

Leadership and teamwork in the early years
Arweinyddiaeth a gwaith tîm yn y blynyddoedd cynnar

Reflection on the staff meeting

For this assignment it was required to form a group of people and prepare a discussion for a staff meeting, and reflect upon this meeting, identifying the leadership styles that have been used in the process. There are many leadership styles which are demonstrated in different ways, and used depending on the type of environment that is required (Watkins, 2009). With the limited amount of knowledge I had regarding the requirements of leadership, I was drawn to using the framework created by Tuckman (1965). As this model showed a resemblance to the situation that was put before the group. The Tuckman model has four characteristics, Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing. (Nestor, 2013).

Some members of the group were not familiar with each other, this would be known as the forming stage, getting to know each other (Nestor, 2013). Due to the friendly nature of all persons in the group, this stage was rapidly moved on to the next stage which is storming. The group arranged a meeting where this storming commenced. I recommended that everyone researched information required from the assignment task in order to commence the scenario straight away and save valuable time.

The storming stage was a great success a lot of discussion was shared, it was apparent however, that there were some members in the group that were less confident than others. This is comparative of an early years setting and was similar to the scenario, in that many settings have some confident staff and some inexperienced staff (Rodd, 2013). A leader needed to be selected, according to Diaz (2011) leadership raises the quality of the task, or as in an early years setting the standard of the provision. I was chosen to be leader.

The leadership style that I wanted to adopt was that of a democratic style. A democratic leader according to Bhatti et al. (2012) invites group members to contribute to decision making. Which also according to Bhatti et al. (2012) increases the self-esteem of the team members and promotes motivation within the group. This type of style could be adapted into an early years setting, according to Rodd (2006, cited in Aubrey, 2011) as it encourages leaders to model ideas to inexperienced staff as well encouraging, motivating and inspiring staff. This type of leadership however, was not in the long term suited to the scenario as the participation is a lot slower, therefore leading to a slower pace of work.

The Norming stage of Tuckman's model is where the team was working together to form a common goal (Adair, 2004). As the scenario was set and the five tasks had been selected, everyone was in agreement to the responsibilities, the norming stage was also complete. Reflection of the norming stage, all members of the team worked collaboratively. Due to the more experienced members of the groups, it was a great opportunity for the less experienced members to learn and be motivated by the experienced.

This is an advantage of using this method within a newly formed group, according to Cassidy (2007). However the disadvantage could be that staff could have strong characters and team members may want to enforce ideas rather than work collaboratively. Cassidy (2007), also suggests that this could similarly be the case in an early years setting, with employees that already have their own views and ideas. During this stage I also ensured that all the members of the teams views were taken into account, as this also leads to the success of a provision or activity (Hadfield et al., 2015).

The Performing stage was for each member of the group to research the five agreed topics. At this point the leadership style was that of Laissez faire, in that all members of the group were asked to research the five topics, but with not much guidance or focus as to what would be done with the information (Nestor, 2013). A Laissez-faire style is aimed at professional teams that have the experience of being able to work independently, without guidance, or that perhaps I did not want to appear to be forceful as some members of the group had commitments. Pahi and Hamid (2016) suggests that a laissez faire leader avoids the process of making decisions or enforcement. I had tried to deliver the focus however, not all the group shared the vision that I was trying to portray, perhaps due to inexperience. The group then brought the research back to the table. According to Rodd (2013), if this type of style was adopted in the early years setting, then staff could be subjected to conflicts due to breakdowns in communication, this is bad because it does not create a suitable environment for the children.

I was, however, concerned the timescale for the discussion was nearing. At this point I realised that the group required more than polite guidance. I adopted the delegation style of leadership and I provided guidance as to what was required but also gave a time frame as to when the task was to be completed, Cappelli (1999, cited in Klein et al., 2006). Each member was given one of the topics and told to create a dialogue for all within that given topic, then report back before the next meeting. However, this is not a style that should be adopted in early years, Cappelli (1999, cited in Klein et al., 2006) suggests that the relationship between staff can become weak due to the lack of motivational relationship. This may lead to low staff morale and a high turnover of staff. Being a leader entails having the ability to motivate and inspire others. I, like many others according to Bernis and Nanus (1985, cited in Sadler, 2003) find it hard at times to achieve this. However, the ability to change the leadership style according to the situation presented was one of the strengths I possessed during this activity.

Effective Leadership in the Early Years

An effective leader in the early years according O'Sullivan (2015) is critical to its success. Although leadership, can be complicated, there should be emphasis on producing good leaders, to create and maintain quality provisions throughout (Sylva, 2010). Brooker et al. (2010) in a report conducted for the Department of Education suggest that some practitioners are aware there are needs to improve leadership qualities and share the views of creating a holistic pedagogical quality provision. However, some practitioners need guidance in how to put this into practice. Whalley (2011) shares this vision. As does Stamopoulos (2012) and further suggests this should be expected in all practice. It is therefore, according Woodrow & Busch, (2008) disappointing to discover that many practitioners still perceive leadership as an extra role and a development of skills rather than a vital part of creating a professional quality provision.

According to Hadfield et al. (2015) a quality provision should be explained in three parts. One evaluating the effects of child development, two how the quality of provision rates in respect of ECERS or Estyn and three the qualities and support offered to children and families. Gasper (2010) tells us there are expectations for practitioners to support parents as well as the children, when creating a quality provision. Hevey (2010, cited in Hadfield et al., 2015). suggests that early years departments have been asked to transform underqualified staff members to graduates with inclusion of leadership qualities. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) agree with this suggesting that there should be a greater emphasis for a more highly qualified workforce.

Early years practitioners should be aware of these leadership qualities, and research which leadership style is suited to the environment of the early years setting. When understanding the role of an effective leader, there are certain things to consider, teacher training requires more than child centred education and care (Brooker et al., 2010). Leadership requires practitioners to understand the needs of the teams working with them as well as the families and communities to be supported (Gasper, 2010). Leadership teamwork is about inspiring and motivating all concerned with the care of children (Brown, 2013). Inspiring others to reach a shared thinking (Rodd, 2013). According to Stamopoulos (2012) training in leadership should be incorporated during the practitioners initial training. Training of leadership can be learnt according Parks (2005), by using leadership styles or models.

Models of Reflection

Research on the use of models according to some philosophers is that it can assist in raising the qualities of being a good leader (Northouse, 2017). There many styles and models that have been studied for generations, however, not all are effective when related to early years settings (Lee, 2012). Lee (2012) suggests that identification of an appropriate style for the setting is key to its success. Stamopoulos (2012) agrees with Lee (2012) and implies the strengths of the professionals are also important, as well as providing a scaffold to achieve a quality provision. Similarly, O'Sullivan (2015) also suggest that communication skills are key to the effectiveness of a leader.

The Transformational Leadership Style

One of the leadership styles that is quite widely used in the early years foundation phase is the Transformational Leadership Style. This style according Rodd (2013) involves its staff in decision-making, inspiring and broadening interests, motivates them with commitment and success, in return for staff loyalty and high performance.

Northouse (2010) suggests that early researchers believed that leadership was a result of the beliefs and traits that an individual could bring to the job. Which would suggest that only certain individuals could be capable of being a leader. The definition of the transformational leadership has four components, inspirational, idealised, intellectual and individualised, according to Bass and Riggio (2006, cited in Joseph et al., 2015) this can be confused with a set of personality traits rather than a set of requirements to enhance the quality of an early years settings. Northouse (2010) suggests that personality traits are important and need to be engaged at the right time and place. This style can also be compared to pedagogical leadership and leadership of learning (Hadfield et al., 2015), therefore allowing for all traits to be brought into account as and when, which is ideal in early years, as the environment can be unpredictable.

An effective transformational leader according Colloby (2009, cited in Hallet, 2013) demonstrates collaboration between team members whilst promoting participation and facilitation, using distribution to ensure professional practice. This is achieved through communication and promoting knowledge of the values of early years education. When comparing models such as the autocratic model it is the opposite to this method as leaders dictate to the staff and rarely ask for input into the planning. Such a model is not realistic in early years setting as this model certainly doesn't promote collaboration or sharing of knowledge and the autocratic leader rarely asks for advice (Rodd, 2013). If this style was introduced into early years setting, some staff may resent being told what to do all the time, this could lead to a high turnover of staff or staff being absent.

Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the running of an early years setting, as it can improve productivity and performance as well as creativity (Bass et al., 2003). Burn (1990, cited in Northouse, 2017) suggests that this style is a sociable style, as it seeks followers of the shared vision of the setting. Role modelling is another factor of this type of leadership, through the demonstration of behaviours that are required within the setting (Northouse, 2004). This is another reason it is a popular model used in the early years.

There is however some criticism that the routine of transformational leaders may not always follow plan due to the creativity and unpredictability in the setting. This style is often supported by the transactional style, which offers rewards for jobs done on time. This type of leadership does not promote collaboration and may lead to staff conflicts or possible absenteeism. Slavin (1996, cited in Killen, 2007) perception of leadership is that peers should work together to succeed a common goal.

Another point to be raised regarding transformational leadership is training. Some authors are against using the transformational style, one of these being Bailey (1988, cited in Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Bailey (1988, cited in Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) suggests that it can be difficult to teach or train someone due to traits and emotions not being able to be taught. However, Parks (2005) argues against this, suggesting that if a person has character and value, the basics of leadership can be acquired and the rest is learnt through experience. Similarly, Fielder (1976) believed this however, this would depend on how the training was delivered and that would depend on the circumstances of the setting. Similarly (Baring et al., 1996) believes this style of leadership is broken down into three components, skills, perspectives and dispositions. Suggesting some people learn better than others and are better at adapting to different scenarios, with the ability to apply knowledge learned at different levels, perspectives can be trained, but ambitions are however difficult to teach but can be inspired.

Padilla et al. (2007, cited in Northouse, 2017) tells us that some leaders using this style have been accused of using power to control staff, as the trait is following the leader, a leader that is too controlling. Padilla et al. (2007, cited in Northouse, 2017) suggests that staff can be exploited by this style of leadership, for example it could be the case that the rules are set by them and enforced accordingly, the inexperienced practitioner would be motivated by the experienced leader and may be forced to work unethically. Similarly, Peck (2004, cited in Caldwell et al., 2012) also believes this can be the case in early years settings, as there can be a lot of inexperience. However, Bass and Riggio (2006) argues against Padilla et al. (2007, cited in Northouse, 2017) suggesting that not all leaders exploit inexperienced staff and the qualities that leaders possess can be of great value and influence others positively and create a quality setting of the future.

Consideration of using any model should be given to development of leadership choice and whether individuals are automatically drawn to becoming a leader (Bechtoldt, 2015). Some leaders do not choose to be a leader but are placed into leadership positions because others have recognised their qualities (McDowall Clark, 2012). The transformational leadership style through its inspirational and motivational design can be an advantage in these circumstances as leadership can learn whilst training and not feel under pressure to perform, as they would be scaffolded throughout the process. The role of a leader is not necessarily according to Aubrey (2011) about being in charge, it is a pedagogical approach to the running of the setting and its various areas, as the early years setting could have leaders of different areas within the setting.

Conclusion

Through the implementation of leadership into the early years, especially the transformational leadership style, the arguments for, outweigh the arguments against and the benefits against the arguments still allow for an increase in quality of the provision in the early years provision. Even though sometimes the motives of a small minority of leaders can be overpowering according to Bailey (1988, cited in Bass

and Steidlmeier,1999) this should not cast judgement on the theory's qualities and what it's framework is there to achieve (Northouse, 2017).

On reflection, I have learnt that it is not only important to use a model for reflection in the the early years setting to promote best practice, but it is equally as important to use a style of leadership to promote a quality provision in which not only enhances the child's learning experience, but allows for a motivated and inspired setting, that any practitioner should be happy to embrace and attend everyday.

Implementing leadership and increasing the quality of all provisions should increase the value of the education for all, there has always been a debate that some children will never progress in life because of the poor education that they receive, especially in an area of deprivation, according to Neugebauer and Schindler (2012) and similarly, Simpson et al. (2015) if standards and quality of provision are increased then children of all backgrounds and classes can succeed.

Finally, Being a leader was not on my list of priorities and I had never been aspired to undertake (McDowall Clark, 2012). However, on completing the research and task for this module, I appreciate how rewarding it was to not only motivate other members of the team but also be a part of a project that I had a vision that was shared and completed to a given deadline Woodhouse and Pedder (2017).

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