

## Being the Architect of Your Setting

By Phillip Butler

When thinking about what role you might want to play in your setting, whether it be as the Director, co-educator, teacher or educational leader, you have the opportunity to dramatically influence the environment and the people around you if you choose to.

*I would like to put forward the revolutionary idea that all teachers can lead. If schools are going to become places where all children and adults are learning in worthy ways, all teachers must lead.* (Ruth in Harris, Day, Hatfield & Chapman. 2003)

Recently I've been thinking more and more about the topic of leadership, and how key a role it has to play in the overall success of the early childhood setting. I like to think of the role in terms of houses and construction, and here's why.

Picture a house, a well constructed, obviously expensive house. A house that while being made of the finer materials is relatively plain in design. It has four simple walls, two stories, and plain windows. Not the most inviting of houses, but a pleasant enough house to look at and one which has utilised every square footage of the available ground for bedroom space.

Now picture another house, a house that has been designed to complement the environment around it. It has a beautiful indoor / outdoor living space, glass stairs, contorted and shaped roof, is fully self sustainable and environmentally friendly. What is the difference between these two houses? Why does one end up looking and feeling plain, simple, understated, while the other looks so inviting and feels so right when you walk through it? They both were built under the same building regulations and codes, both working with materials readily available, and both with the same budget. The difference is that one had an architect to help design and plan its construction, and the other had a builder. Now, there's nothing fundamentally wrong with a house built without the use of an architect, but it's always clear to the viewer when you do walk into an environment that has had that extra design.

So you need to be the architects of your environment. Architects look at the spaces and dream big. They think of the spaces and who will be using them, planning for harmony, and most importantly, they have a passion for their vision and will stand up for it against anyone.

*Charismatic school leaders are perceived to exercise power in socially positive ways. They create trust among colleagues in their ability to overcome any obstacle and are a source of pride to have as associates. Colleagues consider these leaders to be symbols of success and accomplishment, and to have unusual insights about what is really important to attend to; they are highly respected by colleagues.* (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999, p. 57)

We all have the same rules and regulations to abide by, it is the level we choose to move our colleagues and ourselves to, that is up to us. Don't be a reactive practitioner, simply waiting for external prompts and motivation to move forward. Practice being proactive, utilise all your

training, professionalism, practical experience, creativity and passion, and dare to create the environment that takes each viewers breath away. At this time of the year, it's a great time to reflect upon what you are doing, and how you are going to be moving forward into the new year. What vision are you going to set, and how are you going to achieve it?

So here are some points to move your practice and thinking to another level:

1. See with clarity what it is you are surrounded by and why things are the way they are
2. Question your intentions and motivations for your current way of being and doing
3. Explore alternatives to how you think and practice. Assess the merit and benefits, the challenges and the pitfalls of each of your current practices
4. Think in a bespoke way. Tailor your thinking and practice to where you work.
5. Expect nothing less than excellence in all that you do
6. Push yourself to the limits of your comfort zone (we dare ya)
7. Think deeply about how you can plan success well into the future
8. Start small but always think big.

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### **References**

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