Advancing pedagogical leadership at national level: Looking for a policy window

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Introduction

Discussions about the development of pedagogical leadership often focus on how individuals or particular organisations advance their own pedagogical leadership. While these investigations are fascinating, there is also a need to consider how pedagogical leadership can be facilitated on a wider scale. We need to think about the development of pedagogical leadership in regional, national and international contexts.

In this chapter, we consider ECE pedagogical leadership in the context of national policy. We begin by briefly framing pedagogical leadership through Meyerson's (2008) understanding of 'positive deviance' within organisations. We consider this understanding of pedagogical leadership in the contemporary policy context in England. We ask what policy realities currently stand in the way of large-scale advancement of pedagogical leadership across the ECE sector. To develop this discussion further, we introduce Kingdon's (2011) policy streams approach, which seeks to explain why policies shift and change when they do. We bring together our analysis of current national ECE policy with Kingdon's policy streams approach in order to consider whether there might be any 'policy windows' opening up and what would need to be aligned in order for the windows to open.

Based on these explorations and analyses, we argue that policy shifts to support pedagogical leadership in England will depend on 1) the framing of 'the ECE problem'

in terms of quality rather than quantity, 2) the existence of viable policy solutions that address the perceived problem, are supported by collective and united voices in the sector, and are backed by bodies of credible evidence and 3) support for individuals and organisations who can create a strong and united ECE voice for policy change (referred to by Kingdon as 'policy entrepreneurs').

Thinking about pedagogical leadership as 'positive deviance'

When pedagogical leadership flourishes, organisations ripple with continuous development and growth. Pedagogical leadership bubbles up from the passion, commitment and everyday actions of individuals working in organisations. We think about these particular individuals as catalysts – they are the people that can subtly agitate for change and help it to take root within a community. Meyerson (2008) describes this kind of subtle leadership as 'positive deviance'. This term describes those small improvements individuals make within organisations. Such individuals are 'tempered radicals', who, operating within organisations, work subtly and incrementally towards social change. Their small acts of self-expression and localised experimentation help to build up new norms and practices within the organisation. These individuals are prepared to try new things and go against the grain, but without radically or explicitly defying the status quo. They manage to fit into the organisational community while bringing about change from within.

While we recognise that pedagogical leadership is associated with the work of individuals, context is vital. Context sets the scene (or not) for individuals to bring about change through subtle and incremental means. For example, Meyerson's research found that positive deviance was more likely to flourish in certain conditions. Of

particular importance was the condition of psychological safety. When members of an organisation feel psychologically safe, they are able to express themselves and make themselves heard without fear of judgment or derision. Within this, a particular kind of relationship with one's immediate manager was found to be important. If the manager minimized perceived power differences in their communication, staff were more open to the acts of self-expression and experimentation that comprise positive deviance. Similarly, the design and leadership in the organisation are essential to ensuring 'small wins' through positive deviance are shared. Managers need processes and systems in place that mean that incremental changes in one part of the organisation have the opportunity to influence practices in another part of the organisation.

However, how organisations function is shaped by wider levels of context. What helps ECE organisations to create conditions of psychological safety for example? What is it that supports the creation of the managerial relationships outlined above? What enables the development of ECE organisations that can not only support positive deviance, but share it, so that it spreads throughout the organisation and creates a powerful culture of continuous learning and growth? Factors in the wider society, including much that is embedded in national policy, will impact on the potential of organisations in ECE to develop these capacities. All of the capacities outlined above require time. If everyone in an organisation feels stressed and under-valued, psychological safety is much harder to achieve. If staff have no space around their 'hours on the floor', opportunities to come together as a team for sessions of reflective practice might be harder to find. When there is little national support for leadership development in ECE, it is more likely that there is limited understanding of the skills, structures and processes through which small changes can be shared through organisations.

We argue that pedagogical leadership is therefore defined through interactions between the individual, the organisation and the wider policy landscape.

Supporting pedagogical leadership in the English national context

Looking at the contemporary policy backdrop for pedagogical leadership in an English context, we see three key inhibitors at work: 1) economic fragmentation and under-investment, 2) de-professionalisation of the workforce and 3) clashes with a wider social discourse in which ECE is seen as 'just childcare'.

Economic fragmentation and under-investment

Within the ECE sector in England, private childcare on non-domestic premises provides 82% of all childcare places on the Early Years (EY) register; this equates to 1.1 million places for young children (Ofsted, 2020). There is widespread recognition however, that there is diversity and fragmentation among those private providers (Bonetti, 2020a, 2020b). Private providers are varied in terms of size, the demographics of the communities that they serve, their financial characteristics, including profit and level of reserves, and their governance structures and practices.

Around one third of private providers are unable to afford any professional training except compulsory training because they operate on a "hand to mouth" basis (NDNA, 2018, 2019; Ceeda, 2019). A recent report – 'The Forgotten Sector' – published by the Early Years Alliance (2020) found that 25% of providers thought that the Covid crisis would force them to close due to financial pressures. Local authorities distribute funding per pupil for a particular number of hours, but Ceeda (2019) found that this funding on average covers just four out of every five children accessing the funded

places. Thus, there is a shortfall in funding rates of 18%, which rises to 21% if unpaid staff hours were properly costed. Given this shortfall, many providers try and subsidise funded places through full fees, but this is less possible in areas of disadvantage. As a result, providers working in disadvantaged areas – where such subsidisation is harder – are disproportionately affected financially.

As we explained in the section above, pedagogical leadership requires time (and therefore resources) in order to flourish. It takes time to build up psychological safety among teams (Edmondson, 2019). It also takes time to develop coaching and management within an organisation, so that reflection and feedback can be most effective (Jones & Gorell, 2018). In a situation where many settings are financially precarious, there can be less time dedicated to pedagogical leadership practices.

De-professionalisation of the workforce

The professionalism of the ECE workforce in England is a hugely contentious issue. There is a widespread recognition that quality ECE services are connected to the professionalism of the workforce – to the experience and qualifications that they bring to their work, as well as the in-service learning that can happen as part of the work (DfE, 2017; Melhuish & Gardiner, 2019). However, while there is support for this rhetoric, for example as part of the 2017 workforce strategy published by the Department for Education, the facts tell another story. The majority of those working in ECE are qualified to Level 3 and this is also the case among those working as managers in a setting. There is no official pay scale and recent research suggests that on average there are only very small salary increases when professionals extend

qualifications beyond Level 3 (e.g., to undergraduate degree level) if ECE professionals stay within a private setting (Ceeda, 2019).

This has created a perception among the workforce that further upskilling beyond the minimum requirement provides no career benefit (Campbell-Barr & Bonetti, 2021). Previous initiatives that had pedagogical leadership built in – such as the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), and to some extent the Early Years Teacher Status (which replaced EYPS in 2013) – have not been well supported by Government. As those qualified to Level 6 and beyond are more expensive to employ, many private and voluntary settings are not in a position to recruit such individuals. We have seen numbers of those qualifying at this level dwindling over recent years (Ceeda, 2017, 2018, 2019; NDNA, 2018, 2019; Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021).

Clashes with a wider social discourse in which ECE is seen as 'just childcare'

It is only when ECE is seen by most people in society as a pedagogical endeavour – when it is thought about in terms of learning and development in the most holistic and uplifting sense – that we lay a groundwork for designing pedagogical leadership into ECE organisations. Current debates about the status of ECE and the purposes of ECE in wider society are important battlegrounds for the advancement of pedagogical leadership on a national level. It is much harder to develop a discourse of pedagogical leadership if it is not part of a wider thinking or understanding. Schein (2017) suggests that it is much harder to embed a practice (such as pedagogical leadership) into an organisation's culture if it clashes with what is valued in a wider cultural context. Thus, we need to consider whether ECE is perceived in wider society in terms of pedagogy and pedagogical leadership, or if – at the other end of the spectrum – it is seen as 'just

childcare', there first and foremost to enable parents to go out to work. If the latter is true, weaving pedagogical leadership into the design of an ECE organisation becomes much harder.

Looking for a policy window: Kingdon's policy streams approach

In John Kingdon's (2011) policy streams approach, policies develop through the flow of three 'streams': the problem stream, the policy stream and the politics stream. When the streams align, a policy window opens, which is a chance for significant policy change.

- The problem stream refers to the perception of a public problem that requires attention.

- The policy stream refers to the presence of constructive policy solutions that have been devised in advance and offer possible alternatives to the current policy landscape. These alternatives are seen as having credibility due to being backed by influential bodies or communities.

- The politics stream refers to what is going on in the political arena, including who is in power, the point of time in the election cycle and notable shifts in public opinion.

When these streams line up, a policy window opens and policy entrepreneurs (individuals or organisations with perseverance and influence) have the opportunity to push policy changes through:

Policy windows mostly open occasionally, and might not stay open very long. Thus, actors who promote a specific solution, the policy entrepreneurs, must

act rapidly before the opportunity passes by, or they will have to wait until the next chance comes along.

<div align="right">(Guldbrandsson & Fossum, 2009, p. 435)</div>

When we consider the policy context of pedagogical leadership in ECE, we can ask whether a policy window exists now or in the near future by analysing the three streams outlined in Kingdon's theory.

- **The problem stream.** Is there widespread recognition of a problem in ECE that needs to be fixed, and is the advancement of pedagogical leadership a recognisable solution to this problem?

- **The policy stream.** Are there constructive policy solutions on the table, supported by influential bodies, that would enhance pedagogical leadership in ECE?

- **The political stream.** Is the political landscape conducive to policy changes relating to pedagogical leadership in ECE at the moment? Is there a political appetite for changes to ECE that would help to grow pedagogical leadership?

- **Policy entrepreneurs.** Are there individuals or organisations in the arena who would be well-positioned to push policies for pedagogical leadership 'over the line' should a policy window open?

To develop our analysis of advancing pedagogical leadership in the national policy context of England, we now consider these four elements of the policy streams approach in relation to the contemporary situation. We suggest what might need to change or manifest in each element in order for a policy window to open that could in turn advance pedagogical leadership across the sector.

The problem stream

For some, the current problem in ECE is the quantity of provision while for others, the emphasis is on the urgent need for more quality provision. Only the second framing of the problem creates a context in which it makes sense to push on a policy level for the advancement of pedagogical leadership in ECE.

The COVID19 pandemic has sparked fears that the ECE sector will decrease in size and fewer children will have places as a result. Recent reports have highlighted the financial precariousness of the ECE sector, with 25% of providers facing the risk of going under according to the Early Years Alliance (EYA, 2021). This has been cited as a problem because of the profound impact that this would have on the economy, and particularly women's contribution to the economy (Fawcett Society, 2021). While this highlights the quantity of ECE as problematic, it does not highlight quality ECE as an issue to be addressed. On the other hand, some public attention has been given to the quality of ECE, suggesting that current ECE provision is not effective enough to have a significant positive impact on the lives of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). Fundamental to this view is that quality ECE services are essential to the welfare of children and families, particularly those living in poverty, and that this matters to us as a society. The COVID19 pandemic has raised awareness about this situation, building a narrative of the most disadvantaged children, including the very youngest, 'falling behind' in their education (e.g. Nursery World, 2021; The Guardian, 2021). The solution to this problem would involve a focus on ECE quality, and within this, pedagogical leadership would have a significant role to play. Thus, an understanding of the problem as one of quality is vital for making the case for policies that advance pedagogical leadership.

The policy stream

Various potential policies could be used to develop pedagogical leadership in the sector. Broadly these fall into three categories: 1) increased investment in ECE services so that organisations delivering ECE have more time to foster pedagogical leadership practices, 2) the development of national training and qualifications relating to pedagogical leadership and 3) greater emphasis on pedagogical leadership in national frameworks outlining quality ECE.

Increased investment in ECE services directly could happen along different lines, and some of these approaches have already been taken by previous governments but then dropped by subsequent governments (e.g. the graduate leader fund, which offered money to settings to employ a graduate-level practitioner). Additional investment could be made by increasing the hourly rate for children accessing funded places. Alternatively, there could be top-up funding for settings when settings employ a graduate, if we all agree that graduates are able to bring more pedagogical leadership to the sector. It might mean top-ups for those working in areas of deprivation or increases in funding for children and families accessing provision who are below a particular income threshold.

Another route would be to develop national training programmes relating to pedagogical leadership. One option would be to resurrect the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) which was introduced in 2007 by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), the now defunct body which was established to ensure that those who work with children and families had the necessary skills. As a qualification, the EYPS could only be undertaken by graduates, and it required their

work to be assessed in the context of an ECE provider, whether this was a placement or their current workplace. Fundamental to the creation of the EYPS was the value placed on building quality provision through the extension of pedagogical leadership, via individual graduates (McDowall Clark, 2012). Inherent to introducing the EYPS was the ambitious vision that by 2010 all Children's Centres *(a particular type of state-provided cross-sector provider for children's and families)* in England would have an Early Years Professional (EYP) on their team and that this would extend to all type of providers, including Private, Voluntary and Independent setting (PVIs), by 2015. This vision would be funded by substantial government investment through the Graduate Leader Fund, which provided all settings with financial incentives to recruit graduates including EYPs.

However, in 2013, the EYPS was replaced by the Early Years Teachers Status (EYTS), which placed greater emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy and less emphasis on the open-ended possibilities of pedagogical leadership for continuous quality improvement. The shift was argued on the basis that the EYPS was not having enough of an impact on early inequalities and a more direct approach to addressing educational disadvantage – focused on literacy and numeracy – was required.

The EYTS has been relatively untested since the Graduate Leader Fund was removed since many settings have struggled to afford to employ individuals with EYTS. Linked to this, numbers of individuals taking the qualification have decreased in the last four years, with only 595 individuals starting the training last year compared with initial numbers of 2327 in 2013.

The rise and fall of the EYPS suggests two learning points. Firstly, we need to carefully protect the vision of pedagogical leadership from a more narrow focus on instructional capacity, particularly relating to numeracy and literacy. We must build bodies of

evidence that demonstrates that pedagogical leadership, as an expansive concept inextricably linked to organisational practices and relationships, makes the difference. Secondly, all qualifications need to be seen in the wider funding context for the sector. New training programmes that focus on pedagogical leadership can only be as successful as the capacity of the sector to employ those who complete the training. This is likely to require further Government investment, with top-up funding to employ those with the qualification.

A third policy route for advancing pedagogical leadership would be to build it into quality frameworks – so that the Early Years Foundation Stage for example - highlighted the role of pedagogical leadership practices in quality provision and how this could be demonstrated in action. This could be effective in shaping the discourse in the sector and gearing it more towards pedagogical leadership but there would also need to be an investment in the professional learning to support such a shift. All of these policy shifts to advance pedagogical leadership in ECE depend on government investment, and therefore on the political appetite to develop the ECE vision for the future. This is considered in the following section.

The politics stream

We currently have a Conservative Government which has shown no significant interest in expanding or developing ECE provision. Having said this, part of the political response to the COVID19 crisis has been a growing discourse around 'giving back' to those on the frontline. This includes those working in ECE, since ECE settings were asked to stay open during lockdown even when schools closed. Furthermore, as mentioned in 'the problem stream' analysis, there is public attention on growing

inequities as a result of the pandemic and a focus on the negative consequences for disadvantaged children and families. What this means for pedagogical leadership in ECE is that there may be political appetite for investment in both the ECE workforce and the development of quality provision that support children living in poverty to succeed in line with peers. Politicians want to be seen to be supporting those who have been on the frontline during the pandemic (and ECE settings have gained public attention in this respect) and they want to be seen to be supporting those children and families that have been worst affected by the pandemic. They could achieve these political aims through funding geared at advancing pedagogical leadership practices in settings serving the most disadvantaged, for example, through top-up funding to employ graduates in these settings.

Policy entrepreneurs

In Kingdon's policy streams approach, even when the three streams align and a policy window opens, it is essential that there is an individual or collective who can effectively advocate for the policy change to occur. In the English ECE sector, it is not clear who or what this policy entrepreneur would be. Various sector bodies seek to represent the sector but tend to be more closely aligned to particular types of provider. A potential cross-sector policy entrepreneur keen to draw attention to the importance of pedagogical leadership is the self-appointed Early Years Workforce Commission 2020-2021 (EYWC). In January 2021, EYWC published its first report 'A workforce in crisis: Saving our early years', 'Pedagogical leadership' is mentioned four times in the report, amidst specific recommendations with regards to the recruitment of graduates into the sector, and leadership development through training. The report recommends that:

A targeted re-introduction of a Leadership Quality Fund should be considered so that higher qualified staff can work as pedagogical leaders in early years provision serving less advantaged communities, with enhanced pay and status, and there should be a place for the role of pedagogical leader in every setting.

In this extract, pedagogical leadership is positioned as key in addressing disadvantage among children and families by being at the centre of the development of quality ECE provision. It also suggests that pedagogical leadership, in more general terms, is important across the sector, regardless of the communities served or the type of provider. Thus, EYWC have put an emphasis on pedagogical leadership but it is not yet clear whether the EYWC will have the necessary clout to shift policy should a policy window open.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have considered the English national context in which pedagogical leadership operates and how current policy realities inhibit the advancement of pedagogical leadership. Through Kingdon's policy streams approach, we have examined whether we can think about the current context as a 'policy window' and what would need to change or align in order to make this the case. Based on this analysis, we argue that generating a policy window for the advancement of pedagogical leadership will depend on 1) ensuring that the problem with regards to ECE is perceived in terms of quality rather than quantity, 2) having viable policy solutions on the table, based on credible and up to date evidence and 3) building up the clout of policy entrepreneurs – whether individuals or organisations – who can overcome division in the sector and present a strong and united voice. Although we

have focused closely on ECE in England, we offer the chapter as part of an international dialogue about how to foster pedagogical leadership at national scale. We hope that the framing of the analysis, via Kingdon's policy streams approach, may be helpful to those working in other countries and thinking about the potential for 'policy windows' in their national context.

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