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“How Can I Enhance Positive Leadership Skills in Young Children?”

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“How Can I Enhance Positive Leadership Skills in Young Children?”

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Abstract

This research paper is a self-study action research paper based on the title “How can I enhance positive leadership skills in young children?” The research site is a private preschool in Ireland. Fifteen children aged three to four years, their parents and four educators participated. Interventions introduced included persona dolls, new roles and responsibilities, books, and a leadership elf. A workshop was developed for the educators. Data was collected using anecdotal observations, focus groups, learning journals, surveys, and a reflective diary. Kolb's (1984) reflective cycle was used to reflect and build on developing and enhancing children's leadership skills. Brookfield's (2017) critical reflection theory was used to support the self-study element. Critical friends and a validation group supported reflections. Findings show the child's disposition, stage of development and learned values are important while the role of parents is paramount to the development of leadership skills in young children. Educators and the pedagogy of the classroom enhance those skills. Recommendations have been made for future practice.



“A wise old owl sat in an oak, the more he saw, the less he spoke, the less he spoke, the more he heard, why are we not all, like that wise old bird” (author unknown).

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Abbreviations

SSAR	Self-study action research
AR	Action Research
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
ECI	Early Childhood Ireland
EI	Emotional Intelligence
PL	Pedagogical Leader
OECD	Organisation Economic Co-operation and Development
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DL	Distributive Leadership
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HSE	Health Service Executive
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Curriculum Development and Education
DES	Department of Education and Science

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is a self-study action research project (SSAR). It is two-fold. An exploration of leadership in young children and on myself as a pedagogical leader.

1.0 Introduction

Early childhood care and education in Ireland is on a journey since ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. Current financial investment figures from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) are 0.2% compared to 0.8% in other European countries (Byrne, 2022). One of the first documents to emerge was Ready to Learn (Department of Education and Science, 1999) (DES). This was a governmental white paper on early education. The core objective was to underpin and develop quality early education in Ireland. The main strategy was investment to achieve the objective and guidance on curriculum to achieve quality. At its heart was that early education would be child centred, with a focus on development and inclusive pedagogy and learning. This document is the foundations for the early years sector today. It has slowly been built on, with some significant changes to legislation, policy, and guidelines.

There is a crisis in the sector. Those employed in Irish early years settings find huge expectations from the Government, including being overregulated, unsustainable, and staff that are leaving the sector in their droves. Early years settings are expected to provide quality care and education without sufficient resources and the administrative load has increased tenfold. It has become increasingly difficult to inspire and motivate educators when there is little or no acknowledgement of their professionalism and training by the government and public (Early Childhood Ireland, 2021) (ECI). Over many years, Ministers for Children and the Irish Government have not shown leadership in investing in a sector that has shown it is indispensable to keeping Ireland open for

business nor in young children when research informed them it saves money in the future (Murphy, 2015). During Covid 19 lockdowns, this became noticeably clear when essential workers could not return to work because of the lack of childcare. As I hand in this thesis, Irish Government leaders are beginning to invest in the professionalisation of the sector with core funding due to start in September 2022. Its goals are to help with increasing operating costs and maintaining staff;

- Set minimum pay scales to support and supply quality practices;
- Develop a graduate led workforce.
- No increase in fees for parents.

This was the core objective of Ready to Learn (DES, 1999), twenty-three years ago!

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Research

Leadership is about people, their behaviour, how they inspire, communicate and influence others to achieve. Where there are leaders, there will be followers. We might be leaders in some roles and followers in others. We all have leaders we admire. But what makes a good leader? Are you born to lead? Is it your personality? Is it the skills you have accumulated? Is it your culture? Your education? Or is it something else? It strikes me that it depends on which lens or perspective you choose.

This SSAR project aimed to find out *How can I enhance positive leadership skills in young children? and How can I improve my own leadership skills?* Underpinning those questions were; Is leadership in children the same as leadership in adults? Are the same dispositions required? What are the benefits of promoting leadership skills in preschool children?

1.2 Background and Context

I began my life as an educator in 1996, just as change began in the sector, opening a preschool in 1997 just as part 7, the preschool regulations (1996) were added to the Childcare Act (1991) (Government of Ireland, 1991). Those regulations were amended in 2016. I have developed and grown personally and professionally with the sector over the past twenty-six years. I have trained, adapted, and changed my practices based on my education, professional learning, and experiences. I am the owner, the manager, and an educator in the setting. I perceive myself to be a reflective and open pedagogical leader. I recognise that my ontological, epistemological, and educational values underpin who I am and how I behave. I aim to be a good role model always to my team, children, and parents, living my values of care, respect, integrity, equity, and empathy.

Four educators and I provide a quality learning environment for preschool children aged between two and eight months to six years. The preschool is privately owned, values based, award winning, inclusive and caters for forty-four children over two sessions on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme at capacity. We view children as confident, capable, and competent. Our curriculum is play based, an eclectic mix of High/Scope, and Froebel all umbrellaed by Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) (NCCA). Our curriculum is emergent, that is, building on children's interests, child centred, and collaborative. I believe the style of leadership to be distributive, with all stakeholders having a voice in all decisions in how the preschool operates.

In 2018, a group of parents put my name forward for A National Educator Award from Early Childhood Ireland (ECI), which I won. While this implies that I am a good pedagogical leader I was uncomfortable with the attention that surrounded it. I had a sense of imposter syndrome. I was just doing my job which I could not do without a supportive team. This imposter syndrome

is the underpinning factor for the self-study element of this research. I wanted to learn about myself and see what others saw in me. Considering myself as a leader made me wonder how I could support children to develop positive leadership skills, especially when our worlds have been turned upside down due to the Covid pandemic and the current news is filled with examples of diplomatic and democratic leadership from countries at war around the world.

The participating children were aged between three and four years of age and in their first year of the ECCE scheme, so the majority will be returning for another year. I aimed to develop the children's communication, critical thinking, and creativity skills so that they can be empowered and see themselves as capable and competent leaders.

1.3 Values

From the moment we are born to the moment we die; we are developing relationships. They are at the heart of everything I do in my work with children and my team. The values I hold which support relationships are, I am caring, respectful of all, communicative, empathetic and have integrity. My values are deep rooted in my childhood and continue to develop based on my exposure to experiences, people, cultures and education. These are my ontological values, how I perceive myself in relation to and with others.

I am lucky to have grown up in a strong and loving family. I was not overly fond of school and was glad to leave it, only finding my passion for early years' education after having my own children, when it became meaningful. My school days left me with distrust of teachers in general. Education was not my first choice of occupation, but when I decided to become an educator, I made a commitment to myself that I would be a good one. The lecturers, tutors, and early years professionals I have met ignited a passion for formal education in me as an adult. I am learning every day. Twenty-six years later, as a pedagogical leader, owner/manager of my own preschool,

I am still passionate about my work with children and families and along with the educators I provide an environment where every child and family are valued, nurtured, cared for, and educated using a play-based curriculum. These epistemological and educational values can all be underpinned by the value of care (Tye, 2021; Noddings, 2013).

Caring and education are inextricably linked. For a child to learn, they must be comfortable with the educator, they must have a relationship which is founded on respect, integrity, collaborative communication, and empathy. We cannot expect others to learn what we teach if we do not care about them. We need to be present with children, allowing them to lead and we follow to learn about them as individuals with their own skills, knowledge, and attitudes. We need to support and develop the whole child, not just their minds. Similarly with parents and educators, we cannot work harmoniously together if we do not have similar values in relation to children, early education, and play. I see myself as inclusive, democratic, and fair in my dealings with all people, all underpinned by the “care” value. Garboden Murray (n.d.) identifies these as “rituals of caring.”

“I wasn’t willing to rank care, hide care or disguise care. I wanted to name care and show that the rituals of caring require dignity, respect, presence, dialogue, and intelligence, Care is teaching. Care is education (Garboden Murray, n.d).”

1.4 Context

I planned to develop a framework to promote and enhance positive leadership skills in young children in an early year setting. I aimed to develop these skills through interventions using play-based methods. I used Kolb’s (1984) reflective cycle theory to frame how the research developed and changed. Literature on leadership was reviewed. Findings were analysed using Brookfield’s (2017) four lenses theory of reflection. Conclusions on the research topic of leadership were made based on the research findings and recommendations were made for future practice.

1.5 Interventions

Having completed a focus group with the children, I found that they did not understand the term leader or leadership, nor when prompted the skills required for leadership. I consulted with the team of educators on the skills we would like to develop and what strategy to use.

The main interventions in Cycle 1, were the introduction and use of Persona dolls. Running alongside this, new leadership roles and responsibilities were introduced, while the use of books were used to discuss and identify leaders and skills at story time.

Applying Kolb's (1984) reflective cycle, I identified that the educators needed support to identify leadership skills in the children and to view themselves as pedagogical leaders. A workshop on leadership was developed and completed as Cycle 2.

From reflection and brainstorming during the workshop Cycle 3 evolved, the introduction of the Leadership elf.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

In the following chapters I will outline the processes taken during this self-study action research project.

Chapter 1 - explains the focus and aim of the study. It outlines the research background, the setting context and the interventions used, along with my values system.

Chapter 2 – reviews the literature on leadership in young children, adult leaders, pedagogical leaders, and the skills required to promote positive leadership.

Chapter 3 – explores the self-study action research approach and why I chose it. It outlines the research plan and the data collection methods used.

Chapter 4 – Discusses and analyses the research findings using a critical lens approach to identify if the research question was achieved.

Chapter 5 – Draws conclusions from the research and makes recommendations for future practice and research opportunities.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained my rationale and aim for choosing the topic of *How can I enhance positive leadership skills in young children* and the reasoning for the self-study element. I included a historical overview on the journey of ECCE leadership in Ireland today to set the context for the research. I described the research setting and the participants included in the project, and I have given a brief overview of what to expect in the following chapters.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I propose to explore literature available on the topic of leadership in relation to young children and adults. I have found the literature available on leadership is vast in relation to adults, adolescents, middle childhood, and gifted children, however there is a significant omission when it comes to preschool aged children. Chen (2021) completed a “systematic synthesis” of close to ninety years of research into leadership in preschool during social play. Similarly, she found extraordinarily little research on the topic. Finding her research and in discussion with her has given me a feeling of vindication and the freedom to move forward to carry out this research project.

2.1 Leadership

Jankurová et al. (2016) state there is no one definition of leadership. It can be seen as complex, dependent on styles, types, traits, characteristics, and context. Jankurová et al. (2016) also suggest, leadership is defined in three ways. 1. It is not a solo activity, as leaders need followers. 2. It is transactional and reciprocal between leaders and followers and 3. Influence is involved in leading. They identify 4 themes of “leadership activities” that are interlinked and work in harmony along with the list identified above, “power and influence, charisma and inspiration, encouragement and mobilization, trust and commitment” (p,148).

2.2 Child Leaders

When we think of child leaders, we think about people like Greta Thunberg, a young environmentalist; Malala Yousafzai, shot by the Taliban for pursuing her education, now an advocate for women's rights to an education; and closer to home, Joanne O Riordan, an activist for access and inclusion for people with disabilities in Irish life. It is interesting that I think of three

women, and I wonder if gender plays a role in leadership and if so, why are there so few women leaders in positions of power in Ireland. I wonder about their early years experiences and how that has impacted on their development as leaders?

Defining leadership in young children is difficult. Fu (1977) having developed a rating scale for measuring child leadership and its characteristics in a nursery school (preschool), defines it as the idea that one child influences another by giving a “direction, command, order, request or persuasion etcetera” which leads to “cooperation and submission.” Fu (1977) further states that this is the leadership approach and includes initiating innovative ideas and activities. She calls this “*Successful leadership.*” “*Unsuccessful leadership,*” which she defines as, the child's attempts at directing, commanding etcetera are not conformed with by the other children (p, 13).

Submissive followership she defines as the child who receives and conforms to the requests of the leaders and other children. While in “*Unsubmissive followership,*” the child is not compliant, ignores the requests and continues at own activity *or* leaves or refuses to join when a leadership approach is initiated by another child (p, 14). She identifies two types of leaders, “the bully” and the “diplomat.” The language Fu (1977) uses is forty-five years old and negative; it does not reflect the changes that have occurred over time and how educators, the sector and society now view the child. Trawick – Smith (1988, 1992) argue once children can think independently and chose or not to play, they are leaders as they are making their own choices and decisions. Soutter (2018) agrees, she theorises that children can step in and out of leadership space depending on contexts.

If Fu’s research is recognising these leadership skills in preschool children, we must begin to teach diplomatic skills and values as early as possible. Hensel (1991) identifies leadership skills in young, gifted children as including verbal communication. This supports the ability to share their

ideas, identify and vocalise their feelings, give others direction and develops empathy and good social and emotional skills. She suggests that child leaders have charisma and are sought out by other children. Hensel (1991) and Chen & Kacerek (2021) further suggest that conflict resolution, problem solving, and sensitivity including empathy and theory of mind can be taught through play experiences. While Hensel's research was with gifted children, the question needs to be asked if these skills can be developed with all young children?

2.3 Values

Core values are personal qualities that represent beliefs, they form the basis for our actions which lead to outcomes. They are how we subconsciously lead our lives. Core values are shaped by our familial contexts, experiences, and cultures (Harris, 2020; Doring et al., 2017). Tye (2022) identified six foundation values which develop the self and a further six which are action values, which build on the foundation values. The foundation values are authenticity, integrity, awareness, courage, perseverance, and faith. The action values include purpose, vision, focus, enthusiasm, service, and leadership. Tye (2022) argues that trust and respect are outcomes and behaviours. Tye (2022) argues to gain trust you must be reliable, display humility and honesty. This is the behaviour. The outcome then is respect and trust, and the value is integrity. In quality early education, the core values of the educators set the culture of the setting, and provide a values-based pedagogy (Lovat, 2005) so it helps if educators share similar values. Sorake (2015) states, societies values are determined by quality education.

2.4 Play

Learning from play can be traced back to Froebel in the late 1800's. Other pioneers of education such as Montessori and Steiner built their curricula around play experiences (Lunga et al., 2022). Play has also proven to be key to supporting the whole child's development with founding theorists such as Piaget linking play to the development of intellect, Vygotsky to social development, and

Kohlberg to moral development (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Bruce & Meggitt, 2006). Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland (NCCA, 2009) promotes play to support the child's sense of, Identity and Belonging; Communication, Exploring and Thinking and Well-being no matter, the curricula approach used in early years settings. Play, learning and development are inextricably linked. Christie (2021) questions if young children do not have play opportunities in their lives does it impact their development and learning? Hirsch-Pacek et al. (2021) reminds us that play does not happen just in a classroom which suggests that if children have the time, space, and opportunity, play can happen anywhere which implies that learning and development will occur. Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, that is, children learning from each other, building on what they know already and what they learn from others and Piagetian theory of cognitive development can be observed in play-based experiences (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Bruce & Meggitt, 2006). This makes the argument that if play is unnurtured can it lead to children who are victimised, controlled, and aggressive impacting on their mental well-being and that of their peers (Chen & Kacerek, 2021; Fu, 1977). Parten (1932) identifies stages of play in (cited in Chen, 2021) as moving from solitary to cooperative. Children's first experience of anything other than solitary play may be when they enter early education settings and here, they may have to learn the skills of play, such as communicating, negotiation, problem solving and empathy, all highlighted in research as leadership skills (Chen, 2021; Chen & Kacerek, 2021; Leadbeater et al., 2016; Hensel, 1991).

2.5 Persona Dolls

Persona dolls are an educational resource which is used to support and develop many skills in young children. They were developed by Babette Brown in England in 2000. Persona dolls are cloth, lifelike and represent the diverse identities of children in the settings. They tell stories to the educator about their lives which are recounted to the children. Through the educator the dolls

involve the children in sharing knowledge and experiences to solve problems and dilemmas (Nursery World, 2019). The dolls are used in a safe environment to promote empathy, inclusion, and diversity. They are a tool to challenge discrimination and inequality (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2022). The dolls come to visit, and become friends with the children; however, they do not play with them. Their specific purpose is a visit to tell a story about themselves or something that is bothering them. Time is given to the children to engage in discussion, explore topics they may not have experienced, and philosophise as to a socially acceptable solution which they take with them into the world. The Media Initiative for Children and Respecting Difference programme was developed in Northern Ireland due to research conducted by Connolly et al. (2002) which found that children as young as three years had an awareness of the cultural, religious, and political divide. They developed a series of cartoons and persona dolls to teach children about respecting difference as part of the Peace Initiative (Early Years, n.d). Training is required to use the Persona dolls and they are an excellent source to explore a range of topics with young children. Wilkinson and Wilkinson (2022) diverged from using the persona dolls to represent the children's identity and used them to explore topics which the children may not have encountered in their study, for example "fostering". Their research found that an outside researcher can remain objective and distant, while an inside researcher has trust and a bond with the children. If the aim of persona dolls is to develop empathy and the skills of respecting difference, then a safe environment is required, the inside researcher may be the best approach to use (Carter & Nutbrown, 2015).

2.6 Books

Books are used daily in preschools. They can be read with and to children individually and/or in groups. The benefits of reading and exploring books are immense in the development and learning of young children (Agosto, 2016; Beck & McKeown, 2001). For example, they can support the development of emotional intelligence, communication, problem solving and relationships

(Hibben, 2016). One of the strategies in the Penn Literacy Network is an approach called before, during and after (BDA) where the book is explored with the children prior to it being read. Questions are prompted and the children engage with the text and educator during the story. After the story, the educator questions the children about the story and prompts philosophical questions (Botel & Morton-Botel, n.d).

The Leader in me is a book which recommends a framework programme to teach children the skills necessary for leadership. It is based on teaching the 7 habits of Highly Effective People in a child friendly and inclusive way. While their book is for older children, it is the inspiration for this thesis project. This book has three themes running through it. 1. A Whole School Approach, which involves all stakeholders working together to enhance leadership skills in the children. 2. A Whole Person Approach, finding the greatness within each individual and creating opportunities to develop and nurture their talents. 3. A Whole Lot of Imagination Approach, where the curriculum is emergent and based on interests, developed in collaboration and is a process in action (Covey et al., 2014).

2.7 Leadership skills and dispositions in young children

As outlined above, the key leadership skills identified in previous research on young children include emotional regulation, communication, problem solving, negotiation skills and the child's personability or charisma. In the next section, I will explore these skills.

2.7.1 Emotional Regulation

Emotion Knowledge has two dimensions. Emotion recognition where the child recognises and can define expressive facial emotions and emotion situation knowledge where the child is able to read cues and react in situational contexts (Conte et al., 2019). Emotional Regulation occurs within a social context where children learn to decipher emotions, process them, and become proficient in

using them appropriately. When children have acquired the skills of emotional regulation, it supports them throughout life with challenges faced, stress and managing anxiety as well as improved interactions and the development of relationships with others and academic success. While dysregulation of emotions can lead to poor mental health and can affect behaviour negatively (Young et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018; Séguin & McDonald, 2018). Yue and Yang (2021) identify emotional regulation as prosocial behaviour which defines actions.

Goleman (1998) defines emotional regulation as Emotional Intelligence (EI), while Mayer et al. argue that he added personality trait theories and that in fact EI has in fact four branches with the lower branch as the foundations for the other branches. At the bottom branch is the ability to discern emotions in the self and others, followed by the ability to use emotions in supporting reasoning, the third branch is understanding emotions including emotional signs and language and the final branch is the ability to manage one's emotions to reach a desired result (Mayer et al., 2008). This final branch would appear to be emotional regulation when the child can adapt and use their emotions appropriately in any given context (Yue & Yang, 2021). More recent research, Alegre et al. (2019) identifies two EI's. The first – Ability EI, an exceptional ability to organise information from emotions related to but separate from intellectual ability; The second – Trait EI refers to personality traits and is functional in social emotional situations. Alegre et al. (2019) research is a comparison study of trait EI and the big five factor model of personality (Lazaridou, 2020). They found a correlation between the two and identified trait EI as another procedure to measure personality. Drigas and Papoutsis (2018) developed a nine-layer level in a hierarchical pyramid of EI. It takes into consideration EI and trait EI. They define EI, the ability EI, as self and social awareness. Trait EI as the dispositions connected with emotions, the response behaviour, and the context. Drigas and Papoutsis (2018) also connect their theory to Gardner's multiple

intelligences' theory which includes intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. Interpersonal relates to the ability to comprehend and work successfully with others by understanding their desires, intentions, and behaviours. This is also referred to as theory of mind (Conte et al., 2019). While intrapersonal intelligence is how we comprehend ourselves, and how we use this information to self-regulate (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018; Hayes et al., 2017; Petrides, 2013). This is consistent with Tye's (2022) theory on values development.

Either way Emotional Regulation begins to form from birth and considers the child's temperament, parental responses, parenting styles, levels of parents' education, socio-economic status, and the gender of the child. It is a whole child perspective (Conte et al., 2019; Young et al., 2019; Séguin & McDonald, 2018; Hammer et al., 2017; Ulutas & Omeroglu, 2007). Research highlights the need for early interventions to support parents, in the home and in school (Hammer et al., 2017; Peachey et al., 2017; Ulutas & Omeroglu, 2007). These interventions are critical where some/all the above are deprived. Educators can build on developing emotional regulation by providing a loving, caring, and nurturing environment with positive role modelling (Bruce & Meggitt, 2005). In early education settings, children are exposed to more opportunities to develop this skill through the structure, routine, and play opportunities (Arnott, 2018).

2.7.2 Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills are intertwined with executive functioning skills, cognitive and emotional skills, and EI theories. Problem solving is sited in self-control, where the child can adapt to problems, situations, activities, or games that challenge and support them in finding solutions. It is more a cognitive function than emotional function as it is a thinking process, it is the brain's ability and flexibility to guide the child in questioning, predicting, motivating, planning,

organising, and working memory. (Hedenbro & Rydelius, 2019; Zhang & Whitebread, 2019; Drigas, & Karyotaki, 2019).

2.7.3 Negotiation

The weak or strong child, power attitudes, and cultural context are influential in negotiation and decision-making skills. Where it is left to the “weak” child to decide, the stronger child is usually the one to make the decision taking an authoritarian approach (Fu,1977), yet in a democratic approach all children have the capacity to make and share in making decisions (Hensel, 1991; Trawick-Smith et al., 1988, 1992). In classrooms, the rules are usually set by adults and abiding by them becomes the cultural norm of behaviour within. Educators should consider involving the children in setting classroom rules. This will allow children to be their own problem solvers and their voices heard rather than being teacher dependent (Government of Ireland, 2021). It is in this context and through play that children can learn the skills of negotiation, self-regulation and decision making. They manipulate, communicate, manoeuvre, direct, and circumvent in play within these structures, learning with and from peers, adults and their responses which are consistent with Vygotskian theory of peer learning (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Bruce & Meggitt, 2006). Children who are emotionally regulated, capable and competent are less likely to draw attention, than those who are not in relation to negotiation skills, as their physical and reactional behaviour can be seen as more challenging and resistant when negotiations do not go in their favour (Kuczynski et al., 2019). The Educators role is to support the children with access strategies and facilitate the development of negotiation skills, however it depends on consistency, routine, contexts, power interchanges and the dynamics of peers and educators' responses. (Arnott, 2018; Worchel, 1967). Educators should also consider the contexts in which the child is negotiating and with whom, as these are not static but fluid. Participation in play and life requires ongoing negotiation and the skills to proceed (Hayward et al., 2019; Elvstrand & Lago, 2019). Negotiation

can be an individual concept or in collaboration/discourse with other children. Negotiation is dynamic and takes many forms such as making choices of who, what, where and when to play; influencing the type, direction, and roles of others; initiating play and sorting out problems that occur within play.

2.7.4 Personable

When we think of the word personable, we think of a child who is liked by others, their ability to socialise, their charisma, their personality and their character being of a happy, good-natured disposition. When you consider McCrae and Costa's (2003) Big-Five factor model of personality which considers Extraversion (outgoing and energetic), Agreeableness (friendly and compassionate), Conscientiousness (efficient and organised), Neuroticism (secure, calm, and confident) and Openness to Experience (inventive and curious) it is all or a combination of these (Lazaridou,2020). Personality is noticeable soon after birth. It dictates reciprocal responses and reactions and builds the child's understanding of the world. The child's personality can be an important predictor for mental and physical health, success in education, future life and prosocial behaviours. The parents' physical and mental health and parenting styles can impact on the development of personality (Vásquez-Echeverría et al., 2022; Whalen et al., 2021; Muir et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2013).

2.7.5 Communication Skills

Communication is the skill of imparting or receiving information, however it is a complicated process requiring the considerations of culture, context, and mediums. Communication can take many forms such as reading, writing, language, sign language, eye movements, facial and body movements, symbols, and listening (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Bruce & Meggitt, 2006). Communication is expressive and/or receptive (Green et al., 2018; Schroeder, 2016). As with all developmental skills, the parents as primary caregivers are significant in the early development of communication

skills. It is dependent on the parents' ability to play, comment on activity, respond to signals, share, and turn take, imitate, and mirror sounds. If the child has a developmental delay or disability this can impact on the parent and their interactions with the child (Hedenbro & Rydelius, 2019; Green et al., 2018; Quinn & Rowland, 2017). The development of communication skills has a profound effect on children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Cognitive communication empowers the child to question and learn, describe, explain, and discern, direct, predict, clarify, and report. Social communication supports the development of relationships through social interaction and includes the 'reading' or understanding of facial expressions, body language and eye contact. Emotional communication enables the child to express emotions, develop theory of mind and empathy skills (Ciftci et al., 2021; Bee & Boyd, 2007). Malaguzzi (Mphahlele, 2019) wrote about the 100 languages of children, he was stating the ways that children express themselves, for example through singing, dancing, art, storytelling, not just verbal language. Young children should be given every opportunity to express and communicate during play and interactions and educators should be supportive and acknowledge by actively listening and following their lead in conversations or in whatever form of communication they use.

2.7.6 Conclusion

When we consider the five leadership skills in young children, a pattern emerges of the importance of emotional availability by the primary caregivers and early years educators. It is significant then, to consider relational pedagogy as crucial, noting that the child is situated within a nest of contexts with multilayers of complexities if we are to encourage and empower positive leadership skills in the children (Hayes et al., 2017)

2.8 Relational Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the "art or science of teaching," and the term was first used by Herbart in the 1600's. Pestalozzi was the leader of change in the early years sector; his seminal work influenced

educational pioneers such as Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Freire, Malaguzzi. I suggest that Pestalozzi's Pedagogy of Love is the basis for relational pedagogy. It was child centred, and child led; with a loving, nurturing, caring learning environment for all stakeholders (Sellars & Imig, 2021).

Pedagogical leadership is difficult to define because educators can have many roles and titles. They can be managers, supervisors, administrators, room leaders and team leaders. This can lead to difficulty not only defining what it is, but also in supporting educators have an identity and a concrete job description (Fonsén & Soukainen, 2019; Albin-Clarke et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2018; Rodd, 2012). Educators are often "accidental leaders" joining the sector for a variety of reasons, they must have the flexibility to adapt to any role that is required of them in any given moment in time (Coleman et al., 2016). However, if pedagogy is the art of teaching, are all educators not leaders? In an Irish context, the leader is usually removed from working with the children due to the administrative tasks required which suggests how can they lead if they are in an office?

The PL's key role is supplying and promoting quality education and care using the settings curriculum philosophy, the environments, assessment, and family involvement (Halpern, 2020). Relational pedagogy includes all stakeholders; therefore, it involves parents, children, and educators.

2.8.1 Parents

Primary caregivers are usually the first to tune into their children's emotions. They begin to understand incredibly early the different signals for differing emotions from their child. The child's natural attributes and dispositions are important to the responses received (O Connor et al., 2018; Government of Ireland, 2018). Parents are the primary educators of their children in their early years and their role in supporting the child's holistic development, particularly social and

emotional development, and in the provision of a secure attachment base is paramount to the development of positive sustainable relationships going forward (Bruce, 2021; Young et al., 2019; Séguin & McDonald, 2018; Hammer et al., 2017; Ultus & Omeroglu, 2007; Whalley, 2007).

Parenting skills and styles are based on their own experiences and intuition be that positive or negative. Baumrind and later Maccoby and Martin cited in Li (2022) identified four parenting styles. They are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful. The authoritative or democratic parenting style is responsive and warm towards the child. Rules and boundaries are set using reasoning, guidance, and collaborative tactics. The authoritarian style is adult control with low response rates towards the child. Obedience is demanded and control is coercive. The permissive parent is caring but indulgent and unlikely to set rules or boundaries. While the neglectful parent has a low responsiveness and ability to engage with the child. They are uninvolved which may stem from their own childhood experiences (Li, 2022).

In a relational pedagogy it is important for the PL and educators to have a knowledge of parenting styles to support parents with their children.

2.8.2 Educators

The educator's role is like Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Connecting the gaps using a strengths-based approach to communicate professional knowledge respectfully to parents, building on their intuition and guiding them towards positive approaches to developing skills in their children. This is the ideal but can be hard to implement. Some parents do not want a relationship, they do not want or cannot be involved in their child's education for a multitude of reasons, such as their own home/school/teacher experiences. However, developing and implementing an inclusive relational pedagogy (Halpern, 2020) with a whole school approach

(Covey et al., 2014) will make a difference to the education and learning of all stakeholders (Sellars & Imig, 2021; Whalley, 2007).

In early education, it is crucial to ensure positive interactions occur prior to, and during the child's settling in period. It is significant to developing and supporting the home school link (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019) (OECD). It also helps if there is a key worker system in place. Relationships develop when the educator communicates and learns about the child from the primary caregivers and responds respectfully to their parenting styles, cultures, and contexts. This collaborative approach impacts on the child's holistic development and has proven outcomes for academic success (Oki, 2021; O Connor et al., 2018; NCCA, 2009; Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education, 2006).

2.8.3 Children

The educator/keyworker further develops their relationship with the child based on this information by responding, observing and listening to the child's one hundred languages' (Garcia Senet et al., 2021; Mphahlele, 2019; Albin-Clark et al., 2018). In doing so educators develop an understanding of the child's abilities, needs, interests, cultures, language, hopes, and dreams. Developing these relationships of authentic care, in consultation and collaboration with children and families can eradicate bias and prejudices that exist even implicitly in classrooms (Rector-Aranda, 2019). Educators can make an emotional connection and develop relationships with the child different to the parental connection yet equally important. Making connections with children to develop relations according to Lowe et al. (2019) is significant but difficult to measure (OECD, 2019). These care values are the gateway for and to moral and inner psychological well-being key skills for leadership (Oki, 2019; Reeves & LeMare, 2017). Putting the child at the centre of the curriculum supports this connection.

2.9 Relational Pedagogical Leadership

Alward and Phelps (2019) identify leadership traits as trust, emotional intelligence, communication, and motivation and Halpern et al. (2020) identify similar traits as leadership in children.

2.9.1 Skills and Dispositions

Women are the dominant workforce in early education and are more likely to be employed based on their personality traits such as conscientiousness, open mindedness, creativity, and agreeableness than their level of education (Lazaridou, 2020; Oke, 2019; Muiris et al., 2018). Theorists differ in how personality develops. Some believe it is biological, while others believe it is affected by context. In the biological, personality develops up to the age of thirty, while contextual develops over life (Lazaridou, 2020; Muiris et al., 2018). Could it be a combination of both?

Either way, Elmuti et al. (2005) identify the importance of teaching leadership skills with a particular focus on conceptual and interpersonal skills. Positive and negative leadership is a global problem which affects government and non-government agencies, private and community businesses such as education settings (Maloney, 2015). Global political decisions can have a knock-on effect on the early years sector. For example, in Ireland, the argument must be made that education is now a factor in employment, not just because it is a legislative requirement but because there is a higher capitation for graduate led educators with three years' experience on the ecce scheme. "Care ethics." may not be an employment factor. Zembylas (2018) terms this as "ethico political work" the conflict between our ethics and the demands from micro and macro systems. The new core funding (2022) will include funding for graduate led educators and management.

Graduate educators need skills such as intrapersonal and reflective skills, critical thinking and conflict resolution skills, decision making skills and ethical and moral attributes to ensure a relational pedagogy and values-based education occurs (Halpern, 2020; Covey et al., 2014; Eva & Sandjaya, 2012; Elmuti et al., 2005). This will filter down and develop children who will be confident and capable and positive leaders of the future

2.9.2 Continuous Professional development (CPD)

Professional development is necessary for early educators for many reasons. Early childhood education legislation and policy in Ireland and internationally is changing rapidly and educators must keep pace (Oke, 2019; Fonsén & Soukainen, 2019). Reflection on self, on and in practice (Schon, 2016), training, and opportunities to network with colleagues are crucial to maintain and drive quality (Oke, 2019; Fonsén & Soukainen, 2019; Zembylas, 2018; Rodd, 2013).

Albin-Clarke et al. (2018) research calls attention to the educators' sense of identity (Zembylas, 2018) and how personal values, beliefs, education, and experiences are significant in their professional relationship development and vice versa. Professional experiences and education can be significant in developing a relational pedagogy. It is worth noting that the educator is sited within a broader ecosystem than the child, which impacts on the child, family, and the development of relationships between them (OECD, 2019; Hayes et al., 2017). Ecosystems might include the curriculum, legislation, policy etcetera.

Professional development is a requirement by legislation (Government of Ireland, 2016) and mandatory for early year settings. The pedagogical leader in collaboration with their teams should reflect and identify areas that could be improved and develop or supply training (Peeters et al., 2017). Informal training programmes specific to the setting such as workshops/ presentations; mentoring and the creation of communities of practice (Wenger, 2008) are some examples. Bente

and Rosa, (2018) suggest that continuous professional development (cpd) should include critical reflection, communities of practice and policies to address and support social democracy in the setting and sector.

One of the main challenges for Irish early educators is sustainability, managing budgets including professional wages within the constraints from Government funding. Professional development occurs in the evenings or weekends, depending on the setting it may be unpaid and is on the educator's own time (Oke et al., 2021). During Covid 19, most training moved to online. While this is a better option, in that it is time and cost efficient, it is usually unpaid and, on the educator's own time. Qualifications are required to work in the early years sector; however, the Government funding does not correlate with paying educators a professional wage. Educators recognise that professionalism is more than having qualifications (Oke, 2021; Oke et al., 2019; Maloney, 2015). It is important to remember change will occur in the sector in September with the promise of a professional pay scale and core funding to meet the increase in wages and the introduction of paid sick leave. It should also include built-in cpd days with full pay for early years settings (Maloney & McKenna, 2017).

2.10 Leadership Styles

2.10.1 Introduction

There are many types of leadership styles used in organisation. Some examples include transformative leadership, transactional leadership, and democratic leadership.

2.10.2 Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership (DL) is identified in research studies as an important leadership style in early education. It takes a socially constructive approach, is transformative and relational (Heikka et al., 2021; Lazaridou, 2020; Nuttall & Thomas, 2018; Rodd, 2013). There are three functions to

this style of leadership. To develop people, to create a collaborative, supportive, connected environment and a joint approach in decision-making (Printy & Liu, 2020). DL is a move away from individual leadership to a collective relational shared leadership. In early education, DL is with all stakeholders, the educators, the children, and their families. Using a whole school approach, promoting agency in the children, problem solving within the contexts and environments together empowers the development of parental and community reciprocal relationships which in turn develops the school identity, development, and growth (Gurr et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020; Covey et al, 2014).

This leadership approach fails to consider that not everyone wants to be a leader (Coleman et al., 2017). This may be due to their abilities, personalities, education, and/or lack of interest or even age (Munby, 2019). Developing a DL style can take time and energy for everyone to buy into. There is a fine line between being supportive and manipulative. Personal and professional boundaries can be crossed and create tension, which can in turn set up a conflicting environment and affect group cohesion (Ho & Ng, 2017; Torrance, 2013). Lazaridou (2020) notes that younger pedagogical leaders, under forty years of age, may be more open to a distributive leadership style compared to older leaders. A weakness with this argument is if mature personalities are open to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeable, and develop over a lifetime (Muiris et al., 2018) then they are more likely to be inclusive, develop team relationships, be collaborative, share and promote the vision, values, and workload of the service.

2.11 Power

In Ireland, many early education settings are privately owned and managed. Power differentials must be considered when developing a relational values-based pedagogy. Owner managers in these settings have hierarchal powers and often make executive decisions (Giroux, 1986). Hegemony is

dominant (Freire, 1972). Executive decisions are made when a collective decision cannot be reached; when the route to achieving a goal/task shifts direction; when there is a need to call back to task or enforcement of the rules of employment or policy (Jankurová et al., 2016). If diplomatic power is continuous, educators are oppressed (Smith, 2017; Freire, 1972) and performance and motivation compressed.

In opposition to power is influence. Influence is based on trusting and respectful relationships with the stakeholders. Influence includes the need for dialogue, examples, explanations and meaning making. Jankurová et al. (2016) state that “influencing is primarily understood by leaders as an explanation and convincing” (p,142). This is an over-generalisation; it does not consider the different traits of the leader nor the leadership style in the organisation. Influencing is collaborative, reciprocal, and equitable (Coleman et al., 2016), which in the early years sector is relational pedagogy.

Other power differentials that need consideration are between the parents and educators; the educators themselves; the educators and the children; and between the children themselves. Power in relationships can be quite subtle and hard to observe.

The question that needs to be addressed now is the style of leadership in the research setting, DL and is a relational pedagogy in place?

2.12 Curricula Approaches

As far back as the early 1800’s when Froebel opened his first Kindergarten, he recognised that learning stems from the child, their interactions, freedom of movement and choice in play. The Froebelian approach nurtures problem solving skills through play, dialogue, experience, and reflection. This occurs in environments which are safe, challenging, sensorial, and promote

exploration and thinking. The educator's ensures children have this freedom to explore, to learn and think. Their role is to guide the children and work in partnership with parents and the community to develop relationships, responsibility, and a sense of identity (Watts, 2021).

2.12.1 Montessori

Montessori believed that education continues through life and takes many forms. Montessori's lifelong work in early education addresses the development of the child and his/her interactions within the environment. In her classroom, the directress (educator) takes her instruction from the child. Bennets and Bone, (2020) infer from Montessori's work that leadership lies within us all, and it evolves with support and guidance within transformational environments. The child is the leader and will show us the way.

2.12.2 Reggio Emilia

Malaguzzi's pedagogy can be observed in the Reggio Emilia approach. There the child is viewed as capable, competent, an agentic citizen with rights and who communicates in one hundred languages in an environment that is the third teacher ((Mphahlele, 2019)). The curriculum uses a social constructivist approach. The child learns through inquiry project work which is relevant to them. The projects aim to develop deeper levels of learning as the child is self-directing, and focused because the topic/inquiry is their choice and important to them. The child can express themselves using any medium he calls these the 100 languages of children, for example, through dance, drawing, writing to reflect their learning, feelings, and philosophies. The educator's role is to observe, document and through collaborative discussion with the child, guide their interests and build on their knowledge by providing "provocations." Families and communities are involved in the projects and have an active role in this curriculum approach (Garcia Senet et al., 2021). Emerson and Linder (2021) argue that while you can love the Reggio Emilia approach, it is grounded in Italian culture and context and for use outside of Italy, it needs to be reframed.

2.12.3 San Miniato – Tuscan Approach

Fortunati (2016) states ‘children are not an empty box to be filled. We must allow them to show us what they are capable of.’ He discusses trust, opportunity, and time. We must trust children to direct their own play and learning, give them the opportunities and time so they can achieve (ECI, 2016). The San Miniato approach has many similarities to Reggio Emilia, and while there are differences, both at their core, have the child as a protagonist, family involvement and documentation which supports emerging interests as the starting point which can lead to endless possibilities and learning opportunities (Fortunati, 2014).

2.12.4 High/Scope

The High/Scope curriculum views the child as agentic. It is play based and emergent. Learning is within the child and through activity the child becomes. Looking at this curriculum through a leadership lens, adults share control with the child, they guide and support the child’s agency and intentions through dialogue, collaboration, and positive interactions. The environment is planned with areas of specific interest, accessible and open-ended resources, and materials. The daily routine is consistent and supports the child's agency, interactions, and holistic development (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995).

2.12.5 Irish Perspective

From an Irish context, while not curricula, both the Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) and Síolta, the Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006) image of the child is centred on them as citizens with rights. The child is viewed as capable, confident, and competent. The adult role is to recognise the individuality of each child, taking a whole child, respectful perspective as the starting point for the child's learning journey and to develop relationships with them and their families that are positive and meaningful for the child. These frameworks see children as agentic and propose a supportive curriculum which considers socio cultural and social constructivist approaches to promote, the child as an explorer and thinker, a communicator, a citizen with the right to an identity and a sense of belonging and good well-being.

2.12.6 Curricula conclusions

Putting the child in the centre of any curricula is significant. However, Floom and Jansen (2020) argue that child-centred approaches may develop children who remain egocentric and egotistical who do not take or see the relevance and importance of the social and natural worlds around them. They argue that the child's relationships with the environment, people, and world around them are what needs to be nurtured rather than learning outcomes. They further suggest the educator must question and critically reflect on their own ontological, educational, and epistemological values in relation to child-centeredness, to support and develop the child's values, promoting respect, kindness, and empathy.

While the educator's image of the child and their role in developing positive values is important, the argument must be made that no educator sets out to teach children to be egotistical or to remain egocentric. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory highlights the impact of relationships and interactions on the child from other systems (Tudge et al., 2021; Hayes et al., 2017). Irish

literature puts the parents' role or primary caregivers as paramount to the development of the child (Government of Ireland, 1937). It is also important to consider the child's biological dispositions and personality (Young et al., 2019; Séguin & McDonald, 2018; Hammer et al., 2017; Ulutas & Omeroglu, 2007) which Floom and Jansen, (2020) have omitted.

When considering the curricula, Reggio Emilia and San Miniato are the only two who call the child, a leader (protagonist). Yet, if we see the child as capable, competent, and independent, then are all children not leaders (Bennets & Bono, 2020; Covey et al., 2014)? Are we really giving young children the autonomy to develop and learn skills to be leaders of their own lives? Early childhood experiences have been proven to have long term effects in adults' personal lives such as mental and physical health and executive functioning; and on the country, through the economy and infrastructure (Government of Ireland, 2018; Homann et al., 2008), therefore, it is crucial that children are at the centre of any curricula, and educators have an awareness of the crucial role they play. We must also consider that not all children like adults, are capable, competent, and independent or have leadership skills (Torrance, 2013; Ho & Ng, 2017), however as educators we can nurture, encourage, and empower children to be the best that they can be, leaders of their own lives!

2.13 Conclusion

When we review this sample of literature on leadership, pedagogical leadership and children as leaders, there are some common themes between them. The role of personality, traits and dispositions, contexts/environments, skills, and values all play a part. Grouping the themes together, it finds that relationships with significant people in environments underpin them all. Experiences, interactions, and education develop ontological, epistemological, and educational values, shape the development of the person. It is imperative then, that we support young children

to learn and live by values that are respectful, inclusive, and caring to instil and ground leadership skills. Early childhood relationships lay the foundations for the type of people we become.

I have discussed the role of the pedagogical leader/educator and that of child leaders. Their suggested behaviours, traits, types, and styles which make for positive leadership who inspire, communicate, and influence others to achieve.

I suggest that leadership is complex, dependent on the context, the individuals, the innate dispositions and learned skills of the individual. What leadership is though, is values based and relational. You cannot be a leader in isolation. From the moment we are born, we are part of a universe that is interconnected and interactive, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory is a good example of this. That is the essence of a child-centred curriculum approach, that the child and childhood are afforded respect and dignity by parents, significant adults, the State, and society (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education, 2006).

In the next chapter I will outline the methodologies used to promote positive leadership skills in young children.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.0 Introduction

There are several types of paradigms or frameworks which research is based on. For example, the positivist approach is scientific based and measurable. When the results are tested, they are found to be replicable. The researcher is objective and is not related to the research. While in an interpretive paradigm, the researcher is subjective and seeks to understand phenomena or situations. It acknowledges that results vary due to interpretations based on contexts and experiences (Hoffman, 1991).

The paradigm chosen for this thesis is self-study action research (SSAR). Action Research (AR) is an interpretive approach. The researchers are subjective, involved and co constructing knowledge/theories with others for others (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2022). Theories are phenomena which are dependent on context, professional, practical, and tacit knowledge.

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical background to self-study action research methodology.

I will outline the plans and methods used to research and collect data.

3.1 Action Research

The researcher in AR considers data based on their experiences, considers the whole picture, attempts to make meaning, to develop a new theory or elicit new knowledge which may not be measured or even replicated before sharing it with the public (McDonagh et al., 2020; Schon, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is based on Max Weber, the German sociologist's belief that our culture and values shape our actions and society and how we make meaning (McNiff, 2017; Elliott et al., 2016; Giddens, 2006). Data collection is of a qualitative nature but can be used with quantitative methods making it a mixed method approach. Qualitative research data is interpretive, broad ranging and involves human participants. Some sources of qualitative data

are, for example, dialogue, case studies, interviews, artefacts, case notes, observations, schemes of work, validation groups, and critical friends (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Data collection from a variety of sources is paramount for triangulation purposes. This paradigm considers four areas for validity purposes, because the examiner or reader of the research may take a unique perspective on the findings. Therefore, it needs to be dependable, credible, confirmable, and transformable (McDonagh et al., 2020).

In an AR project, Kurt Lewin cited in Coughlan and Jacobs (2005) stated that for change in a person to occur, they must be involved in the process. It considers the interaction and experiences between the individual and the environment. Fundamental to this, is the idea that the social world can only be understood by trying to change it, which suggests it has elements of sociological theory (Dillon, 2019; Fox & Alldred, 2017), a socio-constructivist theory (Mi Song, 2014; Bassot, 2012), and a change theory (Málovics et al., 2021; Flockhart, 2016). McNiff (1995), defines the principles of AR as the requirement for democracy and justice, the right to speak and be heard, the right to highlight how the researcher has developed and improved their personal and professional selves.

3.1.1 Critical Reflection

The self-study element of AR is critical reflection to ensure professional and personal learning materialises. Learning in SSAR occurs through dialogue, inquiry, and reflection, not necessarily in isolation but can include others depending on the methodology chosen. Critical reflection is important, but it is imperative that action takes place to enhance, transform and grow the self and practice (Kemmis, 2009; Coughlan & Jacobs, 2005; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

SSAR requires critical reflection on the researcher's values, beliefs, assumptions, aspirations and how these influence actions, attitudes, and being (Brookfield, 2017). Kemmis (2009) describes

this as a dance of “sayings, doings and relatings” (p,463), which are dynamic, entwining, and interdependent. Norton (2020) defines pedagogical AR as an investigation of your own practices as an educator and how it impacts on the children's' learning. This suggests that it aims to improve the self and the practice, however, Huxtable and Whitehead (2021) argue that the inclusion of the educational influences of educators own learning and how they envisage the learning of others and social processes which impact on practice and on values are required. They argue that including these leads to professionalism and improves knowledge through the creation and dissemination of their research, a living-educational-theory. Whitehead (2014) identifies Living Educational Theory as educators' explanation and inquiry into their own practices to enhance, develop and improve their practice for themselves, and their students framed within their social contexts. It is a unique theory to the educator and epistemological and ontological values based. These are the judgment standards for the theory, and values must be identified to see if they are being lived out in educational practice and if they can inspire others to learn (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021).

Brookfield (2017) identifies four lenses to support critical reflection to improve educational practice. They are through the students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, first-hand experiences, and theory. Whitehead's (2000) theory has four implications. The 'I' is paramount, as the researcher engages in reflection and studies I, the self. “I” come to understand myself and learn from it, therefore, it is educational. Because “I” am living the learning, I question how it will improve my practice and what justifies that belief as I search for an explanation, so that I can articulate my new learning and theory. Whitehead identifies the term, ‘a living contradiction.’ By this he means, having two or more contradictory values, for example, the value is care, but care is not demonstrated in thoughts, words, or actions. He suggests that we accept we are living contradictions and use that to reflect on the past, then, act, create and improve for the future

personally, professionally and for society. The difference between AR living theory and Living Educational Theory, Huxtable, and Whitehead (2021) argue is the inclusion and generation of justifiable evidence of educational influences. Glenn et al. (2017) identify AR as collaborative, participatory, reflexive, and critical and include living out their values in their educational practices. They do not distinguish between the diverse types of AR as conclusive, instead see them as interconnected (Glenn et al., 2017; McNiff, 1995).

3.1.2 Why I chose Self-Study Action Research? (SSAR)

I chose SSAR for this study because it is more suited to educational settings compared to the positivist approach. Schools and classrooms are dynamic and different. Researching with young children is complex and contextual. It cannot be measured. It depends on the school's philosophy, pedagogy, policies, partnerships, and external politics. Kemmis' (2009) description of the dance of "sayings, doings and relatings" (p,463), reminded me of early childhood curriculum frameworks such as Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and Te Whariki,, the New Zealand curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, 1996) and how in early education everything is connected, the environment, the stakeholders' roles, values, dispositions and attitudes, and the curriculum.

SSAR highlights what works in research because the educators understand and know what works in their classroom, who and how it will benefit. The educators decide if the research findings could change school policy and if it would be beneficial to the wider educational community, if so, they may share their findings with a wider audience. It has elements of transactional theory (Ostman et al., 2019), transformative theory (Biesta & Miedema, 2002) and complexity theory (Gibbs, 2021).

AR has been practiced in my setting for many years. This has been down to my ongoing training and education in the early years sector. While I was aware it was called AR, I did not know the theories behind it, nor had I reflected on my values at such a deep and critical level to inquire as

to how they influence my personal and professional practice. I have, however, reflected on my personal and professional practice with each piece of AR completed. My ontological, epistemological, and educational values influenced my choice of methodology, my approaches and strategies with the children, parents and educators' and the development and sustainment of relationships of which I feel is paramount in the early years sector, indeed in life (Noddings, 2013).

3.1.3 Conclusion

SSAR is a methodology used in educational settings to transform and ensure growth of educators personal and professional practices to ensure quality practices and procedures. Connecting the title of this thesis to the principles of AR is congruous. I hope that having carried out this action research with young children, they will leave our preschool as positive leaders, in charge of their own lives with the skills and abilities to ensure the world is their oyster. Connecting the SSAR to self-study, I hoped to be able to reflect on myself, my professional practice and to improve areas that need to be developed.

3.2 Research Design

I developed a conceptual framework based on Kolb (1984) reflective cycle which kept me focused during the research process. As I critically reflected on my approach through Brookfield's (2017) four lenses, I was able to provide continuity and fluid connections to enhance positive leadership skills in the children. I also developed the educators and my own, personal, and professional learning, and practices. I was reflecting in and on practice (Schon, 2016).

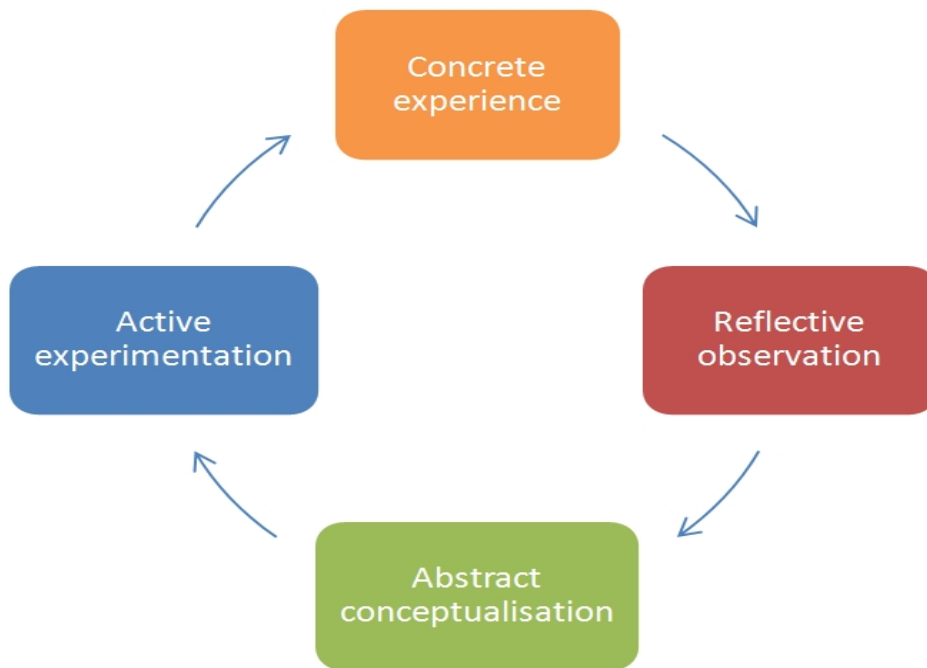


Image. 3.0 Kolb's Reflective Cycle

Source: Brown (2015)

3.3 Research Plan

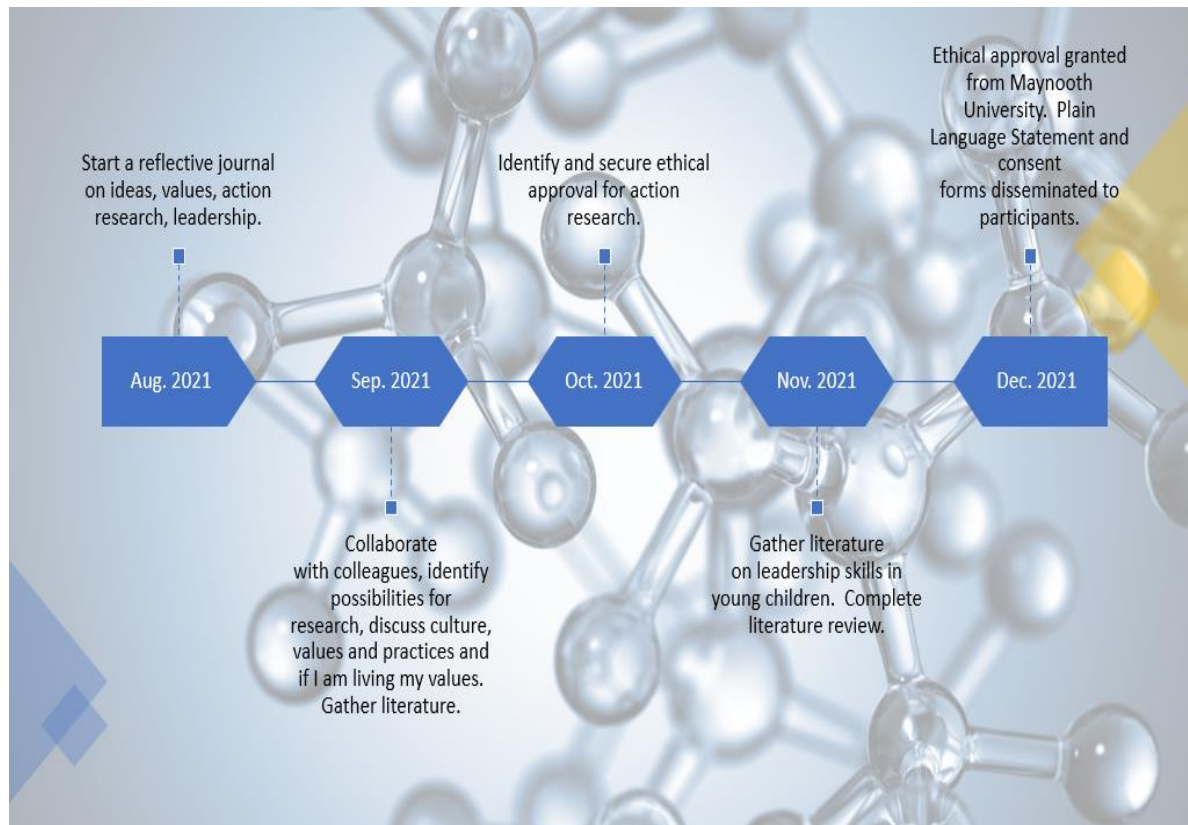


Image.3.1: Research planning

Image 3.1 displays the planning prior to the research actions taking place. Planning began in August 2021 and went on to December 2021. This included the seeking of ethical permission from the Froebel Department of Primary & Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University.

3.3.1 Research Participants

Nineteen children were invited to participate in the research of which fifteen gave assent. Their parents/guardians gave consent for their own participation and that of their children. The staff team were invited to participate and gave consent to collect data during the different cycles of research. All were assured they could withdraw at any time. The fifteen child participants are all three-year-old children attending one class group. They have similar socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and cultures. Of the four educators, excluding the researcher, one is a graduate in early education, one was in their final year of university, one has a FETAC Level 6 award in supervision in early education, and the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) support worker has a FETAC Level 5 award in early childhood care and education.

Child Participant Assigned Names	Place in Family
Ciaran	Oldest of two
Laura	Oldest of two
Eamonn	Oldest of two
Mary	Middle of three
Sarah	Oldest of two
Sean	Oldest of two
Leah	Youngest of three
Katie	Youngest of three
Liam	Only
Harry	Oldest of two
Charlie	Second youngest of six
Rian	Youngest of three
Sive	Youngest of two
Ivan	Youngest of three
Brian	Only

Image 3.2 Child participant assigned names and place in family.

3.3.2 Research Site

The research site is an urban preschool, on the outskirts of Dublin. It is Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education, 2006) (CECDE) accredited and an award-winning setting. It is known in the sector for its outdoor play, inclusive practice, and partnership with parents. I am the owner and manager, and therefore the gatekeeper in research terminology.

3.4 Interventions

Prior to developing interventions, I had to assess participants' knowledge of leadership and if they understood what a leader was. Two focus group meetings were held with small groups of children. Online surveys were completed by parents and educators. Following reflection on the results, brainstorming occurred with the educators to identify strategies that may work to enhance positive leadership skills.

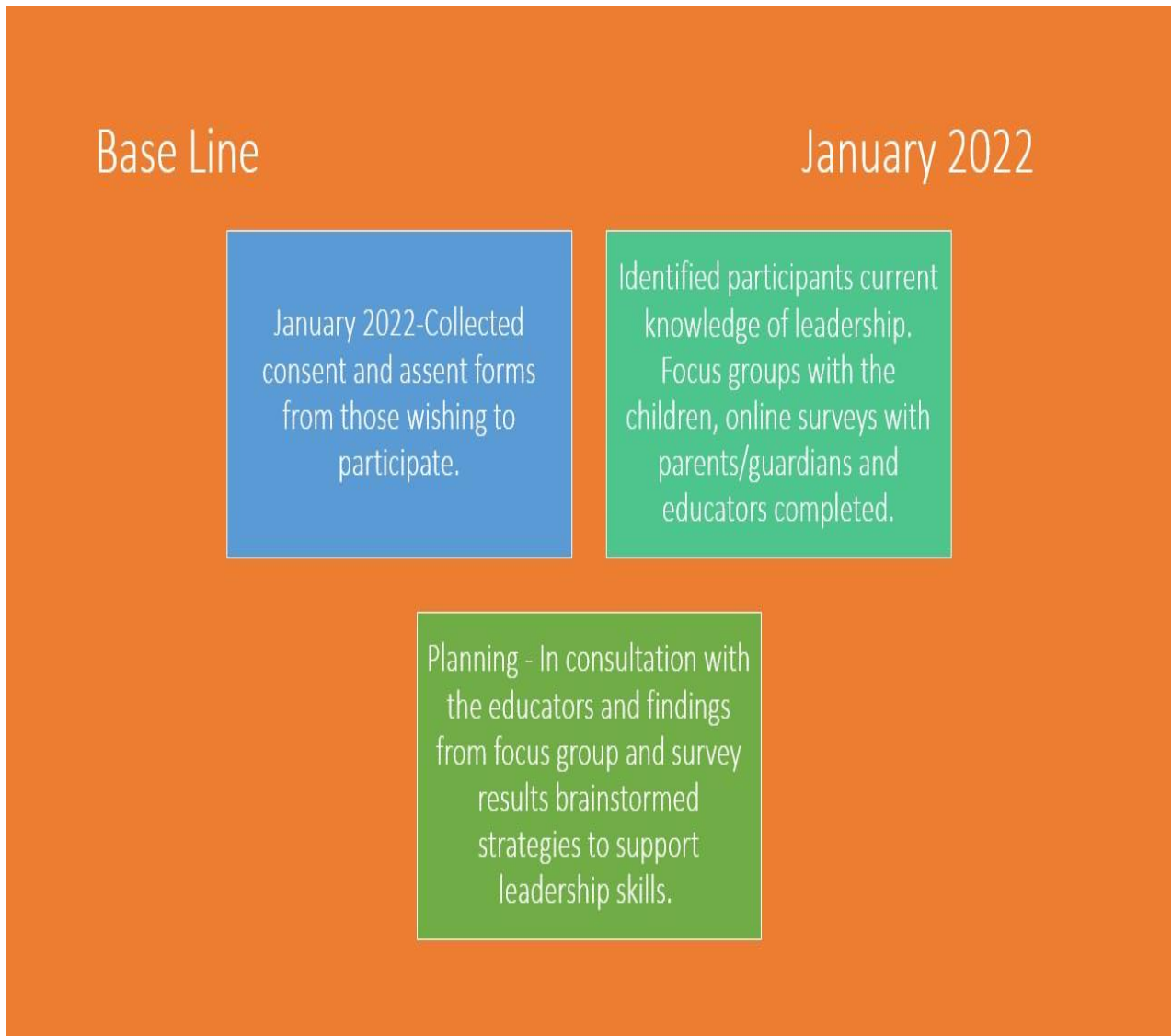


Image 3.3 Baseline prior to identification of interventions.

The main intervention, Cycle 1, was the introduction and continued use of persona dolls. This cycle also included the reading and exploration of books and the introduction of roles and responsibilities for the children.

Cycle 1,2 and 3 – Action Research with the children January to June 2022 (Continuous)

Implementation – Prepared and implemented the introduction of persona dolls with the children in large group discussions.

Implemented new roles and responsibilities for the children.

Discussed leaders and leadership identified in books at story time.

Collected data and analyzed leadership skills observed in the children.

Reflected on findings

Found that educators needed support to identify and document leadership skills in young children.

Image. 3.4 Action Cycle 1



Image 3.5 Bukola, Jenny, and Kathleen (Persona Dolls L-R)

Using Kolb’s (1994) cycle of reflection, I recognised that the educators needed support to identify leadership skills in young children to document for data collection purposes. This led to action cycle 2.

Cycle 2 – Action Research – April 2022

Identified that the educators needed support from their leader.

Together, we identified a professional development workshop as best methodology.

Developed a workshop on pedagogical leadership and young children as leaders.

Implemented, collected and analyzed data.

New strategies identified to enhance leadership skills in young children.

Reflected on findings.

Image. 3.6 Action Cycle 2

During the workshop, we brainstormed further strategies we could introduce to promote leadership skills with the children which became action cycle 3.

Cycle 3 – Action Research – April to June 2022



Image 3.7 Action Cycle 3, the Leadership Elf.

3.5 Data Collection

Prior to the research process I obtained permission from Maynooth University's Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Ethics Committee to proceed. I asked permission from all stakeholders attending the setting. The small sample group was chosen simply by those who returned and gave consent and assent to participate. Fifteen children in total. There was no discrimination as all children, parents and educators were notified of the topic and processes prior to the dissemination of forms in the Halloween and Christmas Newsletter. The plain language statement was clear with the offer to clarify any questions offered.

3.5.1 Data collection tools

The data is qualitative, collected through observation, children's voices, children's work, reflective diary, parental and team surveys and an educators' workshop. All data collected was anonymised to respect the privacy and rights of the participants. Critical friends, a validation group and my thesis supervisor supported and guided my thinking throughout the research project.

I began the process of data collection by keeping a reflective journal on my actions and thoughts. This was an arduous process for me as I am not used to documenting daily and it took a few months before it became a habit. I am a reflective person, but I tend to do it in my head, in the moment, or at a time when I have time to think. Literature from Kahneman (2017) and Grant (2021) got me thinking about meta cognition and if I really was reflecting critically or simply using system 1 (Kahneman, 2017) and reflecting on a superficial level based on presumption, experience, and prior or tacit knowledge. Was I really a reflective practitioner, “reflecting in and on practice” (Schon, 2016)? Was I really living my values or a living contradiction (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) and do I learn from my mistakes or continue to make them again? I was unsure of what I should be journaling until I read more about action research, how it is a messy process (McDonagh et al., 2020; Brydon- Miller, 2003) and I needed to reflect on my learning with and from the children, educators, and parents; as well as my supervisor, critical friends, and validation group. I needed to remove some hats, if you like, and remember that this thesis is self–study so therefore it is all about me. I had to become reflexive in my thinking.

The children's learning portfolios told me a lot about them as individuals, their dispositions, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. They build a picture of the child (NCCA, 2009). During action cycle 1, the educators and I captured the children's words and actions during play and activities using

vignettes, learning stories, photographs, and anecdotal observations. We conversed with them to ensure what we are thinking is what the child is doing/meaning. We linked their learning to the themes and goals of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) and/or to leadership skills. We used the portfolios to plan and support each child's learning and development, and their emerging interests, thereby developing our own emergent curriculum plans.

The leadership elf (action cycle 3) was a figment of the educators' imaginations. His name was Patrick, and he caught the children being leaders. He documented what he saw and at large group time, the educator shared his notes naming the child and their leadership actions. The notes were placed in the child's portfolios for sharing with their family (NCCA, 2009; CECDE, 2006). Anecdotal observations were documented in the moment, things I saw, overheard or my colleagues or parents shared with me about the children. Where we saw leadership skills, they were documented in the portfolios.

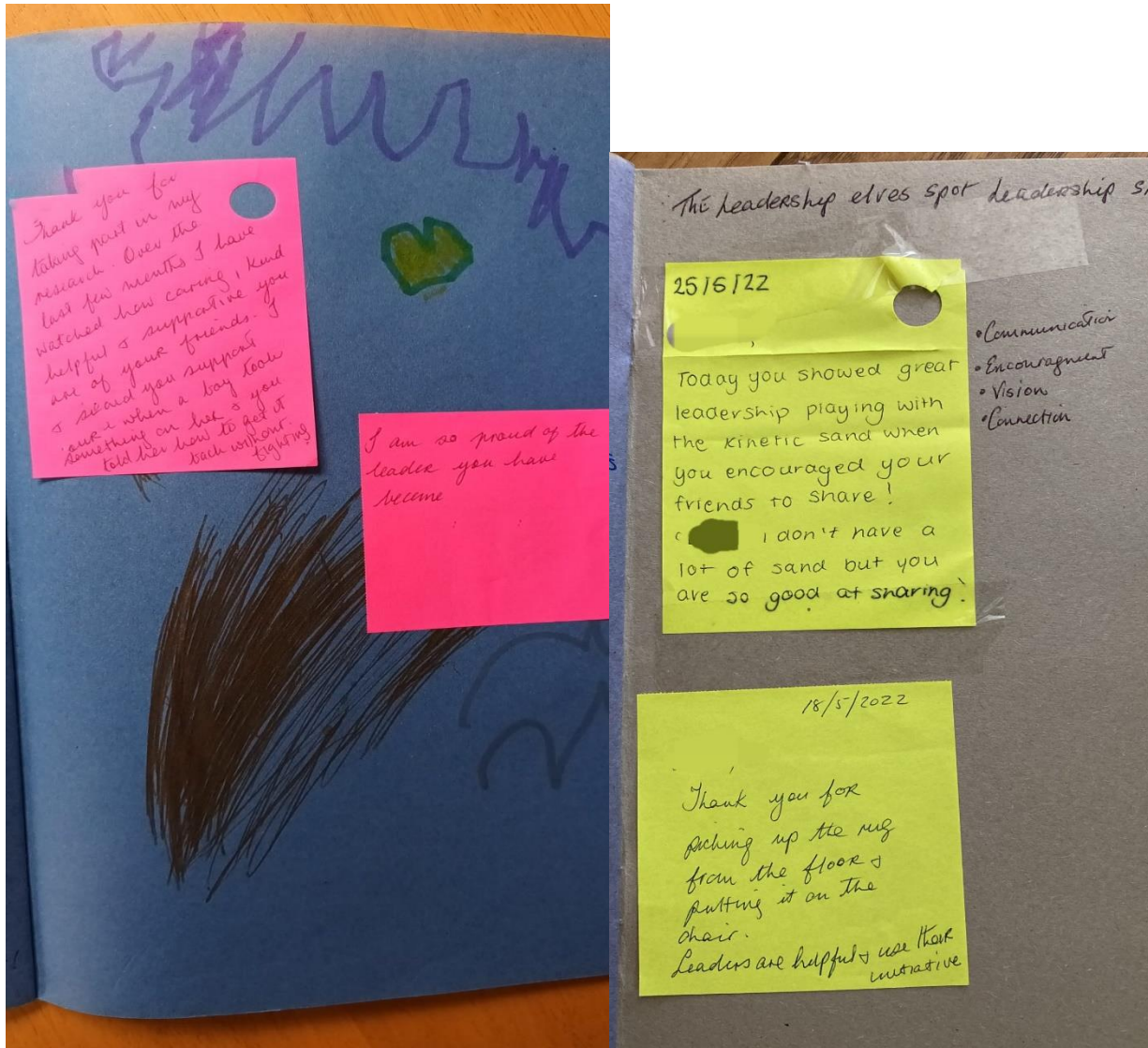


Image. 3.8 Child participants learning portfolio examples.

The workshop was a reliable source of information gathering as it was often difficult to find the time during the day to reflect fully. Cpd is important for educators to ensure they are meeting legislative and policy requirements. Learning can support their roles and personal and professional development (Moloney & McKenna, 2017). Inservice training is as important as externally sourced training because it can target specific elements to the setting and the stakeholders, which was the case with the workshop developed for action cycle 2 (Appendix, 16).

Focus group meetings with the children were used to find the base line prior to the research and again at the end of the research where the children drew pictures and discussed their understanding of leaders and leadership.

Online surveys with educators and parents were beneficial for reflection and to provide evidence for triangulation purposes. Data collected ensured focus and clarity on the topic of leadership skills in young children.

It is important to gather data to support your research and provide evidence for your theory and/or new knowledge. It helps to identify changes that need to occur in practice and on the self (McNiff, 2017; Glenn et al., 2017; Whitehead, 2010). Data gathering tools used throughout the entire process of this thesis ensured I critically reflected on my values and if I am living them in my pedagogical practices and indeed in life (Brookfield, 2017; McNiff, 2017). Those reflections became deeper as my critical friends, supervisor, validation group and educators questioned and delved into my thinking, practices, and experiences to enhance and make meaning of my research. By working in collaboration and consultation with the children, educators, and parents I was able to back up that evidence which is important to ensure accuracy of my findings (McNiff, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2016). The conceptual framework used in this self-study AR project is underpinned by my ontological, epistemological, and educational values. Considerations were given to, the Ethics Guidelines from Maynooth University, the Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects involving Children (2012), The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020 (2015) and the theoretical framework designed by Kolb (1984) for reflection.

3.5.2 Validation Process

The validation of this research was not solely my own reflections. Whitehead's theory (2000) is generated and validated using Brookfield's (2017) four lenses. Engaging with critical friends, a validation group, children, parents, and educators backed up with theory, inquired into the explanations, how the theory could be strengthened, authenticated, extended, and deepened from a socially cultural aspect.

I engaged and reflected with the children, throughout the research. Parents' opinions and reflections were sought at the beginning and end of the research. Educators were consulted throughout the process. The validation group, all pedagogical leaders, and critical friends, both lecturers in early childhood education in Ireland and United States of America, and my supervisor all contributed to my thinking and learning. They encouraged me to think deeper, more critically and challenged me every step of the way on how my strategies would support the children and myself learn. Their knowledge of early years pedagogy, their own leadership skills, and their ability to give deep and critical feedback to develop my reflections enhanced and transformed my practice, thereby my personal and professional development. The theory element of the lenses (Brookfield, 2017) supported or negated my findings.

This reflecting in and on practice (Schon, 2016) was based on my ontological, epistemological, and educational values and how they influenced my attitude, professional practice, and critical reflections to gain new knowledge and a new living theory (Whitehead, 2000). Reflecting critically, supported me to change and develop my practices for the better. Ferguson (2015) believes that teachers need to have consistency and be accountable to their values. Should these values be challenged, they must be reflected on, adapted, and changed if required.

The validation process enabled the development of a new living theory on leadership skills in young children.

3.6 Ethics

Before carrying out any research with children, ethical guideline considerations are paramount. Young children are vulnerable, and they need to be safeguarded. All preschool safeguarding policies and procedures required by legislative and governing bodies such as Tusla, the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth were adhered to. Legislation, such as the UNCRC (1989); The Childcare Act (Government of Ireland, 1991) Part 7 the Preschool Regulations (1996); General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (Data Protection Commission, 2018); The Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects involving Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012); The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020, (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) and The National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021) have all been considered prior to, beginning, during and writing up this project. Prior to the research, parents, staff, and children were informed of the topic and asked if they wished to participate, without coercion or risk of consequence. They were issued with plain language statements and consent forms for signatures and given time to consider and complete if agreeable. The children were given forms to draw a picture if giving their assent, completed at home. Assent was checked again prior to beginning the research with the children during a focus group meeting. I observed the children's body and facial language for signs of dissent and/or disengagement. Permission was granted by fifteen children and parents and four educators. Online surveys were chosen rather than focus groups for parents and educators to ensure access to as many as possible and time constraints. Eleven parents and three educators engaged with the first survey

prior to the research and fourteen parents and four educators at the end of the research. I checked in verbally with all the participants regularly over the six-month period of data collection to ensure they still wished to participate. No elements of the research gave rise to harm to any participant. Data collected was confidential (within the limitations of the law), anonymous and was stored safely in encrypted files and hard copies in a locked filing cabinet. The participants can access the information stored on them at any time, and a copy of the completed thesis will be available should they wish to read it. All information gathered will be stored for ten years before being deleted and/or shredded, in line with the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University and GDPR guidelines. If this thesis is disseminated or published to a wider audience in the future, all ethical considerations will continue to be adhered to.

3.6.1 Power

As the owner of the setting, I am the hierarchy, the leader and even though there are elements of distributive leadership, I hold overall power and make the executive decisions (Giroux, 1986). I can be the oppressor (Freire, 1972). All participants hold power, and I was conscious of this throughout the research. I was conscious of the power differentials in relationships such as age, stage of development, knowledge, education, experience, and culture. I was conscious and respectful of all participants' rights to have their needs met and voices heard.

3.6.2 Limitations

There are limitations with this research. It was with a small group of fifteen children, their parents/guardians and four educators, so it is contextual and subjective. It was conducted during a pandemic, Covid 19, which may have impacted on this group of children's holistic development prior to the research being conducted and in ensuing absentee rates in the preschool. One of the children who gave consent and assent to participate in the research has special educational needs and is non-verbal. Strategies needed to be considered to ensure this child's voice was heard. Being

the owner meant I was not always on the floor with the children and was dependent on the educators' participation to gather data.

3.6.3 Conflicts of interest

Being the owner/manager and the pedagogical leader meant that I was conflicted as it meant I was caught up in administrative tasks. I had a conflict of identity. The subjective nature of action research may also have compromised my decisions and actions taken. The ethical considerations of including a child with special educational needs in the research was a conflict given the topic of enhancing leadership skills in young children.

3.6 Conclusion

This SSAR is grounded in my values, my education, my experiences, my reflections, and the importance of developing positive relationships with all those in my life. SSAR is particularly suited to education and in this case young children as they interact and learn through play. It was an ideal paradigm to assess my personal and professional practice. AR can be done with others, but not on others (Glenn et al., 2017; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003).

In the next chapter, having completed the research, I will outline the findings and critically analyse using Brookfield's (2017) lenses of learning.

Chapter 4. Results and Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present, examine, and analyse the data findings from the research gathered on ‘How can I enhance young children's leadership skills?’ Using Brookfield’s critical lens theory (2017), I will also examine and explore my own leadership skills under the research findings.

4.1 Children as Leaders

Codes				
Inspiration	Communication	Empathy	Teamwork	Relationships
Directing	Negotiation	Self-belief	Inclusion	Friendships
Power	Problem solving	Theory of Mind	Helpfulness	
Moral development		Self esteem		
		Emotional regulation		
		Kindness		
		Caring		

Image 4.0 Codes identified from the research

4.1.1 Values

Reviewing the codes identified from the data collected from the children, I identified core values such as self-esteem and self-belief, empathy, caring, and kindness. Tye (2022) identifies these as foundation values, learned within the family and community experiences. Building on these, he

identifies action values such as those observed in the children, helpfulness, encouragement, inspiration, and communication.

Grouping the codes, I identified three themes which are founded in values. Power in relationships, emotional and social development, and communication.

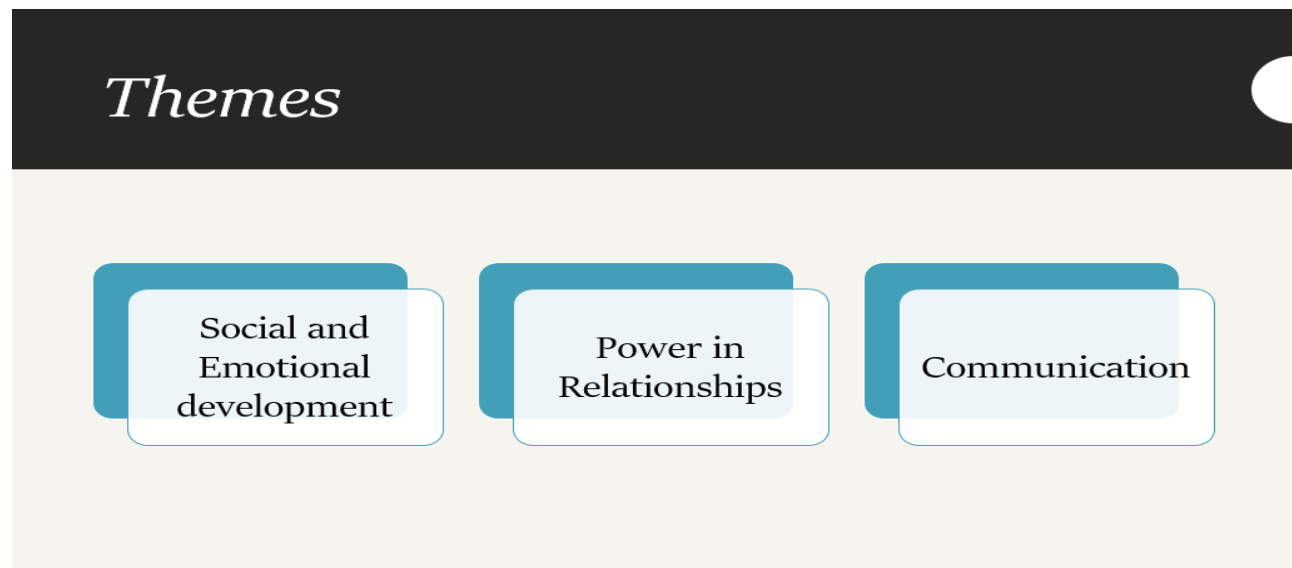


Image.4.1 Themes identified from the codes found in research.

Values are the foundations of leadership skills; they underpin how children learn, and parents/significant adults are the influencers. The family and community context of instilling values, skills and knowledge through experiences is consistent with theories from pioneers of early education such as Bronfenbrenner, Froebel, and Vygotsky (Bruce, 2020; Lawlor et al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2014; Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).

Cycles 1 and 3 were focused on the children. In cycle 1, the persona dolls, books, new roles and responsibilities and the social context of small and large group free play used in this research ensured the children had lots of opportunities to practice the foundation and action values (Tye,

2022) while the leadership elf promoted the self-esteem and self-belief element when he caught positive values, for example: -

Kindness -

“Charlie, you were so thoughtful to fetch the milk for the lamb’s bottle when she had drank it all. Farmer S and Farmer M thanked you for being so kind” (Anecdotal observation, 29/4/2022).

Later, Farmer M sent a message to the parents’ group chat,

“The lamb had a bottle with it, special powder milk that we make up, and he finished it off and was following the empty bottle around and Charlie went to the fridge and got the milk carton out to share with the lamb, so lovely and so thoughtful of him” (Text message, 29/4/2022).

His mother responded to the text

“Aww brilliant, good boy Charlie, so proud of u...” (Text message, 29/4/2022).

Helpful -

Ivan is climbing into the pirate ship, one foot in the porthole. He is holding the rope and trying to pull himself up. Sive says, “hold on, I’ll help you.” She fetches a chair for him to stand on and pull himself up (Anecdotal observation, 27/4/2022).

Empathetic -

Charlie asks Laura “why are you crying”? He gently lays his hands on hers and asks, “are you ok now”? (Anecdotal observation, 15/3/2022).

Caring -

Brian is new to the setting, Ivan says “Brian, don’t forget to take out your lunchbox from your bag and post your name (Anecdotal observation, 17/2/2022)).

The children participating in the research have spent a lot of family time together due to Covid 19 lockdowns, two of their three years with one or both parents present constantly and little or no socialisation outside the family home. Family is important to the children, and they display this during their interactions with stories and the persona dolls, for example (Appendix, 11, 12). The children talk about leaders being helpful to mammy and daddy, baby sisters and a puppy.

I observed these positive values in the children, with only one example of a harmful trait over six months. This suggests that the parents of these children, their parenting skills, and styles, coping mechanisms and own dispositions during a pandemic all empowered and conveyed positive values to their children (Young et al., 2019; Séguin & McDonald, 2018; Doring et al., 2017; Hammer et al., 2017; Ulutas & Omeroglu, 2007). It could be argued that all family experiences are different, but the participants in this study share similar culture, backgrounds and socioeconomic status suggesting that these values are not just familial, but societal too (Yeu & Yang, 2021; Bruce, 2020; Halpern, 2020). Bruce’s (2020) ideas couple with Bronfenbrenner's theory and connect the development of children as a community of practice when the setting works together with all stakeholders and our role as educators is also supportive of the parents. The above example of Charlie and the lamb is consistent with this as is the following message sent to the parents at the end of the research.

I really appreciate your time and the permission to include your unidentifiable children in the research. My main finding is that leadership skills are founded in core values, so I

believe that this is instilled by you and your parenting, so keep up the good work. I believe that we can build on those in the playschool through play, experiences, peer, and adult support (Text to parents, 5/7/2022).

4.1.2 Power in Relationships

It could be argued that as early educators we focus and build on the positive, especially when the goal was to enhance leadership skills in young children so negative data examples of leadership were not captured. This was not the case. Looking deeper at the observations and vignettes, it did identify diverse types of leaders, and the use of power subtly and/or complex (Chen and Kacerek, 2021; Fu, 1977).

For example, Laura wants Eamonn and Liam to play doctors with her.

Eamonn says, “I don’t want to be a doctor, I want to be a dog.” Laura points at Liam, “You be the doctor,” he responds, “No, I’m a dog too” (Anecdotal observation, 26/1/2022).

Fu (1977) describes Laura’s dictating manner as “unsuccessful” leadership. Eamonn would appear to be the “successful” leader and Liam the “submissive” follower. Laura is not an unsuccessful leader, she has yet to develop the cognitive and socio-emotional skills associated with leadership such as negotiation, inspiration, and democracy, the core values are in place, she needs support with the action values (Tye, 2022). Continuing the use of the persona dolls, adult and peer support and role modelling will guide her leadership skills.

Laura, I observed you help (a child) put on her apron. That was very kind of you. You are going to be the best big sister to your new brother (Anecdotal observation, 21/3/2022).

We also see Eamonn as a “submissive” follower

Outside today, Eamonn hits a child in the eye because Ciaran told him too. An adult comforts the hurt child while another takes Ciaran and Eamonn aside. She asks Ciaran why he asked Eamonn to hit the child? Ciaran replied, ‘cos I didn’t want to do it myself’ (Anecdotal observation, 30/3/2022).

Fu (1977) identifies two types of leaders the “bully” and the “diplomat”. In this observation, Ciaran may be seen as a bully however, one must take into consideration other factors, such as what happened prior to the observation, what was going on his life at the time, and was this a typical emotional response for him? It is not straightforward (Chen, 2021). As the educator, I suspect it was an emotional response to changes in his home environment. Both his parents agreed with this and together we formulated a home – school approach to behavioural challenges to support him cope with those changes and his emotional regulation in a more positive, culturally appropriate manner (Bruce, 2020; Young et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018; Séguin & McDonald, 2018; Whalley, 2017).

In a different observation captured, there is role reversal and hierarchal conflict: -

Eamonn approaches and takes the axe from you (Ciaran). There is a little altercation, and you give him the saw. ‘I don’t want the saw,’ he says. You tell him, you need it to saw the trees I chop. ‘I’ll saw the branches,’ Eddie says. ‘Come on lads, let’s go,’ and you all go off together (Learning Story, 21/3/2022).

This identified Ciaran’s positive leadership skills of negotiation, communication, and problem-solving skills, his innovativeness, inspiring and persuasive techniques redirecting the game to involve Eamonn without aggression while getting his own way. A more positive “diplomatic” example of leadership. But when you consider this interaction with a Trawick – Smith lens of

leadership, you see that both children are leaders. They both think independently and chose to accept or not to follow each other (Trawick-Smith, 1988, 1992; Owen, 2007).

This is consistent with Soutter's (2018) theory of a leadership space. Where children step in and out of leadership as required. They are contributors and partners yet maintain their independence.

Katie and Mary are playing dogs. Katie is the dog and shapes the game by running away from her owner Mary who is chasing her. Followed by retrieving a toy and dropping it at Mary's feet, who picks it up shouting "fetch" (Vignette, 30/3/2022).

Both children are leaders, there is no dominant player. Katie shapes the game, and Mary follows, however she too has a role. They are respectful of each other's contribution to the game (Tranwick-Smith, 1998, 1992).

Power in relationships is intricate. It can be subtle and/or complex. Factors that may contribute to power influences may be the child's disposition at that time, their ability to emotionally regulate, the social context, players, communication skills, intellect, and the environment.

4.1.3 Social and Emotional development

Mud Area, Sarah and Mary were playing with a bowl in the muddy puddles. Sean takes it from Mary. Mary got upset. Sarah put her hand on Mary's arm, leaning into her and making eye contact, she said, "It's okay, you just have to say, stop I don't like it." Mary repeated Sarah's words and Sean handed her back the bowl (Anecdotal observation, 8/2/2022).

The next day from my office, I overheard Sean and Mary in the mud area and stood up to observe.

Sean took something on Mary, she puts her hands on his arm, looks up into his face and says, "I don't like it, Sean." He returns the item (Anecdotal observation, 9/2/2022).

Vygotsky believed that learning occurs through interactions and support from more competent and knowledgeable others (Cited in Lawlor et al., 2018; Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Piaget and Kohlberg research on moral development suggests that children of this age, three years, base their actions on their chances of detection and punishment (Carr, 2006). I suspect that this is correct, however I make the argument that the children did not know an adult was watching and listening, so the only reprisal in this example was positive and internally motivated.

Sarah's prosocial skills supported the development of morals and emotional regulation for both children, she empowered Mary's autonomy and challenged Sean to do the right thing. Froebel calls this inner motivation. They are motivated to do the right thing, they are supported and guided by Sarah's actions, communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills (Ciftci, 2021; Bruce, 2020; Lazarus, 1991). Emotions direct prosocial behaviour (Yue & Yang, 2021) but consideration needs to be given to the age and stage of development of the child. The child's cognitive and emotional skills need to be aligned for higher order thinking to function and support problem solving skills and self-control (Hedenbro & Rydelius, 2019; Zhang & Whitebread, 2019; Drigas & Karyotaki, 2019). This display of prosocial behaviour supports the development of friendships, the inter and intrapersonal skills needed to build relationships, and reflect the action values identified by Tye (2022).

While the research cycles may have enhanced Sarah's leadership skills of communication, theory of mind and problem-solving skills (Ciftci, 2021; Bee & Boyd, 2007), we must also consider what part, role gender, her disposition, where she is situated in the family and her family values play. Of these three children, Sarah appears to be emotionally regulated and have good emotional intelligence while Mary is following swiftly as their friendship develops and she learns from her more knowledgeable peer in relation to her emotions (Conte et al., 2019; Arnott, 2018). Sean is

beginning the journey and the persona dolls and leadership elf have supported him to do the right thing in both these instances. He was listening to the girls' words, and I suggest internalised the morality to make the right decision He was self-disciplining, the precursor to theory of mind (Bruce, 2020; Carr, 2006).

Being emotionally regulated if supported and continuously developed will support them through life, but this too is established from birth. Children learn to read, reflect, and understand emotions from birth (Conte et al., 2019; Sette et al., 2015). I suggest mask wearing during the pandemic in preschools may have a detrimental impact on the development of young children's ability to learn how to read and re-enact emotions and their communication skills. This requires future research (Farrer Mackie et al., 2022). In this setting we chose not to wear masks for those exact reasons. The use of the persona dolls and the leadership elf would assist all settings especially where mask wearing is mandatory to develop emotional intelligence and prosocial skills in young children (Lazaridou, 2020; Drigas and Papoutsi, 2018; Hayes et al., 2017; Petrides, 2013; Goleman, 1998). Parents' responses and reactions to the child's temperament, their parenting styles, parents' education, and the child's gender all play a role in the development of emotional regulation (Young et al., 2019; Conte et al., 2019; Séguin and McDonald., 2018; Peachey et al., 2017; Hammer et al., 2017; Ulutas and Omeroglu, 2007). I suggest that the child's position in the family may play a role, as parenting style and responses may differ from their first born to subsequent children (Freeman, 2019), however this requires further research.

I think naturally Rian likes being a leader, he is the youngest of three so likes to be heard!
And likes being "the boss" with children his own age, as he usually has to follow his older brothers at home. (Parent, Final Survey, July 2022).

4.1.4 Communication

Throughout the data examples, we can see the importance of the children's verbal abilities in enhancing their leadership skills. Cognitive and language development are connected to the development of emotional and social skills as children are more able to verbalise their feelings and actions (Bruce, 2020; Conte et al., 2019; Soutter, 2018). Communication is a key factor in leadership for adults and children. It is transactional, between people and reciprocal (Jankurová et al., 2016; Hensel, 1991) and is a key leadership skill. In the following transcript extraction (Appendix, 9) from Kathleen's (persona doll) visit, we see some of the children's thought processes, their empathy and theory of mind through their communication with her.

Charlie – 'Educator, is this your best friend'?

PL – 'This is my best friend Kathleen, Charlie, yeah. They are all my friends up there, but those friends won't play with Kathleen, they won't share, and they won't take turns and they won't play with her.'

Charlie - 'They will.'

PL – 'They will? She says they're not and that is making her sad. What do you think she should do? Has anybody any ideas what should Kathleen do'?

Leah – 'Play together'

PL – 'Play together Leah, yes, what else might she do'?

Laura – 'Some of her friends should share her toys with her'

PL – 'You think some of her friends should share their toys with her. Would that make you happy Kathleen? It would'?' (Transcripts, 26/1/2021).

It is worth noting that this example was at the beginning of the research, so the core values the children display of caring, and kindness are already present. When parents were asked

How do you think your own personal and family values along with your parenting style have contributed to your child's leadership skills? (Parents Final Survey, July 2022).

One parent replied:

We like our child to have his own opinions and we encourage his assertiveness, but we also want him to listen to others and be respectful to his elders and peers. (Parent, Final Survey, July 2022).

Parents are paramount to the development of communication skills in young children which include cognitive and emotional communication (Chen & Kacerek, 2021; Ciftci et al., 2021; Conte et al., 2019; Bee & Boyd, 2007). Therefore, as educators it is important that we develop a communicative professional relationship with them and build on their positive home values to cultivate and enhance those values (Bruce, 2020; Soutter, 2018). A relational values-based pedagogical approach is the foundation for enhancing positive leadership skills.

In the following extract, we hear the children's idea of leadership as being helpful and doing jobs (Appendix, 11, 12)

Ciaran – 'I'm a leader.'

PL – 'Eamonn, what did you do today that made you a leader'?

Eamonn – 'Mm, I was helping Ciaran carrying the blocks.'

PL – 'you were helping Ciaran carry the blocks. Working as a team, that's a good leader skill. Sean, what do you think Jenny saw you doing that made you a leader'?

Sean – ‘Helping Ciaran and Eddie.’

PL – ‘Helping Ciaran and Eddie, did the three of you work, carry the blocks as a team. You did’!

Ciaran – ‘and (.....)’

PL – ‘Four of you, oh my goodness that is so wonderful, well done, well done. Ciaran what made you a leader today’?

Ciaran – ‘helping Eamonn and carrying something different.’

PL – ‘Oh, not just the blocks, what did you carry differently’?

Ciaran – ‘I don’t know.’

PL – ‘Katie, what about you, how are you a leader today? Did you do anything brave today? Did you do anything helpful today? Are you shy?’

Katie - ‘no.’

PL – ‘do you want Jenny to tell you what you did today that made you a leader’?

Jenny (doll) - ‘She said she saw you come over and give Educator a hug for no reason’

PL – ‘that was really nice, Charlie, what made you a leader today’?

Charlie – ‘pickin up the lunches’

Educator – ‘and he helped me outside tidy away the cars.’

PL – ‘picking up the lunches and helping (educator). Well done, good job, that makes you a leader. Harry, were you a leader today? What did you do?’

Harry – makes ‘humming noises’

Jenny (doll) - ‘I think you were very brave going into the sensory room in the dark.’

PL – ‘yeahhh, who’s next? Sarah, what did you do that makes you a leader today?’

Sarah – ‘I helped (.....) paint and make her picture beautiful.’

PL – ‘you helped make her picture beautiful and’

Jenny (doll) - ‘said she saw you do the jigsaw with (.....) for tidying up time.’

PL - Did you help (.....) do the jigsaw that fell? Yeah, you did, thank you very much.

Who’s next, Rian, are you a leader? You are? And what did you do that made you a leader today?’

Rian – ‘the car box.’

PL - ‘The car box and what else, I didn’t hear you, Jenny didn’t hear you’?

Rian – ‘the train box and the car box.’

PL - ‘the train box and the car box, and were you able to carry them together? Wow, well it sounds like to me that everyone here is a leader.’

Rian – ‘even Harry’?

PL – ‘even Harry. Harry and (.....) were very brave today.’

Rian questions if Harry is a leader. Inclusion and equity are important to me as the PL, so does this mean that non-verbal children with disabilities or disorders such as intellectual disability, speech, and language delay and/or on the autism spectrum disorder (Conte et al., 2019) cannot be

leaders? It is interesting to highlight that the children notice differences and one of the main goals of persona dolls is to support children respect difference (Early Years, n.d.).

Harry drew too but didn't stay focused, he is non-verbal, and I am struggling to find/think about how to include him. As I plan on only a few focus groups with them, and it will be observation/anecdotal recordings, he will still be able to participate, however I wonder how much he actually understands and if his consent is legitimate/invasive/against his rights (Reflective diary, 19/1/2022).

He was included and engaged particularly with the persona dolls through his facial and body expressions, however in the data collected, it is not obvious as it could not be captured without the use of video. Throughout the research, Harry is the receiver of the prosocial behaviours of others. At the outset, I recognised that this may be a limitation for him as a participant in the research.

I must be cognisant of this child, his verbal sounds and body language and that of all the children. I will need the support of the team so I must ensure they are consulted with, and their ideas taken on board and integrated into ideas. (Reflective diary, 20/1/2022).

As the data was gathered using anecdotal observations, learning stories and vignettes based on the children's interactions during play and this child is supported by an adult to support his social and communication skills it was difficult to ensure he was fully included and any leadership skills he initiated or displayed may have been very subtle and missed by the researcher. Research on the topic of children with special needs as leaders is worth investigating further.

Communication is a key requirement skill in adult and child leadership. It involves so much more than verbal communication (Bee & Boyd, 2007; Sandrock, 2007). This research failed to

gather data that displayed anything other than verbal, which is a disappointing finding. The use of video would have captured so much more communication skills such as pauses, body language, facial expression, eye contact etcetera.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The findings in relation to the children show that the interventions were supportive of enhancing positive leadership skills in the children. At the beginning of the research, they were unable to identify what a leader or leadership was but at the end, they could identify themselves as leaders and name some leadership skills.

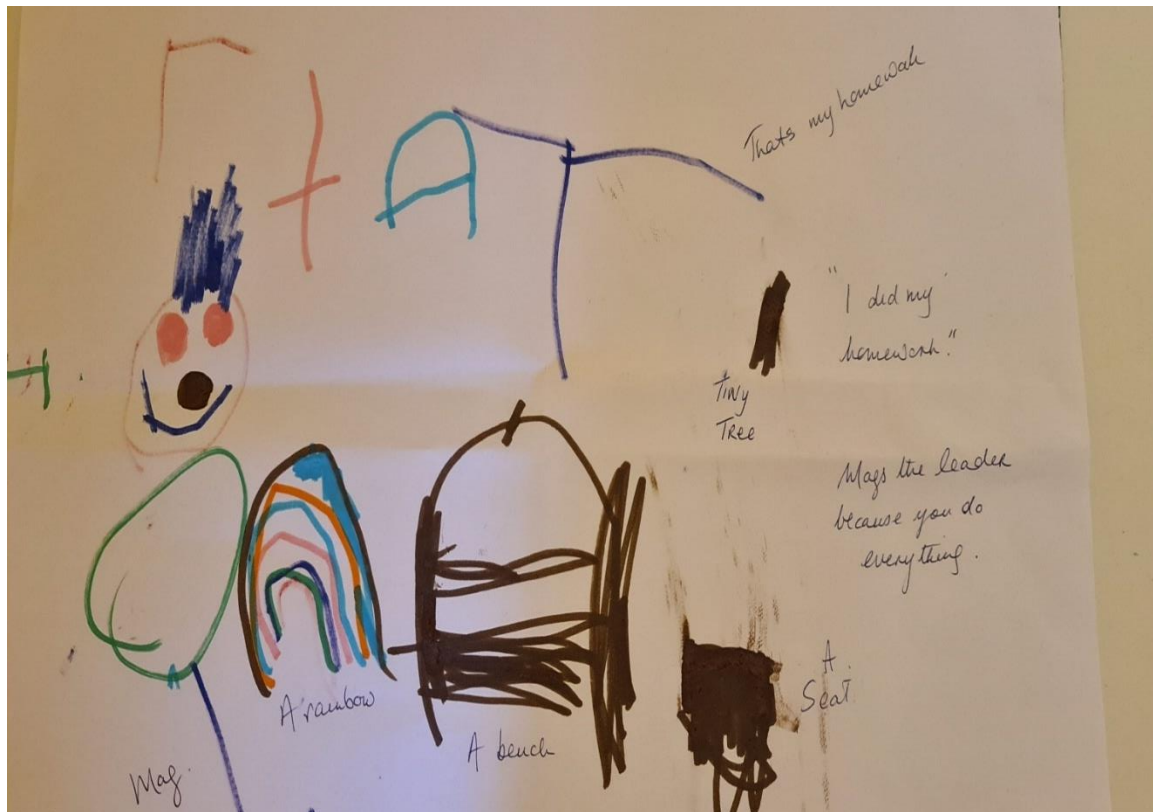


Image. 4.2 Child participant's picture of a leader at the final focus group meeting.

The main work was done by the parents as they instilled positive values in their children prior to preschool attendance. The relational values-based pedagogy of the setting, and this research ensured the research goal was successful.

One challenge identified included the ability to capture the children's non-verbal language during cycle 1 and 3, this was particularly important for inclusion of the child with special educational needs.

In the next section I will use the same themes identified by the research with children to reflect on myself as a Leader.

4.2 The Leader in Me

4.2.1 Introduction

In this section I will critically reflect and analyse my own pedagogical leadership. I will use the same themes found as enhancing positive leadership skills in young children. I will explore my values, power, communication, and socio emotional skills. I will give examples from my reflections from my critical diary, with my validation group and critical friends. I will link my findings to theory, thereby I am using Brookfield's (2017) four lenses for professional learning.

4.2.2 Values

My own value system was at times challenged during the research process. I found that while I lived my values by being caring and respectful to the children and parents, that was not always the case with my staff team

I interrupted a team member who thanked Ivan for bringing out another child's coat, she then asked him, why?.....Reflecting on this interaction, mine and team member, I

felt I was not showing good leadership as I questioned her in front of the rest of the team and children rather than having the discussion later (Reflective diary, 4/2/2022).

This interaction was not respectful. I corrected her in front of her colleagues, and it could have been detrimental to our harmonious working relationship. This jumping in and acting in the moment (communication) rather than taking time to process and act/respond in a more positive manner is a trait that appears often in my reflective diary and is an area highlighted for me that I must work on (Schon, 2016).

Having reflected further on this interaction,

I apologised to her for questioning her in front of the team and children. I apologised in front of the team, and we had a collaborative discussion on our roles as showing good example. I explained my thinking, that he could have left the coat on the floor or rehung it, instead he was being helpful and while that was acknowledged questioning him further might mean he thinks there has to be a reason for being helpful rather than using his initiative. I talked about the difference in raising his self-esteem by thanking him but then lowering it by questioning him. (Reflective diary, 7/2/2022).

Was I trying to explain and convince (Jankurová et al., 2016)? I also chatted with my critical friend

We talked about a pattern that I feel is emerging, that is acting in the moment rather than thinking/reflecting a bit more. This is important to consider, and her valuable advice is to consider if others perceive this to be so. I asked her if she thought I was being too hard on myself and she said if I'm honest and it hurt's then I must reflect on that, why I feel like that and is it something that needs to change (Reflective diary, 18/2/2022).

I was reflexive and displayed good leadership by returning to the team member and apologising to her in front of the team. By explaining my reasons, I hoped it would support her and all the team to consider themselves as promoters and builders of positive values in the children. It also shows that I can be empathetic and caring as I knew I had hurt her feelings. It shows my integrity that I am not too proud to apologise. However, the way I communicate is an area that I need to reflect and develop further so I do not create tension and an environment that has conflicting views which in turn affects the culture of our classroom and relations (Ho & Ng, 2017; Coleman et al., 2016; Torrance, 2013).

This also links and leads into power and power in relations, one of the findings from the research which is discussed below.

4.2.3 Power in Relationships

Power in relationships is similar for children and adults in their roles. I was troubled meta reflecting when my reflective diary uncovered my biases, assumptions, prejudices and hegemony and the possibility that I was required to articulate them (Brookfield, 2017; Noddings, 2013). After speaking with my validation group (11/4/2022),

I feel more enthused and eager now to move forward with the research and making connections. I feel like I'm swimming again and that I don't necessarily have to focus on the negative aspects, but they are important and will leave me feeling vulnerable. This could be the reason I have taken so long to return to it. I am emotionally questioning my own values and leadership. (Reflective diary, 12/4/2022).

As the owner/manager and lead educator of this playschool, seventy five percent of the team have worked with me for over ten years. We have an excellent working relationship and I believed distributive leadership in the setting. I had never reflected on the power I had in the setting until

this project began. Throughout my reflective diary there are instances and examples of my power in relations and how I dealt with situations that arose, some like the situation above (values) and others such as my response to a text message from a student who had been absent since October when I had initiated the contact.

I was cross that she thought that she could just turn up today after having made no effort at all to inform us of what was happening. I responded to her text, hoping she didn't get covid, we would be glad to see her, but thought she had dropped out. (Reflective diary, 10/1/2022).

“The pen can be mightier than the sword” (Bulwer-Lytton, 1839).

A passive aggressive, subtle text displaying my power over a student, is not conducive to keeping the lines of communication open which is so important in leadership and as a role model. Leadership evokes emotion, it is how you respond shows the true nature of your leadership skills. I am an emotive and passionate person in relation to my work and this can be construed as power. Power can be interpretive, subjective, and intersubjective (Kemmis, 2012).

I have a real tension between power, leadership, and empowerment. I am a recognised leader in the field of early education, however with the best of intentions sometimes my power while subtle is dominant. It is not possible for me to be the owner/manager and lead educator, there is a conflict of interests and roles (Sampson, 2021; Fonsén & Soukainen, 2019; Zembylas, 2018; Albin-Clarke et al., 2018; Rodd, 2013). I have a loss of identity, a loss of power (Albin-Clarke et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2016). I cannot be with the children when exosystemic pressure dictates the logistics of operating an early year setting. I cannot lead a team by example nor be lead educator if I am not full time on the floor. There is not distributive leadership style, because I am the

“hierarchy,” the one with the power, the employer. I am unwilling to relinquish full power and trust my team to make “right” decisions as experienced and knowledgeable pedagogical leaders (Ho & Ng, 2017; Jankurová et al., 2016; Torrance, 2013). What are “right” decisions and who decides? There can be no leadership without trust (Alward & Phelps, 2019). That is one of the reasons I initiated cycle 2 of the research. I did not feel that the team were supportive of me in my research and in gathering data as co-researchers. However, I also reflected, had I been supportive and clear on the topic of leadership to them? I discovered that I had not, therefore how could I expect them to support me? I had an expectation and assumption! That made me feel vulnerable but also made me consider how arrogant I was to assume that they did not need any guidance (Whitaker, 2021).

The workshop uncovered hegemony and its influence on lives. During the exploration of selves as leaders, two of the team identified they did not want to be leaders (Ho and Ng, 2017; Torrance, 2013).

It became clear through the discussion that they did not feel confident or educated enough and felt they were and would be judged (as I had judged in example under values heading). They named incidents throughout their childhood experiences from home and school as being the root cause (Workshop notes, 27/4/2022).

I needed to use my power to lead in a positive manner, tread carefully and inspire, motivate, and empower them to see their own leadership skills and to help them identify and enhance those skills in the children.

I thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and took a lot of new learning away from it. It gave me a new outlook on what being a leader means and made me stop and think about how I

can be a leader as well as promoting this in young children. (Educator, Final Research Survey, July 2022).

Like the children, I too can step in and out of leadership space (Soutter, 2018). I too, can contribute and be a partner yet maintain my independence which when garnered with that of the team can be socially constructive, transformative, and relational. This would indicate there are elements of distributive leadership in the preschool (Heikka et al., 2021; Lazaridou, 2020; Nuttall & Thomas, 2018; Rodd, 2013).

With power in relations, we see my ontological, epistemological values and leadership style being challenged internally and externally through the reflective process. An example of this is the consent given by Harry's parent to be included in the research. I wrote,

It strikes me about power relations, and I wonder did his dad feel he had to give consent for the research (Reflective diary, 20/1/2022).

Harry was included, he had equal opportunities to participate, however it was tokenistic, and I wondered about ethics especially when I could not capture his voice. Therefore, is my value of equity a living contradiction?

I am a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 2010:93). I do not always live by my values. I am struggling with my identity. Power in relationships is web like with many tendrils to ponder. It is extraordinarily complex. When I consider power through a Freire lens using my reflections, I see myself as the oppressor and the oppressed (1972). Oppressor, as I am the one with the control, and depending on the situation, how I control my emotions depends on the response physically or communicatively which may be oppressing, demeaning and disrespectful to my team, parents, students, and children (Zembylas, 2018; Brookfield, 2017; Jankurová et al., 2017; Freire, 1972). I

am the oppressed, because my ability to be on the floor and leading the team and children is gone due to external pressures and ethico-political influences (Zembylas, 2018; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Buchanan, 2015). The office is not where I want to be. I am the “accidental leader” (Coleman et al., 2017), however, there must be a leader who has the vision to inspire, motivate and lead the stakeholders even, I suggest even, in a distributive style of leadership (Gurr et al., 2021; Halpern et al., 2020). I propose that leadership space (Soutter, 2018) is a dance between being oppressor and oppressed and that everybody can be a leader (Covey et al., 2014), we just need to reflect, be honest, open-minded, become self-aware and use the reflections to discover, and be reflexive to find and improve our true selves (Kemmis, 2012; Palmer, 1997).

4.2.4 Social and Emotional Development

I am a highly emotive person and quite tuned into my emotions; however, I tend to internalise my negative emotions of anger, vulnerability, and hurt. I also use negative self-talk about my abilities, hence the belief that I was an imposter on winning the national educator award (Reflective diary, 31/1/2022).

This stems from my childhood. Not learning the skills of naming feelings and socially appropriate ways to externalise them. Not being emotionally supported at an early age has carried into adulthood (Conte et al., 2019; Noddings, 2013). The reflective journal gave me the space to examine these emotions in a safe, private, and secure place.

Her reply left me feeling angry and frustrated (Reflective diary, 16/2/2022).

This example in relation to a parent and her child’s lack of engagement and therapeutic supports from the Health Service Executive (HSE) for children with special educational needs. Writing feelings down in relation to examples was an opportunity to release, externalise and explore them at a deeper level. It gave meaning, clarification and supported me to make decisions and act in a

socially appropriate way. It changed the way I think, thereby, respond (Kelchtermans, 2009; Rogers, 2002; Greene, 2000; Woditsch & Schmittroth, 1991). As a leader and to enhance leadership, it is important to be emotionally regulated, emotionally in tune, to be able to empathise, to connect, support and develop a positive sustainable relational pedagogy (Oki, 2019; O Connor et al., 2018; Reeves & LeMare, 2017; Noddings, 2013; NCCA, 2009; CECDE, 2006).

The values I hold of care, respect, communication, empathy, integrity, and equity are important in relational pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2010; Giroux, 1986). They are all care values (Noddings, 2013) and care ethics (Zembylas, 2018). I am passionate about relationships; they are at the heart of my being and are at the heart of everything I do. They are interdependent, entwining, and dynamic. Where I do not live this value, is usually in an emotional response but I am quick to reflect, because of how I feel and how the other feels. I am quick to apologise for my behaviour. It is ok to make mistakes once we recognise and take the learning from it (Ferguson, 2015; Freire, 1972). I must remember to be kind to myself but recognise there are areas to be developed (Chen, 2021; Zembylas, 2018; Rodgers, 2002). Emotional intelligence and prosocial behaviours are skills that I have developed and matured over my lifespan, and they will continue to evolve and develop. Huxtable and Whitehead (2021) might refer to this as a living educational theory.

4.2.5 Communication

Reflecting on my own communication skills through a leadership lens, my epistemological, ontological, and educational values are the creator of the relational values – based pedagogy in our setting. My ability to verbally communicate my vision for the service with all stakeholders has ensured consistency in the staff team, a recognised quality and successful preschool, with a culture of consultation and collaboration. It has ensured a child-led, play-based curriculum with parental participation as the norm. The data from my reflective diary informs me communication

is a skill that I need to continue to hone, particularly in relation to taking the time to reflect before I articulate so that it is cognisant of the recipient, that it is respectful and builds rather than harms relationships.

I felt so bad that I had hijacked her..... I really need to learn to stop and think before acting and then to be prepared (Reflective diary, 28/1/2022).

In relation to my use of the persona dolls, and reflections on the transcripts I recognise that I talk too much because I try to include all children. Reflecting on these experiences I was not prepared for the discussions or where they might take me. My use of the persona dolls was quite didactic and while I was trying to be inclusive and ensure every voice was heard, I may have made some children uncomfortable.

I am not infallible. I am a lifelong learner. I am a leader who tries to do the right thing, but I am impulsive which can be both beneficial and detrimental to my leadership depending on the circumstances. There are times where after reflection and where I have been true to myself, I need to show myself compassion to support my own well-being. I cannot teach or support the well-being of the children, parents, and teams if I cannot look after my own (Chen, 2021; Palmer, 1997).

4.2.6 Conclusion

Prior to this research project, I was living my ontological, epistemological, and educational values in my work with young children, their families, and a staff team through my leadership. Or so I thought! Subsequently, I find, I am a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 2014) and do not always live by them. This SSAR has been a learning curve, it has highlighted that I am a good leader, my values lead my personal and professional practice. However, I must be cognisant of them and continuously work on living them to be a just and democratic leader.

In the closing chapter I will draw conclusions on “How can I enhance leadership skills in young children?” I will make recommendations for future practice and for further research.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will draw together the information gathered in the thesis from a twofold perspective, leadership skills in young children and my personal leadership skills. I will draw final conclusions in relation to the research on “How can I promote positive leadership skills in young children?” I will make recommendations and suggestions for further research and future practice.

5.1 Leadership skills in young children

The overarching question for this thesis was “*How can I promote positive leadership skills in young children?*” Underpinning that were the questions “*What makes a good leader? Are you born to lead? Is it your personality? Is it the skills you have accumulated? Is it your culture? Is it your education? Is leadership in young children the same as leadership in adults? Are the same dispositions required? What are the benefits of promoting leadership skills in preschool children?*”

This research found that positive leadership skills in young children are founded and underpinned by personal value systems. Therefore, leadership is dependent on many factors. Parents as primary educators support the holistic development of the whole child including their value systems. Parents own dispositions, their parenting styles, culture, and education all play a role (Bruce, 2020; Young et al, 2019; Séguin & Mc Donald, 2018). The impact of parenting is related to the disposition of the child and the communicated emotional responses in whole child development (Conte et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018; Sette et al., 2015). The young child comes to preschool with learned values in place be they positive or negative.

This research found that it is the educators’ role and responsibility to support and develop a relational pedagogy with all stakeholders to build and respond positively to individuals' values, with a values-based educational approach (Halpern, 2020). This was achieved by educators having

courteous professional working relationships and a shared vision for the setting (Covey et al., 2014). It was important that the children observed good role modelling, communication skills and caring individuals to support the development of positive values, thereby promoting leadership skills (Oki, 2019; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017).

Cycle 2 of the research, a professional development workshop, was consistent with further developing an understanding of the vision of the research for the educators. It successfully ensured that the educators saw themselves as pedagogical leaders. The educators gained knowledge about leadership in adults and young children, and this helped clarify their role in supporting and capturing data for the research (Oke, 2019; Fonsén & Soukainen, 2019; Schon, 2016; Rodd, 2000).

The findings deduce that promoting positive leadership skills in young children using persona dolls, books, roles, and responsibilities (Cycle 1) are a good method to use in a preschool setting. The persona dolls provided a tool to explore elements of leadership such as values in a safe environment. Using them as an inside researcher meant that we could focus on topics that were central to the research and observed behaviours in play. They supported the children philosophise and learn positive values, responses, and leadership skills (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2022; Carter & Nutbrown, 2015). The children became educators. The use of the Penn Literacy Networks BDA approach supported the exploration of leadership in books throughout the research. Philosophising with the children about what they might do in similar situations built on the work with the persona dolls as books were read daily. While Cycle 3, the leadership elf was an excellent method to ensure the children got affirming feedback on their leadership skills which also supported their prosocial development.

Over the six months of the research, the evidence showed that the methods used, and the data collection tools used enhanced leadership skills through self-directed play, however the inclusion

of video recording would have ensured all voices were heard. Most of the children became more in tune with their emotions and better communicators which enhanced their problem solving and negotiation skills (Chen, 2021; Chen & Kacerek, 2021; Leadbeater et al., 2021; Hensel, 1991). These are skills, when consistently supported and developed, will benefit the child through life (Young et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018; Séguin & Mc Donald, 2018).

A relational values-based pedagogy between all stakeholders consisting of a shared vision and values appears to be key to developing positive leadership skills in young children.

5.2 Personal Leadership Skills

Throughout this self-study action research I experienced much personal and professional growth in exploring myself as a pedagogical leader and as an educator. Kolb's reflective cycle (1984) and Brookfield's critical lens theory (2017) supported my reflections in and on practice (Schon, 2016).

When I looked at myself through the same themes that emerged from the research with children I did not always like what I discovered, which ensured the research became a transformative journey (Biesta & Miedema, 2002). Keeping a reflective diary, consultation, and discussion with my team of educators, thesis supervisor, critical friends and validation groups challenged and supported my thoughts and actions in investigating my own practice. It highlighted that while I am a successful leader, I am a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2014) as I was not always living my values of care, respect, integrity, inclusiveness, and empathy. Becoming more conscious of these ontological, epistemological, and educational values, ensured that positive reflexive action took place to counteract any negations, thereby growing myself and my practice (Kemmis, 2022).

5.3 Recommendations for future practice

I plan to continue this action research with the children as they move into their second year of preschool to enhance and empower their leadership skills. However, there are elements in respect of myself as a pedagogical leader I need to develop.

I will be more prepared when using the persona dolls, ensuring an objective is targeted and have leading questions which would guide the children to the required outcome.

I will be less didactic, and actively listen to all the children's voices and ensure it is the persona doll's voice not mine that is being heard. I would not question the children constantly on "leader/leadership" in any intervention rather label it when I see a behaviour or value that represents it.

I will ensure that parents are more involved and have a knowledge of the vision, the topics and how it will be achieved using a more collaborative approach.

I will ensure that each child's learning journal is kept up to date with anecdotal observations displaying leadership skills.

I would use video as a tool to collect data ensuring all non-verbal communication is captured and all children can participate fully.

On improving my practices, I would like to draft a research paper for dissemination to the sector.

In relation to the educators, I will step back as the pedagogical leader and take on a more administrative role, handing over my "power" to the educators to support the realisation that they are all pedagogical leaders. By stepping back, I hope that a more realistic distributive leadership style becomes the norm in the setting.

In collaboration and consultation with them I will ask them to reflect on their own professional development and areas they wish to learn more about and develop. I will source and/or deliver cpd training to support them.

This research highlighted for me that I had a crisis of role identity (Fonsen & Soukainen, 2019; Albin- Clarke et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2018; Rodd, 2000). Making the above changes to my practice, releasing my power to the educators, and giving myself a title and role should give me a more grounded identity and a better sense of self going forward.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

There is no evidence from this research that the child's position in the family or their gender plays a role in leadership skills. However, a longitudinal study following the child from preschool to adulthood may draw different conclusions.

As we are at the endemic stage of Covid 19, a longitudinal research project on its impact on babies and young childrens' development and well-being would be helpful to ensure mask wearing has not had a detrimental effect.

5.5 Recommendations for the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Fully paid, continuous professional development days should be integrated into the practices of the early years sector like primary schools.

Leadership in early years education should be included in universities to ensure graduates have knowledge and confidence in their own skills as pedagogical leaders. This should include the skills required for the administration of the different programmes in the sector.

5.6 Summary

In conclusion, leadership in young children and in adults is complex and dependent on a multitude of factors. It is founded and underpinned by learned values systems. It is a classic example of the nature v nurture debate. The leadership skills observed in adults can also be observed in young children (Jankurová et al., 2016). A relational, values-based pedagogy enhances and develops values and promotes positive leadership skills in young children which can further impact on their life. This is consistent with Covey et al. (2014) three themes of a whole school approach; a whole person approach; and a whole lot of imagination approach for developing The Leader in Me. It also answers the question “How can I enhance positive leadership skills in young children”?

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Appendices



Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and
Early Childhood Education

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of this programme, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on Leadership in Young Children and supporting and developing these skills.

To do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom, by developing strategies through play experiences which will support and develop leadership skills.

Data will be collected using observation, listening, journals, questioning, my personal journal and interviews with the children, the staff and yourselves. The children will be asked their opinions through questioning, focus groups, observation and listening.

No child or parent will be identified, and the name of the preschool will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. You and your child may withdraw from the research process at any stage, however once data is anonymised, withdrawal may not be possible.

All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated time frame in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission to take part in this project. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at margaret.coogan.2022@mumail.ie or my thesis supervisor patsy.stafford@mu.ie

Yours faithfully,



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Parental/Guardian and Child Consent Form

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of myself and my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Name of Child _____



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Information Letter for the child

Dear

I am trying to find out how children become leaders in preschool. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch and listen to you when you are playing, ask you questions and to write some notes.

Would you be ok with that? Circle one. Yes No

I have asked your Mum/Dad/Special Person to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that, can you sign or draw a picture of you in playschool on the form which I sent home?

If you change your mind after we start, that is ok too.

Kind regards,



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Child's Assent to Participate

My parent/guardian has read the information sheet with me, and I agree to take part in this research.

Name of child (in block capitals)

Date _____



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Adult Participants Consent Form

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Signature _____

Date _____



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Information Sheet

This information sheet is for parents/guardians and adults participating in Action Research.

What is the Action Research Project about?

Educators undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining, and analysing an area of their own practice. Data will be generated using observation, listening, journals, questioning, my personal journal, staff team journals and interviews with the children, parents, and staff team.

What are the Research Questions?

What is leadership? What are leadership skills and why are they important?

How does leadership in young children present? What can I do to empower leadership skills in young children? Are leadership skills in the adult necessary to support the development of the skills in young children?

What sort of methods will be used?

Qualitative data will be collected and analysed through observations, children's work, personal journals, parents'/guardians' notes/records, focus groups and interviews with children, parents'/guardians', and the team to identify patterns and hopefully draw up a living theory.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by myself as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, MU (Maynooth University). The thesis

will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education programme and will be destroyed in accordance with the University guidelines.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at margaret.coogan.2022@mumail.ie or my supervisor patsy.stafford@mu.ie

Focus Group 1. Laura, Ciaran, Kate, Sarah, Harry

Me – ‘Do you know what is a leader?’ ‘What’s a leader?’

Laura - ‘A bug’

Me – ‘A what? A bug? A bug leader, ok.’

Ciaran – ‘No, a boy, he is’

Me – ‘A boy, a leader is a boy?’

Ciaran – ‘Yeah, look at mine’ (showing me his consent picture)

Me – ‘Can a girl be a leader?’

Ciaran – ‘No’

Me – ‘Why?’

Ciaran – ‘Because just, do you like my drawing’

Me – Acknowledges his picture with a nod. ‘So, Ciaran, you said girls can’t be leaders, why?’

Ciaran – ‘because I said so.’

Me – ‘hu?’

Ciaran – ‘because I said so’

Me – ‘Because you said so. Kate, do you think girls can be leaders?’

Kate nods her head, - ‘yeah.’

Me – ‘You do. What is a leader?’

Kate – ‘they lead.’

Me – ‘they lead? Are they good people or bad people?’

Kate – ‘good.’

Me – ‘They’re good people? Laura, what do you think, are they good people?’

Laura – ‘good.’

Me – ‘Sarah, what do you think’?

Sarah – ‘bad’

Me – ‘you think leaders can be bad people. You are right; I think we can have good leaders and bad leaders Ciaran.’

Ciaran – ‘No’

Me – ‘aha. Why, what do you think would be a bad leader’?

Ciaran – ‘eh’

Me – ‘what would they do’?

Ciaran – ‘he’d wear a mask’

Me – ‘he’d wear a mask’?

Laura – ‘he'd he'd grab stuff off ya’

Me - ‘he'd grab stuff off people, you're right Laura, he does grab stuff off people. Right, what else would a bad leader do’?

Sarah – ‘He'd throw the house down’

Me - ‘He'd throw the house down, how would he do that’?

Sarah – ‘with his big muscles’ (jumping off the chair and flexing her arms to show me her muscles).

Me – ‘with his big muscles, so a bad leader has big muscles, has he? Oookkk. Kate, what do you think a bad leader is’?’

Ciaran – ‘Look how strong I am’

Me – ‘wow, I think you could be a leader. Do you, do you think, what would a bad leader do Kate’?

Ciaran – ‘can I go now’?

Me – ‘Just, yes if you want. What about a good leader? What would a good leader do’?

Kate – ‘Good stuff’

Me – ‘do good stuff? Like what? What would a good leader do’?

Kate – ‘em play some lego’

Me – ‘play some lego, yeah’

Kate – ‘with me’

Me – ‘with you, so they’d share lego’?

Kate – ‘yeah’

Me – ‘Cool,’

Kate - ‘look at so much colourin’ (showing where the marker has gone through the page onto the table)

Me – ‘ohhhh, look at the table, whoops, what about you Sarah, what would be a good leader do’?

Sarah – ‘They’d share toys’

Me – ‘They’d share toys, they sure would, what else would they do? Yeah, that’s ok’ (remarking on the table).

Sarah- ‘They’d share their house,’

Me - ‘They’d share their house, they would. What do you think Kate’?

Kate - ‘shared.’

Me – ‘huh’?

Kate – ‘shared toys’

Me - ‘So they’d share, they would. Harry, what do you think? What would a good leader do?’

Ciaran, what would a good leader do? What would a good leader do? I can’t hear you.’

Ciaran – ‘he would march’ (making marching movements)

Me – ‘he would march, like that, ooookk. Right! Thanks C.’

Transcript 2

Focus Group 2

19/1/2022

Focus Group 2.

Liam, Eamonn, and Ivan.

Liam – ‘I’m using green’

Me – ‘you’re using green.’

Eamonn – ‘I’m using blue’

Me – ‘ok, so what does, does anyone know what a leader is?’

Eamonn – ‘No’

Me – ‘No’?

Me – ‘no. Did you ever hear the song, we’re following the leader, the leader, the leader (singing) did you ever hear that song?’

Eamonn – ‘no’

Somebody says something, (I didn’t catch it).

Me – ‘you like markers. Mm, so a leader is a person who can be a good person or a bad person and they’

Liam – ‘a bad person’

Me – ‘a bad person, what do you think a bad person would do to be a leader?’

Liam – ‘it is a leader’

Me – ‘what would he do’?

Eamonn – ‘I don’t know’

Liam – ‘scare things’

Me – ‘scare things? Yeah, what. You’re making a bad guy (directed at Eamonn) what would a bad leader do Liam’?

Liam – ‘run away’

Me – ‘run away, what do you think a bad leader would do’

Me – ‘he'd trap him, yeah, and what about you Eamonn? What do you think a bad leader would do’?

Eamonn – ‘kick people in the butt’

Me – ‘he would kick people in the butt. Do you know what. Would that be a nice thing to do’?

All – ‘noo’

Me – ‘No, so I don’t think I’d like that kind of a leader. What kind of leader do you think I might like? I think I might like’

Liam – ‘Green,’

Me – ‘yes, there are two different types of green.’

Eamonn– ‘would he kick the goblin’?

Me – ‘would, he kicks the goblin? I think I would like a nice leader. What would a nice person leader do’?

Ivan – ‘No, a bad leader’

Me – ‘No, I don’t want a bad leader. What do you think would make a nice leader’?

Me – ‘they wouldn’t do bad things anymore, they wouldn’t. Liam, what do you think they might do nice’?

Liam – ‘eat’

Me – ‘Liam, did you say eat? Ivan, what do you think a good leader would do, a good person’

Ivan– ‘red’

Me – ‘Liam or Ivan? (I wait for a response), you’ve got the red marker now, what would a good person do Ivan’?

Ivan – ‘a bad p’

Me – ‘what would a good person do’?

Ivan – ‘a bad p a’

Me – ‘right. So, so, so thank you for that.’

Me – ‘Hello everybody’

Collective – ‘Hi’

Me – ‘This is my friend Kathleen; do you want to say hello to Kathleen?’

Rian – ‘No’

Collective – ‘Hi Kathleen’

Me – ‘what's Kathleens face like, does she look happy?’

Eamonn– ‘Sad’

Me – ‘She looks sad? Why do you think she looks sad?’

Ciaran– ‘cos she has no friends’

Kate – ‘There's her friends’ pointing up to the other persona dolls

Me – ‘Yes, her friends are there but do you know what? She said they are not being very nice to her. Does that make you sad Kathleen?’

‘Mm, yeah it makes her sad. Will we ask her what her friends are doing that’s making her sad
Will we?’

Collective - yes and Rian ‘no’

Me – ‘Kathleen, what are your friends doing that’s making you sad? Pause. Oh, dear. Will I tell you.’

Collective – ‘Yes’

Me - ‘She said they won’t share or take turns with the toys with her. Do you think that’s a good reason for her to be sad’?

Collective – ‘yeah’

Charlie – ‘Mag, is this your best friend’?

Me – ‘this is my best friend Kathleen, Charlie yeah. They are all my friends up there, but those friends won’t play with Kathleen, they won’t share, and they won’t take turns and they won’t play with her.’

Charlie - ‘they will’

Me – ‘they will? She says they’re not and that is making her sad. What do you think she should do? Has anybody any ideas what should Kathleen do?’

Leah – ‘play together’

Me – ‘play together Leah, yeah, what else might she do’

Laura – ‘some of her friends shouldn share her toys with her’

ME – ‘You think some of her friends should share their toys with her. Would that make you happy Kathleen? It would’? What if she goes to the playground? What if you go to the playground Kathleen, what do you think about that idea? Oh, she says, sometimes in the playground, Tom and Jenny push her. I don’t think that’s nice Kathleen. What do you think boys and girls, is it nice to push her’?

Collective – ‘No’

Mag – ‘So, so what do you think Kathleen should do’?

Laura – ‘just ask her to tell her to stop’

Mag – ‘to say stop? Kathleen, did you tell them to stop? She said, no, she just cried.’

Collective – ‘oh’

Mag – ‘is that good’

Collective – ‘no’

Mag – ‘what does she need to say’

Collective – ‘sorry’

Mag – ‘well, they pushed her, they pushed her, so should she say sorry’?

Ciaran – ‘yeah,’ collective - ‘no’

Mag – ‘Ciaran why does she need to say sorry’

Laura– ‘She doesn’t.’

Mag – ‘she doesn’t Laura. what should she say. Anybody know? When someone pushes you, what do you say.’

Collective – ‘Stop’

Mag – ‘stop’

Liam – ‘I don’t have any more comment’

Mag – ‘you don’t have any more comment. Ok, so you just stay stop. You need to say stop Kathleen when somebody hurts you in the playground. You need to say stop, I don’t like it. Do you think you could do that Kathleen? Do you think they would play with you then? She doesn’t know. What do you think? would they play with her when she says stop, I don’t like it.’

Collective – ‘Yeah’

Mag – ‘What would they do, would they listen’

Collective – ‘No’

Mag – ‘You don’t think they’d listen, so what would happen then Laura’

Laura, - ‘they’ll push her again’

Mag – ‘you think they’d push her again, so what do you think she needs to do then’

Rian– ‘say stop’

Mag – ‘stop, I’

Collective - ‘I don’t like it’

Mag – ‘and what do the other children need to do’

Eamonn – ‘why is she sad all the time’

Mag – ‘well she mightn’t be sad you have to help her; you have to tell her what she needs to say’

Collective - ‘Stop it, I don’t like it.’

Mag - 'She said thank you, she's going to try that and she'll come again and tell you whether it works. What do you think?'

Rian- 'no'

Mag - 'what do you think, should she try that'

Rian- 'no'

Collective - 'yes'

Mag - 'So Kathleen, oh Kathleen says, she's going to sit in my office and she's going to watch all the children playing outside to see if they say, stop, I don't like it when somebody hurts them. Is that a good idea?'

Collective - 'MMM'

Mag - 'so are you going to show Kathleen how to do it'

Collective - 'yeah'

Rian- 'no'

Mag - 'will you show her outside if somebody hurts you'

Collective 'yeah'

Rian - 'no, I'm not going to'

Mag - 'you're not going to Rian, ok'

Laura - 'I am'

Mag - 'You are Laura'

Eamonn - 'I am'

Mag - 'you're going too, Eamonn'

Ciaran - 'me too'

Mag – ‘and you Ciaran, what about you Sive, yeah, Sean, Ivan, are you going to show them, yeah, ok Leah are you, yeah, so we’re all going use our words if somebody hurts us and say stop, I don’t like it. So, you put up your hand and you say’

Collective - ‘stop, I don’t like it’

Mag – ‘Ok, what do you think Kathleen, will that make you feel better? And you're going to watch all the children? And do you think you will be happy then? So, Kathleen’

Laura – ‘your hand is under her.’

Mag – ‘ooh Kathleen said, she might come before you go home after watching you in the playground and she might be happy then if she sees you all saying stop, I don’t like it if you hurt somebody. OK so do you want to go into my office now? And you're going to watch out the window, you sure? You don’t want to go to bed?’

Charlie – ‘she did, she's going to bed’

Mag – ‘no she doesn’t want, she wants to go into my office, so I have to carry her now, I have to carry her into my office.’

Learning Story

8/2/2022

Three boys, Rian, Liam and Eamonn are playing with the loose parts building a square structure. Eamonn passes in the wood and Liam and Rian lay the wood. They lay a long plank of wood lengthways across a log and another sideways from it, on its side on the ground to another log, leaning it up against it and do similar with another parallel to the first plank. Eamonn reinforces it with another long thinner block of wood running on the inside in the same direction. They lay smaller planks on the ground, floor like. "Let's work together like a team," says Rian as he steps over the structure in Eamonn's direction and picks up a small plank. Eamonn echoes him "together as a team." Conor carries a ball over on a frying pan and lobs it into the structure. Eamonn and Rian step over the wood and into the structure, "don't step on it" says Rian. They both say together "we don't need a ball" and Eamonn throws it out. Liam gets a piece of gutter pipe and stands it up on a smaller plank, then lifts it up and lays a small block of wood on a plank, he pinches it with a pliers, then lifts it up, holding the gutter pipe, small block of wood and plank. Rian walks towards the final piece to be constructed and in one hand he lifts the end plank and leans it on its side to meet the other side he holds with his left hand. "We're going to need the tooler," Liam says, "here, here is a chimney for you" he says to Rian handing him the gutter pipe. Eamonn calls out, "is that a better chimney" as he holds up a long thin pipe. "Yeah, thanks" says Liam walking in his direction and Eamonn passes him the chimney. "It's a longer chimney" Eamonn says. Liam walks towards Rian, "it's a longer chimney" he says. The two pieces of wood are falling for Rian. He attempts again, it falls again. "Agh" he says angrily looking at the adult present. "This is not working" he says, she replies, "how can we fix it? Think". Rian nods his head. "You fixed it earlier" she says. Liam is standing on the smaller floor planks holding the longer pipe open end to the sky and working his pliers on the pipe. Rian lifts the wood, a piece in each hand and leans the two ends to meet forming a triangle shape. "Oh, did you fix it Rian?" the adult asks. He nods his head and smiles in response. He turns and picks up a small plank and lays it side by side with another on the ground.

Adult is called away by another child to find some dinosaurs.

Transcript 4.

18/5/2022

After a Story

I read a story called The Little Cockroach by Susie Violet. It is about 2 cockroaches Pedro and Enrique escaping from a predator gecko on an airplane and their adventures when they land in Italy. Before the story we discussed what a predator was. During the story, we explored unfamiliar words and what they might mean. And after we talked about the leader.

Mag – ‘Now, who do you think was the leader’?

Ciaran – ‘I was’

Mag – ‘No, in the story, who was the leader? Was it Pedro or Enrique’?

Ciaran – ‘Pedro’

Mag – ‘Why was it Pedro’?

Ciaran - ‘cos of his size’

Mag – ‘Because he kept getting Enrique in’

Ciaran - ‘into trouble’

Mag – ‘he did, he kept getting him in trouble, didn’t he’?

Ciaran – ‘he did’

Mag – ‘he brought him on the airplane, where else did he bring him’?

Laura – ‘Italy’

Mag – ‘where?’

Laura – ‘Italy’

Mag – ‘He did, he brought him on the airplane to Italy and then what happened when they got to Italy’?

Laura – ‘They fell asleep’

Mag – ‘yes, they fell asleep at bedtime but what happened them before that?’

(They nearly got eaten)

Mag, - ‘they nearly got eat in a calzone’

Laura –’ no in a pizza ya mean’

Mag - ‘in a calzone pizza’

(.....)

Mag – ‘So why do you think Pedro was the leader?’

Katie – ‘cos he kept getting him in trouble’

Mag – ‘mm mm so do you think he was a good leader because he kept getting Enriquo into trouble?’

All – ‘No, a bad leader’

Mag – ‘I think he was a bad leader too because he kept getting Enriquo into trouble, didn’t he?’

Ciaran – ‘and what about Enriquo?’

Mag – ‘are you a good leader Ciaran’?

Ciaran – ‘Yeah’

Mag – ‘you don’t get anyone into trouble sure you don’t’

Laura – ‘I don’t’

Mag – ‘well then you are a good leader. I like good leaders, what else does a good leader do’?

Eamonn – ‘I’m a good leader’

Mag – ‘You’re a good leader, what does a good leader do? What do you do in playschool that means you are a good leader’?

Eamonn – ‘tidy up’

Laura – ‘clean up’

Mag – ‘what else’

Laura – ‘do the lunches’

(.....)

Mag – ‘what do you like about being a good leader in playschool Eamonn.....are you a leader at home? What do you do at home that makes you a good leader’?

Eamonn – ‘I make (little sister) go asleep’

Mag – ‘you make her go asleep? Oh, that’s very helpful isn’t it? Ciaran, what do you do in playschool that makes you a good leader’?

Sean – ‘I, I, I’

Lots of voices talking together

Mag – ‘hold on, hold on,’

Ciaran - ‘I help people,’

Mag – ‘You help people? who do you help’?

Ciaran - ‘I help Eddie’

Mag - ‘You help Eddie’?

Leah – ‘I have a new puppy called’ (same as little sister).

Mag – ‘What do you do Leah’

Leah - ‘I do a new trick when I give my new puppya treat, so I say Just close your eyes, then I hide it andfinds it’

Mag – ‘ohhh, that’s a good way to be a leader Leah, how are you a good leader in school Sean’?

Sean – ‘I help my mammy make pancakes’

Mag – ‘You help your mummy makes pancakes; does she like when you help her make pancakes’?

Laura – ‘I help mammy make cakes, excuse me, I help mammy make cookies’

Liam – ‘I help mammy and daddy make pancakes’

Mag – ‘so it sounds to me like a leader helps people, is that right’

Lots of voices – ‘Yeah’

Mag – ‘so they work as part of a team’

Lots of voices – ‘Yeah’

Sive – ‘Danny Mag, sometimes at home I help mam make dinner’

Mag – ‘you’re so good.’

Mary – ‘I play with my friends’

Mag – ‘you play with your friends, are you nice to your friends or nasty to your friends’

Mary – ‘nice’

Mag – ‘That's the kind of leader I like, so let me see, could, Ivan, do you need a tissue? Sarah, are you a leader’

Sarah – ‘yeah’

Mag – ‘what do you do that makes you a good leader’

Sarah – ‘I give (little sister) a bohobop’

Mag – ‘you give (.....) a bottle. That’s very good of you. Does that help Mammy? Ah you’re so good.’

Mary – ‘I made krispie buns after football yesterday’

Mag – ‘did you? Where's mine’?

Mary – laughs, ‘they're all gone’

Mag – ‘you eat them all. Katie, what about you’

Katie – ‘I help mammy make dinner sometimes’

Mag – ‘you help mammy make dinner’

Katie – ‘sometimes’

Laura – ‘the next time, the next time, I’ll make a cookie for you’

Mag – ‘That would be nice, thank you.’

Mag – ‘Could Antoinettes team go to their table please. Who’s on (educators) team’

Voices – ‘I am.’

Ciaran – ‘We met her before’

Mag – ‘You met this Jenny before; she was in my office’

Child gives Jenny a hug

Mag - ‘do you think that is why she is happy looking, isn’t she. Oh, Charlie, thank you for giving her a hug. Jenny, you are very lucky, the children don’t give hugs very often you know’

Lots of children come to give hugs to Jenny.

Mag - ‘Harry, Harry, would you like to give Jenny a hug?’

Harry gives Jenny a hug

Mag – ‘ah, lovely’

So, everyone, this is Jenny, do you know what age Jenny is

Collective – ‘No, 4, 5, 6, 8, 7, 8, 3’

Mag- ‘yes’

Collective – ‘three’

Katie – ‘I’m older than her because I’m four.’

Mag - ‘you are four now but (.....) is still three’

Macy – ‘I’m still three’

Mag – ‘Rian, what age are you?’

Rian – ‘Three’

Mag – ‘three, Harry, Harry, what age are you? Four? Charlie?’

Charlie – ‘four’

Mag – ‘Ciaran’?

Ciaran – ‘Four’

Mag – ‘Eamonn’?

Eamonn – ‘I’m four’

Mag – ‘Sean’?

Sean – ‘mmm, my mammy didn’t tell me’

Mag – ‘did she not? Are you three or four’

Sean – ‘nearly four’

Mag – ‘you are nearly four’

Mag - (to educators) ‘what age are you’

Ed 1 – ‘five’

Mag – ‘what age are you’

Ed 2 – ‘two’

Mag – ‘what age are you’

Ed 3 – ‘I’m five’

Mag – ‘You are five as well. Oh, I couldn’t tell you what age I am. So, does anybody know what Jenny’s face is saying? Does she look sad’?

Collective – ‘she looks happy’

Mag – ‘I wonder why she is happy? She was happy before you gave her hugs. So, what do you think made her happy today.’

Ivan – ‘hugs’

Sarah – ‘tidying up’

Mag – ‘you tidied up? Aha’

Jenny (doll) - 'She said, she saw you all working as a team and tidying up, yeah. What else do you think made her'

Mag - 'playing well, Aha, all playing nicely together, yes the hugs made her happy, but she was happy before the hugs sooooooooooooo will I ask her'

Collective - 'yeah'

Mag - 'what made you happy today, Jenny. Mm aha, yeah.'

Jenny (doll) - 'She said she saw lots of leaders in the classroom today'

Collective - 'me, me me'

Mag - 'ok, ok, Eamonn why were you a leader today'

Ciaran - 'I'm a leader'

Mag - 'Eamonn, what did you do today that made you a leader'?

Eamonn - 'Mm, I was helping Ciaran carrying the blocks'

Mag - 'you were helping Ciaran carry the blocks.'

Mag - 'working as a team, that's a good leader skill. Sean, what do you think Jenny saw you doing that made you a leader'?

Sean - 'Helping Ciaran and Eddie'

Mag - 'helping Ciaran and Eddie, did the three of you work, carry the blocks as a team. You did'?

Ciaran - 'and (...).'

Mag - 'Four of you, oh my goodness that is so wonderful, well done, well done. Ciaran, what made you a leader today'?

Ciaran - 'helping Eamonn and carrying something different'

Mag - 'Oh, not just the blocks, what did you carry differently'?

Ciaran – ‘I don’t know.’

Mag – ‘Katie, what about you, how are you a leader today? Did you do anything brave today? Did you do anything helpful today? Are you shy?’

Katie - ‘no’

Mag – ‘do you want Jenny to tell you what you did today that made you a leader’?

Jenny (doll) - ‘She said she saw you come over and give Mag a hug for no reason’

Mag – ‘that was really nice, Charlie what made you a leader today’

Charlie – ‘pickin up the lunches’

Ed 3 – ‘and he helped me outside tidy away the cars.’

Mag – ‘picking up the lunches and helping ed 3. Well done, good job, that makes you a leader. Harry, were you a leader today? What did you do’?

Harry – makes humming noises

Jenny (doll) - ‘I think you were very brave going into the sensory room in the dark’

Mag – ‘yeahhh, who’s next? Sarah, what did you do that makes you a leader today’?

Sarah – ‘I helped (.....) paint and make her picture beautiful’

Mag – ‘you helped make her picture beautiful and’

Jenny (doll) - ‘said she saw you do the jigsaw with (.....) for tidying up time.’

Mag - ‘Did you help (...) do the jigsaw that fell? Yeah, you did, thank you very much. Who’s next, Rian, are you a leader? You are? And what did you do that made you a leader today’? The car box and what else, I didn’t hear you, Jenny didn’t hear you?

Rian – ‘the train box and the car box’

Mag - ‘the train box and the car box, and were you able to carry them together? Wow, well it sounds like to me that everyone here is a leader.’

Rian – ‘even Harry’?

Mag – ‘even Harry. Harry and (.....) were very brave today, so do you know what, oh, oh Jenny, do you think’

Jenny (doll) - ‘she said ed 2 is a leader today, cos do you know what she did? She had a good idea, and she said,’

Charlie – ‘who's your friend’?

Mag – ‘she came into my office, and she said, Mag, can all the children come on a picnic today and I said yes, so ed 2 had a good idea, so she is a leader today. Jenny wants to give you all a big clap cos you are all so wonderful and now Jenny you have to.....hold on, hold on, sit down, (as all the children rush forward to give Jenny a final hug). I’m going to read the story, then Jenny is going to give you all a hug before you go on your picnic, okay?’

Ivan – ‘are we allowed bring her’?

Mag – ‘I don’t know, we can ask her.’

Mag is holding Kathleen in a hug.

‘Do you think Kathleen might be happy, sad, or grumpy’

Collective – ‘Happy’

Mag – ‘You think she’s happy today’

Collective – ‘yeah, happy’

Mag – ‘What do you think Ivan?’

Ivan – ‘Sad’

Mag turns her around

Mag - ‘Is she sad’?

Ciaran – ‘did you make her sad’?

Mag – ‘I didn’t make her sad. Did I make you sad Kathleen’

Kathleen (doll) shakes her head

Mag – ‘No, it wasn’t me, what might have made her sad’

Laura – ‘the fire’

Ivan makes siren sound

Mag – ‘no, someone already said that’

Laura – ‘maybe they crasheded’

Mag – ‘was it because you had a crash’

Liam – ‘and then it was brokeed’

Mag – ‘the car was broken from when it crashed’

Ciaran – ‘look she has a broken leg’

Mag – ‘she doesn’t have a broken leg, that’s her trousers and her skin under her trousers, same as you have skin under your trousers, yeah, see that’s her skin. So how are we going to find out what makes Kathleen sad’?

Sean – ‘I like her flowery top’

Mag – ‘you like her flowery top, do you’

Laura – ‘I like her earrings’

Mag – ‘You like her earrings’

Liam – ‘I like her shoes’

Mag – ‘You like her shoes.’

Leah – ‘I like her handies I’ll give her a high five’

Mag – ‘ok, so how are we, guys, guys, sit down, so how are we going to find out what makes Kathleen sad’

Rian – ‘I don’t know’

Laura – ‘maybe because her.....’

Mag – ‘why don’t we ask her’?

Collective – ‘Yeah’

Mag – ‘If you saw somebody sad, what would you do’?

Ciaran – ‘make them happy’

Mag – ‘How would you make them happy Ciaran? Liam, can you sit down for a minute please’

Ciaran – ‘can I give her a high five’?

Mag – ‘so who’s going to ask Kathleen’?

Laura – ‘me’

Mag – ‘ok, ask her’

Laura – ‘what happened’

Rian – ‘what happened to her’

Kathleen (doll) - ‘she said her teacher asked her to draw a picture today and she didn’t draw it and her teacher got very cross with her’

Collective drawn in breaths - ‘ohh’

Mag – ‘what do you think of that?’

Liam – ‘what happened Kathleen’

Mag – ‘she just told you’

Liam – ‘what happened else Kathleen’

Mag – ‘so, so what do you think, is that enough to make her sad, cos the teacher gave out to her. Why did the teacher give out to her?’

Laura- ‘because she didn't draw a picture’

Mag – ‘she didn’t draw the picture, no.’

Eamonn – ‘what was it’

Kathleen (doll) - ‘what a leader does’

Mag – ‘she said what a leader does Eamonn’

Eamonn – ‘oh’

Mag – ‘what does a leader do’

Laura – ‘they help everybody’

Mag – ‘they help everybody, yeah. Charlie’

Laura – ‘and tidy up’

Charlie – ‘helps everybody,’

Mag – ‘they do help everybody. Ciaran what does a leader do’

Ciaran – ‘they do nothing’

Mag – ‘they do nothing, ok’

Ivan – ‘the leader has to pick another story’

Mag - ‘Sive what does a leader do’

Sue – ‘be kind’

Mag – ‘they do be kind, you’re right. Liam, do you know, can we tell Kathleen because she’s not sure’

Liam – ‘helpin kickin balls’

Mag – ‘help kick balls, yeah, so who kicks balls’

Liam – ‘me and Eamonn’

Mag – ‘You and Eamonn, so’

Liam – ‘not this Eamonn, the one in big school, the one Eammon in big school’

Mag – ‘your cousin Eamonn. So, footballers play as a team don’t they? And a leader plays as a team. Rian, what do you think a leader does? Do you know? Did a teacher just give out to you, no, no, okay. Ivan, what story did you pick, is it about a leader?’

Ivan – ‘no, it's about not telling the truth’

Mag – ‘it's about not telling the truth; how do you know that.’

Ivan – ‘will you read it’

Mag – ‘do you want me to read it’

Ivan – ‘yeah’

Mag – ‘well before I read it, we better call the roll because I forgot to call the roll the last day.’

Kathleens face has changed to happy, and the children point it out.

Mag to Kathleen – ‘why are you happy now’

Katheen (doll) ‘Because some of the boys and girls told her what a leader does, and I gave her a hug and patted her on the back.’

Mag – ‘So I was kind, wasn’t I? I was nice to Kathleen and that made herKathleen, do you like hugs. You do? Would you like one from all the boys and girls? Or would you like a high five’

Rian – ‘High five’

Mag - ‘oh, ok, I think that’s a good idea’

Katheen (doll) - ‘she said after the story’

Ciaran – ‘I love your head’

Laura – ‘I love your hair’

Mag – ‘after the story. Ivan, please call the roll’

The children are tidying up inside, prior to large group time and going to wash their hands.

Liam – ‘we didn’t finish fixing the roof’

Mag – ‘I know you didn’t finish the roof; you’ll have to come back tomorrow and do it. You don’t get paid until the job is done.’

Laura, Ciaran, and Liam – ‘we won’t, no, we won’t’

Mag – ‘no, I’m not giving you any money until it’s fixed.’

Ciaran – ‘why’?

Mag – ‘because builders are known for not coming back and finishing the job.’

Ciaran – ‘why’?

Laura – ‘well, I’m not going to come back’

Mag – ‘because builders sometimes don’t come back and finish the job’

Ciaran – ‘well’

Mag – ‘well I’ll pay you when you come back, and it’s finished’

Ciaran – ‘okay’

Mag – ‘I’m not paying you before then.’

Staff Team Workshop

Aim – To identify skills and attributes in ourselves as pedagogical leaders and how we can promote leadership skills in young children

Objectives – At the end of the workshop, the team should be able to

List skills and attributes possessed by leaders

Identify skills and attributes they possess which make them good pedagogical leaders

Name three skills that are important to pedagogical leadership

Recognise the importance of values and their impact on our educational values

Discuss ways we can promote positive values which support and empower leadership skills in young children

Time	Topic	Method	Resource	Consideration
4.15	Leaders	Game	Sticky labels	
4.25	Leaders x 4	PowerPoint (PP) Brainstorm/ Discussion	Slide 2 Flipchart	Charisma/Personality/personality/ power positive and negative/ communicators/passion/openness/reflectors/ problem solvers/negotiators/ empathy/inspirers
4.35	Pedagogical leaders	PP Individual exercise/ Discussion	Pen and paper Audio recorder	
4.45	What children want us to know	PP Discussion VE	Video Audio recorder	What are your thoughts? What feelings are evoked? What are the 3 lessons mentioned? Do they apply to us? Why? Prejudices/Bias/Awareness of knowing the families and having that connection
4.55	Core Values	PP	Audio recorder	What values do you consider important for yourself, the team and to promote

		Individual exercise		leadership skills in the children
5.05	Leadership skills in young children	PP VE Discussion	Pen and paper Audio recorder	Think about leadership space? Are all children leaders? Are we all leaders? What have we done to promote leadership skills in young children? Are they working? What might we do differently? What might we implement further? Why are these skills important to children?
5.15	Mission Statement – Bringing it together	PP Discussion	Pen and Paper	Do we work to this? What if anything needs to be added or removed?
5.25	Summary	VE		
5.35	Close	Plus, and Delta	Flipchart	

