

Rodd, J. (2013). *Leadership in early childhood: The pathway to professionalism*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Developing Leadership Competence in Early Childhood Educators

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The importance of developing leadership competence has not been sufficiently recognized in the early childhood field (Goffin & Janke, 2013). Current circumstances demand that early childhood educators exert leadership. Whether they notice it or not, early childhood educators' work requires the exercise of leadership, which encompasses a range of interactive behaviors and practices. Directly in a classroom or indirectly through decision-making, it is the responsibility of early childhood educators to ensure that high quality experiences are designed and implemented for young children's positive learning and developmental outcomes.

In this context, Jillian Rodd's contribution to advancing the field's discussion around the topic of developing leadership has been instrumental. This book shares ideas with practicing and aspiring leaders, scholars and students in academia, and all stakeholders who are involved in early childhood services regarding what leadership in the early childhood field means, what roles it plays, what skills are associated with developing leadership competence, and how it can contribute to professionalizing the field.

This book is composed of three parts. Part I explores the concept of leadership and presents various theories, models, and styles of leadership. In an effort to help readers understand the complicated concept, the book highlights the differences between leadership and management, and outlines key concepts related to leadership such as influence and motivation, vision and goals,

and collaboration. Leadership is conceived as a process to identify, establish, and actualize a vision for a group of people, in collaboration with its people, to achieve a common goal. Part II discusses the skills and characteristics of effective leaders in early childhood practice, which include: communication skills and meeting others' needs; meeting personal needs and managing stress; conflict resolution and mediation; decision-making and problem-solving; cultivating the culture of collaboration and collective responsibility; supporting professional development of its team members as a supervisor, mentor, and/or coach; and coping with and leading change. Part III presents issues related to the responsibilities of leaders in early childhood in four aspects: (1) knowing the benefits of research, having positive attitudes toward research, encouraging a research culture and participating in action research; (2) understanding the importance of and challenges in engaging families and communities, advocating for them, and becoming politically active; (3) leading ethical practice, protecting the rights of children and families, and ensuring quality services for them; and (4) building leadership capacity of early childhood educators and preparing for succession.

Theoretically and practically, this book is a great addition to the literature on leadership in early childhood in many aspects. First, it approaches the concept of leadership from both a general framework and an early childhood specific framework. After presenting a general understanding of

the concept, the book discusses the uniqueness of the early childhood field, in terms of the possibilities of taking the leadership roles and positions at earlier stages of one's professional career in comparison to other fields. Second, basic principles and guidelines for identifying and building leadership characteristics and skills are provided throughout the book. In terms of its practical applicability, these basic elements, principles and guidelines described in the book allow readers who may have a diversity of educational background, training, and experience to understand and apply them to meet their various needs. Third, insightful arguments are based on the author's research and expertise on the topic over the past decades, along with her interaction with numerous formal and informal leaders in various countries. The book's content is fortified with rich cases and reflections from the field practitioners. Thus, while academically strong, this book serves as a bridge between research and practice on emphasizing, identifying, and building leadership in early childhood educators, and a good example of how a book's research-based content and arguments can be applicable to the work of field-based practitioners. Fourth, in terms of future directions for the field, the book argues for the need to recognize the importance of leadership and to build leadership capacity of early childhood educators. It continuously states the responsibility of the field to build a cadre of future leaders in diverse ways, not only for formal leadership positions, but also for informal leaders who are frontline practitioners whose daily work involves various forms of leadership activities. The need to put more efforts to identify and train these potential leaders is emphasized.

While the book has many merits, there were a few aspects that readers may want to have more insights from the author. First,

Rodd states the challenges in defining leadership in early childhood as the following: "The fundamental question of what is meant by 'leadership' in early childhood still has to be answered in a way that is meaningful and credible for educators" (p. 4). While it is the case that there is no agreed-upon definition regarding what leadership is in the field, readers would be interested in having a more explicit understanding of how the author defines leadership and whom she considers as leaders in early childhood. Second, in terms of future directions for the field, the book discusses the responsibilities of leaders in early childhood. In considering how to build leadership capacity of early childhood educators, the role of major groups such as higher education institutions and professional organizations is critical. While there are some parts of the book that discuss the role of higher education and professional organizations, more in-depth discussions regarding their roles and related suggestions for these and other key stakeholder groups would be helpful. Especially for major early childhood stakeholders in various settings (e.g., early childhood services, higher education, professional organizations, government agencies, and community agencies), providing a set of implications serving as a conceptual and practical framework would lead to positive changes in the field. Maybe, it is the task for readers in various positions and roles to contemplate on the ideas presented in the book, identify what they can do in their current practice, and take actions collaboratively, consistently, and strategically.

Overall, this book is an inspirational work and a significant contribution to the field's discussion on developing leadership competence in all early childhood educators. Early childhood educators have the great potential to contribute to improving the quality of services for young children

through exercising of their leadership. Our nation's young children and a variety of programs that serve them are unlikely to succeed until we get serious about the quality of leadership of early childhood educators regardless of their positions or work settings. This book is a great resource

for all early childhood educators at different stages to think about the critical role of leadership, be serious about becoming/growing leaders in the field, and be motivated to take actions on behalf of children, families, and early childhood practitioners.

Reference

Goffin, S., & Janke, M. (2013). *Early childhood education leadership development compendium: A view of the current landscape (2nd ed.)*. Goffin Strategy Group.