styles do have an impact on retention, it is not always due to the leader that the retention of staff is not maintained. They say that managing staff can be difficult to do effectively due to factors including, for example, staff who require authority, exhibit emotional reliance or seek rewards. Therefore, suggesting

that leaders should take on a style of behaviour that minimises staff's dissatisfaction and enhances their work performance which can increase moral, retention and the overall quality of service within the setting (Notman, 2011; Cheng, 2013). These types of characteristics could link to a pedagogical leadership style, which will be discussed in more detail within this reflection.

Linking to early years settings, Vonderen (2016) states that a high turnover of staff within the early years can have a detrimental impact on children within their development. Losing staff members that children are attached to is said to affect their learning, as well as social and emotional development, when looking at it from a pedagogical leader's perspective (Vonderen, 2016).

Through research and considering module content, links can be made here to Tuckman's theory, as this change and disruption, according to Largent (2016), can have an effect on the quality of the provision as it can make it difficult for staff members to form close working relationships and can make employees feel anxious and insecure about the continuous change of staff. Miller et al. (2012) therefore suggest that, to retain staff, leaders must take on a more transformational leadership style and suggest that offering training opportunities has some influence on retention. However, this may also not help in staff retention as trained staff may use their training or new qualifications to find other employment.

Having reflected on the process of group working, research and module content, the leadership style chosen for further analysis is the pedagogical style. Looking into this style of leadership has allowed for a better understanding of the impact that it has on the supporting of teaching, leading and learning within practice to enable a high-quality provision (Rodd, 2013). This style was evident from most members within the staff meeting as they referred to, for example, children's rights, learning environment, the role of adults as facilitators and the development of the provision, through their leadership.

Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) state that this pedagogical type of leadership role within settings is crucial in motivating staff to continuously improve teaching and learning, thus contributing to the quality of the early years setting by allowing opportunities for continuous change and improvement. In contrast to this, leaders who pursue laissaz faire leadership can be described as detrimental, passive and unproductive, which does not support an effective team and provision (Wong and Giessner, 2018). Therefore, suggesting that a pedagogical leadership

style has more impact on increasing the quality of early years provision and influencing organisational change (Andrew, 2009).

Here, links can be made to a transformational style of leadership, as this style is said to encourage change and the expanding of skills and knowledge, thus allowing for continuous change and improved practice (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). Similarly, pedagogical leadership is said to, in turn, build a culture of reflective practice that contributes to the overall effectiveness of the setting, therefore there are links to having some reflective leadership within pedagogical leaders (Coughlin and Baird, 2013).

Although a pedagogical style of learnership aims to provide a child-centred and holistic approach, which is the type of style that Reggio Emilia settings follow (Tzuo et al., 2011), Lindon and Lindon (2011) believe that children's experiences are influenced and dependent on adults' choices and behaviours, therefore this leadership style mostly focuses on the children, although it does have some focus on staff.

Andrew (2009) states that pedagogical leaders need to promote adults as learners. Therefore, a graduate or transformational style could support this further, according to Jayawardena (2012), as transformational and graduate leaders are said to seek to empower and enhance the performance of themselves and staff team, with the aim to achieve successful outcomes. Although, Siraj-Blatchford and Hallet (2014) argue that a pedagogical leadership style promotes learning and development for staff as it offers for opportunities to develop their own understanding, knowledge and practice through, for example, courses.

A pedagogical leader is said to promote moral and motivate staff by giving them opportunities within, for example, team meetings, to share ideas and make suggestions to improve practice and the setting as a whole. Here, there are links to democratic leadership, which, as previously mentioned, was presented within the staff meeting.

This more democratic approach to leadership is said, according to Lindon et al. (2016), to be more effective within early years settings than an autocratic approach, as it allows for other's opinions to be taken into consideration, allowing for new ideas and suggestions, which makes every member feel part of a team and valued as individuals. This valuing and supporting of staff by working with them is said, according to Mulford (2003), to be key in the retention of staff.

Looking at more recent findings, Heikka et al. (2012) argues that within early years settings, it is a more distributed leadership style that supports all levels of staff and children to achieve outcomes and has been recognised as more significant in increasing the quality and standards of early years settings, as well as the retention of staff.

Looking from an early years perspective, considering the traditional system of hierarchy and leadership functions within settings, Heikka et al. suggests this system is ineffective as a means of pedagogical leadership and says that teams within settings should work together through more distributed leadership to enable quality provision.

To ensure that leaders provide high quality provision, consideration to statutory requirements outlined by, for example Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales, need to be considered. Both suggest that leaders should promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to settings improvement, consider how effective collaboration between staff and multiagencies is within the setting and implement strategies, such as continuous professional development. These are said to improve teaching, help raise standards and contribute to staff retention (Estyn, 2018a; Care Inspectorate Wales, 2018). Here, links can be made to pedagogical leadership but also having a reflective and transformational approach, as they are reflecting and moving practice forward (Coughlin and Baird, 2013).

Considering statutory requirements, legislation relating to children's rights, employment laws and policies and procedures, it is suggested that autocratic leadership, rather than pedagogical, would ensure that settings have higher control and follow statutory guidelines appropriately, to improve consistency, timeliness and quality of service (Majoni, 2015). Although, autocratic leaders are said to make decisions on their own without consulting others, which Pareek (2010) states can result in very high levels of dissatisfaction within teams, thus not promoting retention.

When considering retention of a high-quality team, Hallet (2013) states that pedagogical leadership allows for their experience, enthusiasm and emotional passion of working with young children and within settings, continuing professional learning and reflective practice to allow for development in pedagogy and shape and improve professional practice, with links here to having a collaborative leadership style.

Grant (2009) states that a transactional leader concentrates more on management and targets and that children are merely numbers within settings and their true learning and development is not a priority like a pedagogical leader. Grant suggests that this type of leader, compared to

a pedagogical one, focuses more on competing with other settings regarding, for example, inspection outcomes or test results and adheres to the governments high productivity measures by setting high goals for both children and staff, thus causing stress and anxiety within settings.

With this being said, Male and Palaiologou (2015) believe that educational settings endeavour to embody pedagogy throughout the setting as their core purpose and activity, which has links to Burner, Vygotsky, Mortimore and Webster's theories. Although, they state that people's assumptions are that if an educational setting exists, that the leaders within it follows a pedagogy, thus are pedagogical leaders, which according to Heikka and Hujala (2013), is not always the case.

Heikka and Hujala argue that although educational settings leaders aim for a pedagogical leadership style, they can impact very little on children's educational development, as their time is mostly spent on management tasks, which links to a more transactional leadership style. Heikka and Hujala also pointed out that recent studies suggested that the lack of time for leaders to focus on actual practice of developing pedagogy within settings mean that this pedagogical style of leadership is not implemented within the setting as much as they would like.

A more recent study by Male and Palaiologou (2017) suggested that the examination of data taken from two case studies on pedagogical leadership in action say that several characteristics of leadership were identified which contributed to the overall success of settings, including, ensuring achievement throughout, sustaining effective team relationships, managing a supportive environment and managing external expectations. Thus, suggesting that although pedagogy is at the core, other styles and strategies of leadership need to be implemented to ensure the overall success of settings. Linking this to the group discussion, this suggests that having a range of leadership styles rather that one clear style may be more effective in providing a high-quality provision.

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