

Leading by heart and soul: using magic, being moral, creating merriment and mobilising others.

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“How do we nurture our souls? By revering our own life. By reaching the best within ourselves. By taking chances and stretching our boundaries. By leaping into the unknown. By going places we have never been. By having faith and staring down our fears. By embracing our own special uniqueness. By doing things for the fun of it. By slowing down, so the important things can catch up. By breathing in wide open spaces. By walking in nature’s wildness. By appreciating each day, moment by moment. By learning to live it all, not only the joys and triumphs but the pain and struggle. By giving more than we take. By being there for others. By making a difference. When we are living the life we love, our souls are singing and dancing.” (Yamada, 2004)

Using magic, being moral, creating merriment and mobilising others are all part of creating strong pedagogical leadership practices in early childhood settings. In the words of George et al. (2007), “Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self discipline to get results. They know who they are.” Today, the literature on leadership is vast and the question has been asked, “what do leaders need to know?” I certainly am not saying that I have the answer to this question, but what I would like to share with you is what, in my experience and observation, I have found to be powerful indicators of strong and rich learning communities. I believe we need committed and responsive leaders at all levels and we should be concerned with both personal and professional qualities to meet the challenges ahead, particularly in the changing times of living in the 21st Century. Good leaders have a significant effect on the success of children in education and, as teachers, we therefore all have an obligation to be good leaders.

Children and their families come from an increasingly diverse range of communities and ethnic groups. In New Zealand we are committed to recognising the Treaty of Waitangi and building a culture in early childhood setting that not only acknowledges Kaupapa Māori but also promotes te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. We know from extensive studies in our country that the success of the child’s education is affected by the degree to which the

child and family’s culture is respected by the early childhood setting (Bishop et al., 2007). The role that a leader plays in the most challenging communities is a critical factor when it comes to successful outcomes for the children (Marzano et al., 2005).

OECD research (2008) recognises that where teachers are deeply engaged in their own learning there will be improved outcomes for children. Pedagogical leadership that creates opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share the results of their own inquiry and action research is a powerful force for building a community of learners that will strengthen and sustain the early childhood community (Coburn, 2003). The characteristics of teachers needed to create positive learning cultures are stated eloquently by Peterson and Deal (1998), “Where the staff have a shared sense of purpose – where they pour their hearts into the children and their teaching. Where the underlying norms are of collegiality, improvement and hard work. Where ritual and tradition celebrate child accomplishment. Where the informal network of storytellers, heroes and heroines provides a social web of positive information, support and history. Where success, joy and humour abound.”

Every teacher, child and parent has the right to be engaged in leadership. Lambert (2003) stated that “Everyone is born to lead in the same way as everyone is born to learn. The Early Childhood Leader maybe seen as the person in whom the dream of making a difference has been kept alive...” Powerful leadership therefore begins with the individual and “Groups are... leaderful, when everyone in the group feels empowered to start and stop things, to challenge others and to meet challenges, to move out in front or to fall back” (Starhawk, 1988).

Leadership is therefore a shared endeavour, and pedagogical leadership focuses on learning for constructive change. For the purposes of this article I would like to focus briefly on just four aspects of building strong pedagogical leadership within an early childhood educational setting that I have found useful.

I call these the four Ms:

- **MAGIC**
- **Morals**
- **Mobilise**
- **Merriment**

MAGIC



Magic occurs in learning settings when teachers are fully engaged with their community. Working hard to build strong, authentic and effective relationships is in my view both the most challenging and the most rewarding work a leader or teacher can do. It has the potential to have such a profound impact on the early childhood centre or organisation. Fullan (2002) sees it as the single most important factor to successful change. If relationships improve, schools (early childhood settings) get better. His research has shown that if relationships remain the same or do not improve then important ground can be lost. In these very complex and changing times, emotional intelligence is essential. It is emotionally intelligent leaders and teachers who will have the abilities to move forward engaging others and building strong communities of learners (Goleman et al., 2002).

The more recent literature around 'teacher presence' discusses the importance of being an authentic person teaching and relating in the moment. Gibbs (2009) states, "Teaching and learning involves many human capacities. Our capacities to hear, smell, touch, feel, and

see all stimulate our cognitive, physical, physiological, emotional, affective, and spiritual development. If we simply learned the skills and knowledge of teaching, we would teach like technicians. We learn to teach by being the person we are, then we teach from our heart."

Morals

I believe that many enter teaching because of strong altruistic goals to make a difference in children's lives, a real sense of purpose. As Fullan (2006) has said, "School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students. They are concerned about [...] raising the achievement of – and closing the gap between – high performing and lower-performing students." A strong focus on ethics and morality is even more important today than it has been in days past, especially as in New Zealand we move towards a more strongly privatized sector. Early Childhood Education is about more than profit. It has a crucial role in providing opportunities for children and families to transform their lives.

Solomon (1993) drew on the work of Aristotle, when he noted that, "There is too little sense of business as itself enjoyable, that business is not a matter of vulgar self interest but of vital community interest, that the virtues on which one prides oneself in personal life are essentially the same as those essential to good business – honesty, dependability, courage, loyalty, integrity. Aristotle's central ethical concept, accordingly, is a unified, all-embracing notion of 'happiness' (or more accurately, *eudaimonia*) perhaps better translated as 'flourishing' or 'doing well'. The organization is strengthened when individuals genuinely feel there is a strong sense of moral purpose and character in the organization (justice, caring, excellence)."



Mobilise (ideas)



Good teaching is characterised by the free movement and promotion of ideas and information about learning across all sectors (children, families, teachers and administrators). The importance of every teacher and every leader finding their voice cannot be underestimated. All teachers need to be able to articulate their practice to discuss the underlying theoretical ideas that surround their teaching, and to share with parents the learning that is taking place in their setting. In any early childhood setting there will be many leaders. Leadership is distributed and shared in many ways. Schlechty (1997) provides a useful analogy, "Shared leadership... is less like an orchestra, where the conductor is always in charge, and more like a jazz band, where leadership is passed around ... depending on what the music demands at the moment and who feels most moved by the spirit to express the music."

We need to encourage a community of learners who is eloquent, persuasive, strong, energetic and willing to debate and contribute to the community of practice. Professional learning is a key to building these strong rich communities, communities of teachers where everyone knows that their contribution is valued. If within a community there are members who believe they are not leaders and cannot be leaders then an exploration into the work of Carol Dweck will soon dispell this.

Dweck's work (2006) has the potential to transform every person's life by recognising that our future growth is in our own hands. In her words, "I have always been deeply moved by outstanding achievement and saddened by wasted potential". We must ensure that every teacher, child and parent is open to all the possible selves that they can be.

Merriment (joy in the workplace)

Those of us who work in full-time jobs, spend more time with our colleagues and the children and families that we work with than we do with the people we love most in our lives. It is for this reason that we should take the culture of our settings and places of work very seriously. We need to balance the serious matter of teaching with joy and humour. It is even more important to acknowledge that many of the children in our care are spending more of their waking hours in our settings than they are in any other place in their lives. We have the opportunity to ensure the environments we create are not institutions, but reflect the best in a warm, responsive home environment. If the teachers and leaders in these settings are not experiencing joy, then there is little likelihood that the children will be experiencing joy.

A group of men in a fish market in Seattle developed a set of principles to help people to rethink the 'organisational culture' in their settings. Four principles help them to foster a positive rich culture at work – "Play", "Make Their Day", "Be There" and "Choose your attitude" - and are now referred to as FISH! Philosophy (Lundin 2000). I have found that this sort of focus has the power to revolutionise the organisational culture in early childhood settings as well. Fullan (2005) states, "Re-culturing is the name of the game. Much change is structural and superficial. Transforming culture - changing what people in the organisation value and how they work together to accomplish it – leads to deep lasting change." This is the outcome of a 'leaderful' community where everyone (children, teachers and parents) are full participants in transforming the organisation.



More than at any other time do we now need to bring **magic** into every early childhood setting. We need to articulate and make visible our **morals** and ethics in our efforts to make a difference for children and families. We need to have the courage to **mobilise** our ideas and the value of learning in the wider community and we should take the risk to be playful and promote **merriment**. These attributes are needed to build communities where people are encouraged by shared spirit, passion and effort to be the very best they can be and to realize possibilities they have never imagined.

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