

## ECE Leadership Skills



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*DR. MAIDIE ROSENGARDEN*



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Welcome to Leadership in Early Care and Education – Leadership Skills! We hope you find this text helpful, thought provoking, and affirming. We created this text to support learning in a couple of

different. This text can be used from start to finish, or as modules that you (the instructor or the student) select based on your learning outcomes.

We created this text with these principles in mind:

- Anyone can be a leader at any time. Leadership is not title specific and the field of Early Care and Education needs leaders from diverse background, experiences, and expertise.
- Leadership has an inherent set of responsibilities and leaders need to understand what those are and how to navigate them.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion are important topics and leadership should be grounded in them.
- Reflection is a key part of professional practice and should be encouraged and supported at all levels.
- It is important to represent a variety of contexts, individuals and scenarios.
- White space is important. How we interact with learning materials is important. We hope you will find our design effective.

Leaders in Early Childhood Education and K-12 Education exist at levels and take many different paths to leadership. Some receive formal education and while many find themselves in leadership roles because they have the most tenure. Most become leaders through a combination of education and experience – and all are woefully underprepared for what they experience.

These modules were designed to empower leaders at all levels and in any educational context. We realize that is a lofty goal and we felt it was important to aspire to ensure that all leaders could see themselves in the scenarios and strategies we share. We have been in leadership roles and know how challenging and complex leadership in education can be.

We created these modules with the understanding of the importance of several key leadership influences. We felt it was critical that the topic of leadership be intertwined with the topic of



Ethics. Leaders set the tone and provide opportunities for ethical behavior to thrive or to be silenced. We also developed this course material with an emphasis for diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is essential that leaders represent the stakeholders, families, and communities they serve. It is equally important that leaders are culturally responsive and tackle topics such as bias and systemic racism.

These modules are developed to celebrate the diverse leaders in the world of education and to empower new and existing leaders. Leadership can happen any place, in any position, and at any time. We are excited to support all students; wherever they may be on the leadership journey!

This text is part of a collaborative process and we want to encourage continued collaboration from our colleagues, students, and stakeholders. If you have information that you think is important to include please contact Tammy Marino at [tammy.marino@socc.edu](mailto:tammy.marino@socc.edu). Let's have a conversation!

Dr. Sally Guyon, Dr. Tammy Marino, Taya Noland, and Dr. Maidie Rosengarden

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# About the Author



## **Maidie Rosengarden Ed.D.**

Dr. Maidie Rosengarden is from Hudson, Ohio. She holds an undergraduate degree from Kent State University (Kent, Ohio) and Graduate degrees from Belmont University and Trevecca Nazarene University (Nashville, TN). Dr.

Rosengarden spent the first part of her career working in the arts, developing a strong interest in collaboration, creativity, and leadership. A passion for arts education and how young children learn led to teaching at the pre-school and K-8 grade levels. Dr. Rosengarden went on to earn a Doctorate in Education with a focus on collaboration in the classroom. Since 2004 she has been teaching at institutions of higher education in early childhood and elementary education programs. Dr. Rosengarden has been teaching at Southwestern Oregon Community College since 2014 and lives in Coos Bay, Oregon.

Dedication: To Sally, Sarah, Tammy, and Taya: Thank you.

I.



## Learning Objectives

Objective 1: Describe leadership models found in early childhood care and education programs.

Objective 2: Identify specific roles in early childhood care and education systems as leadership roles.

Objective 3: Identify behaviors, skills, and beliefs that articulate personal leadership preferences.

## Leadership and Power are Intertwined

If you have had a job at some time in your life, you may have found yourself wondering, “Who is in charge here?” You may have even found yourself saying, “If I were the boss, I would do things differently!”

Understanding how power is distributed amongst people is an important key to understanding the elusive and often confusing job of a leader. Power sometimes comes with a title and sometimes with a personality, and often both! There are many different types of power and people use power (both personal and professional) to be productive, and sometimes to meet their own personal motives.

Understanding and defining what “bosses” do is an area of study that is constantly evolving and changing. Thoughtful and creative people have been writing and talking about “leadership” for many years.

Leadership in education is a fascinating and complex area of study that is getting plenty of attention in current times! In the field

of early childhood care and education, leadership is particularly complex. Why? Because, as we will explore together in this section (spoiler alert), *everyone is a leader in early care and education*. When we enter the field of early care and learning (just as when medical professionals enter the field of health care) we take an oath to lead, and to be mindful of the ethical responsibilities that require us to lead, no matter how “low” we are in the staff structure.

Let us begin with some groundwork. Think about jobs you have held – the person leading you (manager, parent, lead teacher) had power, and they used different techniques and strategies to get you to do whatever the job required, and earn whatever was offered to you in exchange for your work.

How people in charge use power, and what *they believe* about the actions their role as a leader requires, is where we can identify a range of leadership skills, styles, and behaviors. Leadership and power are braided and blended together.

In recent years there has been a significant trend towards sharing power in educational settings, rather than creating a “top-down” structure of leadership. This is called the “stakeholder” model in which influence and power is redistributed amongst all and shared with the idea that *sharing* of power among stakeholders can and will encourage active participation in productive decision-making and increase student achievement in schools.

What does the term stakeholder mean in education? Stakeholders in the setting of early care and education are *everyone*—parents, children, cooks, licensors, and you. You have a “stake” in working for positive outcomes for the children you teach and families you work with. You know that when you do your part productively the whole community is improved and hence your life and well being is improved.

You are a stakeholder! No matter what your role is with children. Without you leading, (along with others) the organizations we work in would struggle to keep going effectively and productively. In early childhood care and education, everyone is a leader with power and

responsibility to practice skills and behaviors that demonstrate a leadership style.

To put it simply, shared models of leadership are the current trend in education and have the potential to improve outcomes for everyone.



Think about power—who do you feel has power over you and why? If you are a manager or leader, do

you feel you have power over others?

Think about “bosses” you have had in the past. Reflect on a person whom you

liked working for—write down two actions or behaviors they implemented or demonstrated that caused you to feel good about you and your work. Reflect on a person you did not like working for—write down two things (actions or behaviors) that caused you to feel bad about yourself and your work.

A footnote about power in early care and education: Remember – children are mostly powerless. Aside perhaps from the elderly, children are our society’s most vulnerable population. Have you considered how much power you have in relation to children? How does that make you feel?

### **Examining Two Different Leadership Models**

First, let us review the traditional model of leadership with which most people are familiar. The traditional leadership model can be described as:

The Traditional Leadership Model

✓ Organizes the leadership as a pyramid or top-down graphic with more workers at the bottom and few at the top.

When power and leadership is shared, people who work in and attend schools, can be more successful, and student achievement can increase.

- ✓ Views organizations as mechanisms where people are assigned a part of the work like a wheel in a machine.
- ✓ Makes decisions from a top-down perspective (the person at the top is the ultimate authority).
- ✓ Operates with the assumption that people need to be told what to do (they will not or can not think for themselves).
- ✓ Believes that the one person (at the top) has the skills and talent to create success for all.



*Can you think of a school or business you are aware of that follows this model? What evidence is there that the organization follows a traditional leadership model? In the setting (business or school) that you are thinking of, is the model successfully implemented? Are there implementations of the traditional model*

*that are not successful? Can you describe them? Who has the power in a traditional leadership model?*

### **What Might This Model Look Like in Early Care and Education?**

You ask great questions! Before we move further let's take a look. The traditional leadership model in early care and education might look like this:

#### *Scenario*

Director Marcy is well organized, always on time, and makes sure all details are handled. She can come across as stern sometimes with parents and staff. Marcy organizes the classroom calendar and instructs lead teachers on



which curricular themes to plan for each month. She has a process for scheduling staff (based on length of employment) that she uses regardless of the personal needs of staff members. When a staff member shares a concern, or makes a complaint, Marcy decides on a solution and informs the impacted staff of her decision.

#### Staff Input on Marcy's Leadership:

- Cook Mindy reflects, "I don't mind Marcy, except I wanted to implement some fun recipes for the kids and she said no. Hey, it's a job, I get bored, but I know what I'm supposed to do so it's all cool, I clock in and clock out."
- Lead Teacher Juanita comments, "I want to do my own planning, I don't like the curriculum Marcy makes us teach—in fact, I really just do the minimum with her plans—Teacher Heather in room B agrees with me and we basically ignore her planning emails, I don't know if Marcy notices. I think Marcy is a micro-manager. But I love my job and my classroom!"
- Dad Richard asks, "Who is Marcy? The lady at drop off with the clipboard? She keeps the line moving along for sure, I always get to work on time. I don't know what they do in that school, but that's ok, our son Mark is happy!"
- Teacher Assistant Jenny states, "I have been here for fifteen long years, and my knees can't take it anymore, I arrive in time to monitor the playground and leave before clean-up at the end of the day—I don't care if Heather doesn't like it, I've earned a break—what's fair is fair, I've earned the right to have the schedule I need."



*What do you perceive might be positive about Marcy's choice of a traditional leadership model? Negative?*

## **The Collective Leadership Model**

Now let us review a second leadership model. The collective leadership model contrasts with the traditional leadership model as it challenges the ideas of traditional leadership. Collective leadership recognizes that people influence each other, influence systems and processes (created and used by people) and examines the social process that is inherent between groups of people. Let us look at how Collective Leadership compares to Traditional Leadership.

	Traditional Leadership	Collective Leadership
View of people in the organization.	Views organizations as mechanisms where people are assigned a part of the work like a part in a machine.	People in organizations are seen as systems rather than individual parts.
Structure of Organization.	Organizes the leadership as a pyramid or top-down graphic.	Organizes leadership as a web of connected networks of people without a “top”.
Who makes decisions?	Makes decisions from a top-down perspective (the person at the top is the ultimate authority).	Decision making is shared or rotated amongst stakeholders.
Assumptions about people’s abilities.	Assumes people need to be told what to do.	Assumes people are inherently capable and can make decisions and/or lead.
Beliefs about success.	Believes that the one person (at the top) has the skills and talent to create success for the organization.	Believes that organizational and individual success comes from the perspectives, efforts and skills of diverse stakeholders.



Can you think of a school or business you are aware of that follows this model? What evidence is there that the organization follows a collective leadership model? In the setting (business or school) that you are thinking of, is the model successfully implemented? Are there implementations of the collective model

that are not successful? Can you describe them? Who has the power in a collective leadership model?

## What Might This Model Look Like in Early Care and Education?

The collective leadership model in early care and education might look like this:

### *Scenario*

Director Steve schedules both staff and one-on-one meetings regularly. Staff take turns leading meetings, presenting “Well done!” awards, and bringing forward “Concerns” that are shared from other staff weekly and anonymously. Steve facilitates creative problem solving between staff and in team meetings, though sometimes he has to make an “executive decision” if there isn’t a reasonable solution. Each month a staff member brings an article for shared learning to the building meeting and it is discussed together. Steve leaves classroom planning up to each teaching team. Each year Steve carefully creates the schedule, doing his best to meet the needs of each staff member while honoring the requirements of their jobs. Most of the time it works out pretty well, although sometimes resentments between staff build when schedules don’t seem fair.

Staff Input on Steve’s Leadership:

- Cook Avis states, “I love my job! I am able to use recipes that are healthy and the kids love! Sometimes I try to get out of going to the “community learning meeting” —but I get it, my input is important too. All these meetings do take up time and

I'm pretty busy with my family."

- Lead Teacher Charlotte comments, "I like to do my own planning with my group of children, and I'm good at it – it doesn't take me very long which irritates the heck out of Teacher Jim in room B – he always complains when I leave early, but hey—Steve approves my plans!"
- Dad Julio claims, "Steve is awesome, he always stops to chat and ask about the new baby. Sometimes the car line gets a bit backed up, but we survive it! We try to stay aware of what Julio JR is studying in his class – we came in and taught the children how to make tortillas last month!"
- Teacher Assistant Cheyenne says, "I am not sure what I am supposed to be doing all the time, and the other assistant does things differently than I was taught, it's frustrating to not know what to do and Charlotte and Jim don't always agree on what I should do, so sometimes I just guess. I suppose I should ask someone about it but I'm not sure who."



*What do you perceive might be positive about Steve's choice of a collective leadership model? Negative?*

### **Which Model for Early Care and Education?**

You can probably identify places you have worked or are aware of that appear to be in one model or the other. Furthermore, you might see positive and negative in both models.

For our purposes we want to know, "What leadership model is appropriate for early care and education?" Not only what is appropriate, but how can leadership and power be shared and used effectively in our world of early learning if collective leadership is the identified trend that promotes success for children and schools? We also cannot help but wonder if there are times when the traditional leadership model is appropriate! This is a good question to get on the table for consideration.

Another spoiler alert for you, both models present challenges, and everyone *sometimes* wishes they could exist in the traditional model, and simply tell people what to do, or the collective model so they can influence a decision. Note that the traditional leadership model is deceptive—rarely do people simply do as they are told. Often in traditional leadership the power that is perceived at the top is taken by those at the bottom who might then demand change. Conflicting beliefs cause difficulties that make the workplace at the least frustrating, and at the most seemingly impossible. In the collective leadership model, much time is needed to hear the perspectives of the stakeholders and solve problems collectively. Trust is needed for relationships to be built, and relationships require listening. Often, in a collaboration, everyone gets “a bit” of what they want, but not everything — a reality that can leave everyone unsatisfied. Further, there are times when stakeholders feel that “someone should just make a decision!”



*Is it possible that both models sometimes feel right, depending on the role you are in, or wish to be? Which model reflects your personal values? Which model reflects your professional values? Does conflict exist there? Could it? Might you change your thinking about these models depending on your role? **What does this tell you about your***

#### ***needs in the workplace?***

As your colleagues working and studying in early care and education, we have noticed some key differences that the collective model of leadership offers that indicate the need for us to pursue implementing it in our workplaces – even when it is challenging.

- First, the model reflects intentionality—a concept we use in all our work with children, and want to use with colleagues. In classrooms we consider all children when we plan curriculum, work with families, and work side-by-side with colleagues.

Working with children is a team effort—although we know there are many times when final decisions must be made.

- Second, assisting children, families, and colleagues to learn how to think critically, solve problems, and communicate are central to our work. The collective leadership model offers a process for early care and education leadership that allows all stakeholders to engage meaningfully and share in the creation of success in a learning process. A goal we have for children most certainly!
- Third, collective leadership asks stakeholders to *change their thinking* about their role, and perhaps **themselves**. This is not always easy! A goal in collective leadership is for people to be motivated both by the external rewards of the job and their internal feelings of accomplishment. Working together toward a shared vision, everyone uses their varying talents and skills to contribute to the success of the organization. In fact, collective leadership recognizes that sustained success is not possible without the contributions of diverse stakeholders.
- Fourth, one of the beauties of the collective leadership model in early care and education is the *flexibility* it offers. A complexity of early care and education is the many roles found within, and the multiple relationships between stakeholders. All stakeholders are important, and all are connected. It can be hard to perceive these connections, especially when people are accustomed to (and may only know) traditional leadership models. Often staff in early care and education grow, develop, and are promoted upwards in the leadership structure quickly. When this happens, relationships shift and change, and flexibility is important for navigating these changes.
- Finally, the collective leadership model aligns with the emphasis in early care and education on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It also aligns with our shared vision of “Power to the Profession” (NAEYC) in which the workforce in early care and education is compensated equitably, professionalized, and developed effectively (we all share a passion and desire for

helping all children reach their potential.)

## Why do not more Schools use a Collective Leadership Model?

### **Good question!**

There are many answers for this one! First, remember what was said earlier about the practice of traditional leadership. In America, the educational system was built and is maintained on the traditional leadership model—created in the industrial age, where traditional leadership was the accepted practice in business and society. The traditional leadership model is still general practice in our public school system.

Further, as you may have experienced, leaders in education are faced with very real shortages of time and money. Lack of resources makes investing in collective leadership a challenge. Finally, an important answer to “Why do not more schools use a collective leadership model?” lies in one of the paradoxes of being human—change is all around us every day, but, in most cases, we do not like change. We struggle to identify and let go of our mental models. What do we mean by mental models? Mental models (held by everyone) are deeply held beliefs about the world around us, sometimes we are not aware we have them! Mental models often shape how we think and behave in our personal and professional lives.

Everybody has some mental models, biases or beliefs about what leaders should or should not do—and sometimes we pick the model that works best for us in the moment, depending on our role as a “boss/leader” or when we are a “worker/follower.”

As you can see, both of the models we have introduced you to present issues a leader is tasked with sorting out. In both models there appear to be satisfied employees and employees with frustrations. It may depend on whose shoes you are wearing!





What are your mental models about leaders? Mental models, often based on assumptions, are sometimes hard to uncover in ourselves. Earlier you identified leaders and jobs that worked for you, and did not work for you. You identified an organization you feel is led

in a traditional model. Look back at your reflections – do you see mental models influencing your thinking? Imagine yourself in two very different stakeholder roles (perhaps manager and classroom assistant). Can you imagine how each leadership model might affect the behavior of the stakeholder?

We learned at the beginning of this section that we are all stakeholders and all leaders in early care and education. We also learned that institutions of education are changing—finding the collective model more effective, productive, and enriching for all of the people it serves.

When we dig more deeply into collective leadership, we notice it is more complicated than at first glance. If everyone is a leader:

- What *actions and skills* do we learn as leaders, to be active members in a collective leadership?
- What *behaviors* do we practice, (while still being our authentic selves) which will promote collective leadership effectively?
- Finally, what *decisions* do we make that will reflect our commitment to collective leadership, regardless of our stakeholder role?

As stated earlier, there is plenty of quality information available about leadership and how to become an effective leader. It takes time and practice to learn, and requires change in ourselves to develop into the leaders we want to become. Change is hard and

human beings get frustrated when things change, or they realize that *they, themselves* need to change.

Consider a few of the many stakeholders in early care and education:



- |                     |                |              |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Families            | Teachers       | Siblings     |
| Home Visitors       |                |              |
| Boards              | Directors      | Cooks        |
| Teaching Assistants |                |              |
| Coaches             | Janitors       | Educators    |
| Librarians          |                |              |
| Policy Makers       | Funders        |              |
| Children            | Evaluators     |              |
| Consultants         | Administrators | Grandparents |
| Trainers            |                |              |

We might think it would be easy for all these stakeholders to eagerly embrace collective leadership, see and feel the equity found within it, and willingly work for change. **Remember**, the traditional model of leadership has been around a long time, and most people may have experienced only the traditional model, and in truth, as you have considered, there are times when we might prefer the traditional model.

**Collective Leadership: A Deeper Look**

Let’s dig into the collective leadership model and untangle some of the concepts it presents.

**Concept #1: Removing Boundaries and Sharing Decision Making**

Concept: To create our vision and move towards that vision we must work together not only in the defining of our vision but in our understanding of how we work together. We must first consciously remove boundaries or barriers that did not allow some stakeholders

to lead or work together equitably. We must create conditions for stakeholders to feel motivated and valued as part of the process.

In action: We identify where there is inequity between stakeholders, discuss how to achieve equity and then inspire one another toward shared achievements. We define success and use reflection to analyze the processes we used to get there so we can make improvements moving forward.

Consider this scenario for early care and education:

### Scenario

*Home care providers Sunny and Talal hold parent meetings twice per year. They like to get families together so that they can build relationships over a potluck dinner and learn about what children are studying in the classroom portion of Sunny and Talal's home.*

*The home has a large grassy field next to the classroom. The classroom windows look out on the large field. Sunny and Talal have a small fenced play area with a climbing structure with wood chip ground cover and sand box behind their home where children spend outside time.*

*Mom Mary stands in the classroom looking out the windows. Then she comments to Talal, "Too bad you can't use that lovely field as an outdoor play area—who owns it?" Talal replies, "Well actually we own it, but we couldn't afford to purchase the proper fencing when we opened. We had hoped to do that in about five years when we have more equity built in this property." Dad Jason has wandered over and heard this exchange. He mentions, "You know Talal, my brother in law has a fencing company, and I bet we could get a*

discount.” Mary adds, “Would you be open to some fundraising?” Talal replies, “Well yes, I guess, but wow, I never considered those options. Why would parents want to invest in our property?” Mary comments, “Let’s bring it up and see what people say.”

When the families all sit down together, Mom Mary tells the families about the conversation. Another Mom comments, “So, how do we fundraise for someone’s home business?” A grandparent, Verlene adds, “I’m not a parent, but it would be a wonderful thing for them to do for the children Sunny and Talal care for each day, and for future children – like a legacy. My husband is a retired contractor, and built many fences. Could we do some of the work ourselves?”

Sunny offers, “You know, maybe we could borrow part of the money required on our home line of credit – that way we are assuming some responsibility as well.” Talal gets a paper and pencil and starts taking notes as the parents and family members start brainstorming.

## **Concept #2: Relationships and Work/Life Balance**

**Concept:** In collective leadership time is spent understanding the relational processes between people that encourage leadership in a group, and how communication and planning help all stakeholders to understand and navigate professional relationships. An invitation to bring wholeness to the table is part of the process. Stakeholders work to engage and encourage relationships that include a focus on mind, body, and spirit, and they identify the real benefits to the organization when focused attention is placed there. Engaging in work/life balance is an important part of the work, not just an afterthought.

**In action:** Time and energy is dedicated to communication,

building relationships, and learning about each other. Best practice is identified and utilized as stakeholders learn how to navigate decision making together. Stakeholders are engaged in connecting to all parts of themselves and actively supporting the “wholeness” of others and the organization. Success in relationship building and satisfaction in personal growth and self care result in excitement about work and commitment to a larger vision.

Consider this scenario:

### Scenario

*Teacher Asha brings a book about practicing yoga with children to morning circle time. She teaches the children one pose and helps them take some deep breaths. After circle time Teacher Ken rolls his eyes to Teacher Jane and comments, “Kids can’t do yoga, I hope she doesn’t want us to eat bean sprouts next!” Teacher Jane smiles and says, “Now Ken, yoga is really kind of fun, have you ever tried it? I was going to do a yoga class but never signed up—I think this might be fun—come on, have an open mind.” She laughs and gives Teacher Ken a fist bump.*

*At pick-up time, Molly tells her Aunt Sarah that they did yoga today. Aunt Sarah approaches Teacher Jane and exclaims, “Molly told me about the yoga! I am a yoga teacher, I would love to come and do some yoga with all of you!” Teacher Jane says, “That is wonderful! Let’s pull in Teacher Asha and talk about schedules.” One thing leads to another and Aunt Sarah is visiting the classroom regularly practicing yoga with children.*

*Director Bill visits the classroom and notices how calm*

everyone seems as they practice deep breathing. He asks Aunt Sarah if she would like to do some yoga with staff at in-service next month; she says she is happy to do so. The yoga session is such a hit that the teachers ask her if she would be willing to practice with them once a month for the last 20 minutes of their team meeting. During this time Teacher Asha has adopted some additional healthy practices in her personal life and has lost 10 pounds. Teacher Jane asks Asha to share what she is doing as she wants to become more fit as well. Teacher Ken finds himself doing deep breathing at home when he is irritated about something, he smiles to himself thinking, “Now for the bean sprouts, I’ll tell Asha it’s working!”

### **Concept #3: Connecting Experiences/Collective Knowledge**

Concept: The idea that one person holds all the knowledge is refuted with the idea that everyone has something to add that will improve an idea or plan. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A collective intelligence exists that is deeper than individual intelligence, and when stakeholders connect with intentionality and deeper inquiry the result is better than what might have been designed previously by only one person.

In action: Time, energy and respect are utilized strategically to create opportunities for stakeholders to share and work together. These activities result in new connections and new learning. These activities are documented and used to lead stakeholders to new ways of doing things or “course correcting” plans and visions.

Consider this scenario:

## Scenario

The laboratory school on the campus has a pre-k classroom. The classroom has a sensory table, and teachers place dry materials and wet materials in the table each week on a rotating basis. One week new teacher's assistant Jamal places rice in the sensory table. He found the bag of rice in the store room and assumed it was available for use in the classroom.

Cook Chanel pops her head into the morning team meeting – “Did anyone see the large bag of rice? It’s missing.” Jamal says, “I used it for the sensory table—I’m sorry I thought it was a classroom supply.” Lead Teacher Malik comments, “I was taught that it is not ok to place food items in the sensory table— some families may not have enough to eat— it’s really disrespectful to throw away food.”

A discussion ensues:

“I got it on sale, we’ll never use it all anyway.” Cook Chanel

“What if we then use it for compost in the garden?”

Teacher Summer

“I’m confused—we used macaroni yesterday to make the Coquille Tribe Indian necklaces.” New Teacher Assistant Jamal

“That is a project in the Coquille unit that student teacher Natalie is teaching—it’s really cool, I think her Grandfather is an elder.” Teacher Malik

*“It was old macaroni I brought from home, so it’s ok, no one would want to eat it.” Teacher Summer*

*“You can eat old macaroni, it won’t hurt you.” Cook Chanel*

*Director Laurie has stepped into the office, “Hi everyone, sounds like we’ve got some great topics to discuss —first, food in the sensory table is definitely a topic we should talk about—I’d like to hear more from everyone about food and how we can respect our families, and our school community, and what your thoughts and beliefs are about how we use food in our center. Second, I want to talk about the necklace project—some Indian tribes assign special significance to the materials they used to make items to wear or keep —the Hopi Indians assigned meaning to marks and materials in their jewelry. How are we teaching about these items, and let’s talk about how to make sure we are making connections for children and families that are respectful and informed. I am so glad Natalie is interested in teaching about the Coquille Tribe! Let’s pull her into our next team meeting.”*

#### **Concept #4: Collaborative Decision Making**

Concept: When people are willing to make some leadership decisions together instead of someone imposing decisions on others, better outcomes can result for more stakeholders.

In action: People deliberately create and engage in opportunities for meaningful connections with each other that center on key processes and decisions. As stakeholders build and maintain relationships, collaborative decision making can occur naturally and be sustained. People learn how to make agreements, give and take, and design accountability structures and processes that sustain momentum in important decision making.

Consider this scenario:



## Scenario

New Director Abby sends out an email to all staff that states that she will be doing the new staff schedules this week and sends them out. At the end of the week on Friday the schedule is shared, with a hard copy placed on everyone's desk. Teacher Dan comments, "Awesome, I got the late shift—perfect." as he collects his coat to leave. Teacher Yvette slams her desk drawer, "Abby gave me the early shift, she knows I have to drop my son off at school and can't get here on time. I don't want him on the bus with the older kids. I'm going to have to talk with her about this." Teacher Assistant Finn claims, "Well I can't work over lunch, I have class—so this won't work." He throws it in the trash can and leaves. Classroom Assistants Jenny and Piper don't have anything to add as they leave for the day.

By Monday, staff are stewing internally. Teacher Dan is certain he'll get bumped to early shift and is feeling resentful, Teacher Yvette is worried about her son, and Assistant Teacher Finn feels like no one cares about his life. Director Abby notices that Monday and Tuesday staff seem a bit disgruntled, and in Wednesday's team meeting there is a stony silence when she enters the room. Teacher Yvette starts with, "Abby you told us that when we had a concern we should speak up, so I am—the new schedule is not going to work for me." She crosses her arms, and looks to Finn for support. Teacher Dan looks uncomfortable and states, "Well I like it, and we have an agreement to rotate shifts whenever we can so that everybody gets the shift they want some of the

time.” Jenny and Piper exchange glances as if to say, “Here we go! They are going to argue!”

After an uncomfortable pause Director Abby reflects, “Thank you for telling me that you are concerned, Yvette. I meant it when I said I want to be accountable. But, I am the director, and my schedule policy is clearly stated in the employee handbook.” She looks around at the frowning faces in the room, and realizes that she may have a problem on her hands that will be hard to untangle. “I have to admit, there is no way to make everybody happy with the schedule—that’s why I have a policy. I’m going to have to think about this before I make any changes.”

During the following week Abby does not mention the schedule and she feels angry about it. “I’m the boss!” she thinks to herself. Teachers Dan and Yvette avoid each other and Finn feels disconnected. At Wednesday’s team meeting Abby is again greeted with an uncomfortable silence when she enters the room.

Teacher Dan states, “Ok, I know we are all thinking about the schedule. Look, we need to work it out somehow. Abby, you did make an agreement to work with us on issues.” Director Abby says, “I did, and I meant it.” Assistant Finn exclaims, “Well I have to say I feel a bit disrespected. Everyone knows I have class at lunch, and now I’ll have to drop it or quit.” Abby looks surprised, “Finn, I didn’t know that was ongoing—I’m sorry, I don’t want you to quit, you are a really important part of the team.” Classroom Assistant Piper offers, “You know, if Finn and I started early, he could still go to class. I would actually rather start early anyway.” Teacher Yvette says, “That works for Finn but it doesn’t solve my problem, I can’t get here and get my son to school on

time.” She stares meaningfully at Teacher Dan who looks at the floor. Director Abby states, “Well ok, how about this—I will come in early so Yvette can start a bit later. That way everyone gets what they want until summer session. Yvette, would you be willing to start early in summer?” Yvette replies, “Sure! I can do that.” Teacher Dan states, “Well I would be willing to change shifts later in the year if it’s necessary, but thanks for letting me have the late shift now.” Abby reflects, “Thanks for bringing this forward, let’s work on more shared decision making together.”

### **Concept #5: Flexibility and Continuity**

**Concept:** Organizations are complicated, and even seemingly straightforward work is complex. Paying attention to how problems emerge and change, and how people adapt to solutions (intended or unintended) provide opportunities for understanding how the organization is growing, learning, and developing. Avoiding rigid structures, allowing for creativity and spontaneity and then tracking the progress of situations or problems promotes the design of better practices.

**In action:** Practices can be both planned and spontaneous. Allowing people to generate ideas and try new processes can result in learning that can benefit the organization. Allowing for creativity, and tracking the progress of problem solving will provide an institutional history from which to learn.

Consider this scenario:

*Scenario*

It is a team meeting day for the teachers in the pre-k room. Lead teacher Jeremy reflects, “I wish we could get our assessments completed on time this year. If we could do that we would have all the time we need for our water unit, I hate that it gets cut short every year, the children love it.” Jeremy gives a heavy sigh and frowns down at his clipboard. Teacher Assistant Cooper comments, “Well I admit that I drag my feet on them, it’s my least favorite activity.”

After a short silence, Teacher Assistant Sylvie states, “I’m not sure I understand why we don’t get them done on time each year, Cooper I don’t think it’s because you do them more slowly, it seems like we always run out of time.” She smiles at Cooper.

Director Emma comments, “How can I help? I can see this is bothering you.” Classroom Assistant Pam says, “Well I learned how to do the physical assessments last year. What if we were able to find someone else to do the breaks in the infant toddler room? Then I could spend almost two hours each day doing some of the assessments.” Jeremy exclaims, “That’s right! That’s a great idea Pam – Emma, do you think we could do that?” Emma replies, “I don’t see why not if I get on the phone right now for a substitute – I’m not sure I can guarantee 2 hours a day though.” Cooper smiles and states, “Well I like the water unit too so I can commit to moving faster on mine. Let’s get out the sprinkler this year!” Teacher Jeremy laughs, “Only if you take charge of it!” Director Emma states, “OK, help me make sure I understand what we are saying here, and let’s make some commitments together and individually to get this figured out – great thinking!”

Again, when we dig more deeply into collective leadership, we

notice it is more complicated than at first glance. The “actions” described above feel slippery – they feel hard to link to actual skills we can learn. Often when we become employed in early care and learning, regardless of our position, we think the expectations of us will be made clear by someone further up the chain of authority—as we know, that doesn’t always happen.

You have reflected on models, stakeholder roles, and leaders. You have probably already realized that the skills and behaviors of leadership are often skills we (and you) already possess. Sometimes they are skills that get rusty and sometimes they are skills we over use.

Good news – you can start where you are, and you have many wise guides with help to offer!



Can you recall a time you used skills or behaviors you possess intuitively,

or learned from someone else, to step in and lead? This might be an event from your professional or personal life. What were the skills or behaviors you used? Were you aware you were leading at the time?

Remember the big idea about people not liking change we mentioned earlier? Well, people don’t like it when other people disagree with them either – so another spoiler

You, **just as you are** authentically, have leadership skills. Some are your gifts, some you learned. Some you might practice more often, some you might decide you need to let go of. **You are in charge** of deciding what to do and how and when to take your own leadership skills to whatever the

next step is for  
you in your work  
and  
development.

alert: collective leadership requires an understanding of professional ethics. Have you ever left work thinking to yourself, “That’s it, I’m quitting!” because someone did something you did not like or agree with? If quitting your job would be a bad idea for your grocery budget, say hello to practicing your leadership

skills.

### **Authentically Practicing Leadership Skills**

At this point, you might be saying “Hey, just provide me with a list of skills and I’ll do them when I get promoted, or get the job I want!”

Spoiler Alert and Big Idea: Leadership skills and behaviors are not by-products of getting a promotion or a job. Leadership skills and behaviors are a choice regardless of your current job.

We know that it is a **myth** that job skills come only from getting “better jobs”. In fact, the **truth** is that all of your life experiences provide you with information about leadership skills and behaviors.

You may be thinking, “But which behaviors and skills are effective, and when to use them?” Collective Leadership looks complicated! Let us take a look at some leadership skills and behaviors that are effective and can be practiced in the journey of collective leadership.

### **Four Basic Leadership Skills**

Let’s begin with some foundational skills that you can practice regardless of your role, and that probably include skills you already possess intuitively.

#### **Skill #1: The Skill of Influence**

To influence is to have the ability to effect change in someone. Choosing to use a particular influential approach helps you communicate your vision or goals, organize people, and build commitment from stakeholders. At a basic level, influence is getting someone to do what you want them to do. But genuine commitment from other people is often required for you to accomplish more

complex tasks, hence there are a variety of strategies for influencing people. Ultimately, influence is a tool that helps you to get things done and achieve outcomes you want or have to make happen.

Influencers can force and compel using coercion, or can more subtly influence through trust, emotion, and logic. When a leader needs action and compliance is critical, obligation through a mandate is required. When there is resistance or unwillingness to comply, coercion is the influential approach that may be chosen. These are often found in employee handbooks, contracts, and job descriptions.

For example:

- When the fire alarm goes off all staff are to assist children as they exit the building, regardless of the lunch and break schedule.
- Employees who are late (more than 15 minutes past the start of their shift) more than three times without notifying the director will be terminated.

When choosing to use influence it is critical to know your stakeholders. Each person has special concerns and issues, so various groups and individuals will require different approaches for influencing. Early in your career, influence is about working effectively with people over whom you have no authority. It requires the ability to present logical and compelling arguments and engage in give-and-take communication. In more positions of authority influence is focused more on steering long-range objectives, inspiration, and motivation in the people you manage.



Three skills to practice that are influential:

- **Logic** – Logic appeals to people’s rational and reasonable thinking. You present an argument for the best choice of action based on organizational benefits, personal benefits, or both, appealing to people’s minds and reasoning.

#### *Example*

At the staff meeting Bus Driver Ann points out that she is almost always on time, and if a staff member was at the curb when she pulls up, it would save time unloading children from the bus, and afternoon snacks would not run late every day, causing the break schedule to back up.

- **Emotions** – Emotion connects an idea or a message to an individual’s goals and values. An idea that promotes a person’s feelings of well-being, service, or sense of belonging tugs at the heart and can garner support.

#### *Examples*

Staff in the Butterfly classroom have made a pact to support each other in planning for healthy dinner preparation each evening, so using group texting, everyone



reports on what they made for dinner after work. Nathan is always tempted when he drives past a fast food restaurant, but he feels obligated to support his colleagues so doesn't stop and pick up a hamburger.

- **Cooperation** – A cooperative or collaborative appeal can create a feeling of teamwork, a sense that alliances are being built and stakeholders are not alone. Offering strategies for working together to accomplish a mutually important goal extends a hand to others in the organization and is an extremely effective way of influencing others.

### Examples

At the staff meeting Teacher Assistant Joel points out that if all three staff assist in clean-up for 15 minutes after the last child leaves, everyone will be able to leave on time. Staff Heather and Dawn are on board, as they often have to stay late waiting for clean up to finish. They are happy to help in order to leave on time.



*Which of these three feels natural to you? Can you think of a time you were an unintentional influencer? Can you think of a situation in which you could choose an appropriate and intentional influential tactic and use your influence as a leader?*

As you match influential skills to

situations you wish to improve you are building the next level of influencing skills:

- **Organizational Intelligence:** When you practice a variety of influential skills, learning more about the people around you, what they care about, what bothers them, and how they prefer to communicate, you will begin to understand how to get things done and work with the reality of your organizations individuals and quirks in order to lead effectively.

#### *Examples*

The Blue classroom team likes to do lesson planning together, so the schedule is arranged for them to have some time each week together. The Yellow classroom team likes their lead to do all the planning, so they provide him with a few extra hours once a week while they stay in the classroom. Director Ann allows for the teams to organize differently even though it makes more work for her.

- **Serving Authentically:** Through the intentional actions you choose as you practice leading, you will find what best matches who you are authentically. Your “youness” will be noticed, and you will credibly promote yourself—while also promoting what’s good for the entire organization.

#### *Examples*

Director Heather notices that Teacher Assistant Jeremy (an extroverted young college student) is always making suggestions that the team likes, and in fact they have begun asking him his opinion. She wonders if he would like to move into a lead teacher role.

- **Building Trust:** Leadership involves guiding and helping people through risk and change. Trust is essential to this guidance. All the leadership skills discussed here have the potential to build trust, and the wise leaders look to trust as foundational to success.

### Examples

A new assistant joins the Green classroom team, and Lead Teacher Jim organizes a welcome lunch for her, so that all can begin to form relationships.

- **Building and Maintaining Networks:** No leader is truly acting alone. Leaders are empowered by their connections with others and look for others to connect with. As you recognize the support and collaboration others provide to you, and you build trust and understanding, you and those around you will feel satisfied. Networks of people with shared ideas and goals get things done!

## Examples

Family Home provider Mandy organizes with her assistants and two regular parent volunteers a few days in which they all receive some professional development paid for by her business—they have asked to learn more about lesson planning, and so she organizes the time for them to attend and provides a nice lunch for them.

### **Skill #2: The Skill of Agility or Being Nimble**

Being agile or nimble means to be able to move quickly, to have flexibility, and to pivot when needed. When you are agile in your learning, you choose to seek out the lessons of experience, remember those lessons, and value them in your growth as a leader. This calls for recognizing when new behaviors, leadership skills, or attitudes are needed and accepting responsibility for developing them. Learning agility involves learning from mistakes, asking insightful questions, and being open to feedback. It includes taking advantage of opportunities to learn, and responding with as much intentionality as possible to new situations. For leaders, learning agility is also about inspiring learning in others and creating a culture of learning throughout the organization – modeling for the leaders you are growing. A key word for this skill is accountability.

In early care and education, stakeholders are often asked to behave in an authoritative approach that requires significant learning agility. Regardless of your role, to be the authority is to take the lead, make a final decision, take command, act as an authority figure in a situation. Authority figures are perceived as powerful, regardless of the accuracy of their knowledge. Most structures that involve people (businesses/institutions) have structures of

authority, in which some people manage or have authority over other people.

In early care and education, adults are perceived as the authority figures by children. Often teachers are perceived by parents as authority figures. Authority and power are closely linked, with authority figures granted power by systems or by other people. All stakeholders have the choice to act with authority, and behaving with authority is a choice.

Choices to consider as you learn who you are as a leader include:

1. Seek out new and different experiences. Remain open minded and broaden your perspective, even when you feel vulnerable.
2. Accept and welcome challenges or the unfamiliar. Find the willingness to move out of your comfort zone. Dig deep and allow these experiences to change you!
3. Reflect and internalize these new experiences. When you take the time to truly internalize you are then able to recall and share later. Process your learning so next steps become evident.
4. Be open to criticism and create a strategy for taking in feedback from others and being accountable when needed. View feedback as a gift of learning. You may not like it, and it may be uncomfortable, but there is value in it for you nonetheless.
5. Move on! Many of us feel the need to get things done quickly, and feel the pressure to act, causing us to over think at times, or hesitate. It's ok to be creative! You can use accountability later if something doesn't work out.

### **Skill #3: The Skill of Communication**

Communication is one of the most basic leadership skills all of us need to develop and refine during our professional careers. Communication is consistently rated among the most important skills for leaders to be successful. Communication is also embedded in a number of other leadership skills and behaviors,

Communication begins with practicing the art of active listening. The active listening skill set involves these 6 active listening skills:

**Pay attention:** When you are talking with a colleague formally, or even informally, don't cut others off, appear distracted, finish their sentences, or start formulating your answer before they've finished speaking. Pay attention to your body language as well as your frame of mind when engaging in listening. Be focused on the moment, and behave from a place of respect as the listener. Set a comfortable tone that gives your colleague an opportunity to think and speak. Allow "wait time" before responding. If you can't be attentive, be up front and set up another time to meet.

**Withhold judgment:** Active listening requires an open mind and lack of prejudice. As a listener and a leader, be open to new ideas, new perspectives, and new possibilities when practicing active listening. Even when good listeners have strong views, they consciously suspend judgment, reserve criticisms, and avoid arguing or articulating their point right away. This takes practice!



**Reflect:** When you're the listener, don't assume that you understand your colleague correctly – and don't assume that they are aware that you are actively listening. Mirror your colleagues' information and emotions by periodically repeating key points to assure them that you are paying attention. Reflecting is an active listening technique that indicates to your colleague that you are not only paying attention but understanding their points.

**Clarify:** Do not hesitate to ask questions about any issue or statement that is confusing or unclear when engaging in active listening. As the listener, if you have doubt or confusion about what your colleague has said, say something like, "Let me see if I'm clear. Are you talking about ...?" or "Wait a minute. I didn't follow you." Open-ended, clarifying, and probing questions are

important active listening tools that encourage the person to do the work of self-reflection and problem solving, rather than justifying or defending a position, or trying to guess the “right answer.” Examples include: “What do you think about ...?” or “Tell me about ...?” and “Will you further explain/describe ...?” When engaging in active listening, the emphasis is on asking rather than telling. It invites a thoughtful response and maintains a spirit of collaboration during the interaction.

**Summarize:** Restating key points or ideas as the conversation proceeds confirms your grasp of the other person’s point of view. It also helps both parties to be clear on understanding and perhaps next steps. Briefly summarize what you have understood while practicing active listening, and ask the other person to do the same, especially when strong feelings are involved.

**Share:** Active listening is first about understanding the other person, then about being understood as the listener. As you gain a clearer understanding of the other person’s perspective or problem, you can consider when to introduce your ideas, feelings, or even suggestions. You might talk about a similar experience you had or share an idea that was triggered by a comment made in the conversation. Depending on the situation this may help the conversation to shift into problem solving. As the listener, continue to question, guide, and offer, but be careful about solving problems before allowing colleagues the opportunity to be problem solvers themselves.

Active listening is one of many communication skills you can practice as you choose to pursue your own growth as a leader. You want to think with clarity, express ideas, and share information with a multitude of stakeholders. You can choose to learn how to handle the rapid flows of information in your workplace, and among all the stakeholders you work with. Effective communication and effective leadership are closely braided together. Leaders need to be skilled communicators in a variety of relationships at many levels, especially in early care and education.

#### **Skill #4: The Skill of Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness means understanding your strengths and weaknesses, along with a willingness to consider your mental models, biases, and triggers. As we discussed earlier, gaining self-awareness is anything but simple, and change can be hard to implement. Your ability to be self-aware is one of the critical leadership skills for sustainable and long-term effectiveness as a leader. Self-awareness is a challenging skill to develop, and it serves as the foundation to many other skills we have discussed.

Your effectiveness as a leader is less impactful or more impactful based on how well you understand yourself, your awareness of how others view you, and how you choose to navigate the resulting interactions between you and your colleagues. Here are basic behaviors you can implement as you focus on your awareness of yourself.

- **Your Own Wisdom.** There are insights from your experience that you can apply to the challenges you face with others. You bring your life experience and your learnings from others in your life to every situation. Insights from your life won't come to mind immediately, but as you practice reflecting on how you are going to choose to lead, and what has been productive (or not) in the past you find that your own wisdom will help you. This requires practicing deep reflection as part of your self awareness – looking for bias, mental models, and assumptions.
- **Your Professional Identity.** This is about who you are in your current professional setting. Just as you have a personal identity, you can develop a professional identity that demonstrates leadership. Your professional identity influences how you are leading whether you're aware of it or not. In our diverse world it's critical to understand our own identity and how it shapes interactions with others. Knowing your own professional identity may help you find common ground with



others that leads to stronger relationships.

- **Your Professional Reputation.** This is how others perceive you as a leader and professional based on your current and previous behavior. Your professional reputation is what others think of you as a colleague, a leader, a stakeholder. Understanding your reputation helps you comprehend how you may be perceived and judged by others. Knowing how you're perceived is sometimes difficult and requires trying to see yourself through other lenses. You can choose to change your current behavior, and you can influence how you would like others to think of you if you choose to change. This will take self-awareness, and trusted mentors.
- **Leadership Potential.** How do people know the leadership skills and behaviors you're capable of, and how do you communicate your potential? What aspirational set of leadership skills and behaviors do you want colleagues to see in and from you? Defining how you'd like to be perceived allows you to choose what to work on, and where to start. Strong leadership skills can only be developed if you're self-aware, willing to consider your leadership reputation, define your professional identity, and be reflective. For those who work at it, greater self-awareness will pay off no matter what your role.

### **Bringing it all Together**

In this section we have examined how power is interwoven with leadership, introduced the current trend of stakeholders as sharing power and leadership in education for increased student and institutional success, described two leadership models, and examined many specific skills that you can practice as a leader in

early care and education. We introduced the reality that all of us are leaders in early care and education, and you have reflected on how your role in the field and in other work settings has created mental models for you depending on your position and perceptions.

We have introduced you to the collective leadership model as the one best suited for early care and education and offered some foundational skills you can choose to practice to promote that model.

We provided a scenario for each element of collective leadership earlier in this module. Can you see yourself in any of the scenarios? Might you, without knowing it, have been a contributor to collective leadership? Perhaps in a scenario like any of those written, you chose to use a leadership skill or behavior to make things better for you, or for a colleague. We think you probably have done one or the other, and that as was stated earlier, you already possess some of the skills described here.

It is our hope that at this point you see yourself as a leader in early childhood care and education, no matter what your current role, and that the collective leadership model makes sense to you as an effective and satisfying model for building and growing successful, intentional stakeholders.

Whatever your current role is, we know you will continue to grow and develop. Take the skills and behaviors provided for you here and create a plan for using them, every day. Start small and track your progress as you see results. Take some time to reflect on what puzzles you in your working relationships, and look for some help from other resources. Weekly jotting in a notebook will keep you on track, and you will see your persistence paying off. We will be with you on your journey!

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This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.