

Widening the leadership story – moving beyond the individual

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Abstract

Distributed leadership that includes democratic practices can open spaces for children and their families to share their knowledge and skills and participate in everyday early childhood leadership activity. Drawing on the findings of a Masters thesis this article discusses how one kindergarten's exploration of the local community has afforded insights into reframing leadership as an emerging social process whereby teachers, children and families are participants in an approach to leadership described as democratic leadership. Past leadership research has commonly focused on skills, traits and behaviours of people deemed leaders. Moving away from the primacy of the individual towards knowing leadership as an emergent phenomenon that exists between people incorporating multiple worldviews, elevates democratic principles such as collaboration and meaningful participation. Leadership-as-practice was used to analyse the ways in which excursions into the community have broadened teachers' understandings of leadership and fostered more democratic and inclusive participation of children and families in the kindergarten programme. Utilising excursions within the local community as a mechanism to support a democratic form of leadership suggests that leadership can be perceived as arising from the collective work of people in everyday contexts. The value of extending the learning environment beyond the boundaries of the kindergarten, to engage with the local community, offers possibilities to make connections with the surrounding land, understand local stories, histories and cultural events. In this sense democratic leadership intersects with place-based education as children's awareness of themselves as citizens of a community deepens. Inquiry as a form of participatory democracy was a key feature of decision-making in this study and provided a common purpose for community excursions while encouraging leadership opportunities.

Keywords: *Democratic leadership; leadership-as-practice; early childhood education; collaboration; place-based education*

Introduction

Despite the huge potential of leadership to impact positively on the provision of early childhood education services, democratic leadership research remains relatively unexplored in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Democratic leadership, as a form of distributed leadership, offers potential to widen the early childhood leadership story beyond that of the individual in a designated role of authority by offering an expansive conception of leadership that makes room for children, teachers, families and even the wider community. The notion of democratic leadership lessens the need to assign leader/follower roles, enabling leadership to become focused on the work people achieve when united in a common purpose. The intention of this paper is to provoke and encourage conversations around alternative leadership approaches in early childhood services. It seeks to make a case for promoting democratic leadership as an alternative to the taken for granted single strong leader. This interpretation is demonstrated through findings from a Masters study situated in one kindergarten that went about connecting democratic leadership with collaborative explorations of their local community. The article considers the place of democracy in education and introduces Leadership-as-practice (LAP) as a means of analysing excursions in the local community. Place-based education, incorporating inquiry learning is acknowledged as a major influence on this study, providing a means to promote meaningful participation. Three key considerations for democratic leadership are outlined: transforming dialogue, power sharing and meaningful participation, together with teacher

views on promoting democratic leadership. Limitations of the study along with future possibilities conclude the article.

Educational leadership research

Interest in educational leadership has emerged as a field of study gaining considerable attention. The field is well stocked with an array of views and approaches to leadership, each espousing their merits. Literature and research examining contemporary educational leadership theory has largely been dominated by the compulsory education sector (Harris, 2003, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004; Ritchie & Woods, 2007; Woods, 2005) and limited attention has been given to early childhood leadership (ECL). To date, research has focused on the “micro concept” of leadership, investigating traits, environments, styles, roles, and behaviours of the leaders themselves (Dunlop, 2008). Internationally, investigations have considered the distinction between leadership and management, the role gender plays in ECL, together with a growing interest in the importance of context (Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, 2013; Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002; Waniganayake, 2014).

Recognising the lack of a cohesive leadership strategy for early childhood and in a desire to promote action in leadership development, the New Zealand Teachers' Council commissioned a report (Thornton, Wansborough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken & Tamati, 2009) which revealed challenges and dilemmas facing New Zealand ECL. The report discovered a lack of understanding in early childhood services of what leadership involves, an unwillingness by many teachers to connect with the notion of leadership and confusion surrounding the terminology of leadership and management (Thornton et al., 2009). The findings also found a lack of professional development programmes to support professional ECL growth. A focus on offering ECL professional development for individuals in appointed positions of authority, be it a supervisor or head teacher, perpetuates individualistic models of leadership within early childhood settings.

In acknowledgement of the limitations of viewing leadership as the sole domain of a single individual and recognising the power of mobilising the strengths of many, distributed forms of leadership have been attracting much scholarly attention and exploration (Woods & Roberts, 2016). Woods (2004) contemplates distributed leadership from the perspective of leadership becoming the property of a group of interacting individuals, giving little prominence to the formal leader. Despite the commonly held assumption that distributed leadership is difficult to define, Woods (2004) has put forward three elements that make distributed leadership distinctive. First it is “an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals” (p. 441), secondly it requires openness to boundaries, and finally it involves leadership according to expertise, whereby all and everyone can offer leadership within the group context (p. 442). Recent work from Woods (2015) looking at research out of Finland, advises that the notion of distributed leadership as a “resource which exists and has to be used at all levels” (p. 177) could be strengthened by including the values and learning that guide distributed leadership (p. 178). Holistic democracy, embodying concepts of democracy and social justice is one such suggestion. Woods describes holistic democracy as involving the personal growth of individuals and facilitates mutual empowerment together with fair participation in social and organisational environments (Woods & Woods, 2013).

Democracy and education

Thinking that connects early childhood education and democracy is by no means new. Looking to Northern Italy and the region of Reggio Emilia where the municipal school movement began in the aftermath of the Second World War, an early childhood system that celebrates diversity, difference and pluralism can be found (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). Over one hundred years ago the American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey advocated for the positioning of democracy to be the central purpose of education, and in recent times scholars have attended to the provocation provided by Dewey by researching the incorporation of democratic values in leadership discussions (Woods, 2004, 2005, 2015; Moss, 2014; Raelin, 2016a, 2016b).

Broadly speaking, democratic leadership refers to the cultivation of an environment that supports meaningful participation, power sharing and collaboration. It is concerned with what people can accomplish together in their day to day experiences and is primarily mobilised through social interactions (Raelin, 2016b).

Leadership-as-Practice (L-A-P)

Joseph Raelin's (2005, 2011, 2016a, 2016b) studies of work-based learning offered insights into reframing leadership as "leaderful practice" emphasising an approach to leadership called "Leadership-as-Practice" (L-A-P). Leaderful practice challenges conventional views of leading out front by proposing that anyone can exert leadership and redefines leadership as a collective practice, incorporating the four C's of leadership: concurrent, collective, collaborative and compassionate (Raelin, 2005). Thinking of leadership as being concurrent suggests that leadership can involve multiple members of a community at any given time. As a collective endeavour, leadership is a plural phenomenon, not stemming from the influence of one individual but rather from the people coming together for a common purpose. By incorporating a collaborative perspective, leadership emerges from the flow of interactions and ideas of all members of a community. The final idea, viewing leadership as compassionate, means that all stakeholders are important and that values such as democracy are fundamentally interconnected with leadership (Raelin, 2005). Leaderful practice connects leadership with practices which Raelin (2011) describes as "a cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome" (p. 4). L-A-P is consistent with democratic principles through "its commitment to the dignity of involved persons who are given the right and voice to participate in decisions that affect them" (p. 127). Raelin's (2016b) L-A-P pays attention to the social interactions, reflections and adjustments of those involved rather than focusing on the leader / follower relationship, positioning leadership as a consequence of collaborative meaning-making in practice. This alternative leadership perception contrasts sharply with past attempts to define and affirm the traits and heroics of individuals (Raelin, 2016b).

Place-based education

Place can be seen in terms of people, their daily experiences in relation to one another, incorporating the culture, history and stories of people past, present and in the future. McInerney, Smyth and Down (2011) offer a view of place as a lens through which young people begin to make sense of themselves and their surroundings, form relationships, develop a sense of community and learn to live with others (p. 5). Although not an overly familiar term in the New Zealand education context, place-based education (Penetito, 2009) holds huge potential to respond to issues of identity and culture while simultaneously being both educationally and culturally beneficial to all students. Place-based education is characterised by a focus on a specific geographic location, emphasising the geographic, historic, political, ecological or sociological dynamics of that place. It draws on multiple participants and is inherently experiential, pervasively connecting the individual with community (Penetito, 2009).

In an early childhood context, the principles of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) offer multiple entry points for place based and citizenship education in New Zealand (Manning, 2012):

- Whakamana / Empowerment: focuses on children's developing self-worth and identity and the discussion of bicultural issues (p. 40). Furthermore, assessment as a two-way process means that children can inform adults of learning, development and the environment by providing insights that adults may not have identified (p. 40).
- Kotahitanga / Holistic development: within this principle the child's whole context, the physical surroundings, the emotional context and relationships with others contribute to the child's development. Tasks, stories, events and activities should have meaning and make connections with Māori children's lives and be enriching for all (p. 41).

- Whānau Tangata / Family and community: local communities and neighbourhoods are specifically noted as influencing children's well-being (p. 42).
- Ngā Hononga / Relationships: learning through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things is emphasised in this principle. Social interactions, opportunities to interact with the environment along with the inclusion of Māori people, places and artefacts should be provided.

Te Whāriki asks educators to be creators of curriculum, weaving their own pattern in response to community influence, and educators are expected to develop programmes to meet the needs of its children, families, setting and local community (p. 27). Manning (2012) offers that place based education is consistent with the Ministry of Education's (2011) *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners*, as it affirms Māori learners as Māori by providing authentic contexts for learning language, identity and culture.

Engaging collaboratively within the community from which children are citizens presents emotional, imaginative and spiritual ways of connecting with the world children inhabit. This sense of interconnectedness with the human and non-human world expresses itself in democratic leadership through a commitment to viewing people, land, stories, culture, language, relationships and collaboration as existing together, not in discrete parts. The spiritual principle of the interconnectedness of all things is important in most indigenous societies and explicitly links with holistic notions of embodied learning. Kenny (2012) writes of the convergence of human and non-human in leadership, stating that "the notion of embodied concepts animates our leadership theories with a richness that keeps our worlds vital, integrated and whole" (p. 12).

The study

Research for this project took the form of a case study at one kindergarten in a small Waikato town. In 2013, the population of the town stood at 5127 (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), of whom 60% identified as Maori and 53% as European, with a similar picture of cultural diversity mirrored at the kindergarten. The question under investigation was: How can collaborative exploration of the local community afford leadership opportunities for children, families and teachers and expand our concept of leadership?

Sociocultural theory underpinned the study, acknowledging children as competent, capable research participants. Three teachers, eight children (who selected Cyborg, Elsa 1, Elsa 2, Kirsten, Melanie, Mermaid, Robber, and Sharkman as pseudonyms) and family members from the kindergarten along with community members took part in the study. Conversational interviews with children and focus group interviews with teachers contributed towards narrative data, which followed five excursions into the local community undertaken over the period of one ten-week term. To interpret the data, Woods and Woods' (2013) degrees of democracy framework was interconnected with Raelin's (2011) four leaderful tenets positioning leadership as collective, concurrent, collaborative, and compassionate.

Exploring "our place" to foster democratic leadership

Democratic leadership is grounded in practices that encourage collaborative partnerships between educators, children and families. In this study, shared learning experiences extending beyond the gates of the kindergarten offered a means to enable and support inclusive participation. Situating the study within the local community integrated notions of place as a major influence.

During the study, knowledge formation was a collective endeavour, true to socio-cultural approaches that value co-construction and emphasise active participation. Families were able to contribute personal knowledge and expertise in the form of conversations and written comments as they engaged with children's questions and thinking about their local community. Influenced by Wells' (1999) assertion that inquiry learning is most effective when it engages with children's authentic questions, this research used place-based inquiry education, utilising children's questions related to their place as a platform to afford leadership opportunities for children, teachers and families.

Questions explored during this research were:

Does he live in a castle? – The Koroneihana

Who owns the Hakarimata? – The Hakarimata Ranges

Who's that guy? – Puke-i-aahau Pa

Are there libraries in Australia? – The local library

Is it big or is it small? – Kauri tree walk

Relevance for leadership in early childhood education concerns how the purpose of education is viewed. Could the purpose be to build democratic models of living that connect children and potentially all stakeholders with the community in which they are situated, or is leadership to remain imbued with neoliberal values of individualism and tidy efficiencies? The question “Who owns the Hakarimata” is used to illustrate democratic leadership in practice.

Who owns the Hakarimata?

The Hakarimata Ranges are a dominant feature of the local landscape. Many of the children walk the tracks with their families and the bush is well known to all who live in the town. The question, “Who owns the Hakarimata?” was posed by Sharkman, aged 4, after a shared dialogue between teachers and a group of children. The question was displayed for families to consider and two possible lines of inquiry were posed; it could be a reserve owned by the Department of Conservation, or possibly owned by the local District Council. With the assistance of a whānau member who worked at the council, a meeting was set up between the council and the four children driving this question. Following a short walk to the council office, the quest began with the children leading the investigation:

Robber: *Hey, who lives at the Hakarimata?*

Council: *Who lives there?*

Robber: *And who owns it?*

Council: *Who owns it is a very special question!*

Sharkman: *We are going to talk about that!*

Robber: *Yeah!*

Cyborg: *And who owns it?*

Sharkman: *I live up there.*

Council: *Do you? Who do you think owns the Hakarimata?*

Sharkman: *I do.*

Council: *Ohh, that's a very good answer, the council doesn't own it. . . . But do you know who really owns it?*

Mermaid: *No.*

Council: *Everybody in New Zealand.*

Mermaid: *Wow!*

Robber: *We, we live in New Zealand so we own it.*

This information was brought back to kindergarten and shared with the children and teachers, and a whole kindergarten trip to the Hakarimata Ranges followed. A community member, suggested by the council as someone who could offer expertise, accompanied the group. The council answer to Sharkman's question was further verified during the excursion;

Me: *Some of the children had wanted to know who owns it. Who owns the Hakarimata?*

Community person: *We all own it.*

Me: *There you go, Robber.*

Community person: *We all own it, everyone in New Zealand owns this forest. It's all, um, owned by all New Zealanders. It's as much yours as anyone else's.*

Sharkman: *I own it.*

Community person: *Yes and we're here to look after it aren't we? Everyone's able to come here as long as they look after it, take away their rubbish.*

During the walk our accompanying community member shared knowledge of what creatures could be found in the forest and where they lived. Parents offered their stories of exploring this place, both in the past and the present and shared discoveries such as finding glow-worms on the banks of the tracks during early morning walks.

The question, "Who owns the Hakarimata?" provided opportunities to make connections with holistic democratic leadership and leaderful principles of L-A-P. There was a real, substantive commitment from the children towards one another as they come together as a working body: actively making decisions, aspiring to find the truth. A sense of agency whereby children made decisions and influenced the course of the inquiry was evident as they took charge of the visit to the council office. Inclusive participation is an essential element of holistic democracy and can be interpreted in L-A-P as the collective capacity of people to accomplish tasks together (Raelin, 2011). This can be seen as openings are created for an ever-widening circle of people to become involved in this investigation. Family participation was made possible either through conversations or by writing comments on a whiteboard displayed at the entrance to the kindergarten. Community involvement came about as the children actively sought knowledge from the council. Later, the community person recommended by the council confirmed who owned the Hakarimata ranges and introduced the concept of kaitianga or guardianship, reminding the children that ownership comes with responsibilities: in this case, to care and protect the forest and creatures that live there. Leadership took on a sense of being concurrent and collective as conversations offered new ways to understand this location. An inclusive community of participants collectively worked to achieve outcomes that, importantly, were not previously known by the children, teachers or whānau of the kindergarten. Results from the study highlighted three main factors as being central to democratic leadership: transforming dialogue, meaningful participation, and power sharing.

Leadership in this example was democratic as it did not rely on one single person to make a decision. Spaces for participation were created as whānau and community members shared knowledge and expertise concerning a well-known physical landscape feature within community, contributing to a different leadership perspective.

Transforming dialogue

To shift thinking around leadership from an activity primarily associated with the roles of individuals towards an emergent group property, it was necessary to envisage teachers, children and families as being present in leadership rather than being containers of leadership (Denis, Langley & Sergi, 2012). While investigating "Who owns the Hakarimata?" leadership was both concurrent and collaborative as numerous voices were heard engaged in dialogue seeking information and speaking during the council visit. Driving this process of engagement is transforming dialogue. Woods and Woods (2013) describe transforming dialogue as the fostering of a climate in which differing views are exchanged and debated enabling people to cooperatively seek to exchange mutual understandings.

Results from the study suggested that leadership activity resided primarily in our everyday conversations and it is in this co-joint activity that a democratic culture can be established. Dialogue can be viewed as the principal means by which collaborative agency was shaped and implies that in order to sustain democratic leadership an interactive flow of conversation where ideas are freely expressed is required. Furthermore, it

connects with the leaderful tenet of collaboration as all stakeholders can speak and freely express views: every view and contribution matters (Raelin, 2005). This interactive flow needed to include multiple voices and encourage wide and meaningful participation.

Meaningful participation

Participation was a central driver of democracy (Jenlink, 2009). Throughout the study, meaningful participation was intentionally fostered through collective investigations of the local community. Inquiry was viewed as a type of participatory democracy that utilised children's questions relating to their community as a platform to afford leadership opportunities for children, teachers and families. As a social activity, inquiry connected participants to a common purpose that allowed for full and unrestricted expressions of thought and provided purpose and direction for collective work. As citizens of the local community, children were curious about their surroundings. Collecting information from the council was a group effort as the children collectively participated in asking questions and voicing their understandings. Advancing the notion that leadership can be understood in terms of the ongoing collaboration of many voices, making sense of matters relevant to participants' lives, challenges the idea of leadership primarily residing with a single person in authority. Meaningful participation, in this study, was built on a foundation of strong and genuine relationships developed over time and adhered to the democratic principle of participation given freely, supporting opportunities for equal power sharing.

Power sharing

Ho (2012) writes that leadership and power are inextricably linked. In a traditional hierarchical leadership approach, power is concentrated at the apex, and in formal school settings this is most obvious in the role of the principal. The intention in this study was to distribute power across stakeholders "capturing the spirit of democratic participation rather than central control" (Ho, 2012, p. 254). Democratic leadership, with a focus on cultivating an environment for meaningful participation, acknowledges the potential strength of the group collaborating and sharing power. Shifting the leadership focus from an individual in charge towards a community responsibility fits well with the context of Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education where respectful relationships and partnerships with families are a core responsibility for educators. Teachers, families, community members and children all have talents, skills, knowledge and resources that are essential for supporting quality educational outcomes. This emphasis on working together and sharing power is a central principle in *Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success* (Ministry of Education, 2008) and positions appointed leaders as partners, learners and collaborators in early childhood settings.

Throughout this study, every effort was made to elevate the voices of children, positioning them as knowledgeable in matters pertaining to their lives. Children's agency was apparent in their eagerness to negotiate curriculum decisions such as the destination of excursions. This is illustrated in the following excerpt of dialogue between teacher Melanie and the children, where the destination for an excursion was worked through;

- Elsa 1: *We could go to the shop where my dad got a scary mask. We could buy some stuff.*
 Melanie: *Great idea, has anyone else got an idea?*
 Sharkman: *There's a park on my house on a hill, it's at my house.*
 Melanie: *Would that be a good place for a visit?*
 Sharkman: *No.*
 Mermaid: *I got a park near my house as well.*
 Melanie: *Could we go there?*
 Mermaid: *No cos, um, cos kindy teachers aren't allowed there.*
 Melanie: *Okay.*

- Mermaid: *Cos my mum said no.*
- Melanie: *Alright, have you got an idea Sharkman?*
- Sharkman: *Why don't we go to that tree?*
- Mermaid: *It's too far away.*
- Melanie: *It is far away but we could do it.*
- Mermaid: *Yeah, on a bus.*
- Melanie: *Okay, have you been to see that big tree?*
- Mermaid: *Yeah, cos I was climbing up the top to see the kauri tree, but when I went there I didn't see a kauri tree. There's no park there.*
- Cyborg: *A kauri tree.*
- Sharkman: *Two kauri trees.*
- Elsa 2: *It's for everybody.*
- Melanie: *Yip, you're right, it's for everyone.*

This ongoing flow of interactions to determine where our next excursion would take place revealed the children's sense of belonging and connectedness with the local community as they mentioned possible shops and parks to visit. A participatory process is discernible and in line with holistic democracy as a shared responsibility for decision making occurs. Fair inclusive participation was promoted by the teacher who asked questions to seek individual children's ideas. Through a process of shared dialogue, ideas emerged; active engagement and respect for all ideas saw a final decision being made. Leadership in this instance was compassionate due to a definite reduction in power by the teacher involved and respect for the children's ability to talk through options to come up with an eventual destination. The decision to go to "that tree" highlights the presence of intersubjectivity within the group. Knowledge of the local community and environment meant that all involved realised that "that tree" was the giant kauri. The role of the teacher was commonly one of encouraging quieter voices to be heard and modelling behaviours such as tolerance and openness to novel thinking. A willingness to share power with children was clearly discernible.

Findings in this study highlighted the highly social and relational dimension of exploring the local community, creating what Woods (2015) refers to as a social environment where there exists a shared social authority amongst people. Woods (2015) refers to this as a "holarchic social environment" (p. 181), whereby people are valued for their individuality and uniqueness and what they can contribute towards an organisation rather than their formal status. Power to make decisions, pose possible lines of inquiry and contribute towards learning was shared and inclusive. This demonstrated that democratic leadership lessens the need to define people as leaders and relegate others to be followers. Flexible, open relationships existed accepting leadership from any part or level of the kindergarten (Woods, 2015) and contributed to new leadership understandings.

Teacher perceptions

Reflecting on the five community excursions revealed teachers' beliefs that exploration of the local community, teamed with children's questions, afforded a platform from which to promote an expanded view of leadership. Teachers identified specific factors and techniques necessary to grow a collective form of leadership: respect, trust, time, and developing relationships, along with the nurturing of an environment to ensure children and whānau feel safe to contribute. One teacher identified that whānau will come to share what they choose to share when they are ready, when the relationship has been sufficiently built (Ritchie, 2010).

Role modelling, encouraging participation and experimenting influence how spaces for participation are created. Another teacher explained that exploring the community is a type of learning experience that is not about transmitting knowledge; children direct the creation of their own learning. This opinion was affirmed when a teacher stated that the children "know what they want to know". To foster democratic leadership, teachers needed to listen

closely to children's thinking, take children's ideas seriously and be prepared to act upon them. This is highlighted in the following excerpt of teacher dialogue:

- Jeri: *I think they've enjoyed that we're really listening to them, you know.*
- Melanie: *It's cool seeing those quieter kids find that they can warm up. It takes a little while or time to feel like they're comfortable enough to come out and say things. It's about giving them that opportunity and keeping going with it. It's really awesome that it's not just the outgoing children that have that opportunity.*
- Jeri: *Yeah, they know what they want to know.*
- AB: *It's the process.*
- Melanie: *We're not just here putting words in their mouth, they're in charge of what they want to do.*

Listening to young children has links to democracy as it moves learning away from knowledge transmission towards meaning making and welcoming the unexpected (Moss, 2014). Responsive listening adheres to the aspiration of democratic leadership to widen the space of participation and adds an emergent character to any form of distributed leadership through the notion that everyone, though virtue of their human status, should be able to play a part in democratic agency (Woods, 2004).

Limitations and possibilities

Limitations for this case study approach came about primarily due to the narrow group size and time constraints placed on the researcher. A longer data collection period and a wider participatory group would have contributed towards more substantial data. More time to nurture whānau participation would also have been beneficial for this project. As one of the teachers pointed out, time is needed to build relationships and encourage whānau involvement, rather than pushing the necessity to contribute.

Future possibilities are boundless for services wishing to investigate place-based learning. Geographical locations throughout Aotearoa, New Zealand have unlimited potential to support young children's growing awareness of language, culture and identity by focusing curriculum on local communities. Communities hold historical stories of past inhabitants, natural landscapes, proverbs, and cultural happenings, all of which require authentic meaningful participation from multiple sources, social interaction, and power sharing, to be understood.

Conclusion

In this study, explorations of the local neighbourhood positioned all stakeholders as citizens of a community, interconnected with one another and the physical and cultural dimensions of community. Democratic leadership developed through collaborative inquiries, and social interactions led to new understandings that lessened the need to assign roles associated with leaders and followers. Leadership involved multiple members of the kindergarten community as everyone contributed towards accomplishing tasks together in day to day activity. Dewey argues that democracy and community are inseparable and that a foundation for democracy lies in a faith in the power of collective and cooperative experiences (Jenlink, 2009). Democratic leadership is a powerful approach to ECL that moves beyond the individual leader to harness the collective voices of all participants, focusing on what really matters: community, people, and relationships.

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