

Response to Dr. Jillian Rodd's Discussion Paper – Leadership: an essential ingredient or an optional extra for quality early childhood provision?

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This refreshing discussion paper from Dr. Jillian Rodd hits the retention nail right on the head. Leadership *is* an essential ingredient for quality early childhood provision; no longer can it be allowed to remain an optional extra. The continued focus in recent years on quality provision for young children has at best skimmed over and at worst neglected the need for quality leadership, from professionally mature leaders who value and respect the work of early years and childcare practitioners.

Early years and childcare practitioners feel undervalued (Cameron *et al.* 2001) resulting in constant migration of the workforce as individuals seek better pay and prospects. Undervalued participants in a study of early years and childcare practitioners in private day nurseries felt undervalued and know how to remedy the situation (Simms 2006). They want to be managed by people who make time for the children, are prepared to get their hands dirty; have plenty of experience, are approachable and really listen to the staff, making sure that the team works well together. Participants in the study felt that practitioners evolved into management without necessarily having the maturing for the role or appropriate training. This kind of scenario was said to cause 'negative management.' The qualities practitioners yearned to see in their managers were those of effective leadership. 'Management' and 'Leadership' definitely conjure up different images in my mind. Maybe a simple name change would help.

Historically high educational achievement has not been a prerequisite for working with children, and some practitioners have been unable to fulfil the role in a way that boosts the self-esteem and morale of the team. Intriguingly, practitioners often aspire to own a nursery but not to lead one. Through omission of this vital ingredient 'effective leadership' a whole generation of effective leaders may have been lost. We *must* now ensure that substantial numbers of rising practitioners and those already in leadership roles are supported to access good leadership training and those aspirations of leadership are embedded in to the professional at every level.

References

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