

Framework for developing leadership skill in child care centers in the Bedouin villages

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Abstract: There has been minimal research focused on leadership and management aspects of directors' work in Centre -based child care to date. In Bedouin villages from Israel, practices in early education have been drawn largely from studies in other cultural contexts, particularly research undertaken in the United States. It is timely that Bedouin village's research informs social policy about quality child care programs. The data in this article is part of a larger doctoral study where case studies of directors of child care Centre's were developed through interviews with the directors.

Keywords: innovative activity; child care programs; leadership; management.

JEL Classification: I12, I31

Introduction

The interview methodology focused on exploratory semi-structured, open-ended questions in relation to management and leadership in center-based child care. Directors were interviewed on two occasions within a three month period. This article concentrates on the second interview which explored directors' perspectives on leadership. In the current context of the delivery of child care services in a market-driven climate, the language of business and organizational theory has entered the lexicon of the early childhood field. The findings indicate that directors of child care Centre's need to have training and experience in business management and leadership to enhance their competencies for management of centers in today's competitive environment.

Leadership as a Professional Issue

Despite the rapid development of child care services both in the United States there has been little encouragement for directors to pursue formal leadership training or credentials. Many employers consider it unnecessary for directors to seek higher qualifications because higher degrees are viewed as 'professional gate keeping' requiring increased wages, thus increasing the costs of operating a center (Bowman, 1997). Most directors in child care centers have had no professional training for leadership and administration roles (Hard, 2005). This is despite recognition that leadership training is a critical variable in program quality (Bloom, Rafanello, 1995). This is recently published several texts focusing on early childhood personnel as leaders. The texts explore areas such as leadership theory, constraints of leadership and leadership within the field at an international level. It appears that greater attention to leadership in the early childhood field is emerging in an increasingly market driven competitive environment (Murdoch, 2004).

Child care directors are effectively change agents. A leader needs to recognize that an organization must continually anticipate opportunities for change, which will advance the mission and aims of the organization (Humphries, Senden, 2000). Child care centers are complex organizations influenced by the external environment (Seers & Breen, 2002). Changes in the political climate create uncertainty, meaning that change in child care and family policies requires understanding of the political environment. Further, directors in child care need to be sensitive to the local community needs in which their centers operate. Studies in leadership and administration in early childhood education have found that the director's style of leadership has a profound effect on the total teaching approach of the center (Neugebauer, 1990). In particular, Neugebauer proposed that the director's decision-making style was related to the quality of interpersonal relations within the center. When decisions were made within a team environment, staff was more motivated, dedicated, trusting, and clear on centre objectives than were staff who worked in centers where less attention was given to the quality of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the best type of a leader within an early childhood program was found to be a democratic motivator. This type of leader trusts staff decision making and creativity, rather than taking a strong supervisory role. In later work, Neugebauer (Neugebauer, 2000) noted: "The director must set the course in order to lay out a vision that all staff can use as a road map to guide their day-to-day efforts ... Not only does the director set the course, but she must also keep her finger on the pulse of the organization."

Effective leaders balance the concern for task, quality and productivity with genuine concern for people (Seplocha, 1998). Clyde (Clyde, 1995) interviewed fifty child care directors and found that responsiveness to staff was deemed important by 98.1% of the participants, as was building good working relationships with all staff. This type of director is continually monitoring and supporting the performance of staff to ensure that the organizational goals and vision are achieved and that all parts of the organization are performing as expected. Effective leadership is about focusing on client-centered goals and creating a challenging environment, which provides staff with a sense of purpose and accomplishment (Sergiovanni, 1984). Child care directors are usually aware of their leadership responsibilities (Grey, 1999). However, they are not often aware of their own leadership style and how it can be developed effectively. A vision of what they wish to achieve in their role as leaders is important in order to reach organizational goals (Grey, 1999). A vision of quality in child care services benefits all members of the organization as well as the children and families that a center serves. Capacities to implement a vision of quality care include building supportive relationships with staff through open communication and encouraging participation in decision-making (Gardner, Terry, 1996). An organizational culture that is committed to continuous improvement in the quality of programs is necessary (Frede, 1995; Grey, 1999; Kapsalakis et al, 2000). Leadership emerged as an important professional issue for early childhood education during the 1990s in response to the extensive development of child care services. Leadership of these services is important to the quality of service delivery. Social changes require higher levels of responsiveness by services to family needs and effective leadership facilitates this.

Changing family structures and employment patterns for men and women, as well as workplace and employment conditions, together with the increased recognition of the importance of early education, have major implications for how child care services are delivered. Child care directors need to be cognizant of a range of social and family policies that are likely to affect future service development. In this context, then, this article explores how eight child care center directors perceived their leadership role in the operation of child

care services. It provides a framework for developing leadership skills in the child care sector and argues that in a market-driven economy, attention to leadership competencies is essential.

How to develop leadership in children?

In this chapter we propose a moderator for managers and educators in the care of children and parents is: how to develop leadership in children?

Many leaders also serve as parents, happily balancing a daily workload with ball games and family dinners. Along the way, most of these leader-parents also realize the influence they have over young minds. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders, especially if those children have parents who are leaders.

While leadership skills can come naturally, children learn lessons along the way that significantly impacts them later in life. The right words at the right time can make all the difference.

Here are 15 great tips to help you instill the right skills in the future leaders in your life. (Author)

1. Set a good example.

As a leader, you realize the importance of setting a good example for your team. This is even truer of your role as a parent. By allowing your children to see how well you balance your business and personal roles, you'll teach them accountability through effective leadership.

2. Encourage team activities.

Early on, identify your children's interests and encourage their participation in group activities. Whether it's joining a scouting troop, participating in sports or joining the school band, children learn valuable lessons about teamwork through these activities.

3. Emphasize perseverance.

The best leaders learn to handle failure as gracefully as they handle success. It's important to expose future leaders to disappointment rather than protecting them from it. Children need to learn to handle the loss and move forward when the other team wins or someone else is elected class president.

4. Build negotiation skills.

Every good leader knows the art of compromise. Instead of giving your children a firm "yes" or "no" to a request, make an offer and allow them to counter that offer by offering solid points. Teach them negotiation skills like never giving up something without asking for something else in return.

5. Hone decision-making abilities.

Children should learn how to make good decisions as early in life as possible. Because the children becomes overwhelmed by too many choices, narrow down the options to two or three, whether a child is deciding on afternoon activities or a movie to watch. My wife Kristy says "Teach your children to weigh the pros and cons of each option in order to make the most informed decision possible. This will help them to make correct decisions in everyday life."

6. Practice confident communication.

When you go to a restaurant, do you place orders for your children? You can actually turn a simple dinner into a confidence-building exercise by having your children speak directly to servers. Allowing them to order and speak directly to servers will help them gain confidence in themselves and be able to communicate what they need.

7. Encourage work.

Often children are eager to begin working in some capacity. If your child wants to set up a lemonade stand, support them and encourage it. Once your children are old enough, they can take on work opportunities like babysitting and mowing neighborhood yards, provided you live in a safe neighborhood. These early jobs can be essential to building leadership skills in children.

8. Enroll in summer camp.

Summer camp is filled with opportunities to participate in team-building activities. Once youth reach a certain age, they may even be asked to help counselors. While many camps require counselors to be 18, a regular camp attendee may be able to land spot assisting counselors, where they'll be tasked with leading groups of younger children.

9. Have family game night.

Instead of spending an evening staring at your respective screens, consider an evening of board games instead. A family game night not only provides a unique way to spend time together, it helps children learn to be a good sport, play by the rules, and think strategically.

10. Teach project planning skills.

As a family, you likely have many planned events, from family vacations to visiting relatives. As you prepare, don't leave children out of the planning process. Treat each event as though it were a business project, holding brainstorming sessions and delegating smaller tasks to your young family members.

11. Use vision boards.

One fun way to teach children goal-setting is through the use of vision boards. They'll have fun cutting out pictures and arranging them on a board, and in the process they will learn how to visualize what they want to achieve.

12. Avoid jumping in.

When your child works on a project or activity, it can be tempting to jump in and help, especially if you see your child struggling. Instead, consider stepping back and letting your children work through it themselves. After the fact, you can review the obstacles and challenges that emerged during the task and ask for ideas on how things could have been done differently.

13. Find a mentor.

As great an example as you are to your children, a mentor can be invaluable. A trusted friend or family member can be a great mentor, especially if that person is accomplished in an area in which your child expresses interest. There are also organizations that can supply screened members as mentors.

14. Encourage reading.

Studies have shown the benefits of reading for fun in childhood, with children who read having greater intellectual progress in a variety of subjects. Young readers tend to learn more about the world, even when the reading is of a frivolous nature.

15. Reward optimistic thinking.

The fact that optimism is connected to success should not be lost on your family. Reward optimism, especially when that optimism is connected to attempting to reach a goal.

Financial expert Miranda Marquit teaches that "to teach your children money management you need to allow them to make mistakes. Have them make a list of what they want, then help them to prioritize what on the list is more important and have them save for it." This will teach them valuable lessons that will help them throughout their whole life. It will also help them know what they can and can't afford.

In small ways, today's leaders can prepare younger generations for their future as business leaders. Each of these suggestions will not only create better leaders, but can help children perform better in school and develop better personal relationships throughout life.

Conclusion

Continued research on practice should assess how directors are currently being prepared and the appropriateness of the legislative requirements for the position of a director in child care centers in In Israel ·In Bedouin villages. Practitioners aspiring toward leadership positions need opportunities to understand and learn more about the role and responsibilities of the director, especially the Developing Leadership Skills challenges that would enable them to be better prepared for the role. Consideration should be given to a recognized pathway in the form of director apprenticeship, which would assist interested applicants for directorship to learn about the role before accepting the position. This could mean that an assistant director would shadow an experienced director for a twelve-month period to learn about the requirements of the role to be better informed before taking on the position of director. There is limited research in the field regarding the director's role of advocacy for child care. Advocacy in the child care sector has not received the attention that it deserves, which could be attributed to a lack of understanding of the term by practitioners who work in the field (Hard, 2001). Hard went on to say that advocacy requires high levels of self-confidence and an ability to be assertive. In the study reported here, most of the directors did not perceive themselves to be articulate or confident enough to advocate outside of their own child care centers. Lack of advocacy in this field contributes to a 'weak power base' on the political agenda in order to influence and affect change within the broader sector (Hard, 2001). Increased advocacy would make the child care field more visible within the wider educational community (Fraser, 2000) and consequently increase opportunities for much needed funding. Two questions should be raised:

1. How can directors be assisted to take part in the wider social and political arena?
2. How can directors be supported to link with other community and government agencies in an effort to keep abreast of current trends and issues in the social and political field?

It is important that directors know that they are not alone in this often-stressful work of caring and educating young children, as well as meeting the complex needs of the families and community at large. This article has provided an understanding of the work of child care directors in the current social, legislative and economic context of child care services and an insight into understanding how directors view leadership. The study opens questions for future research in this current context of service delivery. It is a time when the funding and affordability, availability and quality of child care remain significant social and political issues. As more practitioners and policy makers reflect on leadership issues and build on the findings of these directors'

perceptions, the sector will gain a powerful professional dynamic. Childhood, particularly early childhood, has become a key priority for governments and non-government organizations across Israel. This is in response to a raised awareness about the impact on children of the rapid social change in Australia over recent decades, as well as compelling evidence about the importance of the early years in ensuring the best possible outcomes for children later in life. Evident from the narratives is the dedication, commitment and ideals that drive the work of those employed in these early childhood education and care services to provide quality care to children and their families.

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