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Book Review: Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years

Diane Wilkinson

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L. Miller and C. Cable, *Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years*. London: SAGE, 2010, 184 pp., ISBN-13: 9781849205542.

Reviewed by: Diane Wilkinson

We are living through a period which has seen increasing public interest in and the promotion of leadership and the skills related to it. Practitioners employed in the field of early years education and care have not escaped the leadership debate. The aim of creating a graduate led workforce by 2015 whilst in addition increasing the number of individuals achieving Early Years Professional (EYP) status or the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) is directly related to practitioners in the early years field. The publishing of this text therefore presents the opportunity to sit back and reflect on the impact of policy developments over the last decade. The policy developments of the last government created the impetus for the many developments that have taken place in the training of early years practitioners since 1999, whilst at the same time creating a formally structured context which defines what ‘feeling and acting professionally’ means. The contributors to *Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years* reflect on these developments, provide insights from international early years practice and challenge current thinking about what it means to be a professional in the early years sector.

The authors highlight the vital role which terminology plays in shaping our view of the world of early years. They highlight the fact that working as an early years professional can encompass a wide variety of roles, though the inclusion of the word ‘professional’ in the title ‘Early Years Professional Status’ has the potential to imply that those who do not hold the title, or another accepted role, such as ‘teacher’, are not professional practitioners. The books contributory authors have written challenging and thought-provoking texts, which invite the reader to reflect on whether it is possible to reach a consensus regarding the type of professional we want to work with our youngest children. The debate centres around a ‘democratic professional’ who values reciprocal relationships with children, families and colleagues, or a ‘technical expert’ focused on prescribed outcomes.

The book discusses the importance of working in close co-operation with professionals from other disciplines in order to maximize the services available to vulnerable children and families, using the work of teams in Sure Start Children’s Centres as a basis for discussion about multi-disciplinary working. Further chapters discuss the construction and deconstruction of the dominant discourses around the concept of early years professionalism and question the reasons behind the distinct lack of male professionals within the early years workforce.

At the close of each chapter the reader is invited to engage with the topic in a ‘Questions to Discuss’ section. The addition of this feature allows the reader to consolidate their thinking around the subject and is followed by suggested further reading.

This is a book which should provoke much interest and debate. It challenges the reader to examine the steps which have influenced recent policy developments and to take a critical, reflective approach to thinking about the role of early years leaders and managers in the future. This will be particularly important as we move into a new era of policy development related to the early years with a strong emphasis on addressing child poverty and its impact on disadvantaged children. The editors and contributors have clearly worked hard to make the text accessible, making this a very useful, thought provoking book for students in the later stages of early years degrees and those involved in post-graduate study, as well as for leaders and managers of early years settings and children's centres.