EARLY CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATION

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Early Childhood Administration

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Preface

This book was written by an early childhood specialist and a child psychologist. We have collaborated on many projects, including research, teaching, writing three books, and initiating and administering a campus child care center. In the course of working together, we have discovered that, despite the differences in our training and the differences in our specific approaches at times, we share a basic philosophy and orientation. Our ideas about how to develop and administer an early childhood center are grounded in our mutual and separate experiences as administrators of early childhood centers that have varied in size and nature; that is, our ideas are based on practical experience. The ideas offered here are also based on research (our own and that of others) and on theoretical models concerned with child development and educational goals.

Before we embark on a full-scale presentation of our guidelines for early childhood administration, we shall briefly identify some of the basic assumptions that underlie our approach. First, a fundamental assumption is a *developmental* orientation. This point of view has always had special significance in working with young children but is even more critical now, as we extend our efforts to programs for infants and toddlers. Second, our orientation is *ecological.* We have increasingly recognized that the time children spend with us in the classroom is only one aspect of their total daily experience. Our research efforts have been directed toward tracking children during the hours before and after their daily attendance at our center to help us understand the significance of the experience we provide in the total context of their lives.

Finally, we share a *humanistic* orientation. It is our firm belief that administrative policies and practices must be based on the assumption that all persons—adults and children—have within them the capacity to develop to their fullest potential and that, as administrators, our primary function is to provide a hospitable environment for this process to occur.

Some of the ideas offered here are more obviously humanistic than others. However, all of our suggestions are humanistic in their purpose and in their application. Our goal orientation is a good example. Some of the goals outlined are behavioral. We do not consider this inconsistent with a humanistic philosophy. The specification of goals provides a direction to our work, but the goals are not determined apart from a consideration of the individual child; they further our humanistic purpose in that they allow for individualization in our programming. The specification of individual goals also helps us examine the relationship between our intended objectives and our methods.

Many early childhood programs pay lip service to one or more of these principles, but far too many neglect to include them in their daily planning and in their relationships with staff, parents, and children. We are well aware of how difficult it is at times to keep the child, the child's environment, and the growth of all the center participants in mind, but we have found that this can be done without sacrificing efficiency and organization. We feel it is well worth the effort, and we hope, after reading our book, you will feel the same way, too.

Although this book is written primarily for students of early childhood administration, it will also be useful to directors who are initiating new programs and to those who are responsible for the continuing leadership of existing early childhood centers. It is a practical book, offering tips on selecting staff, purchasing, setting up classrooms, recruiting students, working with parents, and all of the many other tasks that fall within the range of early childhood administration. It stresses the importance of a sound, well-thought-out philosophical and theoretical base, giving serious attention to curriculum design and to evaluation. All in all, we believe we have created a useful balance between theory and practice in our attempt to provide a humanistically oriented guide to early childhood administration.

NOTE: Throughout this book, we use *she* to refer to the director and *he* to refer to a child. To avoid the sexist bias that this usage implies, we had attempted to mix the genders of the pronouns in such references, but, alas, the result proved to be too confusing. We regret the implication but trust you will understand this usage in no way implies that the early childhood director must be a woman nor that every child attending a center must be a boy.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many children, families, and teachers with whom we have worked over the years. This book has evolved from our experiences with them. We are grateful to our own families for their patience during the time we have spent preparing this manuscript. A special debt of thanks is also due our typist, Kay Gottlieb, who continued to plow through our scribbling and return beautiful copy for our further disfigurement and dissection.

B.G.
C.K.

Introduction

WHAT IS AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER?

An expanded version of the traditional early childhood center has emerged in response to the changing needs of families in contemporary society. The early childhood center of which we speak may be in a one-room house, serving perhaps fifteen or fewer families, or in a much larger facility. It may provide either part- or full-day sessions, or it may have a flexible schedule whereby the children come and go at varied times.

An early childhood center goes well beyond providing daily custodial care for its children; it even goes beyond offering a high-quality program for children. Rather, it is an educational and service center for *families*, a place where parents can discuss their children with competent, caring professionals, a place where its director and teachers are available to talk about all aspects of child rearing. The early childhood center is a place where parents feel free to ask questions about discipline, about toilet training, or about their children's future schooling. It is also a place that recognizes the alternative forms of modern families and attempts to meet the special needs of each type of family, such as the working mother who may need help with schedules or the single parent who may be concerned about a child's visits with the former spouse. The center often has activities that parents and children may share and discussion groups for parents in which they can exchange ideas with other parents and work out solutions to some of the complex problems involved in child rearing today.

A distinguishing feature of such an expanded early childhood program is its recognition that each child has his own ecological environment. The school experience is significant, but it is only one aspect of the child's total experience. What happens before and after a day at the center has a decided influence on the child's behavior while he is there. Is his mother impatient in the morning because she is late for work? Is the child upset after a weekend visit with his father and a new family? Is he tired or irritable in school because he attends another child care program earlier in the day?

In dealing with these experiences, the center director and teachers work with parents, allowing them to use their own resources and good judgment to find solutions to the complex problems that often beset them in planning for their children. At the same time, the director and teachers, recognizing the additional pressures with which parents are likely to be contending (e.g., economic, psychological, social) that may limit what they are able to do on their children's behalf, attempt to work toward solutions that may require some adjustments for the center as well as for the parents. The ultimate goal, of course, is to provide the most secure, growth-promoting environment for children.

The early childhood center as we define it begins with a philosophical orientation that helps an administrator develop behavioral goals. Its purpose is to facilitate the child's growth directly through the program in school and indirectly through the strengthening of the family's role. The purpose of a center is to be an extension of and a support for the family. In her address to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Betty Caldwell (1979) suggested that early childhood programs are helping support families and, in that sense, are taking the role of an extended family.

Everything provided by the early childhood program, from information about development to confidence that children can be left with caring people without guilt or worry, is designed to contribute to rather than detract from the family's functioning as a unit of society. All parents can benefit from the resources an early childhood center has to offer, but working parents and single parents especially can profit from the extended family support that such a center provides.

Over 25 percent of mothers of preschool children are working now, and the number of working mothers of children in the primary grades is even greater. Many of these working mothers are single parents who do not have the support of another adult in the home. For them, child care is not only a practical necessity, but also a psychologically valuable form of family support.

THE HUMANISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Throughout our discussions in this book, we suggest that administrators adopt a humanistic orientation. What do we mean by *humanistic*? As described by Carl Rogers (1977), the humanistic

point of view is based on the assumption that "there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities" (p. 7). To apply Rogers's (1942) suggestions for psychotherapy, the implications for this point of view are that education "is not a matter of doing something to the individual, or inducing him to do something about himself. It is instead a matter of freeing him for normal growth and development, of removing obstacles so that he can move forward" (p. 29).

The fields of humanistic education and humanistic psychology have developed in response to the increasing danger in modern times that professionals might lose sight of their clients as people and regard them as organisms to be manipulated and controlled. There is a related danger of viewing clients from a single professional perspective, thus not taking into account their wholeness.

Humanistic educators remind us we must take the total child into account, even if we have a particular concern with intellectual or academic growth. Recently, the affective domain (Ringless 1975) has become a legitimate curricular entity, and a child's feelings are considered a significant factor in making educational decisions. Clearly, a child's emotional and social well-being greatly affects his ability to learn. Humanists also regard learning about feelings and acquiring interpersonal skills as essential to a child's total development as learning about science and math.

In the field of psychology, the humanists are opposed to the reductionistic tendencies observed in science and in medicine, which tend to break an individual down into separate components for either investigation or treatment. To understand a child, the humanists consider it essential to take into account not only the individual child but also his family and his social and cultural milieu. They take a phenomenological rather than a behavioristic point of view. This assumes that the child is not a passive creature reacting to environmental stimuli but an active human being who interprets and integrates experience into an existing mental and emotional organization. This makes the humanistic orientation less manipulative than a behavioristic approach. The child is not "done to" but is a dynamic part of what takes place in his growth and learning.

The humanistic approach is based on a faith in the self-actualizing principle within human beings that directs them toward developing and integrating their natural capacities. Humanistic education is an attempt to go beyond the mere adaptation

that is the hallmark of much traditional education. This approach encourages the development of human potential that may surpass conventional limitations. To be most meaningful, a humanistic educational experience must be integrated into a child's own needs and aptitudes. Many children seem to lose their zest for learning, and even for living, because they have not been given an opportunity to make choices and to fulfill their own exploratory and investigatory needs when they are younger. This need-fulfilling capacity must be nourished.

The humanistic approach also allows teachers and administrators to develop genuine relationships with the children, with the parents, and with each other. Genuineness, or *authenticity*, is a key concept in the humanistic philosophy. If you are controlling or manipulating people, it is difficult for you to view them as full-fledged human beings. In such a situation, they may come to regard themselves less favorably—a clearly undesirable as well as nonhumanistic situation. For example, a requirement that all teachers do the same thing in the same way has an effect on them similar to its effect on the children. It denies individual differences, and it denies natural needs for autonomy. Teachers need to develop programs and to evaluate results. They also need to be able to use their own initiative and to develop their own unique teaching styles.

Similarly, parental involvement is an important aspect of an early childhood center. This involvement means *being a part* and it means *doing*. An administrator who successfully involves parents not only is contributing to her program by supplementing paid workers but also is enhancing the effectiveness of her center by acknowledging the strengths of parents and allowing them to demonstrate their caring and competency actively. We don't do parents a favor by taking over their responsibilities, thus making them the passive recipients of our professional efforts. In sum, the humanistic philosophy is a respect for the uniqueness and the wholeness of each person as well as an acknowledgment of the individual's inner resources

THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE: AN OVERVIEW

The director is the linchpin of the early childhood center. She is responsible for all areas of the center's functioning, even though in large centers some of these responsibilities may be delegated.

The director's administrative and educational functions include (1) recruiting, hiring, and orienting personnel; (2) recruiting, enrolling, and orienting children; (3) preparing the budget; (4) preparing reports; (5) overseeing the physical plant; (6) handling publicity and public relations; (7) purchasing start-up equipment and supplies; (8) educational planning for the children; (9) training and supervising staff and student volunteers; (10) educating parents; (11) acting as advocate for children and family; and (12) having the ultimate responsibility for the safety and welfare of the children (Axelrod and Buch 1978; Cherry et al. 1978).

Early childhood administrators often begin their careers as teachers of young children. They may have been excellent classroom teachers, but how do they actually learn the specific tasks required of a good administrator? The skills and attitudes of a caring teacher who is tuned into everyone's needs can be quite useful for a director, but for administrative purposes they must be balanced with a decision-making orientation that may require a degree of impersonality and even an authoritarian stance at times. Are these compatible? We believe so, but the necessary balance is often difficult to maintain (Dombro 1983).

In *Talks with Teachers*, Lillian Katz (1977) describes four developmental stages that directors are likely to experience. The first stage is *survival*: "Can I get through the day in one piece?" "Can I really do this kind of work day after day?" "Can I make it until the end of the week?" The second stage is *consolidation*, whereby the director focuses on one or another aspect of the center that needs modifications to better meet identified goals. In the third stage, *renewal*, the director examines innovations in the field, shares ideas with other directors, and is active in professional associations. The fourth stage, *maturity*, is a time of questioning and searching for answers to more abstract questions about growth, learning, and decision making and, perhaps, the time for considering a return to school for an advanced degree.

The information in this book is designed to help directors of early childhood programs, who may be at any of these stages, to identify their goals, review their program operations, and develop their own schedules. An overriding goal of any administrator is to be able to match one's practices with one's goals. Thus, students of administration need to be encouraged to identify goals even as they learn to meet the daily challenges of administration.

How does an administrator who must be concerned with the operation of the center, including its economic and political sur-

vival, maintain the humanistic orientation we discussed earlier? How does the director balance the business aspects and the humanistic qualities? As already mentioned, having a solid theoretical foundation on which to build daily practice is essential. Also, a director can accomplish management and administrative tasks most efficiently by organizing, budgeting her time, and delegating responsibilities. Organizing will leave more time for the director to respond in a humanistic manner to the people participating in the center. It is often very difficult to consider the points of view of all of the center's constituents and to be open to the ideas of staff, parents, and children. However, we believe that such responsiveness is as much the responsibility of the director as paying the lighting bill and ordering supplies.

In the remainder of this book, we devote our attention to the director's roles as philosophical leader and role model of the center as well as handler of the "nitty-gritty" of administration.

Part I deals with starting a center, setting up the classroom, and engaging in public relations activities. Part II discusses the director's relationships and functions in regard to staff, parents, and children—the cornerstone of a humanistic orientation. Finally, Part III covers selected aspects of the actual administrative functions.

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