

## Book review

Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood

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J O'Sullivan and M Sakr, *Social leadership in early childhood education and care: An introduction*, Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2022; 176 pp.: ISBN 9781350212145, £19.99 (pbk)

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The mission to develop models of leadership that suit early childhood education and care (ECEC) and engage greater practitioner participation is a concern in England and beyond (Palaiologou and Male, 2019). Government policies and reports are trying to include the importance of leadership in workforce development and quality standards (Nicholson et al., 2020) but they tend to lack clarity about forms of leadership or the relationship between pedagogic and organisational leadership. Since traditional notions of leadership are at odds with the pedagogy and ECEC ethos, *Social Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care* is a response to the increasing international concern to develop a new appreciation of leadership that is better suited to developing a greater understanding of the contemporary role of ECEC leaders. O'Sullivan and Sakr's book offers a new model of leadership that centres social purpose and addresses how to create a culture of collaborative innovation and sustainability. They start their book with introducing and defining social leadership, social leaders and the social purpose within the ECEC context. They offer a social leadership model that is made up of six elements: how to implement a social pedagogy; how to create a culture of collaborative innovation; how to invest in others' leadership; how to facilitate powerful conversation; how to sew seeds of sustainability; and how to lead with a social purpose.

Most of the literature does not include explicit discussion of social justice in theorising leadership, or the express purposes of leadership. This suggests the importance of critically examining the epistemological assumptions represented in leadership discourse, and of more intentional links between leadership and goals that address social injustices for children, families and the ECEC workforce. In this book, O'Sullivan and Sakr argue that with the increasing issues around child poverty, which can alter the trajectory of a child's life, and the powerful acknowledgement of the benefits of ECEC, there is an increasing need to adopt a social purpose in leadership. The authors suggest that by adopting this model, the constraints that poverty places on people can be reduced. They note that the role of the social leader is to create a culture of continuous improvement with a focus on refining and improving pedagogy. So, what is the difference between a social leader and other leadership styles Nicholson et al. (2020) discussed in their review? Undoubtedly, O'Sullivan and Sakr offer a new idea of the social leader as co-creating meaning with children, families and other professionals, and by being co-creative, new ways of understanding and co-constructing localised knowledge will help to co-shape cultural organisation. The development of 'collaborativeness' (Fairchild et al., 2022) as an approach not only in research but also in leadership can be seen as a way forward, disrupting the norms and giving space to cultural attitudes and traditions, including attitudes to modern childhood, children's upbringing, and the relationship

between the individual and society. The strength of collaborativeness allows social leaders to promote innovative processes, where they are inspired through external relationships cutting across traditional boundaries. The authors put forward the argument that social leadership can also show how society supports its disadvantaged or marginalised members.

'Investing in others' leadership is fundamental in social leadership model' (O'Sullivan and Sakr, 2022: 100) as this promotes leadership that is collective, community-orientated and local, and serves as a link between the government and the ECEC community. By doing so, it also promotes the United Nations Sustainable Developmental Goals, which explicitly address the need for ECEC. This book captures the importance of sustainability and argues that sustainability is holistic: it is not only about the health and education of children, but also political. The authors argue that social leaders have to strengthen the relevance of sustainability to ECEC; however, they face constant change (local, national and global) as they navigate the implications of a global world.

To conclude, in *Social Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care*, O'Sullivan and Sakr argue that social leadership in ECEC should not be segregated from pedagogical leadership and should not be viewed only as action(s) working with theory but as an interaction of several contextually related factors in any given situation at any given time. Thus, the book proposes that leadership should be viewed as social and that it must champion the 16 goals of sustainability. This book is inspirational in that it challenges and provokes inclusive ways of understanding social leadership for the benefit of not only children, the ECEC workforce and service users, but also a culturally and ethnically diverse wider population.

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