

## 25 Leadership

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### **Chapter Overview**

The EYFS offers leadership challenges within ECEC which are profound and challenging, but not wholly unique to the sector. In other words, there are common features of leadership that apply to all phases of education, but it is recognised that there are specific issues relating to ECEC. This chapter explores those challenges to help identify responses which are appropriate to the sector.

The chapter begins by exploring the complexity of ECEC provision in England to identify leadership and management responsibilities within the system. The key role is identified as the formal leader of settings with more than one employee.

Differences between leadership and management are discussed, as is leadership as a set of social behaviours. This definition, which extends the simple measure of accountability for formal managers, allows for the exploration of shared or collective leadership approaches to creating and sustaining effective learning environments as well as ensuring the safety and welfare of young children. The discussion then moves towards identifying organisational structures and behaviours which support such ambitions. Issues specific to the sector, such as multi-agency working and a heavily gendered workforce, are explored in the context of leadership theories to guide practitioners as to their role. The chapter closes with some practical tips as to how to move beyond the notion of single accountable executive towards collective and connective leadership within each setting.

This chapter aims to to:

- Explore issues about leadership in relation to ECEC;
- Discuss different styles of leadership and reflect on the core values that underpin ECEC;
- Discuss leadership in settings in relation to contributing factors that correspond to the share value system.

### **The Leadership Context**

The descriptor for state sponsored or private provision for ECEC within England is ‘early childhood settings’, a title that covers all provision from a sole child-minder to pre-school group provision. This title tends to disguise, however, the complexity of relationships within the sector that generate significant challenges for those charged with leading and managing such provision. In practice a setting is a place which pre-school children attend on a regular basis and for which there are certain legal, moral and societal expectations. The influences on how the setting is organised and run are multiple which, in turn, present those responsible with a wide range of behavioural opportunities. Together these expectations and influences present challenges to all settings which typically include:

- Identification and consolidation of core purpose of provision;
- Reconciliation of personal (and institutional) values, ethos and mission with external influences and expectations;
- Clarification of leadership and managerial roles and responsibilities;
- Adoption of leadership structure, styles and behaviour that match the existing and emerging environment.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the EYFS provides the framework of expectations for ECEC in England and heavily influences the way in which these issues can be addressed and resolved. The revised EYFS was updated in April 2017 and, whilst

this did not indicate substantial change in overall policy, other factors have emerged to affect the role and behaviour of leaders and managers in ECEC. This has been described as “a confusion of intent” (Palaiologou and Male, 2019: 24) between education and care resulting in several ‘antinomies’ (contradictions) in a mixed economy of pre-school provision which operates within a context of performativity, is generally staffed by a low paid and underqualified female workforce and includes ideological conflicts over the concept of learning in early childhood. This complex scenario, as argued later, is best addressed through leadership that applies ‘wise practice’ (Goodman, 2001) which acknowledges the peculiarities of the sector and seeks a continual interplay between theory, actions and practice in “one unified process” (Gadamer, 1979: 275). This is the concept of praxis, described by Pascal and Bertram (2012) as:

Not simply [being] about everyday practicalities, professional development, competencies, skills or outcomes, but about deeper concepts: reflexivity, processes, actions and interactions, whilst being deeply cognisant of environments of power and values. (p 481)

### **A confusion of intent**

The mandatory curriculum and standards of care contained within the succeeding iterations of the EYFS have been delivered through a range of providers, ranging from young children being educated at home to formal, designated practices, with providers being categorised as ‘group-based’, ‘in-school’ or ‘childminders’. In the Spring of 2018, there were some 80 thousand providers offering 2.8 million childcare places, of which 79% were with group-based providers and registered childminders (DfE, 2018a). The number of places were roughly split between in-school and independent providers, although nearly 60% of staff were employed in group-based or childminding provision. This is a mixed economy with a large proportion of

independent providers, many of whom are dependent on fee income as pre-school education is not compulsory in England. The government does provide free places, however, for all two, three and four-year-old children who meet the eligibility criteria and whose parents want one (see Chapter 2 for full details of free places). In many instances, however, the cost of such provision exceeds the entitlement (Fullfact, 2017) and a market economy exists, which is a major consideration for leaders of settings within the sector (Ang, 2014).

Although the sector is now market-oriented, it still has to operate within the policy parameters provided by the EYFS. There are two aspects to this particular antinomy - the notions of accountability and performativity. The sector is closely monitored by several agencies, each of which have the potential to shape practice. High priority is the principle of care which has been driven by the failure of some social services, notably in the cases of Victoria Climbié (House of Commons, 2003) and Baby Peter (Lord Laming, 2009). The balance between education and care in the sector may be seen in the EYFS guidance document which has nine pages relating to learning and twenty focusing on care (DfE, 2018c). Consequently, local authority and health services play a large part in the life of formal leaders in ECEC, as does Ofsted (the national inspection service), which means there is a high degree of scrutiny on settings and expectations that provision will conform to external performance criteria. Many contributors to this discussion have drawn attention to the neo-liberal approach of successive governments on standardised outcomes, an era of 'performativity' (e.g. Palaiologou, 2017) which has resulted in an 'official' approach of quality, characterised by an objective reality that can be measured, evaluated, assured and inspected (Moss, 2016). This, it seems, leaves ECEC "to remain grounded in a fixed

body of developmental knowledge, honouring one culture, one history, one set of values and one concept of childhood” (Yelland and Bentley, 2018: 11), a factor which could restrict the way in which children’s learning is organised and promoted within the setting.

The second antinomy is the nature of the workforce and the expectations of leadership behaviour that emerge from the demands of the EYFS. A predominately female workforce has seemingly created the myth that women do things differently and exhibit distinctive features of leadership mainly concerned with feminine attributes and behaviour (Moyle, 2006; Rodd, 2006; Aubrey, 2007), an approach to leadership which is challenged later in this chapter. Furthermore, whilst it is true that the workforce consistently features low-level qualifications and pay (Nutbrown, 2012; Osgood et al., 2017), the demands contained within policy anticipate skilful leaders and highly qualified professional staff (see also Chapter 5). As was discussed in Chapter 5 attempts to address this challenge through the professionalisation of the workforce have been largely unsuccessful, despite the introduction of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in 2006 and the successor qualification of Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) in 2013. The cost of such well qualified staff is prohibitive to most providers, meaning that many settings are working with staff who are unqualified and run by managers who have only achieved Level 3 qualifications.

The third antinomy relates to the professional freedom of the practitioner when working with young children. Not only is the sector subject to a narrowing the curriculum for school readiness, practitioners are also engaged in ideological discourses both about what constitutes play-based learning and whether and how to

deploy digital devices in the setting (see Chapter 8). The requirement of leaders in this context suggest Palaiologou & Male (2019: 27) is “to fulfil more than one function, be accountable, show curriculum fidelity, demonstrate data-driven ‘quality’ and make sure that children will be ready for formal school at the age of five, in contrast to developing children’s capability as learners”. To counter this each setting requires clarity of vision in regard to teaching, learning and practice if it is to be successful. This induces a debate about values and ethos which need to be resolved at institutional level whilst not conflicting with regulatory frameworks. A key part of this chapter, therefore, is to see how leaders in ECEC can determine their preferred curriculum and pedagogical practices that are responsive to children’s learning needs, rather than being merely responsive to a culture of performativity.

Determining and delivering effective ECEC is thus a challenge for which leaders require a comprehensive range of knowledge, skills and attributes. Before determining what that might be, however, we explore concepts of leadership and management in education.

### **Where does leadership responsibility lie in ECEC?**

Leadership is about decision-making, whereas management is the process by which decisions are enacted. There is still confusion, however, as to who is responsible for decision-making in ECEC:

[...] leadership in the early childhood profession still has to be answered in a way that is meaningful and credible for practitioners [and there is an] apparent vagueness and haziness of what is meant by leadership in early childhood.  
(Rodd, 2006: 4-5)

### **CASE STUDY STARTS HERE**

## **The story of Gemma**

Gemma is the manager of a large day nursery. She sometimes considers her role as being between a rock and a hard place: accountable to the owners who pay the salaries and run the business; accountable to the parents who pay the fees and who are keen for value for money, increased hours and greater opportunities for their children; accountable for children's outcomes; and accountable externally to Ofsted.

Gemma acts as buffer between staff and the owners on issues of staffing, progress in pedagogy and practice, development and resourcing. She balances the needs of the staff and children against the owners' focus on business and sometimes finds herself in conflict: (the owner) wanted to know if we had to have staff development because of the cost. Of course, we do. There is a statutory requirement for safeguarding, first aid and if we want to market ourselves and be recognised as excellent then we need to invest in the staff to provide for the children- but it is an ongoing tension between what I want for the children and the balance between income and outcome with so many nurseries closing down as the free child care promised by the government does not cover costs, especially if the staff are well qualified, which is what our parents want.

### **CASE STUDY ENDS HERE**

Ultimately leadership responsibility in any system is aligned to those who are formally accountable. Within England the main responsibility falls on the leader/manager of the setting, despite the fact so many others also have a leadership role. This requires an understanding of the nature of leadership and, in particular, the difference between formal and informal leadership within social systems.

The formal leader is not only accountable for outcomes and processes, but can also apply sanctions to other members of the organisation. The concept of leadership is much larger than this simple definition, however, and encompasses the way in which the leader is one who modifies the motivation of competencies, motivation or behaviour of others. Leadership is thus a social interaction and more than a description of the actions of formal leaders. Consequently, in any system most

practitioners can be involved in the decision-making systems, meaning there are many ways in which leadership can be demonstrated.

Much of the literature on leadership confuses this distinction and contributions to the field of leadership in ECEC do not often differ in this respect. It needs to be recognised, therefore, that many actors in the field have leadership roles and responsibilities, with some also having formal accountability. In that regard much of the discourse has been concerned with *headship* more frequently than the broader concept of *leadership*. In other words, the contributions are focused on what the formal leader has to do as an individual, rather than what has to be done to create “the conditions in which all members of the organisation can give their best in a climate of commitment and challenge” (Whitaker, 1993: 74). The institutional leader consequently has to create the appropriate conditions to support and enhance the key features of the EYFS: the learning, development and safeguarding of pre-school children within their setting. To achieve this, the institutional leader (head) has the task of reconciling the expertise and efforts of all other adults they are working with. These actors range from those with professional status, through unqualified employees to those with enthusiasm (such as parents or volunteer workers). Leadership in this context, therefore, is headship and requires behaviours that match the context: “effective headship is situational and contingent on context and circumstance” (Male, 2006: 3).

Within the system notable contributions can be made by those with professional status, therefore, whether they be an employee or a colleague from a related agency. To be successful the formal leader must ensure there are common agreed and shared

values in the workforce and the community local to the setting (including parents). It is imperative, therefore, for the formal leader to establish and sustain a value set that corresponds to the society to be served and for those values to be reflected as the core ethos of the organisation and a framework for decision making (see Figure 25. 1).



**Figure 25.1** *Establishing the core ethos of an organization*

### **Core Purpose**

The EYFS provides guidance which establishes the minimum standard of acceptable provision and becomes the frame of reference for accountability. The institutional leader must ensure practitioners within the setting are sustaining minimum standards. Given that many settings may also have additional expectations (e.g. from the group of which it is a part or the school to which it is attached) there may also be a need to determine difference and diversity in addition to societal expectations. In all instances, however, the legal imperative for formal leaders is to ensure compliance with the statutory framework whilst the moral imperative may be considered as ensuring the provision meets the social and emotional needs of young children within the context of their local community (see Chapter 21 for examples on partnerships). To that extent research in ECEC undertaken by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007: 28) led them to conclude the focus of leadership within the sector should be on learning:

We have argued that *contextual literacy*, a commitment to *collaboration* and to the *improvement of children's learning outcomes* should be considered (by definition) to provide fundamental requirements for *leadership for learning*. [original emphasis]

Leadership for learning includes notions of working within the context of the setting, focusing on “the centrality of relationships with others, such as the learners, parents, community and government, and the building of a learning community” (Male & Palaiologou, 2012: 107). The core purpose of the formal leader thus is to ensure the efforts of all contributors to the field of children's learning and care are coordinated, with the outcomes matching the statutory elements of EYFS as a bare minimum level of provision. Such an approach consequently shifts the focus from leading people to leading practice. This in turn enables practitioners to view themselves in a different light, as leaders of practice, thus aiding self-efficacy. It may also help to change the way that practitioners are seen in terms of their occupational (professional) image, as discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Leadership in ECEC**

A key aspect of formal leadership in ECEC, therefore, is the recognition of the potential capability of other actors in the system to make a positive contribution to the setting. As discussed previously, the workforce comprises a wide range of people, some of whom have advanced qualifications, others with lower level specialist qualifications and other employees. The attempts made by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to classify the wide range of qualifications to determine those that are “full and relevant” (Nutbrown, 2012: 6) have since been supplemented by identification of criteria for Early Years Educators (DfE, 2018d). Legislation now expects that in group settings, the manager and at least half of all other staff must hold full and relevant qualifications. In addition, “the manager should

have at least two years' experience of working in an early childhood setting, or have at least two years' other suitable experience, and the provider must ensure there is a named deputy who, in their judgement, is capable and qualified to take charge in the manager's absence" (Department for Education, 2018c: 21). Whilst recognising the potential powerful influence of the group or school to which the setting is aligned the main actors whose efforts need coordinating, are:

- Senior leaders and managers;
- Qualified practitioners;
- Support staff;
- Professionals from other related agencies;

To be successful with both the legal and moral imperatives of ECEC, leadership needs to be exhibited throughout the workforce and to be appropriate to situation and context. Leadership in this regard refers to dispositions and opportunities to "take a lead" on something, or to show initiative (Nutbrown, 2012: 40). Leadership within education and social systems is considered to be "distributed, differentiated and diverse" in the current century (Southworth, 2006). This is because there are many more people playing a part in ECEC, including qualified practitioners and professionals from other agencies. As a consequence, we tend to find leadership in settings to be shared, with the personal accountability of the institutional leader being the key feature that distinguishes them from other members of provision in the sector. That part of the job is unlikely to do go away as leaders/managers have specific responsibilities in law. Operationally, however, the most effective settings are likely to be those where strategic decisions are investigated and determined collectively (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007).

This has led to calls for models of distributed leadership to be central to settings (Aubrey, 2007; Miller, 2011). The roles of qualified practitioners (particularly room supervisors) are the most notable within the setting, whilst the knowledge and expertise of external professionals are also significant. As will be discussed shortly, however, it is with the role of qualified practitioner where operational leadership may be needed if the provision is to be relevant to the needs of all children. In short, therefore, aspects of leadership behaviour need to be exhibited at all levels, but the key role of coordinating all efforts into an effective gestalt of leadership activity lies with the person charged with institutional leadership.

## **CASE STUDY STARTS HERE**

### **The story of Samira**

Samira leads learning in a maintained setting. She is a qualified teacher working with colleagues who range in experience and qualification. She has adopted a pedagogical approach to leadership and sees her role as leading learning for colleagues, parents and children. But she needs to engage all her colleagues or the workload is too much. "I don't want it to me always driving everything, it's hard.

This year we have introduced an action research project and asked every room to be involved. I thought it would take a long time as we seemed to have spent ages talking about it but actually I've been surprised. It has been great to see colleagues step up to take the lead. It hasn't just been the designated leaders, but across the whole staff. It has really helped us to think about what we do and why. The enthusiasm has been encouraging and the children are really benefitting, even the parents are talking about it. It has helped me as a leader too and build capacity, we know our strengths now and can help each other develop. It has helped us communicate and work as teams, so we are better practitioners."

## **CASE STUDY ENDS HERE**

### **Leadership in the setting**

The most effective settings are those where internal structures and processes not only successfully support children's learning and provide safeguards relevant to need and

context, but also deal more effectively with external influences that affect day to day stability.

Internally there are generally some key elements of the organisation that need to be harmonised in order to provide the most effective environment. As indicated in Figure 25. 2, there must be:

- a clearly defined culture which provides a frame of reference through which possible decisions are explored;

Furthermore, however, there also needs to be:

- a clear grasp of the difference between *leadership* and *management*;
- an effective *senior leadership team*;
- the opportunity and support for *operational leadership*.

As stated above, leaders make decisions and managers operationalise those decisions. Both terms are verbs, rather than nouns, however, so *leadership and management* are both legitimate activities for all members of an organisation. All settings need effective management systems which can effectively deliver policies and maintain good practice. These become the 'rules' of the organisation, the standard practices that allow for smooth operation on a daily basis. Effective institutional leaders need to establish management systems that fulfil standard operational needs.

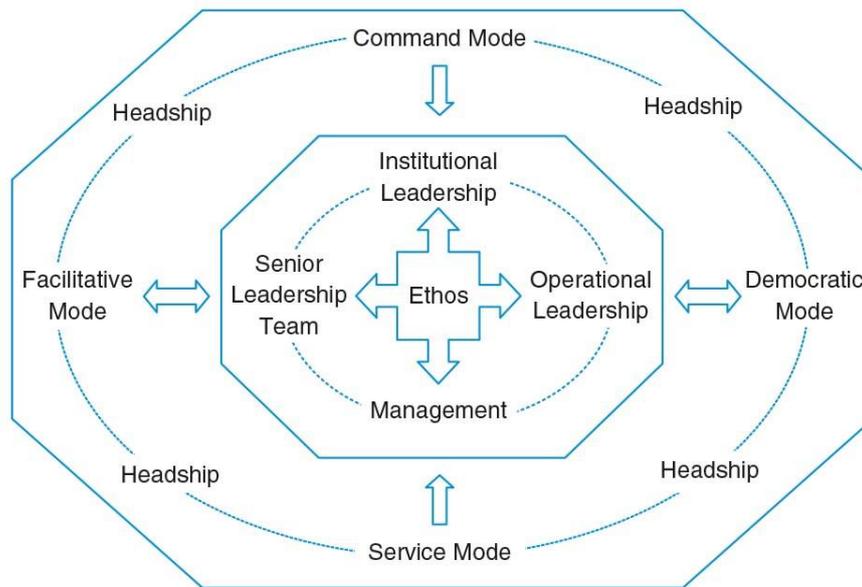
There are, of course, a range of leadership responsibilities emerging from the need to respond to different or unusual issues and the challenge for the institutional leader is to recognise that, although they cannot escape their individual accountability, they cannot complete all the leadership tasks. Others are needed to share the load and in terms of senior leadership, it is the professionally qualified staff who would normally

be identified as senior leaders. Consequently, credence needs to be given to the contribution EYTs and other professional practitioners can make. The critical stage of organisational development, however, is to build the capacity of senior leaders so that not only are leadership responsibilities and actions shared, but the members become a *team*. The difference between a group and a team is well documented elsewhere (e.g. Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), but is usually determined as the willingness of members to give up on self-interest in favour of the group. Members of a team tend, therefore, to be prepared to give with no guarantee of getting anything back in return. Conversely members of a working group can be identified as protecting their self-interest at a cost to overall ambition. Teams are more desirable and recognised as creating synergy, where the collective outcome exceeds the sum of individual inputs. A senior leadership team can only operate, however, where there are high levels of trust, in addition to mutual accountability.

The final piece of the internal structure jigsaw is the need for *leadership at the operational level* where individuals are empowered to take decisions that correspond to the shared value system that has been described above as a prerequisite for success. Each practitioner will need to know their fundamental priority when the demands of practice present them with conflicting opportunities, with the tools they need being derived from the framework of values. The key issue is that the practitioner has “the right to respond to the prevailing context, providing they do not contravene the ethical code that has been established for the organisation” (Male, 2012: 205).

### **Leading the Early Childhood Settings in the Wider Context**

The role of institutional leader needs to become more team focused, therefore, with individual behaviour moving to the periphery. This model does not deny that institutional leaders still have a major role to play in internal leadership and many modes will have to be adopted according to circumstance.



**Figure 25.2** *Different modes of leadership behaviour within the organisation*

In the model displayed in Figure 25.2, the institutional manager adopts the headship role needed to sustain the internal structure through appropriate use of leadership style according to capability of their colleagues. Here reference is made to facilitative, demographic, support and command modes. The main point to be made at this stage is that mode (or style) should be appropriate to context and situation. As alluded to above, the predominance of women in the workforce has led some commentators to observe that there are distinctive features of leadership in this context that are mainly concerned with feminine attributes and behaviour. This is too simplistic an analysis, however, and it is more appropriate to recognise that a range of leadership attributes and behaviours are needed at different levels within the system, only some of which

are based on traditional feminine leadership styles. It is entirely appropriate, for example, to adopt the 'command' mode in situations where there is little clarity of vision or relevant expertise available; similarly, it would be unwise to adopt a singular approach to decision making where there are professionally qualified and experienced staff with appropriate expertise available for consultation. The principal skill for the institutional leader in this respect is not to employ a pre-determined approach, but to choose a leadership style that is suited to the situation and context.

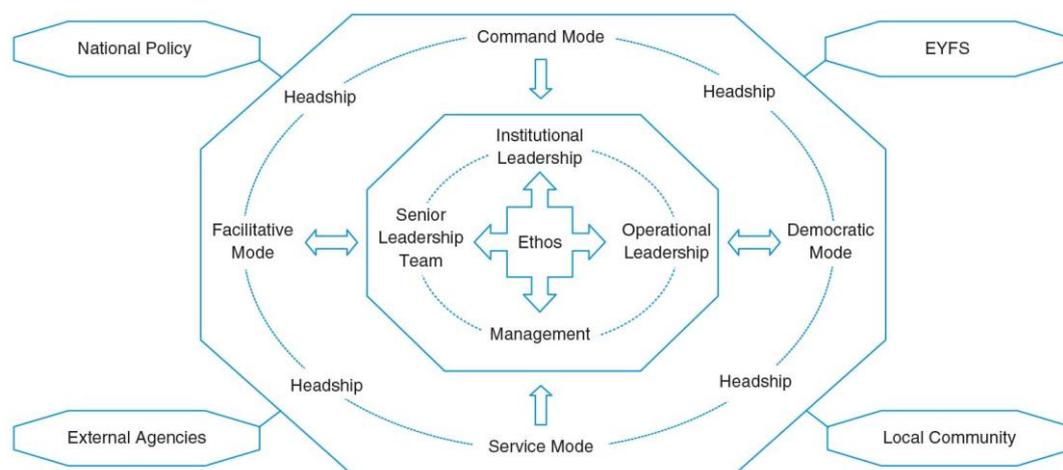
This evolving scenario has created a need to theorise leadership in ECEC and avoid the temptation to borrow leadership constructs from other occupations and, rather, invent them. In recognising there are unique features to leadership in ECEC, Palaiologou & Male (2019) identify and combine knowledge, theory, craftsmanship, practical wisdom and the taking of actions into a unified process; the concept of 'praxis'. Further, they propose viewing leadership as pedagogical praxis, suggesting that the end purpose of leadership in ECEC should be focused on the creation, sustenance and enhancement of effective learning environments, rather than merely providing care. Leadership in ECEC, they conclude, should be pedagogical praxis which is "is rooted in its specific context and pays attention to its own environment through engaging with the historicity, culture and subjective perspectives/realities of the contexts that are involved" (31).

### **Dealing with the world outside of the setting**

The key role of the institutional leader, however, is highly likely to also be one of managing the institutional boundary with the external environment in the quest to ensure the needs of children can be met. This is described as 'boundary spanning', a

process that involves protecting and supporting critical organizational functions while simultaneously attempting to accommodate external demands (Selznick ,1983).

Given the impact of EYFS (which includes the inherent relationships with external agencies), the demands of the local community and the continued emergence of policy initiatives the institutional leaders needs to be continually scanning the environment to ensure their setting is remaining on task.



**Figure 25.3** *Scanning the external environment*

A critical factor in this management of the boundary is the role played by external agencies who have a direct influence on the education and well-being of the child, as opposed to those agencies to which the setting is accountable (such as the group provider and national inspectorates). Prominent in this regard are those working in health and social services as well as other educators who have been brought together into local collectives typically labelled ‘Children’s Services’. A key aspect of such challenges is that “there are many different visions, aims or expectations for early childhood education and care” (Jones, 2008: 18) and this is a field “dominated by individual beliefs, values and perspectives that can have a strong emotional component” (Rodd, 2006: 110). Consequently, people from other professions and

agencies typically tend to “view the situation from the perspectives of their own professions” (Miller, 2011: 83).

### **Bringing it all together**

The issue of multi-agency and inter-agency working is the single factor in ECEC leadership which distinguishes it from other occupations. The influence of these agencies widens the responsibility for determining appropriate learning, development and care for young children beyond any single institution or individual.

Consequently, the establishment and maintenance of core values that underpin actions is a task that sits uncomfortably between many actors. Leadership, as demonstrated above, is exhibited at a number of levels in any social system, but within ECEC there is this added complex issue of the multi-agency support system.

### **Summary**

Throughout this chapter, the concept of leadership in relation to EYFS was discussed. There has been an increase in the literature on leadership in ECEC since the first introduction of the EYFS. The binding factor, however, is the focus on the child and the single accountable position within this system is the leader/manager of the setting. Whilst that places significant responsibilities on individuals, leadership in ECEC has to be a collective effort, or “connected effort” as Moyles concludes, that is child-centred. “Connective leadership” she suggests “is a new, integrative model of leadership that is vital to early childhood and care [as it provides] the basis of the ways in which practitioners work with children and families” (Moyles, 2006: 4). The starting point for such connected leadership efforts should be a value set that is meaningful not only for practitioners and the funding agency, but also to the service

users and the local community. Effective leadership in ECEC, therefore, should be concerned with a collective approach that extends the capability of the child beyond the narrow confines of EYFS.

▪ **Key points to remember:**

- There is a difference between formal leadership and other leadership roles within ECEC;
- Formal leaders have to coordinate the collective efforts of all contributors to the education and care of young children;
- The establishment and sustenance of core (and shared) values underpin successful leadership decision-making processes.

▪ **Points of discussion:**

- What behaviours would you associate with leadership in ECEC?
- Where should the balance between care and education/ safety and learning sit?
- What does satisfactory provision mean in EYFS?

▪ **Reflective Tasks:**

- Identify the key contributors to the education and care of young children in a setting known to you and consider who is the most significant figure in decision-making;
- Think about the contribution each contributor makes to this setting and consider whether this is more focused on children's learning or their safeguarding;
- Identify how opportunities can be created for practitioners to exhibit leadership behaviours.

▪ **Further reading**

**Books**

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- **Useful websites**

*Conceptualising Leadership in Early Childhood Education:*

<https://teachingcouncil.nz/content/conceptualising-leadership-early-childhood-education-aotearoa-new-zealand-july-2009pdf>

*Leadership in Early Childhood Education: Cross-cultural Perspectives:*

<http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514268539/isbn9514268539.pdf>

*What Does It Mean to Be a Leader in Early Childhood Education?:*

<https://degree.astate.edu/articles/k-12-education/being-a-leader-in-early-childhood-education.aspx>

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