

Book reviews

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Verity Campbell-Barr and Caroline Leeson, *Quality and Leadership in the Early Years*, London: SAGE, 2016; 168 pp. ISBN: 9781473906471

Reviewed by: Helen Logan, *School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia*

Verity Campbell-Barr and Caroline Leeson's book explores multiple understandings of two key concepts in early years services: quality and leadership. In their introduction, the authors suggest that 'often leadership is seen as a feature of quality early years provision, but what this actually means theoretically or practically is not explored' (p. 1). Drawing on post-structuralist perspectives and practitioner-based case studies, the authors argue that deconstructing concepts around leadership assists early years practitioners to develop meaningful approaches to leading for quality in their local contexts. The book contains six chapters that are divided into three substantive parts. Each part discusses the key themes of the book: quality, leadership and reflecting on leading for quality in early years services. Together, these parts explore external forces that shape understandings of quality and leadership and suggest new ways for practitioners to respond to them.

Part 1 commences with a broad discussion of global interests in quality from supranational organisations, such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The authors identify how these organisations frame understandings of quality in policy for the early years. They argue the persuasive power of quality holds sway in promoting policy agendas that support parental employment opportunities and children's learning and development. This results in revealing how understandings of quality in national policy agendas for the early years interplay with local understandings of quality in early years services. Furthermore, the authors outline how different approaches to quality, such as modernist and post-structuralist approaches, influence the enactment of quality. They argue that modernist approaches privilege objective ways of thinking about the world and favour quantitative assessments of quality that guide practice. In contrast, they suggest dissatisfaction with modernist approaches has led to an increased interest in post-structuralist approaches. In drawing part 1 to a close, the authors emphasise post-structuralist approaches can be drawn upon to critique commonly held assumptions about quality and reflect on what is important in early years services.

Part 2 briefly traces the history of early years services in the United Kingdom (UK). The authors note historical structures and characteristics of early years services that they argue have contributed to downplaying the importance of leadership. Originating primarily from voluntary organisations and staffed mainly by women, many early years services were typified by low status, poor working conditions and closely associated with unpaid care. As the authors point out, these characteristics were less conducive to constructing cultures of leadership. Although historical constructions of leadership are discussed primarily in the UK context, they also have similarities with other countries, such as Australia. For instance, some similarities include the establishment of many early years services by voluntary organisations, present-day political interest in the connections between

leadership and quality early years services and policy rationales that rely on mixed-market service provision in neo-liberal economies. The authors argue these similarities raise challenges for leaders to balance local community needs with the socio-political and economic imperatives of governments. Campbell-Barr and Leeson complement their discussion of historical constructions of leadership with a broad overview of three traditional leadership theories: transnational, transformational and heroic. They suggest that while traditional leadership theories have been influential in the early years sector, they have limitations that do not fully address the importance of relational contexts. In addressing these limitations, the authors advocate a new paradigm that privileges the relational complexities required to support and lead for quality in early years services.

Part 3 offers reflective accounts from practitioner-based case studies. These studies provide examples of how four early years leaders navigate the challenges of enacting quality and leadership in their services. They provide practical connections with parts 1 and 2 in the book by challenging early years leaders to deconstruct ‘truths’ about quality and leadership. By exploring the values, ideology and feelings that inform understandings of quality and leadership, these examples provide useful reference points for early years leaders to construct new ideas and innovative practices for the staff and families with whom they work. They demonstrate how increased understandings of quality and leadership can be mobilised to guide early years practice.

A strength of the book is its contribution to highlighting the interrelationship between quality and leadership. While much literature focuses on either leadership or quality, this book contributes powerful debates to the issues associated with both concepts. Of the few limitations, there is less discussion of what constitutes early years service provision. Even though the authors point out that definitions of early years services are somewhat problematic, greater discussion of how the diversity and structure of early years services influences understandings of leadership and quality would have strengthened the book, particularly for readers from international contexts. A further limitation is the focus of the case studies. These studies emphasise pedagogical challenges of leaders within their individual services. Addressing these challenges is important; however, it leaves little room for discussions of how leaders advocate for issues of quality and leadership beyond their services. This omission is important because challenges of quality and leadership require early childhood leaders to engage with macro-level policy agendas in order to advocate for change in the early years sector. Despite these limitations, this book makes an important contribution to the literature that supports developing understandings of what forces and whose interests shape quality and leadership in early years services. It will prove to be a valuable resource for pre-service teachers, early years practitioners, researchers and policy-makers.

Jessica Gerrard, *Radical Childhoods: Schooling and the Struggle for Social Change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014; 234 pp. ISBN 9780719090219

Reviewed by: Claudia Díaz-Díaz, *University of British Columbia, Canada*

In a context characterized by discourses of inactivity and deficiency of so-called ‘vulnerable students’ or ‘disadvantaged students’, Jessica Gerrard’s book is a revitalizing reminder of the possibility for education to be a catalyst for social change instead of one of social reproduction. In her book entitled *Radical Childhoods: Schooling and the Struggle for Social Change*, Gerrard outlines and compares the history of two well-known community-based schooling initiatives in Britain – the Socialist Sunday Schools (SSS) during 1892–1930 and the Black Saturday Schools