2004

Profiles of early childhood education administrators: looking for patterns of leadership

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PROFILES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS:
LOOKING FOR PATTERNS OF LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
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May 2004
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people were instrumental in this endeavor that I took upon myself. I want to thank these people for being patient with me and helping me reach the finish line. First, I want to thank, Aaron Wheeler, my loving husband, who never questioned me when I quit my full-time job to start this process and encouraged me to continue the journey. Next, I want to thank Dr. Teresa Buchanan, my advisor, for her advice and thoughtful critique of every step of the way especially the conceptualization of the project. I would like to thank the members of my committee. Starting with Dr. Diane Burts for sharing her expertise in research, developmentally appropriate practice, and early childhood education. Then, Dr. Earl Cheek for his support and giving so generously of his time. Finally, Dr. Joan Benedict who offered instrumental advice and a listening ear from time to time. I want to thank Dr. Doris Collins for her moral support, time, careful review, and helpful suggestions. My family who were a great support system, which understood when I was unable to come home because, “I had to work on my dissertation.” I need to thank Christy Brasseaux who understood when I was too busy to visit and have a girl’s night out. Thank you to Carol Agayan and Kyang Ran Kim for reading the interviews and profiles and contributing to this project. Thank you to Nina Araujo who provided encouragement by listening to my complaints and discussing my reflections. Most importantly, I am always indebted to the six ECE administrators in this study, who welcomed me into their lives, shared their stories, gave so freely of their time, offered advice, and wished me well along the way.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic inquiry into the lives of six early childhood administrators. The researcher investigated stories these early childhood administrators told about their lived experiences and searched for patterns that emerged from the stories suggesting career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles. The sample was obtained from a purposive/criterion sampling of the population. Six early childhood administrators were chosen based on their representation as a strong administrator who had experience with working with young children and families.

Data was collected through three interview sessions. The minimum time for each interview session was one (1) hour. An interview protocol was used in order to assure that each interviewee was asked the same questions by the interviewer. Each interviewee was made aware of the study’s purpose, procedures, and informed of their right to deny being involved in the study. Participants were interviewed and interview transcripts, audiocassettes, and other documents were used for concrete, contextual biographical materials. Participants were asked to review the profile of their career, personal characteristics, and administrative styles developed by the researcher.

This study has provided insight into six early childhood administrators’ career pathways, personal characteristics, administrative styles, and the uniqueness of their early childhood programs. This research expanded the early childhood literature by focusing on the administrator as the “gatekeeper to quality”, which included a structural component, process component, people component, and cultural component. Each early childhood administrator was interviewed and asked questions about each component in relation to one other and to the external environment. Each administrator arrived at her role through a different route. However, each one
had an education in child development and early childhood education. The personal characteristics and administrative styles shared by all the administrators included: concern for children and families, high expectations, value of trust, respect, sense of professionalism, belief in teamwork, nurturing the nurturer, and high demands.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Study

Administrators in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) assume multiple roles each day because of the many interdependent and interacting components of the early childhood program. They maintain an organization that delivers a complex set of services to children and their families. Culkin (1997) stated, “Early childhood managers work in the areas of personnel, budget, pedagogy, adult education and staff development, families, outreach to community, communication, planning, and overall attention to the internal and external values, mission, and goals of the program” (p. 23). Early childhood administrators contend with the following issues: administrative educational preparation and requirements; teacher educational preparation and requirements; auspice of the program; program funding; and minimal standards with no compulsory accreditation program. Each of these issues will be explored in the following section then, followed by a research study that investigated early childhood administrators’ lives and work.

Supervision in the field of ECE is very complex. First, there is no one clear pathway to becoming an administrator in ECE (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Mitchell, 1997). Individuals usually become administrators in ECE settings with little or no higher educational preparation. Despite the multiple roles and the various types of ECE programs (e.g., public schools, Head Start, private child care), there are very few required qualifications for administrators (Mitchell, 1997). Currently, there is not a compulsory national credential for administrators of ECE programs. Administrators’ qualifications can range from no formal education or training to a doctorate degree.
In contrast, there is a well-established path to becoming an administrator in a school system. This route entails attending a teacher preparation program at a four-year college or university in order to become certified to teach within the public school system. Then, these individuals may teach within a public school system after graduation from such a program. They may enroll in a graduate program, such as Educational Leadership, and complete the state requirements to be certified as a school administrator. Mitchell (1997) claimed, “The theoretical knowledge gained from courses and the practical knowledge from administrative internships will prepare the individual to be a good principal” (p. 85).

Administrators of Head Start programs follow a similar path. Head Start administrators typically begin as teachers, become coordinators with some management responsibilities, and finally assume an administrative role. Unlike many child care directors, Head Start administrators do have access to training and technical assistance and have a support system at regional and national levels. Additionally, there is a Head Start Directors’ Association, which offers formal and informal peer support and training (Mitchell, 1997).

However, becoming a director of a child care program, for example, involves a less direct route and requires little or no formal education. There are few college-level programs to prepare early childhood administrators and even fewer continuing education opportunities (Mitchell, 1997; Morgan, 2000). Many times, teachers in child care become administrators but do not necessarily prepare for administration with formal education. In a survey of 990 directors of child care centers in Illinois, it was found that 86% had been classroom teachers prior to becoming an administrator, and 38% had no prior administrative training (Bloom, 1992). Typically, many directors work as assistant directors first, learning how to administer the program from the director. According to Mitchell (1997), “Some directors do prepare for their
leadership roles by working as assistant directors under the nurturing guidance of a mentoring
director in a large center” (p. 85). Mitchell suggested that it is important to learn from
predecessors and mentors.

One resource new directors have to direct and guide them is the state licensing standards.
Unfortunately, these guidelines are typically minimal and promote standards that are good
enough to “do no harm” (Morgan, 2000). Mitchell (1997) pointed out that early childhood
administrators have few opportunities to attend formal college-level courses. According to
Culkin (2000):

> Current preservice and inservice director-focused training opportunities are varied and
uneven in terms of scope of knowledge and design of learning activities. Some are
embedded in higher education, others are based on practical experiences, and some
combine the theoretical with the practical, either in higher education settings or in
programs designed for on-the-job learning (p.8).

Additionally, only eight states mention administrative training in their licensing
requirements (Morgan, 2000). Bloom (1992) stated, “While there is uniform agreement among
theorists about the importance of the director’s role and the need for highly-trained personnel to
serve in this capacity, there is a surprising lack of agreement about what constitutes minimum
qualifications and how individuals should be trained” (p.138). ECE advocates have discussed the
need to implement a compulsory director credential, which would outline educational
requirements for early childhood administrators. Having such a credential, “will better equip
directors with the necessary interdisciplinary and leadership knowledge and skills” (Culkin,
2000, p. 4). The American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC Initiative)
has been investing in director training and credentialing through projects at the state, local, and
community agency level (Culkin, 2000). This initiative is aiming to improve the quality of early
childhood programs through the implementation of a director credentialing project.
A second factor that makes supervision in the field of ECE particularly complex is the management of variously qualified staff. The early childhood administrator manages staff members who do not have clearly defined roles and who are at various levels of cognitive ability, professional development, and stages of life (Sheerer & Bauer, 1996). Child care providers are generally at a different educational and professional level than teachers in elementary schools (Kagan & Bowman, 1997). Bloom (1992) stated, “Despite the accumulation of evidence in the research literature regarding the crucial impact of caregivers on children’s development in their early years, personnel requirements are not regulated in the same manner as those for degreed professionals in elementary schools” (p. 140). The field of ECE appears to be a fragmented system characterized by inequities because of the diverse requirements for child care providers, Head Start staff, and elementary school teachers. Bloom (1992) claimed,

Many believe we are at risk of developing a two-tiered system of early childhood educators. Attracted by higher salaries, more attractive benefits, and better working conditions, the best and brightest early childhood educators are being lured into the public school system. The significant differences in salaries and the status according to those working for public schools exacerbates the problem of staff turnover and compromises program quality in nonpublic prekindergarten programs (p 140).

Sheerer & Bauer (1996) noted the lack of higher levels of education in the field of ECE with many caregivers having less than an associate’s degree and having little to no child development or early childhood backgrounds. Thus, “supervision often becomes interwoven with the professional development of staff- a sound concept, but one that is often overwhelming for untrained supervisors” (Sheerer & Bauer, 1996, p. 202). Staff turnover can also make administration difficult because the administrator may spend a great amount of time and money on recruiting new staff members and training new staff members.
A third factor that makes supervision in the field of ECE complex is the auspice of the program. Early childhood programs exist for diverse purposes, serve children and their families in a variety of ways, and confront different internal and external challenges. They are offered to society through various sponsors (see Table 1): community and government agencies, for-profit groups, employers, churches and synagogues, public schools, private institutions, and individual providers (Goffin, 1994). In early childhood programs the sponsor generally guides the mission and purpose of the program.

Table 1. Early Childhood Education Program Sponsorship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-profit Programs</th>
<th>Sponsored</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church Affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School Affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head Start/ Early Head Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Sponsored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Sponsor: Corporate, YWCA, University, Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>For-profit Programs</th>
<th>Sponsored</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member of a chain/franchise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Proprietary/Partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some programs are privately owned and are for-profit programs or are affiliated with a corporate program (e.g., Kinder Care, Bright Horizons, or Tutor Time). Some programs are church-sponsored and are not-for-profit programs. Other programs fall into the Head Start category and can be governed by community action agencies, local school boards, or non-profit programs. Early childhood educational programs can also be set within the larger context of a Community College or a University. These programs can either serve as lab schools or as a
service program. Lastly, some programs are affiliated with hospitals, corporations, or the military, which support the program for their employees. The early childhood administrator’s behaviors and beliefs may be a function of the interaction of bureaucratic expectations, individual motives, and informal norms as constrained by environmental forces (Hoy & Miskel, 1991).

A fourth factor that makes supervision in the field of ECE complex is that many early childhood programs are privately owned or supported through grants. The administrators of these early childhood programs often have responsibilities that are similar to those of owners of small businesses. Within the field of business and industry, management models discuss customer satisfaction as a component of quality. For private early childhood programs, customer satisfaction is similar to that of the business and industry models because the program relies on parent tuition for its fiscal viability. If parents are not satisfied, they can choose to place their child in another center-based program, a family home provider, with a relative, or with a private nanny. For those ECE programs that are subsidized by grants, uncertainty exists from one funding cycle to the next due to the nature of “soft money” and cuts in publicly funded social programs thus, making it difficult to determine the continuation of the program from year to year. Early childhood administrators of publicly funded ECE programs may have to make drastic cuts in the scope and range of program services when funding is decreased (Bloom, 1991).

Lastly, supervision in the field of ECE is complex because there is no compulsory accreditation program. Each state determines the licensing standards for early childhood programs, however, these standards are minimum standards that do not necessarily reflect best practices in ECE. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed a voluntary accreditation program for ECE programs. However, Bredekamp and
Glowacki (1996) stated, “The biggest challenge we faced in developing a national accreditation system was and continues to be how to set standards for diverse types of programs that operate in very different regulatory and financial contexts…” (p. 4). The elements of minimum standards and no compulsory accreditation program contribute to the complexity of supervision in ECE because administrators are not necessarily mandated to provide services to families and young children that are above minimum standards.

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite its complexity, there is little research on the role and work of early childhood administrators. As Culkin (2000) pointed out, “The lack of broad, consistent attention to the role of a director means that one cannot yet point to a formal consensus concerning the role and work of the director” (p. 9). The patterns of leadership qualities for early childhood administrators are unknown. More specifically, little research has been done on the personal characteristics and experiences that help early childhood administrators develop and lead high-quality early childhood education programs.

Rationale for Study

A good early childhood education program can benefit children, families, and communities. According to the Children’s Defense Fund “an estimated thirteen million children under age 6 spend either some or all of their day being cared for by someone other than their parents” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2000, p. 47). However, it is known that 80% of child care centers have low to mediocre quality and that low-quality programs lack the learning opportunities that promote children’s healthy development (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995). This may be due, in part, to administration. Morgan (2000) claimed, “The assumption that early childhood professional preparation as a teacher is the only training that
administrators need is one of the reasons the quality of children’s programs in the United States is largely poor to mediocre” (p. 40). Most research that defines quality care and the factors linking quality care to positive child outcomes has focused on the caregivers and their role in facilitating children’s development, rather than the administrator’s characteristics (Bloom, 1992). However, an emerging trend in ECE is the recognition of the importance of the role the center director plays in the quality of the program (Neugebauer, 1999).

One way to understand the lives and work of administrators in early childhood is through a life history narrative that tells a story of an individual, with a specific focus on the turning points of that person’s life (Cresswell, 1998). This method is particularly useful for studying topics, like early childhood administration, about which little is known (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Various terms are used for capturing one person’s interpretation of his or her life: “life history,” “narrative,” “life narrative,” and “case study.” Hauser (1995) claimed, “Despite the variation in terminology and different points of emphasis, common themes are apparent in these methods. One is the value of life history to let the reader enter and then understand the lives and work of others. Another is this perspective’s power to connect with possibilities in other situations” (p. 66).

By understanding the turning points in an individual’s life one can better understand the lives and work of early childhood administrators. Hauser (1995) stated,

As research tools, life histories provide descriptions of real people, in real situations, struggling with real problems. Stories remove the anonymity of statistical samples and carefully controlled treatments. They connect us with the humanity that is what the business of teaching and learning is all about (p. 66).

Recording the stories of early childhood administrators will offer lessons gleaned from “real people, in real situations, struggling with real problems” (Hauser, 1995, p. 66). The use of a
life history narrative as a vehicle to research early childhood administrators is supported by Jalongo, Isenberg, & Gerbracht (1995) who show that narratives are a good way to help the brain understand complex experiences. Narratives are powerful because they have the ability to present many interesting paradoxes and simultaneously are abstract and concrete (Jalongo, Isenberg, & Gerbracht, 1995). Jalongo, Isenberg, & Gerbracht (1995) said, “…story is a useful way of portraying life in schools because it is equal to the task, providing a sufficiently flexible, complex, and individualized format to accurately document authentic experience” (p. 8). Learning from early childhood administrators about authentic experiences that are embedded in context, such as the people, places, artifacts, and cultures of the programs, will add to the research in the area of early childhood administration. Telling stories of individuals through life history narratives may lead to increased understanding of the early childhood administrator’s role.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic inquiry into the development of six early childhood administrators and investigate how these administrators’ development influenced and was influenced by the contextual factors that supported the quality of early childhood programs. Bloom (1992) defined directors as the “gatekeepers to quality” (p. 138). Using the concept of “gatekeepers to quality,” this study looked at the personal characteristics and experiences of six early childhood administrators who developed early childhood programs with a reputation of providing high-quality services for young children. This study investigated if early childhood administrator’s beliefs or contextual factors were related to their career choices, leadership characteristics, and management techniques. This investigation took the stories these early childhood administrators told about their lived experiences and sought patterns that
emerged from the stories about common career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles.

Why do individuals become early childhood administrators? What pathways do they take on their career journey? This study investigated the career choices of six individual early childhood administrators. As mentioned, there is no one clear pathway to becoming an early childhood administrator; therefore, this study looked at the career journey of six early childhood administrators.

In addition, this study investigated the personal characteristics of individual early childhood administrators, including their behaviors and beliefs. These behaviors included the administrator’s actions, efforts, thought processes, purposes, language, and affect. Do successful early childhood administrators share personal characteristics?

This study also investigated the administrative styles of the six identified early childhood administrators. The study focused on two aspects of administrative style. The first aspect of the individuals’ administrative style studied was their leadership qualities. For example, what vision did they have for the early childhood program? The second area of focus was on the managerial techniques employed by the individuals. For example, how did they handle the daily operations of the early childhood program?

The intent of this research was to capture each administrator’s interpretation of her life and career experiences. Walsh, Tobin, and Graue (1992) suggested, “As researchers, we have measured people, but we have not listened well to them” (p. 465.) Through an interpretive inquiry, I hoped to gain a greater understanding of the underlying actions employed by individuals within their roles as early childhood administrators.
Significance of the Study

This study was designed to contribute to a growing body of knowledge concerning the complexities of the roles of early childhood administrators. Schomburg (1999) claimed, “Given the wide variety of programs and roles in the [ECE] field, it is easy to see the challenges in trying to reach consensus on the type of preparation leaders should have. No one could be fully prepared for leadership in all of these settings. It is important, however, that leaders be able to see beyond the structure and parameters of their own setting to move toward unity in the profession” (p. 217). This study was designed to help the field of ECE move toward unity in the understanding of leadership.

This study provided insight into the process of becoming an effective early childhood administrator. Culkin (2000) claimed, “If directors and administrative leaders are important to the ECE field’s development, then steps to support the development of directors as leaders are important to the ECE profession” (p. 11). This study was designed to investigate the development of leaders within the field of ECE and their role in leading and managing an early childhood program. Thus, a study of this type helps us understand effective early childhood administrators.

Limitations

Several limitations existed within this study. The quality of this research was directly impacted by the willingness of the participants to accurately share personal experiences that were limited to three interviews. The research was also limited by the lack of direct observations because several of the participants cease to administer an Early Childhood program. Because of the lack of direct observations, the full essence of the dynamic relationship between the early childhood administrator and the staff was not captured. Additionally, there were no objective or
systematic observations of the program. However, other artifacts that augment the absence of observations were investigated, but intentionally eliminated from the study to insure confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, the research sample was limited to six early childhood administrators in south Louisiana who had a reputation for being a strong administrator. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable.

Definitions

Throughout this study, the term “director” and “administrator” are used interchangeably to designate the person in a management role. Individuals working in early childhood settings typically have titles such as “program director,” “program coordinator,” “site supervisor,” “facilities manager,” “child development specialist,” “executive director” or “principal.”

Early Childhood Education is defined in accordance with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) definition. For the purposes of this study, early childhood education will refer to group settings of children from birth to age eight. The term will include center-based child care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and/or school aged children; campus children’s centers; church-sponsored programs; and community-based early care and education initiatives. These programs may be sponsored by various public, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations of different sizes.

The term “caregiver” will be used interchangeably with the term “child care provider” or “teacher.” The terms “caregiver,” “child care provider,” and “teacher” will be used throughout this study to indicate the adult, other than the parental figure, who cares for the child during the course of the day. The term parent will be used to refer to the adult who is the child’s legal guardian.
The term “developmentally appropriate practice” is used to refer to beliefs and activities that reflect guidelines for the individually appropriate, age appropriate, and culturally appropriate early childhood education, developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The term “developmentally inappropriate practice” is used to refer to practice that is not appropriate for the age of the children, the individual children, or the culture of the children in the program.

This research used Mitchell’s (1997) definition of “early childhood leadership.” Mitchell said, “Conceptually, the definition of early childhood leadership encompasses both the ability to create and run excellent programs for young children and the ability to be effective and powerful in decisionmaking [sic] that affects children and families…” (p. 87).

Management and leadership have two separate meanings, but these terms are related. Rodd (1994) noted that management in early childhood settings refers to the details of daily practice, while leadership refers to visionary, reflective, dynamic, and value-based planning and organizing. Bloom (1997) viewed management and leadership as two different sides of the same coin, with neither being subordinate to the other and both being essential for optimum program functioning. Bloom (1997) defined “effective center directors” as being “both leaders-providing vision and inspiration- and managers, orchestrating the way that policies and procedures are implemented” (p. 34). This definition will be employed for the purposes of this study.

Conclusion

Little empirical research or systematic inquiry has focused on early childhood administration. Because of the complexities associated with early childhood administration, early childhood programs and administrators naturally differ from one another. Currently, there is not
a compulsory national credential for administrators of ECE programs. Administrators’ qualifications can range from no formal education or training to a doctorate degree. The regulatory agency of each state sets the standards for early childhood administrators; however, these standards are minimal and vary from state to state. Eight states have embarked upon implementing a director’s credential (Bloom, 1997). Research into the training of child care providers points to evidence that training and education influences the type of care being provided. Following this reasoning, the type of training and education of early childhood administrators may influence the type of ECE program being managed.

Through this narrative study, six early childhood administrators were interviewed extensively to discover their career choices, personal characteristics and experiences, and administrative style. This research employed a complex systems framework to highlight the interconnectedness within the field of ECE.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with a look into the theoretical background guiding the study. Because schools and early childhood programs have been viewed as social systems, the discussion starts with an overview of General Systems Theory then moves into the specialized theory of Complex Systems, the theoretical framework that guides the study. Next, an overview is provided of small business administration, women in management, and educational leadership because all three are integral to early childhood administration. The next section describes various models of ECE supervision in the early childhood administration literature. Finally, there is a review of literature about determinants of quality in early childhood programs and the role of the director in a high-quality early childhood program.

Theoretical Foundation

General Systems Theory

The “systems” concept has permeated all fields of science, including the social sciences. Even though the concept has its roots in biology, it can help to explain human relationships within organizations. Von Bertalanffy (1968) discussed how general aspects and viewpoints are alike in different sciences and formally identical or isomorphic laws are frequently found in different fields. He stated, “In many cases, isomorphic laws hold for certain classes or subclasses of ‘systems,’ irrespective of the nature of the entities involved. There appear to exist general system laws which apply to any system of a certain type, irrespective of the particular properties of the system and of the elements involved” (p. 37). Thus, general systems theory is a general science of “wholeness” that helps to explain the juxtaposition of individual organisms within a larger system.
When applying general systems theory to living organisms, a discussion of open systems is necessary. Von Bertalanffy (1968) claimed, “Every living organism is essentially an open system. It maintains itself in a continuous inflow and outflow, a building up and breaking down of components, never being, so long as it is alive, in a state of chemical and thermodynamic equilibrium but maintained in a so-called steady state which is distinct from the latter” (p. 39).

One such type of open system is a social system. Getzels and Guba (1957) discussed institutions and individuals as two major classes of phenomena that comprise a social system. Institutions have certain roles and expectations that form the nomothetic, or normative, dimension of activity within a social system; while individuals with certain personalities and need-dispositions make up the idiographic, or personal, dimension of activity within a social system. Getzels and Guba (1957) claimed, “To understand the nature of the observed behavior and to be able to predict and control it, we must understand the nature and relationships of those elements” (p. 424). The school and educational administration are conceptually an open social system as demonstrated by Greenfield (1995) who stated, “leadership processes at the school level may flow upward, from teachers to administrators, downward, from administrators to teachers, and laterally, among colleagues and between school professionals, parents, and other agents internal and external to the school” (p. 62).

ECE Programs as Social Systems

Social systems are considered to be open systems because the environment supplies input to the system with exchanges happening between the system and its environment. The school can be viewed as a social system, characterized by social interactions within a given boundary that separates it from the environment. However, the larger outside environment (e.g., the values of the community, politics, etc.) affect the school system. According to Hoy and Miskel (1991),
“As a social system, the school is characterized by an interdependence of parts, a clearly defined population, differentiation from its environment, a complex network of social relationships, and its own unique culture” (p. 51).

Using the social systems perspective to describe ECE programs can provide an understanding of the interconnectedness of each of the parts and the daily practices of the program. Bloom (1991) discussed the organization of an ECE program from the social systems paradigm and proposed the components of the system include the external environment, people, structure, processes, culture, and outcomes (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Child care centers as organizations: A social systems perspective. Child & Youth Care Forum, 20 (5), 313-333. (Bloom, P.J.)
The External Environment

Society is one element of the external environment. The field of ECE has reflected changes in broader society to meet the needs of the social, political, and economic conditions (Goffin, 1994). The sponsoring agency of the ECE program is another influential element of the external environment. Bloom (1991) stated, “Sponsoring agencies have a direct impact on the bureaucratic structure of programs, particularly the amount of paperwork needed to comply with the various policies and procedures” (p. 317). The ECE program exists within a neighborhood and/or local community, which influences program functioning by impacting the type of services provided by the program. The professional community also impacts the program functioning of ECE programs through the type and extent of professional staff development activities offered. The professional community includes resources from local colleges or universities and local or national professional associations. Lastly, the external environment includes governmental regulatory bodies, other competitors, and special interest groups. Bloom (1991) stated, “These elements [governmental regulatory bodies, other competitors, and special interest groups] are often critical to organizational functioning because they make certain demands on the center with respect to the types of service or level of quality required” (p. 318).

The People

The school is an organized whole made up of interacting personalities bound together in an organic relationship (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). ECE programs include individuals and their social interactions, which affect the ECE organization. Bloom (1991) stated, “Social systems are composed of personalities. Although people occupy roles and positions in the center, they are not simply actors devoid of unique needs” (p. 319). Individuals interacting within a social system through networks of social relations have important effects on behavior and find themselves
acting in unity with the prevalent social conditions; thus the roles, norms, values, and leaders play a key role in shaping individual behavior (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). This lends credence to the director of an ECE program as being “the gatekeeper of quality” because he or she helps to determine the prevalent social conditions through his or her administrative style and through the policies and procedures he or she sets in place.

The Structure

Key elements that comprise the structure of a program are legal structure and size, written policies and procedures, the physical environment, and the philosophical beliefs that guide the program’s practices. The sponsorship of the program may dictate many of these elements. Nonprofit programs, for example, may have a far more elaborate structural practice due to the nature of their funding and accountability of the program when compared to a sole proprietorship (Bloom, 1991).

Written policies and procedures are a central component of the formal structure of an ECE program because the roles, goals, and divisions of labor are outlined. The written policies and procedures implicitly outline the power and status of relationships of the individuals working at the program. However, not every program has formalized the policies and procedures of the program, nor will individuals with formalized policies and procedure behave in such a way to carry out the practices.

The Process

Processes within ECE programs include all the behaviors and interactions that occur between individuals or groups. Hoy and Miskel (1991) claimed, “The processes that socially organize human behavior have two sources: (1) the structure of the social relations in the group; and (2) the culture of the group; that is, the shared beliefs and orientations that emerge to unite
the members of the group” (p. 52). Policies and procedures of programs are included at the structural level, but how the program’s policies and procedures are carried out is a process component. Bloom (1991) noted common processes that characterize ECE programs:

- Leadership style
- Decision-making processes
- Problem-solving processes
- Communication processes
- Planning and goal setting processes
- Group meeting processes
- Interpersonal relations
- Conflict management
- Supervisory/training processes
- Center evaluation processes
- Performance appraisal processes
- Socialization practices
- Child assessment practices
- Teaching practices

The leadership style employed by the early childhood administrator is a process that includes the behaviors and interactions of the administrator. The decision-making processes include who is responsible for making decisions, what types of decisions can individuals and groups within the organizations make, when can decisions be made, and where can decisions be made. Socialization practices include how the ECE program influences the behavior of new staff members to make individual beliefs and values correspond with the program’s philosophy and mission.

The Culture

The concept of culture includes the values, norms, ethics, traditions, climate, and history of the ECE program. These contribute to the program’s basic assumptions, shared beliefs, and orientations (Bloom, 1991). The culture of the program provides guidelines for the program’s members regarding appropriate and acceptable behaviors. The traditions and
history of an ECE program contribute to defining the uniqueness of each program and often
dictate the practices of the program. For example, some programs may hold an annual graduation
for children leaving the program; other programs may host an annual family picnic for children
leaving the program.

Complex Systems Theory

The “systems” concept has been expanded by VanderVen (2000) to explain the
unpredictability, interconnectedness, and nonequilibrium conditions in ECE systems. Through
this concept, systems are considered open and dynamic, continuously exchanging information
and connecting with other systems. This key concept is known as the complex adaptive system.
Patterns and connections among systems are traits of complexity theory with special
consideration given to how patterns and connections change the system. Thus, the complex
adaptive system is continuously growing and changing. VanderVen (2000) declared, “According
to complexity theory, the world is spontaneous, alive, and disorderly--in other words, complex.
This results in organizations where there are no simple answers and where people and programs
continually interact with a constantly changing environment” (p. 115).

ECE programs, regardless of their sponsorship, are complex adaptive systems that are
constantly taking in information from other systems, exporting information to other systems,
connecting with other systems, and in a continuous state of change. The traditional model of a
profession being “highly linear and prescriptive, with rigid descriptions of a knowledge base,
criteria for entry, and attributes of educational institutions” (VanderVen, 1997, p. 47) does not fit
the field of ECE. VanderVen (1997) goes on to state, “Early childhood education is in a
favorable position today for the very fact that it does not totally fit the traditional model. Thus it
can evolve as a more contextual model that enables it to interface more effectively with its
surroundings, and to enhance the transferability of teacher education efforts into practice” (p. 47).

Implications for ECE Administrators

The complex adaptive system model can help early childhood administrators understand and achieve a balance between a lack of organizational structure and a control-based management model (VanderVen, 2000). Through this model, administrators can begin to understand how to deal with the complex issues of their programs. Such complex issues include dealing with the development and professionalism of staff, supervision of staff, working with budgets to plan for a high-quality program that is also affordable to families, facility management, and legal issues. VanderVen (2000) stated, “This model [complex adaptive system] requires that the practitioner accept unpredictability, turbulence, and the inability to control, while still keeping active and ‘moving’ or creating and responding to events and opportunities in various complex systems” (p. 127). VanderVen goes on to state, “The greatest potential for creativity comes when the organization, far from equilibrium, is operating ‘at the edge chaos,’ or in complexity” (VanderVen, 2000, p. 127). Thus, administrators of ECE programs may need to understand that their program is a complex adaptive system that is in a constant state of learning and evolution in order to effectively manage and lead the program. Operating ‘at the edge of chaos’ is a trait characterizing administration of Early Childhood Education programs.

Relevant Literature

A discussion of small business administration, women in management, and educational leadership is provided due to the incorporation of all three aspects into the ECE field. Literature in the area of small business administration, women in management, and educational leadership
may provide insight into the career path, personal characteristics, and administrative styles of some early childhood administrators.

Small Business Administration Overview

Small business administration is integral to the discussion of early childhood administrators because some programs are considered small businesses classified under the broad heading of service businesses. Megginson, Scott, & Megginson (1991) used the following definition:

A small business (or Mom-and-Pop operation) is any business that is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field, and does not engage in many new or innovative practices. It may never grow large, and the owners may not want it to. These small business people tend to enter business for reasons other than ‘making a lot of money’ (p. 26).

Two ECE programs that are small businesses are family home providers and for-profit private child care centers. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the administrative styles of early childhood administrators the discussion will begin with a look into the characteristics of successful small business owners, then move into how organizational theory relates to small businesses, and conclude with the financial and personal risks for small business owners.

Characteristics of Successful Small Businesses

Some typical characteristics of successful business owners follow: desire for independence; a strong sense of enterprise; motivated by personal and family considerations; expects quick and concrete results; able to react quickly to changing situations; dedicated to their business; and enter business as much by chance as by design (Megginson, Scott, & Megginson, 1991). Prevalent factors that lead to success in small businesses are: serving an adequate and well-defined market; obtaining and using accurate and useful information; using human resources effectively; acquiring sufficient investment and working capital- at a reasonable cost;
coping with government regulations effectively; having expertise in one’s chosen field of business; and managing one’s time effectively (Megginson, Scott, & Megginson, 1991).

**Organizational Theory As It Relates to Small Businesses**

According to Brytting (1991) there are four central concepts within organizational theory. The first concept, Division of Labor, involves a group of people dividing a complex task among themselves and specializing on different sub-tasks. Brytting (1991) claimed, “In the small firm, the founder, or owner/manager, often puts his or her stamp on the way things are done; he or she has, or is, the solution to many problems and tries to maintain control of the firm’s operations” (p. 44). Because the business reflects the owner’s knowledge and values, the owner/manager may spend his or her time on transferring his or her own special competence to other employees (Brytting, 1991).

Coordination is the next concept within organizational theory. Coordination of an organization involves two-way information flow with input and output from management to the workers. Managers of small firms are able to directly supervise the staff and personally connect with staff to make known the expected tasks and performance measures (Brytting, 1991). Goal setting is a key element when coordinating an organization.

Following coordination is motivation. Brytting (1991) suggested, “To get things done, the firm must employ some appropriate form of reward system” (p. 51). Motivation is dependent upon both personal and situational factors of individuals. Therefore, Brytting (1991) claimed, “because individuals are motivated by different things, reward systems should be more individually designed” (p. 53). An owner/manager may be motivated simply by running their own business, while employees in small businesses seem to have high job satisfaction because they have more control over their own working conditions (Brytting, 1991).
The final concept of organizational theory is institutionalization. This is the notion that the organization is dependent on its environment and continually adapts itself in order to survive (Brytting, 1991). Brytting (1991) noted, “An institution does not survive only by serving its customers satisfactorily, but also by having a position in society, having a distinctive competence, which will make powerful groups defend it for other reasons than monetary gains” (p. 58). Networking is an effective tool for small businesses to connect with and utilize external resources. Becoming part of an industrial network make small businesses a valuable link within a larger system.

Financial and Personal Risks for Small Business Owners

Baumback (1985) suggested that poor management is at the root of most of the operating problems of small businesses. Baumback (1985) claimed, “Many small business owners are either ill prepared or not prepared at all for operating their enterprises” (p. 22). He further claimed there are two major reasons persons undertake business ownership before they are adequately prepared for it. First is the lack of job opportunities and second is the appearance of an opportunity that must be seized before it is lost. External and environmental problems can also contribute to problems of small businesses. Such external and environmental problems include: difficulties in acquiring personnel; difficulties in borrowing funds for expansion; the high levels of taxation which hinder the accumulation of capital; government regulations and paperwork; the new consumerism; and patent abuses (Baumback, 1985). It is important to note that Baumback (1985) suggested, “the individual business, if it is knowledgeable of its environment, alert, resourceful, and flexible, can adjust to the constant changes in our dynamic economy and can survive” (p. 17). However, internal and external influences do threaten the
nature of a small business and the competencies of the manager/owner contribute greatly to its survival.

Women in Management Overview

Because women dominate the field of Early Childhood Education and the majority of administrators are women (Bloom, 1992), it is important to discuss women in the management position and their leadership styles. Powell (1993) discussed the realities of sex segregation in the American workplace. He claimed sex segregation to be a stable feature until the 1970s when it began to decrease “primarily due to the increased number of females in male-dominated occupations, particularly at the managerial and professional levels” (p. 70).

Women in Non-traditional Roles

Lunneborg (1990) interviewed 204 women who worked in a male-dominated occupation. These occupations included physician, lawyer, engineer, landscape architect, stockbroker, state legislator, firefighter, police officer, electrician, and carpenter. She asked these women five basic questions relating to the differences they bring to the job compared to men. Four major, dominant, higher-order themes emerged from the interviews. These themes were a service orientation to clients, a nurturant approach to coworkers, an insistence upon a balanced life-style, and an attraction to managing others using power differently than men. Taking a closer look into the fourth theme, an attraction to managing others using power differently than men, Lunneborg (1990) found “for them, power was not control over others or the world. Power was seeing that resources got distributed fairly and helping people get control over their lives” (p. xviii).

Lunneborg (1990) found, “What happened, across the board, in all ten occupations, was that women, given the opportunity, relished managing and organizing. They were drawn to organizing people, data, and things, in spite of the fact that organizing was not what they were
hired for” (p. 161). She goes on to claim, “Without formal training, without MBAs, they interacted spontaneously with coworkers in a style that is certainly more Beta than Alpha” (p. 162). She explained, “The Alpha style means being authoritarian, hierarchical, competitive, and controlling and has clear win-lose solutions. The Beta style is relational, supportive, consensus building, tolerant of diversity and ambiguity, sharing, and open to change” (p. 162). The women in this study, when compared to their male counterparts, gave more public praise, gave kind orders, had a sensitivity to subordinates’ needs, valued compromise and conciliation, and valued teamwork.

Women in Educational Leadership

Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) did a meta-analysis on fifty studies that compared the leadership styles of male and female principals of public schools. These authors confined their study to “the three most frequently researched aspects of leadership style: a) interpersonally-oriented, b) task-oriented, and c) democratic versus autocratic (or participative versus directive)” (p. 78). Sex differences in leadership styles were found to exist for the democratic versus autocratic style and for the task oriented style. The researchers (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992) found that female principals had a tendency to lead in a more democratic style rather than an autocratic style used by their male counterparts. These authors stated, “This finding suggests that women who occupy the principal role are more likely than men to treat teachers and other organizational subordinates as colleagues and equals and to invite their participation in decision making” (p. 91). These authors also found that female principals had a tendency to be more task orientated than male principals. “This finding suggests that female principals are somewhat more concerned about organizing school activities to carry out necessary tasks and to reach explicit
goals” (Eagley, Karau, & Johnson, 1992, p. 91). This study lends credence to the argument that male and female principals do utilize different leadership styles.

Edson (1988) investigated the career choices of 142 female administrators of public schools. She found that nearly seventy percent of the women wanted to become an administrator because of the growth and challenges inherent to school administration. Another sixty-six percent believed they would make good administrators if they were hired, while fifty-three percent simply wanted to do something more positive for children in schools. Edson (1988) claimed that women who entered into the school administrative role because of the need for growth and challenges thought of their work as a career and had early visions of going beyond the teaching roles. Their interest in administration was accompanied by an image of the way public schools could be run. This author stated, “Women such as these realize that to influence education in the way they envision, they will need administrative titles” (p. 13). The second major reason women entered into the administrative position was because of their strong belief in their own abilities. Edson (1988) stated, “After an initial passage of time in entry-level positions, these women begin reassessing their personal abilities” (p. 15). She goes on to claim,

Over and over, these women tell of their desire to influence and change public schools. Notably absent from their explanations are the commonly held notions of why individuals pursue leadership positions, namely: the need for personal prestige and status. These women desire power, but not personal power. They simply wish to influence the educational environment of children in a positive way (Edson, 1988, p. 16).

Lastly, Edson (1988) found women were motivated to become an educational administrator because of their concern for children in the public school system. Edson (1988) stated, “Women realize that without administrative authority, they will never wield the power necessary to help individual students in American schools” (p. 18).
Educational Leadership Overview

Educational leadership is integral to the discussion of early childhood administrators because these programs provide an educational service to young children. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the administrative styles of early childhood administrators the discussion will begin with a look into the history of educational leadership and the origins of management theories employed in the field of education. Finally, the discussion will move into the argument of whether effective supervisors lead to effective schools.

The history of educational leadership in the United States began around the 1900’s as a response to increased levels of bureaucracy and demands from the public for more control over curriculum (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). At this time in history, teacher deficits were a major concern; therefore, the administrator was to have increased control over the curriculum in order to compensate for teacher deficits. The administrator was to become “the teacher of teachers” (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992, p. 33). Using Taylor’s principles of “scientific management”, administrators specified component tasks to be performed, determined more effective ways to perform each task, and utilized the organization to maximize efficiency (Hoy & Miskel, 1991).

The traditional scientific management is a representation of the classical autocratic philosophy of supervision. In this theory, the teachers are hired to merely perform pre-specified duties as determined by the management. This type of management style is entrenched in control, accountability, and efficiency with a definite demarcation between the boss and the subordinate (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983).

During the 1940’s and early 1950’s, the eras following the Great Depression and the Second World War, education was viewed by society as a way to prepare for democratic citizenship (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). Hoy and Miskel (1982) claimed, “the impact of the
Hawthorne studies upon schools was evident in a wave of writing and exhortation on democratic administration. The ill-defined watchword of the period was ‘democratic’ - democratic administration, democratic supervision, democratic decision making, democratic teaching” (p. 10). It was recognized that curriculum programs could be stronger if teachers had direct involvement in the development of the curriculum. Thus there was an emphasis on human relations and democratic practices. Supervisors viewed teachers as human beings who had a need to be satisfied because satisfied workers will work harder and are easier to lead and control (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983).

Along with the 1960’s came the behavioral science approach that guided the study and teaching of educational administration (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). The field of educational administration was changed. Hoy and Miskel (1991) stated, “Democratic prescription was replaced by analysis, a field orientation by a discipline orientation, raw observation by theoretical research. In addition, concepts from many disciplines were incorporated into educational administration research” (p. 11). The 1960’s and 1970’s were active decades for civil rights demonstrations and various political events (e.g. Watergate and the Vietnam War). Curriculum reform was also prevalent in these decades due to the new emphasis on American principals to managing federally-sponsored programs designed to assist special student populations (Hallinger, 1992). Principals during these decades were expected to monitor compliance with federal regulations, assist in staff development, and provide direct classroom support to teachers. Principals were viewed as potential change agents due to the increased federal intervention in local policy (Hallinger, 1992).

During the decade of the 1980’s, strong administrative skills were linked to instructionally effective schools. Principals were urged to “engage more actively in leading the
school’s instructional programme and in focusing staff attention on student outcomes” (Hallinger, 1992, p. 37). This pivotal decade changed the administrator’s role from a program manager, whose focus was on the maintenance of the school and manager of the program, to the role of instructional leader. Hallinger (1992) claimed, “The principal was expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and able to intervene directly with teachers in making instructional improvements” (p. 37). Principals were viewed as the catalysts for change in effective schools (Hallinger, 1992). This neoscientific management theory was a reaction against the human relations theory. Similar to the traditional scientific management theory, neoscientific management involved control, accountability, and efficiency. Buzz words of this movement included “teacher competencies,” “performance objectives,” and “cost-benefit analysis” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983). This type of management relied heavily on externally imposed authority (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983).

The notion of the Transformational Leader surfaced during the 1990’s. A reexamination of schools was underway due to the recognition of the lack of preparation of students (Hallinger, 1992). There were calls to change the organizational structure, professional roles, and goals of education. Hallinger (1992) claimed, “reformers recommended the decentralization of authority over curricular and instructional decisions from the school district to the school site, expanded roles for teachers and parents in the decision-making process, and an increased emphasis on complex instructional and active learning” (p. 40). Problem solving now included the members of the organization (principals, teachers, and parents) in the decision-making process.

Hoy and Miskel (1991) concluded that there are three concepts to leadership in education: traits, behaviors, and setting. These three concepts are critical when trying to grasp the encompassing term of educational leadership. However, these authors maintained that these
three concepts also make it difficult to understand educational leadership because it depends on the individual’s position, behavior, personal characteristics, and the nature of the situation. These will be explored further in the section that compares school administrators to ECE administrators.

**Do Effective Supervisors Lead to Effective Schools?**

Maxcy (1991) stated, “The absence of a commonly held definition of leadership has tended to frustrate researchers and yield a lack of consensus in findings. Yet, in everyday affairs, people seem to believe that leadership, whatever it may mean to academics, matters” (p. 24). There has been a debate in the field of Educational Administration concerning the role principals play in contributing to the effectiveness of the school. Hallinger and Heck (1996) reviewed empirical research done during the 1980’s through 1995 that focused on the principal’s role in school effectiveness. These authors do not deny that there is a wide spread belief in the principals impact on the lives of teachers and students, however, they did contend that the nature of the effect and the degree of the effect is controversial. Hallinger and Heck (1996) caution readers to carefully inspect the type of study conducted on principal effectiveness. When examining studies, which employed weak models, the effects of principal leadership “were nonexistent, weak, conflicting, or suspect in terms of validity” (p. 37). Studies that used a sophisticated theoretical model, stronger research designs, and more powerful statistical methods had “more frequent instances of positive findings concerning the role of the principal in school effectiveness” (p. 37).

The school’s context (e.g. school’s socioeconomic environment) appeared to contribute to the type of leadership exercised by the principals. Leadership effects that were linked to student learning were aimed at influencing internal school processes such as school policies and
practices of teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1992). The mediating variable that consistently appeared as a significant factor interacting with principal leadership was school goals. These researchers maintained that leadership does effect school achievement even though it takes an indirect route.

Comparison of School Administrators to Early Childhood Administrators

Greenfield’s (1995) concepts of the demand environment and the role environment will be used to compare and contrast educational supervisors with early childhood program administrators. These comparisons will provide justification that ECE program administrators are similar to educational supervisors, but are yet also uniquely different.

Greenfield (1995) suggested that the work of school administrators is different from administrators outside of school contexts. In line with complex systems theory, Greenfield (1995) characterized:

The work of the school administrator involves extensive face-to-face communication, is action oriented, is reactive, the presented problems are unpredictable, decisions frequently are made without accurate or complete information, the work occurs in a setting of immediacy, the pace is rapid, there are frequent interruptions, work episodes themselves tend to be of very brief duration, responses often cannot be put off until later, resolution of problems often involves multiple actors, and the work is characterized by a pervasive pressure to maintain a peaceful and smoothly running school in the face of a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty (p. 63).

Greenfield (1995) claimed that three conditions shape the demand environment of school administration, “These conditions include the moral character of the school as an institution, the presence in the school of a highly educated, autonomous, and practically permanent teacher workforce, and a school milieu characterized by continuous and unpredictable threats to its stability” (p. 62).
The first condition shaping the demand environment of a school administrator is the moral character of the school. Greenfield asserted, “Public schools in the United States are a uniquely moral institution” (p. 63). He goes on to state that young children attend school involuntarily and “are particularly vulnerable to the influences of teachers, school administrators, and the school curriculum” (p. 63). He claimed that the school administrator “has a moral obligation to assure that good conditions prevail and that children are well served” (p. 63).

Greenfield expounds, “Students are not clients, in the traditional sense, in that they are not free to leave the organization, to choose their schools or teachers, or to influence what or how they are taught” (p. 64). He asserted that because students are involuntary members and are subjected to socialization processes, schools are highly moral enterprises.

The moral character of the school, which shapes the demand environment of a school administrator, also shapes the demand environment of an early childhood administrator. For example, Katz (1994) stated,

The younger the children, the less opportunity they have had to learn to trust adults outside the family. The development of such trust depends greatly on children’s sense that they are understood, respected, and accepted. This disposition to trust teachers- a disposition that may set a pattern for all subsequent responses to school- can be strengthened or undermined during the early years of school…Furthermore, evidence suggests that the younger the children served, the more sensitive and vulnerable they are to the emotional states of the adults who serve them. Thus, while older school-age children- with support of their parents and peers- might cope with fluctuations in the emotional states of their teachers, young children are less likely to be able to do so (p. 201).

Therefore, the early childhood administrator also has a moral obligation to ensure a high-quality program for the young children in their care. According to the implications by Katz, it could be argued that the early childhood administrator may have an even greater moral obligation than that of a school administrator.
The second condition shaping the demand environment of school administrators is a highly educated, autonomous, and essentially permanent workforce. Greenfield emphasized that teachers are relatively isolated from one another and experience a great amount of autonomy during their daily work. He claimed there is a low level of interdependency in terms of task accomplishment due to their physical isolation from their coworkers. He also maintained that teachers are not closely supervised, thus making it difficult for school administrators to influence teacher practices. He claimed, “Teachers can, with relative ease, ignore most efforts by administrators to influence their teaching or what occurs in their classrooms. When teachers adopt new practices in their classrooms, it usually is because they are committed to these practices at a moral level” (p.65).

The second condition shaping the demand environment (i.e., workforce) is simultaneously different and similar to experiences of early childhood administrators. It differs in that many early childhood teachers, save those in school settings, are not highly educated or essentially permanent. However, similar to teachers in a school setting, early childhood teachers are physically isolated from each other and exercise a great deal of discretion in their daily work. It is difficult to determine if teachers in a program are closely supervised due to the dearth of empirical research in the field of ECE administration.

The last condition shaping the demand environment is the regular and unpredictable threats to stability. Greenfield (1995) declared, “schools are extremely open and vulnerable to their environments” (p. 65). He further claimed, “many threats are external and manifest themselves in school board election results, hunger and violence creating daily turmoil in students’ lives beyond the school, conflicting special interest groups within the community, highly vocal and often angry parents, and legislative and funding decisions that consistently fail
to be responsive to the growing social, emotional, and pedagogical challenges facing teachers and students in contemporary schools” (pp. 65-66). Similarly, ECE programs find themselves in the center of opposing and often contradictory professional and community expectations.

A Call for Leadership in Response to the Demand Environment

Greenfield (1995) proposed that these conditions that shape the demand environment of school administrators influence administrator’s reactions to their demand environment. He proposed five interrelated role demands on school administrators. These included: the moral, social/interpersonal, instructional, managerial, and political aspects. Greenfield (1995) concluded that school administrators must rely on leadership, more so than administrators outside of school settings, because of their moral obligation to the well being of the children and their influence over teachers. He stated, “Moral role demands associated with the work of school administration entail a concern with the rightness or wrongness of one’s actions as an administrator; with what one ought to do as an ethical school administrator and is concerned with what is in the best interest of children and teachers” (p. 69). He further stated that the judgments of the administrator are influenced by his or her character, by the ethics of the profession of school administration, by the standards of good conduct characterizing the normative community of educators extending through history, and by the moral values and culture of a particular school and community (Greenfield, 1995). Finally he claimed, “Because the school is so highly normative, leadership is both more efficient and effective than administrative authority or other forms of power as a means to influence teachers” (p. 69).

Next, Greenfield (1995) moved into the social/interpersonal dimension of a school administrator’s role. The school administrator’s daily work is highly social in nature and involves working directly with and through other people. Greenfield made a case for the school
administrator to use leadership rather than management techniques to influence the teaching staff.

The severely limited resources available for supervision in schools is such that if the administrator cannot get teachers to voluntarily adopt changes in practice and to self-monitor compliance, it is unrealistic to think that cooperation could be gained by issuing direct orders or through close supervision or frequent inspection. The available alternative is leadership, an interpersonal influence process aimed at eliciting from others a voluntary change in preferences (pp. 69-70).

The next role demand for school administrators is the instructional role. This role involves administrators paying closer attention to the activities, problems, and processes of the core schooling activities of teaching and learning (Greenfield, 1995). Again, the author suggested that school administrators rely on leadership to influence teachers and others to make schools more effective.

The managerial role includes “all technical aspects of the administrator’s work associated with day-to-day planning, coordination, control, and operation of the school in support of the instructional program and associated with school goals” (Greenfield, 1995, p. 71). With the notion of decentralization, and the legislative and professional pressure to involve teachers and community members in the decision-making processes of the school, Greenfield (1995) contended that “leadership rather than administrative authority in managing the affairs of the school” would help administrators face these increasing pressures.

Finally, Greenfield (1995) suggested that due to the scarce resources available to schools and the often multiple and conflicting interests among the participants being served, another role demand of the school administrator is political in nature. Greenfield (1995) proclaimed, “The situation is political in requiring that the administrator develop and use power to influence the allocation of resources and the conflicting and competing interests of school participants” (p. 37).
72). He goes on to further explain how the internal political phenomenon that characterizes the day-to-day work of the administrator is a micropolitical aspect of the administrator’s daily work. It includes allocating resources within the school and contending with the multiple and conflicting special interests among participants within the school.

In summary, Greenfield (1995) stated, “Five role demands constitute the demand environment of school administration and make the work of the school administrator distinct from administration in other contexts” (p. 73). I suggest that these same five role demands (moral, social/interpersonal, instructional, managerial, and political aspects) constitute the early childhood administrator’s demand environment.

Models of Supervision in ECE

Supervision in Early Childhood Education appears to be uniquely different from Educational Leadership and Small Business Administration because it blends both traditions and because it is dominated by women. Kagan and Bowman (1997) claimed, “Past models and traditional leadership theory may not be appropriate to the early childhood field in that they reflected a hierarchical, top-down, male-oriented orientation” (p. 6). Thus, models exclusive to ECE will be explored in this section.

Sheerer and Bauer (1996) investigated common threads among supervisory models in ECE and discussed how the theory of supervision in ECE related to the actual context in which it occurs. Sheerer and Bauer (1996) claimed, “With respect to context, most programs are relatively small and operate in less than adequate physical facilities. Often the director’s office is merely a subdivided section of a classroom; private, well furnished, technologically equipped directors’ offices are a rarity” (p. 202).
Sheerer and Bauer (1996) discussed the following six models of supervision in ECE: team model, supervisory model, developmental model, a comprehensive model of developmental supervision, training model, and supervisor-as-coach model. The team model involves the early childhood administrator sharing the supervisory responsibility with members of specific teams. These teams may include teachers within a specific classroom. The supervisory model stresses the early childhood administrator plays the role of facilitator and encourages caregivers to take risks and make decisions. The developmental model involves an early childhood administrator who considers the teachers’ cognitive abilities, level of professional development, and stage in life when fostering their development as adult learners.

An early childhood administrator working within the comprehensive model of developmental supervision strives to match the developmental level of the staff member to a selected supervisory behavior. This training model was specifically designed for Head Start. The goals of this model are to increase ability and desire to train staff, increase knowledge of facilitating workshops, and increase commitment to the supervisor role. The last model investigated by Sheerer and Bauer (1996) was the supervisor-as-coach model. Within this model, the early childhood administrator helps teachers set goals for themselves and offers teachers support to obtain their goals.

It was suggested that within the field of ECE, models of supervision tended to emphasize the developmental level of individual employees. Sheerer and Bauer (1996) suggested, “This emphasis may be the direct outgrowth of the developmental model advocated for children in child care programs” (p. 204). Each of the models discussed had the supervisor’s role as being a close participant in the supervisory process that takes a collaborative and informal role because of the close proximity of the director and the staff. A common element of the discussed models
was the inclusion of both supervision and evaluation into the supervisor’s role. Last, the six models of supervision in ECE discussed the need for the supervisor to serve as a role model of effective practices due to the differences of educational levels and experiences of the staff.

**Director’s Perceptions of Their Organizations, Roles, and Jobs**

Bloom (2000) examined director’s views of their organizations, roles, and jobs. Qualitative data were collected from 257 directors through in-depth interviews and reflective narrative journals over the course of five years. Several themes director’s had regarding their organizations were discovered by Bloom (2002) through the use of metaphorical analysis. These themes included: caring and nurturing (22%); change, growth, and surprise (18%); making connections (16%); centrality of relationships (3%); uniqueness and diversity (14%); organizational stress, tension, and obstacles (12%); activity and entertainment (10%); and steadfast, resilient, and dependable (5%).

Bloom (2000) discussed findings of director’s perceptions of their roles and their jobs. Again, she used metaphorical analysis to find themes from the data. Bloom (2000) claimed, “In my sample of 257 directors, 40% gave responses that fit into one of three related categories: balancing, multiple tasks and responsibilities, or balancing multiple tasks and responsibilities. The most frequently mentioned metaphor used was a juggler” (p. 69). Of the directors studied, 29% used metaphors that describe the leading and guiding function of their roles. The metaphorical categories of nurturing/protecting and making connections were mentioned by 23% of the surveyed directors. Bloom (2000) stated, “These are important themes because they provide an explanatory framework for understanding the management philosophy of many early childhood directors as well as many of the role-related stress issues that confront directors” (p. 71). She also noted that there were no metaphorical references from the surveyed directors of
themes related to the exertion of power and influence. She pointed this out because leadership was often viewed by the directors surveyed as guiding, coordinating, inspiring, and motivating; rather than cajoling, forcing, or influencing. Bloom (2000) claimed, “The lack of metaphors connoting power and influence is consistent with previous research that has found that early childhood directors (most of whom are females) have a preference for participatory, nonhierarchical management styles” (p. 71).

Bloom (2000) also surveyed directors’ views of their jobs. She found no clear or consistent pattern in the directors’ responses. Half of the directors had responses regarding the pace of their job and dealing with the unexpected issues. Bloom (2000) claimed directors most frequently likened their job to a roller coaster ride. Other metaphorical categories relating to specific jobs of directors were caring and nurturing (17%), challenge and problem solving (11%), stress (8%), making connections (6%), multiple tasks and responsibilities (3%), and miscellaneous (5%). Through in-depth interviews, Bloom (2000) made the following observations:

On the one hand, they [directors] derive enormous satisfaction and personal rewards from serving children and families. They appreciate the diversity of tasks, the opportunity to solve complex problems, and the chance to learn more about their own abilities and beliefs. At the same time, however, they also experience enormous frustration about not being able to meet everyone’s needs and not having enough time and energy to achieve their dream of operating a smoothly functioning, crisis-free program (p. 73).

Core Knowledge

Brown and Manning (2000) attempted to answer the question: What do directors need to know to succeed? These authors presented four knowledge areas as a base for which directors should build increasing skill, knowledge, and expertise. The four areas presented were as follows: 1) knowledge of others, 2) knowledge about organizations, 3) knowledge about the
external world that surrounds the children’s program, and 4) knowledge of self. The knowledge of others includes valuing one-to-one relationships between and among children, parents, and teachers (Reckmeyer, 1990). Staff and parents valued a director’s ability to communicate effectively (Reckmeyer, 1990). Teachers and other program personnel valued a director’s ability to promote a positive professional climate (Bloom, 1988, 1996). Culkin (1994) identified the following behaviors relating to the director’s need for self-knowledge: value of human relationships, developed communication systems, and use of participatory planning.

The Influence of Child Care Policies on Quality of Care

High-quality child care is an elusive characteristic. Both child development experts and parents have debated the components of quality care, however, all agree that there is a need for it. Experts, such as Harms, Cryer, and Clifford (1990), have identified several characteristics that are necessary to quality infant and toddler care, but parents tend to choose care based on their visceral feeling about the center and people. Lally (1995) claimed, “most infant/toddler care programs are based on inappropriate models. Most out-of-home care experiences developed for infants and toddlers were created by people who were experienced in running programs serving older, preschool-age children” (p.1). Many child care policies do not constitute best practices for young children. For example, children are often switched from one caregiver to another when children reach a certain age, caregivers are not required to have specialized training, and caregivers have classrooms with a large amount of children. Arnett (1989) confirmed that the level of training a caregiver receives does contribute to the quality of care provided by the caregiver.

In determining the best indicators of quality care in center-based child care, Howes (1983) systematically observed the social experiences of 40 toddlers and their caregivers. She
found that caregivers who had fewer children, worked shorter hours, and had less housework responsibilities would engage in more facilitative social stimulation, expressed more positive affect, were more responsive, and less restrictive and negative toward the children. In another study by Howes and Rubenstein (1985), space and ratio were found to affect the relationship between children and their caregivers. When environments were viewed as safe and had a low ratio, caregivers were observed to smile more at children and were more willing to condone more exploration by the children. It was also found that the caregiver used fewer negative statements and more positive and encouraging statements that increased the quality of emotional messages passed from the caregiver to the child.

In an Australian study on staff/child ratios within a preschool setting, Russell (1990) found that by increasing the ratio many significant effects occurred in the environment. When the ratio was increased, the children were more likely to speak with other children, be less absorbed in tasks, interact less with the teacher, more likely to tease or annooy other children, and spent more time in a large group. Russell (1990) concluded that child behavior was related to ratio and staff spending more time with children in large groups.

The parent ultimately chooses the center in which the child will attend. Parents have different backgrounds and come from different social contexts. Howes and Olenick (1986) studied the influences and interrelations of family dynamics and of varying quality of child care on the child’s social development. Three components were used to evaluate the quality of the child care center: child ratio, training of caregivers, and continuity of caregivers. Three dimensions of family life were used in the study: father involvement, family integration into social support networks, and maternal role satisfaction. Eighty-nine families with children ranging in age from 18 to 36 months participated in the study. It was found that families
enrolling their children in low-quality child care had more complex and stressful lives than those who did not. It was suggested that children in low quality child care settings may be missing developmentally appropriate experiences that promote compliance and self-regulation because both parents and teachers were less involved and invested in the child’s compliance. In turn, the child was less compliant in the child care setting and less able to engage in self-regulation activities. For those children who attended a high-quality child care center, they displayed more self-regulatory behaviors.

Determinants of Quality in ECE Programs

Bloom (1992) suggested the director of the child care center is the “gatekeeper to quality.” The early childhood administrator is responsible for setting the tone and creating the climate for programs. Bloom and Sheerer (1992) discussing the director’s role claimed, “The causal link to program quality, however is usually an indirect one. The director shapes the work environment for the teaching staff who in turn provide the critical link to the children” (p. 263). The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study (West, Wright, & Hausken, 1995) was a comprehensive examination of the costs and quality of child care in four states: California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina. Data were gathered on 401 child care centers’ operating costs, structural characteristics, and process quality of classroom activities and interactions. A wide variety of child care centers were represented including both for-profit and nonprofit programs. This longitudinal study followed 826 preschoolers from 183 classrooms of 151 child care centers where quality data had been collected. Findings from the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study suggested that high quality child care was related to staff-to-child ratios, staff education and administrators’ prior experience (Neugebauer, 1999).
The most significant determinant of quality was found to be staff-to-child ratios. Center quality was also found to increase as the percentage of staff with a high level of education increases and as the prior experience of the administrator increases (p. 23).

This study also found that states with higher licensing standards had fewer centers of poor quality, while states with the least stringent licensing standards had more poor quality centers. Centers with the highest quality were those that had access to extra resources and did not rely solely on parent fees for fiscal viability (Neugebauer, 1999).

Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, and Cryer (1997) identified structural characteristics of child care centers that were associated with observed child care quality. Child care programs in four states were the focus of this study. Data were collected on 100 programs from a stratified random sample. For-profit programs and nonprofit programs were equally represented. The study focused only on child care centers serving infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers. Observed classrooms were randomly selected with representation from each age group at each center. A male and female child was randomly selected as target children to observe to collect data on program quality. Information gathered on structural characteristics related to caregivers, classrooms, wages, administrators, and economics. Data for the process quality (i.e., day-to-day quality of care) of the center were gathered through three different types of rating scales.

It was concluded that for infant/toddler classrooms, process quality was higher in classrooms with caregivers who were moderately experienced, paid better, and worked under more experienced directors. In preschool classrooms the process quality was higher in classrooms that had teachers with more education, a moderate amount of experience, and higher wages. Other factors that contributed to higher process quality in preschool classrooms were better adult-child ratios, lower center enrollment with lower proportion of infants and toddlers, and lower proportion of subsidized children in the center. The two strongest predictors of process
quality for both infant/toddler and preschool classrooms were adult: child ratio and teacher wages.

Dunn (1993) reviewed literature on the influences of ratio and group size of child care centers on children’s development. Dunn (1993) concluded that the literature reveals ratio and group size does not always influence children’s development. However, she cautioned that careful attention should still be paid to ratio and group sizes in child care settings. She further stated, “the simple fact that ratio and group size can influence children’s development both directly and indirectly, albeit to a limited degree, justifies the role these variables have played and should continue to play in public policy” (p. 221). Ratio and group size of a child care setting taken with structural quality variables indirectly influences children’s development. Dunn (1993) suggested state licensing agencies should regulate ratios, group size, and other quality indicators (e.g., caregiver-education/training) because when combined they seemed to be more effective at predicting children’s developmental outcomes.

In an unpublished dissertation, Reckmeyer (1990) generated a list of traits that profiled the composition of excellent child care centers. The study was a multi-site qualitative investigation into five child care centers which represented a variety of programs with differing sponsorship: a corporate sponsored center, a university-based center, a hospital-supported center, a child care program as part of a public school system, and an individual community-based center. The programs served families from low socio-economic status to upper middle class socio-economic status. Caucasians, African-Americans, and Hispanics were well represented in this study. The children who attended the child care centers ranged in age from six weeks to approximately six years. Through a survey and interviews with the director, staff, and families of the child care center, Reckmeyer (1990) found consistent commonalities among the centers.
The shared traits of these centers included: children are valued, philosophy, parent involvement, staff, leadership, relationships, environment, innovation, organization, location, program, and funding.

Reckmeyer (1990) found that each of the centers, valued children and their lives. The programs promoted individualization, self-esteem, positivity, recognition, and constructive discipline. Each center had varying philosophies that were clearly defined with defined goals. The common thread throughout each was the focus upon quality child care and the importance of quality child care. Parents were viewed as an important component within the child’s life and the child’s life at the child care center. A premium was placed on good staff at each of the studied child care centers. Individuals were hired on personal qualities that could be brought to the child care center, rather than on educational levels. Relationships at the five centers studied included a great deal of teamwork and positive one-to-one relationships among teachers, parents, children, and administrators.

The physical environments within each of the child care centers studied were comfortable and geared toward children. Support and encouragement for innovation was found within each of the studied centers. Each of the centers had a clear structure and an organization, even though the organization was different from center to center. Each program was accessible to where parents worked or where parents lived. Each center provided a program that met the needs of the children, the families, and the communities in which they served. The program was also flexible in order to grow with the changing demands of the children, the families, and the surrounding community. Reckmeyer (1990) also found funding was characteristically important to a child care center’s level of quality because none of the studied centers relied solely on the tuition from families. The common trait was that each center acquired additional funding outside of tuition,
Caregivers’ Influences on Children’s Development

Experts have agreed that the relationship a child has with his/her caregiver contributes greatly to the quality of care being provided (Pawl, 1990; Elicker & Fortner-Wood, 1995; deKruif, McWilliam, Rideley, & Wakely, 2000). Therefore, the context of the child care center involves the relationships the young children have with their caregivers. In many situations children spend an average of 50 hours a week in the care of someone other than their parents, making the relationship between the child and the caregiver particularly important. Lally (1995) claimed,

Never in history have so many very young children spent so much time in the presence of nonfamily members…Part of what infants and toddlers get from caregivers are perceptions of how people act at various times and in various situations (seen as how the infant should behave), how people act toward them and others (seen as how they should feel). The infant uses these impressions and often incorporates them into the self she becomes (pp.1-2).

Elicker and Fortner-Wood (1995) explained that four factors contribute to the quality of the adult-child relationship: characteristics of the child; characteristics of the adult, adult-child interactions, and the context surrounding the relationship. These authors claimed, “Teachers’ thoughts, feelings, and behavior also affect their relationships with children” (p.74) and that kindergarten teachers’ philosophies about the relationship they have with children and the teachers’ behaviors are often consistent.

The relationship between the toddler and the caregiver is a reciprocal relationship in that the child’s behaviors impact the caregiver’s interactions, thus initiating a response from the child. Honig and Wittmer (1985) suggested that toddlers have alternating needs for autonomy
and dependency, which can make it difficult for the toddler to interact with peers and adults. After observing 100 two- and three-year-old boys and girls in child care centers, Honig and Wittmer (1985) reported that toddlers made 778 attempts in 66.7 hours to interact with their caregivers. The majority of the attempts were to seek out adult help, to inform an adult, or to get an adult to look at or respond to an activity. The caregivers responded to 63.5 percent of the toddler’s bids through teaching, questioning, ego boosts, and attending. Toddlers received commands or negative responses to 6 percent of their bids. The teachers used a combination of positive and command or negative responses to 8 percent of the child’s bids. The teachers ignored nearly 22 percent of the toddler’s bids, while 15 percent of the toddler’s bids received teacher responses that included any kind of command, inhibiting, forbidding, threatening, name-calling, or denying.

deKruif, McWilliam, Ridley, & Wakely (2000) examined 63 child care teachers’ interaction behaviors with young children. Through the use of cluster analysis, four clusters of teacher behaviors were identified. The first cluster of teachers, the average group, was the largest of the clusters and received average ratings across all teaching style rating scales. According to the researchers, “they sometimes redirected the children; sometimes introduced nonengaged children to new activities, elaborated, and followed the children’s interests; and sometimes informed, acknowledged, and praised children” (p. 256). The rating on affect for cluster 1 was moderately high. The second cluster, the elaborative group, was characterized by their extremely low ratings on redirects and extremely high ratings on elaborates, follows, praises, and affect. Cluster 3, the control group, had teachers with extreme ratings on all clustering variables. They were rated very high on redirecting and very low on all other variables. It appears that these teachers would stop children’s misbehaviors, but would not introduce new activities or elaborate
on children’s interest or activities. These teachers would occasionally ask children to do something related to what they were already doing, rarely provided information to the children, and rarely acknowledged or praised children’s efforts. The last cluster, the nonelaborative group, included teachers who had high ratings on nonelaborative interaction behaviors, in combination with average ratings on redirecting and elaborative interaction behaviors. These teachers had high ratings on introducing children to new activities, providing information, acknowledging children’s responses without elaborating on what they were doing, and praising children’s efforts. These teachers were also characterized by having above average affect rating.

It is of interest to point out that the elaborative cluster had 5 teachers with a high school diploma, 1 with an associate degree, and 4 with a college degree. For those teachers in the control group, 12 had high school diplomas, 2 had associate degrees, and none had a college degree. This lends credence to the importance of well-trained staff contributing to the quality of care provided by a center and the quality of the relationship between the caregiver and the child.

Kontos and Wilcox-Herzog (2001) examined the relationship of teachers’ education and experience as it related to classroom quality and effective teaching behavior. Through a research in review, Kontos and Wilcox-Herzog (2001) presented three major conclusions. First, the formal education of a teacher (i.e., bachelor’s degree) regardless of the content of the formal schooling, correlated with the overall classroom quality and less often with effective teacher behavior. The second major conclusion was the specialized education of a teacher (i.e., coursework in child development and/or early childhood education) may be casually related to overall classroom quality and is correlated with effective teaching behavior. Last, this research in review concluded that teacher’s experience cannot be consistently linked to either classroom quality or effective teaching behavior.
ECE Administrator’s Indirect Influence on Children’s Development

Phillips, McCartney, and Scarr (1987) examined children’s social development in relation to child care quality. Nine child care centers in Bermuda participated in the study. A total of 166 families with children ages 3 and older who had attended one of the nine target centers for six months or more participated. Quality was assessed through observational environmental ratings, an extensive interview with each program director, and standardized measures of children’s social development. The study yielded overall quality of the child care environment made a significant contribution to children’s social development. More specifically, director experience, child-staff ratio, verbal interaction with caregivers, and verbal interaction with peers affected the quality of the program. The most consistent predictors of the children’s social development in child care were the director’s experience and the amount of verbal interaction between caregivers and children. Children’s social development was higher in centers where there were large amounts of caregiver-child verbal interactions and relatively low amounts of verbal interactions among peers. The programs with more experienced directors appeared to have less socially competent children, as indicated by lower caregiver ratings of considerateness and sociability. However, the ratings of aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety were lower in programs with more experienced directors.

Neugebauer (1999) highlighted factors that 200 center directors rated as being important determinants of quality. Using a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important and 1 being the least important, center directors rated center leadership as the most important determinant of quality with a composite rating of 9.1. Other determinants were teacher training (8.9), staff: child ratio (8.4), and teacher morale (8.1). Towards the middle range were equipment (6.5), center design (6.2), and center size (5.2).
Profiles of ECE Administrators

Austin and Morrow (1986) studied the administrative concerns of 141 child care directors from four different states. The child care directors included Head Start directors, university-based laboratory schools, full- and half-day child care programs, preschool only programs, and other options (e.g. special needs, emergency care, before- and after-school care, etc.). Austin and Morrow (1986) found the mean length of time administrators had been directing a child care center was equal to 4.6 years (SD= 1.2 years) with 59 directors having been in an administrative position for less than 3 years. It was found that 103 administrators (73%) had degrees in early childhood education, child development, or related field; 19.7% did not have degrees and the remaining 7.8% could not be coded. The three areas of major concern for these directors were keeping informed of research and new developments in the field of early childhood development, education, and administration; evaluating their own performance as an administrator including the effects of their administrative style on the staff and the program; and establishing appropriate and efficient ways of communicating a child’s progress and behavior to parents. A factor analysis revealed that directors with fewer years of education and/or who did not possess a degree related to early childhood education, had greater concerns than those who had a relevant degree and/or more years of education. Additionally, directors who did not own their facility generally had more concerns than those who owned their facility.

Leadership Training

Researchers have linked staff training to overall program quality (Arnett, 1989; Howes, 1983; Phillips, 1987). In the field of ECE, specifically in the area of child care, there is not always a formal and universal pathway to becoming an administrator (Mitchell, 1997; Kagan &
Bloom and Sheerer (1992) studied the effects of leadership training on the organizational climate of a Head Start program. These investigators wanted to explore the effects of leadership training on ECE administrators because the literature only discussed intervention efforts with elementary and secondary school principals. The subjects of the study included thirteen Head Start lead teachers and nine Head Start directors. All of the subjects had immediate supervisory responsibility within their programs. All of the subjects were female with an average of twelve years experience in the ECE field. All had family responsibilities and were basically uncertain about their academic ability (Bloom & Sheerer, 1992).

The twenty-two subjects participated in a 16-month Early Childhood Leadership Training Program. Content of the training included: personal and professional self-knowledge; child development and early childhood programming; organizational theory, leadership style, legal and fiscal issues; parent and community relations/public policy and advocacy; and research and technology. A comparison group of an equal number of Head Start directors and lead teachers, who did not receive training, were invited to be a part of the study.

Through quantitative and qualitative data, three training themes emerged with particular outcomes as related to the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program. These three themes included: “(1) participants’ level of perceived competence; (2) the quality of classroom teaching practices by their teachers; and (3) the quality of work life for staff” (Bloom & Sheerer, 1992, p. 581). A statistically significant increase was found for participants’ self-report feedback in the area of perceived level of knowledge and skill in all five task performance areas. Posttest observational data revealed a significant improvement in the quality of classroom teaching.
practices by their teachers compared to the participants who did not receive training. Last, a pretest-posttest comparison of organizational climate showed a significant improvement in areas in which the director had more control. Bloom and Sheerer (1992) affirmed, “These dimensions included clarity, providing opportunities for professional growth, and the degree of innovativeness exhibited at the center” (p. 592). This study helped provide evidence to support Bloom’s (1992) notion of the directors as “gatekeepers to quality” and having control over improving the quality of work life for staff.

Effective ECE Leadership Traits

In a book chapter Espinosa (1997), speculates on the personal dimension of early childhood administrators. Espinosa (1997) argued that more training is not what is needed for early childhood administrators, but rather a “careful nurturing of certain personal characteristics” (p. 97). She suggested that great leaders share the following characteristics: moral principles; vision; courage; time; stamina; optimism and orientation toward the future; and an ability to overcome obstacles. In a commentary on Espinosa’s chapter, Clifford (1997) added two more characteristics to the list. He claimed that leaders also have a good understanding of who they are and have drive, which includes curiosity, integrity, and a desire to accomplish (Clifford, 1997).

Reckmeyer (1990) investigated common traits among five quality child care centers through a qualitative study. She concluded that leadership was one of the twelve traits unique to quality child care centers. She found the directors of five separate child care programs were strong female leaders with a clear focus and a lot of experience in the ECE field. These women were actively involved in the community and became involved with the families who attended their center. These directors were well received by their staff and parents and built relationships easily with their staff and families of enrolled children. These leaders also related well to young
children. Reckmeyer (1990) claimed, “Each was equally as comfortable on her knees talking to a child as they were dealing with a teacher or a parent” (p. 222). Lastly, these women had a strong mission and a sense of purpose for her career and the importance of providing quality child care. The author also mentioned that three of the five directors were the primary founder of the center and played a key role in its development.

Seplocha (1998) examined the work of six administrators of high-quality ECE programs in different regions of the United States. Through a multi-site case study, the researcher shadowed and extensively interviewed early childhood administrators to determine their shared leadership qualities. The data showed that they shared: experience; knowledge in child growth and development; knowledge in early childhood education; an ability to leverage resources; and exhibiting a sense of ownership. Seplocha (1998) also found these early childhood administrators maintained a strong assistant and remained active in the ECE community. The participants in this study had a vision and were focused on the larger picture. They provided support and encouragement to their staff and showed appreciation for them. They encouraged collaboration and teamwork among their staff members. These individuals were caring and listened to parent’s voices. Lastly, these administrators held personal values that influenced their behavior. Table 2 outlines a summary of the findings from Seplocha (1998).

Table 2. Traits of Effective ECE Administrators

| Knowledge in child development and early childhood education | Experience in the field of early childhood education | Skill in leveraging resources | Ownership of the program | A competent assistant who shares responsibility | A clear focus on the goals, opportunities, resources, and constraints | Staff development | Involvement in the ECE professional community | Leadership in vision building | Table continued |

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Bloom (2000) discussed a particular administrative style named Participative Management. This style is characterized as a process of involving those who are influenced by decisions, in making decisions. She concluded that shared decision making is a central tenet of several management philosophies. These philosophies included Total Quality Management (TQM), Theory Z, Quality Z, Quality Circles, and Open-Book Management (p.13). The basic premise of Participative Management is sharing management authority through delegation. The delegating process included responsibility, authority, and accountability. Some of the skills directors are required to successfully implement in Participative Management are interest and concern, the ability to recognize and enhance the talents of others, the ability to recognize and work around weaknesses in others, communication, conflict resolution, self-control, negotiation, compromise, synergy, the ability to learn from the team, flexibility, and the ability to admit personal mistakes (p. 13).

Bloom (2000) discussed four levels of participation in Participative Management. The first level is unilateral decision-making. At this level the director of the child care center makes the decisions. She then announces the decision to her staff and tries to sell the decision to her staff by providing a rationale for a particular course of action (p. 37). The second level is consultative decision-making. At this level the director seeks information or ideas from her staff
before making a decision. She might make a tentative decision and then solicit reactions from her staff before making the final decision or she might present a problem to the staff, solicit suggestions, and then make the decision, which may or may not reflect the staff’s advice (p. 37). The third level of participation is collaborative decision-making. At this level the director and the staff define and analyze the problem together. Together they generate and evaluate alternatives then decide on a course of action. The final decision can be made either through a unanimous vote, a majority vote, or a consensus (p. 37). The final level of participation discussed by Bloom (2000) is delegated decision-making. At this level the director provides relevant information to the staff then allows the staff to make the decision. The decision can either be made by a subgroup of the staff, with or without input from other members of the staff, or can be made unilaterally by individual staff members (p.37).

Conclusion

A picture of an ECE program’s unpredictability and interconnectedness can be painted through the lens of complex social system theory. This conceptual framework illustrates the complexity of the early childhood administrator’s role. VanderVen (2000) stated, “This model [complex adaptive system] requires that the practitioner accept unpredictability, turbulence, and the inability to control, while still keeping active and ‘moving’ or creating and responding to events and opportunities in various complex systems” (p. 127). Thus, the role of the early childhood administrator is to deal with the ‘chaos’ of the program in order to manage and lead a quality program for children and their families.

Early childhood administrators parallel characteristics and daily activities of educational administrators. However, the roles of each administrator in the separate fields do not mirror one another. Due to the myriad of ECE programs and the fragmented system, early childhood
administrators can differ greatly from one another in areas such as education level, professional level, and job responsibilities. Through an overview of small business administration and educational administration, it was pointed out that early childhood administrators could have many roles depending on the mission and purpose of their program. Austin and Morrow (1986) discussed concerns of early childhood administrators in relation to their educational level, experience, and ownership of the program. Early childhood administrators are often faced with similar environmental demands, as that of a principal, however, the research in the field of early childhood administration is not well developed and little is known about early childhood administrator’s responses to the environmental demands.

Through a review of literature on the characteristics and traits of successful small business owners, effective principals, and effective early childhood administrators, a common theme of “vision” was recurrent. Individuals who were “successful” had a vision for the type of services they wanted to provide for the community. Barden (1995) stated,

Furthermore, I expect that prospective child care directors need to have a vision about what children need who are away from home all day. The literature on the importance of vision for school principals is well documented. I expect this applies to child care directors as well (p. 78).

Another recurrent theme for all three areas was the individual having expertise and experience in the chosen field. Lastly, it appears that ‘successful’ business owners and administrators are resourceful. That is to say they use the resources they have to their advantage. These resources can range from human resources to acquiring sufficient investments for equipment and supplies.

Hoy and Miskel (1991) concluded there to be three orientations to leadership in education: traits, behaviors, and setting. These authors maintained that these three orientations make it difficult to understand educational leadership because it depends on the individual’s
position, behavior, personal characteristics, and the nature of the situation. I would like to say that these three orientations also make it difficult to understand ECE leadership for the same reasons. Due to the diversity in the nature of ECE programs, it might be even more difficult to obtain a clear formula for leadership.

Given these challenges, this researcher is concerned with three particular areas of early childhood administrators. First, taking a look at their career history and the process of becoming early childhood administrators. Second, exploring personal characteristics of early childhood administrators. Third, investigating the administrative styles of early childhood administrators and the process of leading and managing an ECE program.

Through this life history narrative study, six early childhood administrators of different ECE program sponsorship were interviewed extensively to shed light into career choices, personal characteristics, leadership style, and management techniques. By repeatedly looking beneath the surface of the early childhood administrator’s stories, the researcher intended to 1) Give meaning to both temporal experience and personal action; 2) Combine daily actions and events into episodic units; and 3) Organize past events and contribute to future events (Polkinghorne, 1988).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic inquiry into the lives of six early childhood administrators. Bloom (1992) defined directors as the “gatekeepers to quality.” Using the concept of “gatekeepers to quality,” this researcher looked for personal characteristics and experiences that helped early childhood administrators develop and lead early childhood programs with a reputation of providing high-quality services for young children. There are three pairs of early childhood administrators. One member of the pair is currently working in the field and the other is retired. The paired profiles are; Carla and Linda (elementary public school principals), Naomi and Laura (church-sponsored child care directors), and Tammy and Nora (private child care directors/owners). The researcher investigated stories these early childhood administrators told about their lived experiences and searched for patterns that emerged from the stories suggesting career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles.

Site and Participant Selection

This life history narrative study was conducted in a mid-size city in South Louisiana. The sample was obtained from a purposive/criterion sampling of the population. The six early childhood administrators were chosen based on their reputation as strong administrators. An invitation to participate in this study was extended to the six early childhood administrators. The participants were contacted through an initial telephone call to determine their interest to participate. During the telephone call, a presentation of the purpose of the study and the interview was made, and time and location for the interview was decided.

Data Gathering Details

Data were collected through three interview sessions per participant. The researcher was receptive to additional interviews, however none were needed due to saturation. The minimum
time for each interview session was one (1) hour. Interviews were scheduled by telephone at the convenience of the participant. Interviews were conducted in early childhood administrators’ homes, ECE programs, and other sites depending upon what was convenient to the participant.

During the initial interview, the interviewer established rapport with the participant in order to gain access to the particular information required for the study. An interview protocol was used in order to assure that each interviewee was asked the same questions by the interviewer (See Appendix B). It also helped the interviewer organize thoughts and served as a reminder on how to begin and end each interview session. This also enabled the interviewer to take notes during the interview about the responses of the interviewee. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed by the interviewer to retain accuracy of the participant’s responses and stories.

Each interviewee was made aware of the study’s purpose and that she was recommended because of her reputation as a strong administrator who has experience with working with young children and their families. Each interviewee was told the procedures of the study and the minimal risks associated with being involved in the study.

Using the purpose of the study as a starting point, the interviewer asked the early childhood administrators to speak about the following areas: their background and education, their career path, why they choose early childhood education, and their approach to working with staff and families. These questions constituted the basis for further conversation and made possible deeper discussions about their role as an early childhood administrator. In order to discover the early childhood administrators’ personal characteristics and administrative style, the interviewer encouraged the administrators to speak freely about their experiences.
Analyses Procedure

The first step was to identify an objective set of experiences in the participant’s life (Denzin, 1989). To obtain information about the individual, an initial interview was conducted to sketch a profile of the early childhood administrators’ school setting, career path, personal characteristics, and administrative style. Second, interview transcripts, audiocassettes, and other documents were used for concrete, contextual biographical materials. Each interview transcript was read repeatedly in order to search for any stories or epiphanies that emerged. This approach resulted in a general illustration of the material and highlighted some common features. The participants were interviewed a second time to expand on the stories and epiphanies and to further develop each participant’s profile.

Narrative segments and categories within the interview-story were isolated, and larger patterns and meanings were determined. Using participant’s quotations that illustrated their own personal characteristics and administrative style reduced data and were used to develop categories. The individual’s biography was reconstructed, and factors that shaped the participant’s life as an early childhood administrator were identified. Analytic abstraction highlighted first the processes in the individual’s life, then the different theories that related to these life experiences and finally, the unique and general features of the life. Participants were asked to review the two transcripts and their personal profile for accuracy.

A third interview was conducted to discuss the participant’s profile as developed by the researcher. Participant’s were asked for insight and input about their personal profile. Participants were encouraged to make suggestions or changes to their profile. During the third interview, participants were debriefed about the study and the researcher shared preliminary analysis with each participant.
Finally, upon updating and completing each profile, the researcher emailed each participant a copy of her profile. The researcher asked for final clarifications and thoughts regarding the profile. Participants were given a deadline to contact the researcher with final thoughts or changes. The researcher then made the final adjustments to each profile.

Integrity of Study

The integrity of the study was maintained through several methods. First, subjects were interviewed for a prolonged period to ensure that the interviewee said all that she wanted to say. Next, persistence in the interview process was used until all questions had been answered including new questions that arose. Third, triangulation was assured through using two additional researchers to develop additional independent analyses. These analyses were used to compare interpretations of the interview transcripts and each participant’s profile. Next, peer debriefing was conducted by asking colleagues for input and suggestions on interview questions and interpretations. Member checking was done by asking the interviewee to review transcribed interviews and profiles for accuracy. Interviewees were also asked to review various versions of the study, while in progress, to make sure the true meaning of their statements had been captured. Transferability through the use of thick description (Geertz, 1973) was used in order to demonstrate applicability for the reader. Dependability audits were used by making all audiocassettes and interview transcripts available for other researchers to verify.

Personal Biography and Voice

The life history narrative approach for this research was chosen based on personal experience as a lead teacher of a two-year-olds classroom at a church-based preschool. While I had no experience in group care and was learning about child development in psychology classes, mentoring by the other teachers in the facility was my only avenue for professional
development. Because they had been doing this job for ten or more years, I trusted their judgment. Their ways included many “teacher-directed” activities and much control over the children. The children were expected to sit during circle time for at least twenty minutes while they listened to a story or sang songs. The children were expected to play with the toys chosen for them. All children were expected to sit down during art time and make something. All children were expected to eat and nap at the same time. It was very frustrating for the children, as they would cry for most of the day. Personal experience in the child development lab on a university campus provided me with the skills to understand child development and developmentally appropriate practice, the importance of the caregiver-child relationship, and the developmental outcomes of the child. Having an education in the field of Early Childhood Education and mentors to model successful practices are important values to me.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Both ethical and political considerations were given attention throughout this research. Ethical considerations included filing an application with the Institutional Review Board with the Louisiana State University Human Research Committee before beginning the study (See Appendix A). The interviewee was not exposed to any physical, psychological, or social risks because the study was based on the individual’s current beliefs, opinions, and administrative practices. The interviewee was asked to sign an informed consent form and was given a copy of the consent form (See Appendix A). One of the steps that were taken to minimize the risks was to allow the interviewees to self-select herself out of the study. Another step that was taken during the interviews was to ensure that questions were asked objectively, and responses were not judged as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ by the interviewer. The interviewer was also trained to be sensitive to the interviewee’s signals that indicated a desire to withdraw or refuse to participate in the
study. The participants’ risks were reduced by assuring confidentiality, fully disclosing the purpose of the research, and debriefing the subject upon completion of the study. To avoid political implications for an interviewee, the name of the program at which the interviewee is/was employed was kept confidential. The confidentiality of the name of the program is important as to not shed negative light on the program. Certain names of individuals associated with the participant (i.e., former employer, children, spouse) were changed during the transcription phase of the project in order to maintain confidentiality.
CHAPTER 4: PROFILES OF SIX EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

This chapter includes six profiles of early childhood administrators who were identified as strong leaders. These descriptive profiles were developed to discover the career choices, personal characteristics, and administrative styles of these individuals. All of the information was reported during an interview process.

There are three pairs of early childhood administrators. One member of the pair is currently working in the field and the other is retired. The paired profiles are; Carla and Linda (elementary public school principals), Naomi and Laura (church-sponsored child care directors), and Tammy and Nora (private child care directors/owners). Each profile begins with a description of the school setting (including the socio-economic status of the enrolled children, level of teachers’ education, and hours of the program). This is followed by an outline of the early childhood administrator’s educational background and career path. Next is a description of the personal characteristics and administrative style of the administrator.

Profile One: Carla, Public School Principal

School Setting

Carla is the principal of a public elementary school that serves 420 children who are in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or first grade. The socio-economic status of the families of children in the school ranges from very low to high. Carla stated there were not many middle class students who attended the school. The school meets the federal requirements of a Title I facility and was awarded the “International Distinguished Title I School Honor.” The school is also accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The school is well-maintained, with a clean and bright appearance. Student work is displayed throughout the corridors. There are twenty classrooms with 32 full-time teachers who are all
certified in early childhood education, 16 paraprofessionals, a full-time librarian, and a full-time physical education coach. The school is well-supported by the community. As Carla explained, “We don’t have any private schools. Pretty much everybody comes to school here so we have good public support.” Carla described the climate of the school as being “friendly and fun.” She said, “…we’re here ‘cause we like being here, we like our jobs.”

Educational Background and Career Path

Carla has a Bachelor of Science in Human Ecology and a Master of Arts in Education. She began her career in 1978 as a first grade teacher. She taught first grade for 11 years, second grade for four years, and started a summer program for kindergarteners before she moved into an administrative position at an elementary school. She stated that after 15 years of teaching, “I just really wanted to get out of the classroom.” Carla’s first administrative role was dean of students at an elementary school. During this time, the principal mentored her and Carla explained she learned a lot during her experience as dean of students under this “fabulous” principal. After a year at this position, she moved to another elementary school to become the assistant principal. Again, Carla stated she worked under a “fabulous” person who taught her a great deal about being an administrator.

After a year of tenure as an assistant principal, she moved to her current position as principal in a different school system. She has been there for the past eight years. Carla claimed that she was apprehensive about applying for the principal’s position because she always thought she just wanted to be somebody’s assistant. Her mentor encouraged her to apply for the job. Carla admitted that during her first couple of years as the principal she was unsure about what she was supposed to be doing, “My first year, I was like, Whoa! What does a principal really do? You know, people think you sit back in your office and make a lot of money and you just don’t
do anything, but that is not true.” She went on to say that she did have “some really good
supporters in the central office staff and they’re still very supportive. They’re all very supportive
and they kinda walked me through, mentored me, and helped me to get going.”

Personal Characteristics

Carla has a passion for being around and helping young children. This is apparent when
listening to her talk about her program. Her energy level is contagious, and her commitment to
young children is outstanding.

I’ve always had a passion for children and young children, in particular…you know, I’ve
always enjoyed children. I’ve always loved children. I worked with the children at
church. I was the director of our youth ministry at our church and just had a real passion
and love for young children and I just value children and I don’t look at them as, a lot of
people look at children as little grown-ups, but they’re not, you know, just childhood is
just a unique state of being and I just felt like I could offer a lot to young children.

She is concerned about the children in her school, which is evident in her relationships
with them. For example, Carla knows children by their first name and often asks about a child’s
siblings who do not attend her school. She stated, “I didn’t just want to be a principal and I want
to really know my kids. I want to know what’s going on in the classrooms. I want to be there as
much as I can.” She claimed this to be one of her weaknesses, “That’s one of my downfalls and
both principals I worked with told me that that was my weakness ‘cause my heart’s a little too
soft when it comes to the kids.” She shared an example of her “human side.”

We have a uniform policy and I had a lady come yesterday, a grandmother, and she said,
“I’m trying to help my daughter raise these kids and I don’t have a navy coat and I went
and bought him a royal blue coat and he don’t have anything else.” And I said, “Let him
wear the royal blue coat.” Whereas, some principals I know would say, “I’m sorry that’s
our policy.” But, I try to be human, you know, it’s a coat.

Carla is an advocate for young children, in general, but particularly for the children in her
school. When she first became principal, she was upset because the school did not have a full-
time librarian, “So, I went to the superintendent and he said, ‘Oh, well, you know those are just babies. You don’t need a real teacher to read books to them.” She explained that in the community, her school is viewed as the “baby school” because she has young children. Her passion for young children helped her tenaciously fight for a full-time librarian and a full-time physical education coach. She also did not implement curriculum changes when asked by higher administration. She felt the curriculum change was neither in the best interests of the children at her school nor in the best interests of her faculty and staff.

Administrative Style

As an administrator, Carla has high expectations and high standards for her staff. She attributes these expectations and standards to her passion for young children. She disclosed, “I have a real loving passion for children and I understand that what you say to them can change their lives in a positive or negative way.” These expectations are seen in her determination that the children in her school come first. In talking about her expectations of her staff, she said, “They all know that I care about the kids first and I’m not gonna do anything that’s gonna hurt the kids and I’m not gonna let them do it.” An example of Carla maintaining her high standards and expectations is when she had to decide not to rehire some faculty for the next school year.

I had some teachers that I had to ask to consider working somewhere else…I had to make some tough decisions about staff and recommended people to return and there were some people that I could not recommend because they didn’t want to change the way they treated children. They didn’t want to change the way they taught [children].

Her high expectations are also seen in her expectation that faculty and staff members behave like professionals. She models professionalism and treats them as professionals, “I love what I do. I have high expectations for myself and my staff. I want the staff to be professional as much as I try to be. I expect them to be professionals and be creative, to get together with
teachers, their colleagues ‘cause that’s something that they don’t have- a lot of time.” Carla encourages her staff to attend professional development trainings and to present at local and national conferences.

I had my whole first grade last school year go to conference and do a reading presentation. These teachers, some of them have never presented and there were, I think, two that had and they were really gung-ho and they said, ‘Rather than just the two of us, what about the whole grade level?’ I said, ‘Fine with me. I really hate to have my whole first grade staff out, but if you all want to go present, I’ll support you.’ They came back feeling like, I don’t know. It just put a little notch in their belt I guess you could say because they shared and there was standing room only in the audience and the people just really, really, really learned a lot and felt good about what they presented and so, that made them feel good about themselves. So, I think it’s an opportunity to grow professionally and offer what you have.

Another example of Carla’s expectations is seen in her hiring policy. Carla looks for teachers whose philosophy of education for young children matches her philosophy. She expects teachers to nurture and encourage young children. She further described perfect candidates as “teachers who are compassionate and teachers who enjoy young children.” The ability to nurture, encourage, have compassion, and enjoy young children are the most important things that Carla looks for when she interviews candidates for teaching positions. She also looks for teachers who are open to new ideas, willing to adapt their beliefs or habits, and willing to be flexible. Carla has made difficult decisions regarding teachers who did not share her expectations for young children in her school. She explained,

You have to be a nurturer to work here and I think that was the thing with the people who left. You can’t work here- it’s hard ‘cause I expect a lot. I really do. I mean I have high expectations. I really do. You have to have a certain heart to work with young children and there are some very fine teachers and I said, ‘You’re not a bad teacher. You’re a great teacher, but you’re just not for this age. Maybe you want to consider middle school. You know, because the kids are older. They are independent and that kind of thing.’

Because Carla’s philosophy of working with faculty and staff involves teamwork she looks for people who can work together as a team. Regarding hiring teachers she said, “We really, really
look for somebody who can work with the group because I’ve had some fabulous teachers, but they didn’t work out because they didn’t work with the group and somebody was constantly in the office telling me.”

Carla has very clear expectations about her program’s standards. She feels that having a high quality program for young children is very important. She stated,

I just really believe morally, spiritually, all that at this age is just so important. What we put into children at this part of their lives as children is something that they’ll take with them throughout their lives. How I think of it is like planting seeds. We’re planting into their lives. We’re putting in there, even though we don’t want to take the place of parents, but we are also reinforcing values like fairness, trustworthiness, and responsibility. I think it’s important that we have a program…if we’re gonna have a program…if parents are gonna send their kids at all, I think it’s got to be a high quality program.

Even though accreditation is not compulsory, Carla chooses to apply for reaccreditation every three years. She stated, “If I didn’t have NAEYC and I didn’t try every three years to become reaccredited I wouldn’t have the great quality because my teachers tend to forget what they’re supposed to be doing.” She feels that being accredited guarantees and protects the high quality status of her program. This way, Carla believes she can communicate her belief that the children are a priority in her school, “I’m assured as a principal that my kids are going to get the very best and that’s why I do it. I want my kids to have the very, very best and with NAEYC standards it’s like having our guidebook; you know that every teacher has the standards, the expectations.”

Another characteristic of Carla’s administrative style is her trust in teachers as decision-makers. She allows teachers to make many decisions regarding curriculum and instruction issues, “I learned that I can’t go find a program that I like and just say, ‘Here it is. Teach it.’ I learned I had to have their input and they have to say, ‘Oh, we like this. Can we have it?’” The teachers from each grade level meet once a week to discuss curriculum and instruction. Carla does not attend the weekly meetings. She allows the teachers to be decision makers as much as possible.
Sometimes they’ll call me to come to the meeting and that’s fine. I told them they can always call me. They make most of the instructional decisions. I mean they really do. If I see something good, I might say, ‘You know, first grade, look at this. I like this, but I’d like your opinion. Tell me what you think because you’re the ones who are gonna have to go around and teach it and use it.’

Carla is very supportive and encourages her teachers whenever the opportunity presents itself. She provides her faculty and staff with positive feedback through a weekly memo. The memo often includes announcements and “a thought of the week.” Carla admitted that the weekly memo is sometimes burdensome, but it is well worth it. She starts her faculty meetings with “celebrations.” This is a time that she praises people for accomplishments and thanks individuals for contributions. She then asks for the faculty to join in and share any good news they may have. Carla encourages teachers to share personal success stories with the entire faculty. She said,

But I just think it’s things like that, encouraging the teachers and kinda motivating them. I’m always telling them nice, kind things, and so if I get a good comment from a parent I’ll share it with them. And those kind of things have turned our whole climate around, I think.

Carla’s style of administration is most closely aligned with Bloom’s (2000) collaborative decision-making. She, along with her faculty and staff, define and analyze problems together. Then they generate and evaluate the alternatives and decide on a course of action. She welcomes the faculty and staff’s input and asks for the final decision to be a consensus. An example of this collaborative decision-making style was evident when Carla discussed how her staff decided on a curriculum to adopt for the school.

Profile Two: Linda, Former Public School Principal
School Setting

Linda was formerly a principal of an elementary public school. The school had approximately 700 to 750 students and served children from prekindergarten through fifth grade.
The socio-economic status of the families of the children in the school was very diverse, with a range from low to high. Approximately half of the children qualified for the free and reduced lunch program offered through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Approximately, half of the children attending the school were African Americans and half were Caucasians. When Linda served as the principal, there were 20 to 25 classrooms, with one prekindergarten class and 4 to 5 kindergarten classes located at a satellite site down the street. Over the period of Linda’s administration there were between 29 and 35 full-time teachers. There was a very high level of participation in the school by the teachers. In fact, Linda stated that one researcher described her school as having 29 leaders. In response to this Linda said, “It was a very unique place and we grew each other, we grew each other professionally, which helped us to instructionally work to capacity with our kids.”

Educational Background and Career Path

Linda has a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, a Master of Arts in Reading, and a Specialist degree in Administration and Supervision with an Early Childhood Education minor.

In 1964, her career began with teaching second grade. After teaching second grade for several years, she taught first grade children. Her experience as a first grade teacher was difficult because there were many children in her classroom, “I had like 42 kids the first day…they didn’t have enough desks, so they were sitting on the floor.” It was during this that she first experienced teaching young children and she thought it was wonderful.

It was just amazing to think that when they entered your room, they did not know how to do anything. They couldn’t read one word, maybe their name, maybe not, ‘cause we didn’t have kindergarten. So, absolutely the most exciting thing you can imagine is to see a small child pick up anything in your room at the end of the year and be able to read it and to love it and to appreciate it.
Linda taught a number of kindergarten/first grade combination classes and first grade/second grade combination classes. After 14 years in the classroom, Linda decided to return to school for her master’s in reading, “As my family says, ‘I can teach that wall how to read.’” After she received her master’s, the Tuition Exemption Act was passed. This legislation authorized payment of tuition for teachers who returned to school for graduate coursework and degrees. Linda decided to take advantage of this opportunity and continued to attend college to work on her specialist degree while working as a teacher. After an additional four years as a classroom teacher, Linda became the principal of her elementary school. She was the principal for 15 years before she moved to become principal of a middle school where she currently works. This researcher talks about Linda as if she is retired because she is longer an administrator in the elementary setting.

Personal Characteristics

Linda is a very honest and genuine person. A Pinocchio doll sits on her desk, as a reminder to all that honesty is very important to her. She stated that one of her obligations to her faculty and staff is to be honest with them. She also feels that it is important for her faculty and staff to be honest with her, “When they call in, if it’s the cat that’s sick and the cat has to go to the vet, they are not calling me up and telling me that they are sick.” Linda’s honesty is related to her belief in people, “I’m a believer in people. Sometimes it might come back to haunt you, but very rarely, very rarely does trust and belief in people, at least in my experience, come back to slap me in the face.”

Linda also has an inherent desire to help other people grow, especially young children. She said, “I think early childhood is the best area to teach in because you can actually see, hear, feel your results daily as they get older… I don’t think there is a more exciting time than early
childhood when students are just learning and to watch them make connections.” She not only wants to help children grow, but others as well. She explains, “people…don’t really realize that when others around you have success, you have success too.” She feels that it is her responsibility to help others reach their goals, “But whatever their goals are for themselves, I think it is my responsibility, if I can open doors, to open them.”

Linda also has a great deal of joy and enthusiasm for teaching, “I’ll be retiring at the end of next year. I’m glad that I’m leaving still as enthusiastic and happy about education and about teaching as a career as I started in ’64/’65. A lot of people can’t say that, but I can say that.” She considers the ability to teach and lead others a gift and she is happy to share this gift with others.

Last, Linda is very creative and innovative. She has been able to accomplish many things in her life because of her personality, “I mean I see things and problem-solve differently than most people. That’s why I don’t think I do well on standardized tests. I do awful on standardized tests because I can pick out two answers and I can get up and defend both of them as being correct.” An example of Linda’s creativity is when she was told by higher administration that they did not have enough personnel to install a network system among the computers in her school and it was going to take several years before the computers could be networked together. Linda got the Navy to network the computers, “When the submarine, the USS Louisiana docked here, the navy came to the school and wired it for us [laughing]. So, where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

Administrative Style

Above all, Linda’s administrative style has always reflected a belief in teamwork and she shares her responsibility as an administrator with her faculty and staff. She worked hard to cultivate a climate where teamwork was the cornerstone of success. She explained,
To some people if they’re not totally in control and totally THE leader, it’s hard for them to develop other leaders and I’m the first to admit I can’t be THE leader. There’s no such thing as that working and the school working. Because there’s too much involved and there’s too many things… I don’t have to be in control of every little thing. I can share. I want to share my leadership and my responsibilities. I value other people’s input to make it better.

Linda’s strong belief in teamwork causes her to spend a great deal of time “growing the leaders.” A component of “growing the leaders” is creating a supportive environment with an administrator who is willing to listen to new ideas and allow teachers to be decision makers. She explains, “You have to teach your faculty, your staff, how to make decisions. Then you as the leader don’t have to make all the decisions. Yes, you might be in on them, but you don’t need to make all of them.” She also believes you have to help the faculty have a vision for the entire school, because sometimes decisions that work toward the vision of the school may not be best for individual teachers.

The faculty at Linda’s school were so involved in decision-making that while she was on a business trip they hired a new teacher. She recounted the story,

I was off on, I don’t know, some convention or trip or something and so my first grade teachers, they were absolutely outstanding, decided to interview a teacher for a first grade position. They [the first grade teachers] knew we were looking for one [a teacher] because one of our first grade teachers was pregnant and having a baby so we were looking for a first grade teacher. This little teacher came in and just gave the secretary her name and where she was from and so forth and so on. Even the secretary picked up on “hmm, she sounds pretty good.” So she goes and tells the first grade teachers and they make arrangements to interview her and when I come back, Sarah Broussard takes me into the closet (we had this big closet and everybody in the office was always everywhere, so we would go into the closet to talk for privacy). She says, “I have something to tell you. I might get fired but I don’t think so” she says, “because I think that you would approve…We all interviewed this teacher while you were gone and she is so great and we were so scared that she would, you know, accept a job or get a job somewhere else, we hired her” [laughing] I said, “I think that’s great, why would I be upset?” I said, “I trust you, why not? You know? Y’all are always part of interviews for hiring teachers.” It came to that trust level. I think trust is something that a lot of schools don’t have and you have to build that trust level.
Linda’s administrative style also involves taking risks. She admitted that in her personal life she is very conservative and does not take risks. However, her career has been filled with many courageous but risky activities and decisions. As a young administrator, Linda began conducting group interviews. She received a letter from the Human Resource department stating that conducting group interviews was unacceptable and continuing to do group interviews would jeopardize her career. Linda wrote a letter back to the Human Resource department arguing the benefits and importance of conducting group interviews. Linda continued to do group interviews and group interviews are now standard within the school system.

I guess success helps risk taking, but [so does] having the knowledge base to get up and convince the world that this is going to work and it’s going to be good. You need to have the knowledge and, I guess, experience because I was willing to take risks in the classroom which gave me experiences that I could say worked.

She also attributes her risk-taking behavior to having a group of supporters within the school setting. She explained, “Where in your personal life you usually don’t have a group that risk-take with you. In my professional life I do.” While at the elementary school, this ability to take risks impacted the professional practice of Linda and her faculty to initiate on many groundbreaking trends.

We did so many groundbreaking kinds of things because as a group we were not afraid to take risks. If one of us did not succeed then we were all responsible for that and revamped it to make it work…For instance, if I took a risk I wasn’t taking the risk alone. I was taking a risk and so were all my other teachers, taking it with me as an administrator.

For Linda this was “one of the most powerful things that we did.” She claimed that this was so powerful because, “not only did it change education and instruction in our environment, but in hundreds and hundreds of other environments.” For example, they would conduct professional development in their school for teachers from all over the state.
Linda’s administrative style can be best characterized as delegated decision-making (Bloom, 2000). She empowered her teachers to make decisions. She said, “You have to teach your faculty, your staff, how to make decisions then you as the leader don’t have to make all the decisions. Yes, you might be in on them, but you don’t need to make all of them.” She provided relevant information to her faculty and staff and allowed them to make the decision. Then, the decision was made by either a subgroup of the staff, with or without input from others, or unilaterally by individual faculty and staff members.

Profile Three: Naomi, Church-Sponsored Child Care Center Director

School Setting

Naomi is the director of a church-sponsored child care center that serves approximately 75 children ranging in age from 6 weeks old to 4 years old between the hours of 7:00 A.M. and 5:30 P.M. There are five classrooms with approximately 15 full-time teachers and 5 part-time college students. None of the full-time teachers have bachelor’s degrees in a field related to Early Childhood Education. One teacher has a master’s in Religious Education and one has a bachelor’s degree in business. Two teachers are working on their associate’s degree. The majority of the full-time teachers do not hold any type of higher degree. Naomi explained that the education levels of the teachers did not include formal schooling, but rather has been learned through their work experience at the child care center, “Everybody else has probably a high school education from, you know a school system…so, what their education level on paper is and maybe what their education level after all these years of working here is two different things and how do you evaluate that?” The most prevalent socio-economic status of families in the school is middle class. Most (95%) of the children are parishioners’ children. Naomi claimed,
“We’re becoming more and more a strong link for the church to young families. The church has even acknowledged it that we’re a very warm and welcoming entry point into the parish.”

Educational Background and Career Path

Naomi has a Bachelor of Arts in Physical Education, Recreation, and Health. She began her career as an elementary physical education teacher. Her experiences with early childhood education began when her children attended a cooperative nursery school. Naomi joined the Board of Directors for the school. Naomi needed a job outside of the home and learned through a friend who worked at the church, that the church was starting a child care center. She admitted that when she applied for the job she did not know anything about child care except what she had learned through her experience as a Board member at the cooperative nursery school. She was hired in August of 1986 and immediately began talking with many directors of child care centers and, with her assistant, she visited all the centers that would allow her to visit. She shared her story,

When I started, not knowing anything, I had to call other centers. I can’t believe I really did all this, but I know that I did. I called licensing to find out what I needed to know. I had to go from day one, you know, how many square foot, how many kids, and what were all the rules and all that ‘cause I had no concept of any of that. Visiting other centers was really one of the best things we could do. We had to find out what they looked like and what were some of the rules, regulations, and procedures they used. So, that was a big step for us to do. My assistant at the time had some experience with child care, so she kinda had some ideas about the way things should be. We just opened the doors. We had a few baby beds and we opened the doors.

The child care center was opened in November of 1996, three months after Naomi was hired. She admitted that opening the center was not difficult because the church had a good reputation. She explained,

Because we are on campus here at the church our reputation was almost intact before we even started. We could have been the worst center in the world and people would have
come. Now, they would have quickly left us, but they would have come because this church has a very good reputation for education.

Since opening the program, she has continued her professional development by reading professional magazines, joining the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), attending professional conferences, and joining a local child care director’s network. She said, “The evolution of the whole thing [the child care center] has followed my evolution because the more I know, the more I put into practice. So, I would think that the more I know, the more things changed around at the center.”

Personal Characteristics

Naomi has a strong belief in families and in support for families. This is evident in the policies of her center. She explained,

I’ve written my polices so the parents can be with their children as much as possible. That’s one reason the center is closed so much. That’s why I have some of the policies I have and why we do some of the things we do to try to encourage family time. We don’t feed the children breakfast. I want the parents to have breakfast with their children before they come to the center. Whether the family goes to McDonalds and sits down there or whether they eat at home. I try to encourage more family time. I suggest that the parents try to shorten the child’s day at the center. Child should not have to be here for 10 hours a day.

Naomi believes that she and her staff are part of the child’s family, “But they [the staff] are really responsible for being a part of that family, of the child’s family. I’m a smaller part of that family. I belong to everybody’s family but not as closely as the caregivers do.”

Naomi likened her staff to a family rather than a team. She stated,

We kinda help each other and talk about that kind of thing. Different staff get along better than others. Different staff will talk to different ones about certain things and some of the staff have what might appear on the outside to be frictions between them, but they in the long run really love each other and care about each other. Sometimes if somebody has a bad day, everybody just stays away or a certain person can approach but others can’t.
They’ve learned, just like a family, to know when to step in and when not to step in and when things are right and when they’re wrong.

Naomi even uses family-like communication with her staff. Her main method of communicating with her staff is posting notes on the refrigerator in the center’s kitchen. When it is something more specific for an individual staff member, she will write a letter and put in his or her mail slot.

Administrative Style

Naomi has sole administrative responsibility for her center. She no longer has an assistant to share administrative duties. She believes that being an early childhood administrator has two aspects. First is the objective side, which deals with the business side of the program. For example, she believes the objective side deals with the policies of the program, the personnel relations, finance, and health and safety of the children. The second side of administration takes on a more subjective aspect and deals with the ministry side of the job. This ministry is to help parents be better parents and to understand their children in order to help families have a better life.

Naomi is resourceful when overcoming barriers. She confided that the finances of the program were a barrier because the expenses were greater than the generated income. She discussed how she was able to rally the support of certain members of the church who worked hard to help resolve the financial issue. These members were able to convince the rest of the parishioners that the child care center was a ministry of the church and should receive financial support from the church. A second barrier she discussed was the facility of the program because it needed to be remodeled. Naomi was able to enlist the parents’ help and had them volunteer to
help remodel the facility. She stated that parents helped to paint some of the classrooms and physically moved some of the walls to make classrooms larger.

Naomi feels more comfortable allowing the staff to make classroom instructional decisions when they have information and knowledge. She encourages her teachers to not only join professional organizations, but to also get involved with the organization. If teachers attend professional training workshops above the 12 clock hours required by the state’s licensing bureau, Naomi will give them compensation time even though she is not required to compensate them for that time.

Naomi’s administrative style can best be characterized as consultative decision-making (Bloom, 2000). She asks her staff for input and listens to their advice and concerns, but she ultimately makes the decisions about things that impact the whole center. She tries to let the staff make classroom instructional decisions.

I’d like to be the kind of manager that allows staff the freedom to make choices and make mistakes and then have them learn from those mistakes, but feel free to make them. But when it comes down to the real important stuff they come back to me to help them figure it out. They have a lot of freedom in their classroom to do things, but there’s some bottom line stuff that they can’t, they shouldn’t make the decision on. I’d kinda like to be that kind of manager, as opposed to a dictatorial [sic], that everything has to be this way or else, I know that I don’t do that.

Profile Four: Laura, Former Church-Sponsored Early Childhood Program Director

School Setting

Laura was formerly the director of a church-sponsored early childhood program that served approximately 235 children between the hours of 7:30 A.M. and 5:30 P.M. The program was established “…by early childhood professionals, by women who were way beyond their time, women who are in their late 90’s right now. They had the vision for an educational facility using professional educators.” The basic philosophy of the program was to “give quality care and
education to children within a Christian environment.” Laura stated that her program was different from other programs because it had an educational component and was not custodial child care or babysitting, where the caregivers just meet the basic health and safety needs of the children in their care. This program had 13 classrooms that included an infant program, toddler program, preschool program, and kindergarten program. The socio-economic status of the families of children in the school was homogeneous, with a majority of affluent families.

Under Laura’s directorship, there were approximately 40 full-time staff members. Six teachers held a master’s degree and a majority of the others held a bachelor’s degree. Laura stated, “I always looked for staff members with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree…If they didn’t have a bachelor’s I encouraged them to go back to school.” Laura also insisted on paying her staff high salaries with benefits, such as insurance and retirement. Laura described her staff as dedicated professionals who worked hard and respected each other.

Educational Background and Career Path

Laura holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Home Economics with concentrations in early childhood and public relations. As a young professional, Laura began her career in public relations. She said that experience helped her as an early childhood administrator. Laura felt that, for her, work in public relations was not a fulfilling career because “There are a lot of rewards in public relations, good salaries, good benefits, company cars, all of those kind of things, but after a while you think, ‘Who gains anything from this?’” Upon moving with her husband to a small town in South Louisiana, Laura began her teaching career.

Well, I worked in public relations for quite a few years and then moving to a little town there was very little to do except work at a bank or teach and I had the teaching background in the early childhood field so... I had absolutely no interest in working in a bank because I wanted to do something that I thought was worthwhile. So, I looked at the
job possibilities in education and that’s when I started teaching in special education and reading and math labs.

In this small town, she taught fifth-and sixth-grade special education. This is where she discovered her passion for teaching. She said, “I always loved children, but I didn’t know that I would really enjoy teaching as much as I did, but I did love it.”

After several years, she and her husband moved again. This time they moved to a midsize metropolitan city in Louisiana. At this point in her life, Laura became a kindergarten teacher at the early childhood program where she would later become director. She was the kindergarten teacher for two years before moving into the administrative role of assistant director. After a short time, the director left the program and Laura was offered this position. She remembered, “It was kinda a tough situation for the school. It was a good school, lots of employees at the school, but it started to fall apart, so I decided that I would take that director’s position for a while.” For Laura, the “a while” turned into 25 years. Her career as a director ended in 1999 when she retired.

Personal Characteristics

Laura is committed to the profession of Early Childhood Education, especially to the children who were in her program and to the program itself. She claimed, “You pretty much have to fight for your program. No one is concerned about what women and children are doing. It’s just women and children, its something anyone can do. If you’re going to let them put you in that category then you’re always going to be getting second rate.” Laura explained that the church administration asked her several times to change the program, and she chose not to do so, “You can change the program if you wanted to, but I was not going to change the program and I
was not going to be part of compromising the program because we had worked too hard for the best interests of the children and to develop a good staff.”

As another example of her commitment to professionalism, Laura established and maintained standards for her program before the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) had standards in place. She explained,

We were actually the first people in the community to get the NAEYC accreditation standards. I think we were the 100th facility in the nation and we had already basically… I mean most of the standards they used we were already working with because I tried to be very accountable when you worked with people’s children and money. You know there are always avenues for people to question what you’ve done, so you have to be extremely accountable.

In addition to program accountability, Laura felt personally responsible for knowing all of the children’s names, their parents’ names, and their grandparents’ names. She stated,

I felt like it was certainly my job, if I were first of all accountable for all these children, I needed to know all their names, I needed to know who they were. I needed to know their parents as best as I could and their grandparents. So, I wanted them to know me because I wanted them to know that I knew them. I think a lot of situations come up in the course of a year with children as they develop and it’s just nice to have a connection with those children because it’s just really difficult to help them.

Laura’s commitment to the children enrolled in her program and to her program extended beyond her fighting for the program, setting and maintaining standards, and knowing the children and parents. She also dedicated herself financially to the program, “Early on I remember my salary would just go back into the coffers so that we could pay for things we needed.”

Laura had a strong work ethic and high expectations for herself and her staff. Laura stated,

I’ll have to say that I have great expectations of myself and for everything I do and I just think that everyone should have that same strong work ethic. If this is what I’m doing, I’m gonna do it the best that I can do it. It may not be the best that it can be done, but it is the best that I can do and a lot of people don’t want to work that hard.
This work ethic also required people to follow through on what they promise, “I think as an individual, I value someone being upfront. You know, if they say this is the way we’re doing something, I expect them to do it that way. Otherwise don’t say it.”

Administrative Style

Laura, as a dedicated professional herself, tried to develop professionals within her program. She wanted to help the teachers understand that their job was part of an important profession. When Laura first began directing the program, many of the staff members were part-time, but Laura worked to make every position a full-time position. She felt that having a part-time staff was not in the best interest of the children or the staff members. She explained, “I think when you can offer people a full-time position, then it becomes a profession, not just a hobby or something to bring in a little spending money. So, if they are really committed to what they are doing then I think they really need that full-time spot.” She tried to develop a sense of professionalism in her staff by encouraging them to join professional organizations. She encouraged them to train others in the field in a variety of ways, from small presentations during staff meetings or large-scale professional conference presentations.

As a leader, Laura tried to instill in her staff an understanding of the importance of their job. She also wanted her staff to trust her as a leader who would help them do their job. She explained,

I think the fact that we had an important job to do and what we did everyday, every minute affected the lives of children then and in the long term. We had a very important job to do. It was quite a responsibility and it was quite a burden, but we were up to the challenge, and we were gonna meet that challenge. I had confidence in them, and I think that it’s important that they have confidence in their administrator that if a problem occurs, that we’re gonna address that problem.
Laura made sure her staff knew what the job expectations were and that she was going to hold them accountable for those tasks. While interviewing perspective teachers, Laura would describe her program and expectations for staff. She would also have the potential candidate work on-site for a minimum of two weeks before she hired them in order to observe the candidate’s interactions with the children and their teaching style. In addition to making the job expectations clear, she would follow through with staff evaluations. If a teacher was not fulfilling the required expectations, Laura would counsel the teacher to ensure the teacher knew the job’s duties and responsibilities. If the teacher was still not able to fulfill the job requirements, Laura would dismiss the person.

Yes, yes I have dismissed many people and it’s never a good thing, and sometimes it may be someone you like very much on a personal basis. You actually respect a lot about them, but it’s not going well, their job performance. I’ve many times said, “This is not for you in this setting. It may be somewhere else. But have you thought about going in the some other area of this profession.” And like I said, not everyone is meant for child care even though all men think any woman can do our job, but it’s not the case.

Last, as an administrator Laura respected her staff and their work with young children. She often praised them. She explained,

If you want people to do what you want them to do, then find them doing it and reinforce it. So, when you see them interact with a child, don’t try and do their job, you know. If you want them to be the professional, don’t always come in and tell them how to do it. Respect the fact that it’s not always the way you would have done it, but it was well done.

Laura included her staff in the decision-making process of the program out of respect for them and their ideas. Laura would encourage the staff members to brainstorm solutions to various problems occurring at the center.

So, it’s a process of defining the problem and then working together for a resolution. Not always can you bring a very large staff into consensus about what needs to be done, but I love to brainstorm because it is good if you have a lot of creative, intelligent people
around you (and I always looked for the best). I always wanted them to be smarter than I…I think the more input you have and then write the ideas down, sometimes you can come to a wonderful melding of ideas and everybody kinda buys into it.

Laura reminded the staff that decisions needed to be based on the best interest of the children and the philosophy of the program “and if it wasn’t in keeping with the basic philosophy and goal [quality care, education, Christian environment] well, then you know it just shouldn’t be happening.”

Laura’s style of administration is most closely aligned with Bloom’s (2000) consultative decision-making. She presented problems or issues to the staff and solicited suggestions. As a whole, the staff would generate and evaluate alternatives. Laura would then inform the staff of the decisions either through staff training or individual consultations. Laura provided the staff with a rationale for a particular course of action. Finally, she would meet with the staff to clarify any misunderstandings.

Profile Five: Tammy, Private Child Care Center Director/Owner

School Setting

Tammy is the director and owner of a private child care center that serves approximately 105 children. The child care center is open from 6:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. The ages of the children range from six weeks old to four years old. The socio-economic status of the families ranges from very low to middle class. A majority (85%) of the children are of African American ethnicity. The school meets and exceeds the state’s licensing regulations for child care centers. There are seven classrooms with 17 full-time teachers and four part-time teachers. The teachers have varying levels of training in early childhood education. Seven teachers hold a diploma in Early Childhood Education from the local vocational-technical college, four hold an Associate’s of Applied Technology in Early Childhood Education, four have a Child Development
Associate, and two have a Bachelor of Arts Degree. The four part-time teachers are all working on Associate’s of Applied Technology in Early Childhood Education from the local vocational-technical college.

The laughter of children is heard throughout the school. Tammy described the school as one that is filled with people who believe fun is important. She also noted that her center is different from other centers because of their philosophy, “We’re a different kind of center because we think outside the box. That we know children don’t learn the alphabets by writing them a hundred times, you know, they learn it by doing other more interesting things.”

The school is a warm environment with home-like characteristics. Children’s artwork hangs on the walls, items from the children’s and teacher’s homes are displayed in the classrooms, while a dry erase board announces the menu of the day and other important information for families to know. Tammy claimed, “Our biggest philosophy is that we welcome everyone. That everyone IS equal and that all the rules are remaining the same for everybody. Doesn’t matter your race, your color, your economical [sic], your religious background, everyone can contribute something.”

Educational Background and Career Path

Tammy began her career as a nursing instructor at a vocational-technical college. She is a Licensed Practicing Nurse (LPN). She decided to leave the nursing field to open her own child care center in 1991 when she was seeking child care for her one year old daughter. She was dissatisfied with the quality of available care, so she and her husband decided to buy a pre-existing child care center. She remembers, “and that’s how we got started, by accident almost ‘cause there were no other child care centers and we needed some place to put Lacey. So, she was the reason this whole thing came up.”
The pre-existing center had 32 children and four employees but the sanitation license had been revoked. Tammy and her husband bought the center, invested an additional $150,000 to remodel the building, and revamped the early childhood educational program. According to the state’s child care licensing standards Tammy was qualified with her nursing degree to be the director of the center. However, Tammy decided to develop her qualifications by continuing her education in Early Childhood Education. She took early childhood courses at the local vocational-technical college and attended national conferences and professional development training offered through the local child care resource and referral agency. Tammy pursued a Child Development Associate (CDA). She remembers, “…back then they didn’t have a structured course, so I took courses all over from Washington to conferences and just kept all the records on ‘em, compiled them and got them approved by CDA to count as hours.” As her knowledge of child development and early childhood education grew, her program began to grow and change, “I think my biggest thing was I attended everything and learned from everyone who knew the work and gathered pieces of information about work and then go back and try it, and sometimes it worked and sometimes you had to alter it a little bit.”

Tammy also sought information about the business of child care from other directors. She found networking with other directors to be an important source of support for herself and her program, “…networking with other child care providers has been a big help because you know the same things are happening at all centers. It’s good to call someone and know they’re going through the same things.”

Personal Characteristics

Tammy has a concern for the families she serves, the children in her center, and her staff. She discussed her expectations for staff interactions with the families, “What I ask them [the
staff] to do is for the good of the child or for the family and whenever they [the staff] look at a child they have to look at the family also.” She further stated,

The staff knows that I’ll be willing to give ‘em [the staff] anything as long as I see them [the staff] giving in return to the children and families. You know, that’s their trade off. I’ll go the mile for you, but I better see it in what you do with the children and what you do with the families because they’re [the families and children] an equal part.

Tammy is also very playful and fun and understands the value of these characteristics as they relate to her business.

I think sometimes that we’re different because we’re open. You know, we’re not strictly business. There are some things we have to be business about, but I have resolved that I’ll never make a lot of money. I’m never gonna have a beautiful home, but I’m determined not to be as stressed out as I used to be. I count my blessings and kiss my husband when I get home ‘cause he makes more money, but I mean hopefully the staff are having fun. They like working. They like coming to work and so that ends up trickling down to the parents and to the children that are coming.

Tammy is not afraid to share her enthusiasm for her job and her playful characteristics, “I like to have fun. I’m the biggest kid. New toys come out, me and Ms. Tracey (the assistant director) are playing with ‘em first.”

However, she is also tender-hearted when it comes to the families she serves and her staff. She has identified this as a personal weakness. For example, Tammy said, “I can’t collect money. I have a hard time holding my hand out begging for money. So, parents know that so, they tend to get by on me a lot longer than they would on some other directors.” She also understands that sometimes this personal quality causes financial hardships.

Like I had a mom that had 3 kids and told me a sad story and I fell for the sad story…she wasn’t paying me very much. Now she hasn’t been at the center for two weeks and she owes me $2,500. I’m never gonna get that $2,500. I might as well write it off and forget about it…you could be a tyrant when it comes to money and lose parents because they don’t like your attitude or you know you end up losing parents because they can’t afford to pay you anyways and then you end up with $2,500 worth of bills.
Another example of her compassion for others has to do with staff relations. When discussing the staff’s annual evaluations, she said, “I do evaluations every year. I don’t give it to them because then I feel bad that I might hurt their feelings, but I do them every year. I’ve got stacks of ‘em in their file that they never see ‘cause I feel bad.”

Administrative Style

Tammy allows her staff freedom in the implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms. She hires teachers with early childhood education backgrounds and trusts that they are competent to make instructional decisions. However, she is demanding when it comes to insisting that teacher’s plan lessons, “I don’t care how good of teacher you are, you can’t wing it. You know, I need to know you have an idea, a plan, something- it doesn’t have to be real elaborate, but you have to have some goal.” She discussed the importance of writing down observations about the children’s progress and using the observations to plan lessons for the children, “if you don’t make a mental note and you don’t jot something off you’re not gonna be as successful in you’re planning, you know. You can have the most wonderful lesson plan that’s gorgeous, but if it doesn’t meet the needs of the kids, it’s gonna flop.”

Tammy has respect for her staff and their work. She knows that this in turn will be beneficial to the children at the center and their families. She says, “I never ask them to do something for me personally for my net worth or my worth. What I ask them to do is for the good of the child or for the family and whenever they look at a child, they have to look at the family also.” She goes on to explain, “The staff knows that I’ll be willing to give ‘em anything as long as I see them giving in return to the children and families. You know, that’s their trade off. I’ll go the mile for you, but I better see it in what you do with the children and what you do with the families because they’re an equal part.”
Tammy also becomes involved in the families’ lives and takes a personal interest in all of the children’s education and communicates this to the parents. She explained,

When they [parents] come in the morning, I know their [the parent’s] names. I know at least something every day their child did or I make sure I know it and if I know it I make sure I tell it to them [the parents] every day, and I’m hoping that if the parent sees that I communicate with them regularly. I tell them the good things and the bad things. If we have we have an outbreak of the worst bowel [diarrhea], they gonna know about it and if we just got some extra money and we gonna spend it on the kids, they gonna know about that too.

Tammy believes that a child does not enroll in the school alone, that they are part of the family, and the family is an important part of the child’s life. She expects family involvement and understands how this in turn helps the child’s future education.

They may pay us money to take care of their child, but they also come with their child. They have to be willing to give, even if it’s a small amount you know, to participate in their child’s education and I think that becomes a clue that I won’t see differences, but when that child gets to school its gonna affect them because that parent will now be in the habit of working with that child and making sure that they have a good relationship with their teacher and doing some of the work that they wouldn’t normally do. They know that they are not going to be able, now some parents do, but they know on a whole that they can’t just drop [the child] at the door and leave. They have to be willing to come in and stay for a while.

Tammy’s demand for parental involvement is evidence that she understands how early childhood education is part of the child’s whole development and educational experience. It is also another of example of her concern for the children and families who are part of her center.

Tammy thinks that as an owner of a child care center, one of the hardest parts of her job is “trying to sell feelings…those warm and fuzzy things.” She explained that selling spaces in a child care center and charging tuition for early childhood education is different than selling tangible products because families don’t take home a product at the end of the day. She stated,

Granted they take home a child that’s well adjusted, you know they don’t see that until the child turns 30. Then they realize, ‘you know, they did a good job with my child. She’s normal, well-adjusted, bright.’ You know, they don’t see that for years after they stopped
paying for it. So, it’s something hard and it seems like your always trying to convince parents that you’re doing a good job.

Tammy’s administrative style can best be characterized as consultative decision-making (Bloom, 2000). Prior to making a decision, Tammy seeks information or ideas and suggestions from the staff. She then makes a tentative decision and then solicits reactions from the staff. Tammy ultimately makes the final decision, which may or may not reflect the staff’s advice.

Profile Six: Nora, Former Private Child Care Center Director/Owner

School Setting

Nora opened her private center in October of 1981 to provide the children and families in a small rural community with a safe, nurturing, developmentally appropriate early childhood program. For the first four years of operation, the program served approximately 80 children ages 6 weeks old to 4 years old and consisted of a half-day program, a full-day program, and an after-school program. After that, the program began to only serve children ages 2 years old to 4 years old and school-aged children. The center was open from 7:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. The socio-economic status of the families in Nora’s center was primarily middle to upper-middle class.

The center reflected an open classroom concept. Teachers had their own space within a large open room with no walls. Nora had approximately 13 teachers. Some teachers held bachelor degrees in Early Childhood Education. Some of the morning teachers held elementary teaching certificates, while other teachers had no formal educational training in early childhood education. One teacher began her early childhood career under Nora’s leadership and went on to become the state’s elementary teacher of the year. The teacher’s salaries were not much above minimum wage, but they did enjoy working at the center.
Regretfully, the wages weren’t that great. I always tried to pay, you know, they might start out at minimum wages, but I would always try to pay them more than minimum wage, but I could never ever, ever, ever financially pay them what I thought they were worth because if you remember what I told you, the tuition that I charged came out of the pockets of the parents from the, you know, dollars they earned, so, you know, I could never raise my tuition to cover all my expenses, but I always tried to pay as much as I could, but like I said, regretfully it wasn’t much over minimum wage.

But, I do feel like the folks who worked for me, the majority of the folks who worked for me, enjoyed coming to work each day. They left every day with good feelings that they had really, you know, really had done a good job, had really done something important and they were ready to come back the next day as evident by the three ladies who were not paid much over minimum wage and formed a partnership to buy my business [together]. I think probably, I never got into their finances, but I think probably never paid themselves much more than minimum wage as they carried out the next few years, but you know they really felt good about what they did and the service that they provided first to kids and then to the community.

Educational Background and Career Path

Nora holds a Bachelor of Arts in Vocational Home Economics as well as a Master of Science in Child Development and Family Relations. She said that her career in early childhood education began with her family of origin. She stated,

I was one of 6 children. I was the second to the oldest…My mother was a registered nurse and worked nights and so when I got home from school in the afternoon, she would still be asleep or just getting up ‘cause she worked 11 to 7. So, you know, I kinda took care of the needs of the younger kids after the household help left- you know fed them afternoon snacks, played with them so that she could prepare supper, that type of thing. In the neighborhood that I grew up in, I was also the neighborhood babysitter.

As a teenager, she was involved in the 4-H club and was mentored by a 4-H Home Economist who knew Nora’s family background. This mentor encouraged her to enroll in a child development contest that Nora won twice. Nora said, “I was the child development winner for that year, won a trip to Chicago and, you know, just all kinds of fun, neat things for just doing what I thought, you know, came naturally to me and just without much effort.” Nora turned this natural talent into a career when she went on to college to pursue a degree in “something that I was just naturally good at.”
After college, she began her teaching career as a 7th grade science teacher with a classroom full of students who were notorious for making teachers quit. She said,

I was able to employ the same techniques with those students that I used with typically-developing preschoolers. So, you know I thought, ‘Well, golly this isn’t as hard as I thought it was going to be.’ So, here again my knowledge of young children really paid off in that particular instance.

Her husband was offered a job opportunity in another city and Nora ended her teaching career and began working as a Home Economist with the 4-H youth program. She explained how this was related to her earlier experiences, “So, here again it’s something that, you know, I felt comfortable doing and felt very natural at and I saw that I could get kids excited and teach kids something about working with younger children.”

After several years, Nora’s husband decided to further his education. Nora also took advantage of this opportunity and enrolled in a Master’s Degree program. She remembers, “I guess selfishly I thought that I would like to have an advanced degree in child development and family relations because I thought, ‘Well, gosh one day my husband and I will have a family and I’m sure this knowledge will, you know, come in handy.’” During this time, she worked at the campus preschool lab as a graduate assistant, teaching the children and mentoring college students.

While in graduate school, Nora did become pregnant with her first child. Three years later, her second son was born. Nora and her husband completed graduate school and moved to a small, rural town in Louisiana. Nora, once again, worked as a Home Economist with the 4-H youth club. Nora then became pregnant with her third son and found the demands of her career and family to be overwhelming. She decided to open her own child care center because her small town did not have a program for young children. She said,
I felt a void and wanted my own children to be able to experience all the wonderful things that I knew that they could experience in a group situation with other young children because I have…I always contend that kids learn so much from each other and then I felt a void because I’ve always learned more from the kids than they learned from me.

In 1996, 15 years later, Nora sold her center to 3 staff members who formed a partnership to run the program. Nora sold her program to become a private early childhood consultant. She shared her feelings about selling her business,

When I left my business what I did is I actually sold my business to three of the women who had worked for me for years…It was really hard for me and I would get emotional sometimes. As the owner of the building I would go back and just on the weekend sometimes, you know, I’d think ‘Oh, gosh. I really wish they’d do this, this, and this.’ But I was out of it at that point and I couldn’t.

Personal Characteristics

Nora was always naturally drawn toward early childhood education. She discussed her teenage years as the “neighborhood babysitter.”

There were a lot of young children in the neighborhood, so I was always the one that they called and it was always just, you know, herds of children around the house and just to keep them out of their parent’s hair and to keep things peaceful at my house, you know, I invented all finds of fun and games for young children.

When sharing her experiences as a high school contestant in the 4-H competition she said, “I came back as the state alternate winner and I was just floored, you know, that how could something that just came so naturally to me, um, you know, have gotten me that far in that particular contest?” Nora mentioned that throughout her career she has “fallen back on her area of comfort.”

Nora is also naturally drawn to mentoring others and especially teaching others about child development and early childhood education. While working on her undergraduate degree, she student taught at a high school where she taught child development, “I didn’t have to teach
food preparation. I didn’t have to teach clothing construction. I just fell into the opportunity to teach what just came naturally to me [laughing].” Early in her career as a Home Economist, she had the opportunity to mentor youth from elementary age to high school age. “So, here again it’s something that, you know, I felt comfortable doing and felt very natural at and I saw I could get kids excited and teach kids something about working with younger children.” During her graduate program, Nora worked as a graduate assistant. She was in a unique position to again teach others about child development with her assistantship in the campus preschool lab. While she owned her child care center, she mentored the staff. She explained,

I would have one of my, you know, one of my teachers there to watch and to learn and then I would slowly turn things over to them and then once I felt comfortable that they were doing things as I would have them do [laughing] I would kinda back out and, you know, be on the perimeter as they were doing those things.

Nora helped to teach nursing students as well. The local vocational-technical college used Nora’s child care facility as an observation site for practical nursing students to study child growth and development. Nora explained, “It was here again having those nursing students come in and getting them excited about young children. In fact, after their experience, there had been several that after their experience in the early childhood center, they went on and their focus is pediatric nursing.”

Nora also taught families of children enrolled at her center, family home providers, the members of the small community, and members of the early childhood community. She explained, “In the early years of my business, it was a process I felt and learned. It was a process of educating young mothers, educating the community on what child care, what preschool, what good programs, developmental programs for young children were all about. And here again… it
was a process of educating the community.” Nora mentioned that a couple of women in the community had a preschool in their house two days a week.

The young mothers didn’t work and so they wanted a half-day program for their children. So, I offered a Monday, Wednesday, Friday program and I think I probably offered those days because the Ms. So-and-sos of the community did Tuesday and Thursdays…So, after a while those folks started coming and they could see the difference, and I was able to help educate them on what was appropriate, and then I was able to get one or two of the Ms. So-and-sos to come and, you know, bring their children and also I got one of the Ms. So-and-sos to, once her child had experienced the wonderful things that I thought kids should experience without the pressures of academics in those preschool years, she even became a teacher for me. So, it was a process AGAIN of mentoring, you know, folks in the community, and mentoring people and changing their viewpoint.

For a brief time in her career, Nora was simultaneously an owner/director of a child care center and a private early childhood consultant. She described her feelings about consulting, “Oh, I just got so excited when I could excite a group of people who worked with young children everyday and I could bring to them my experiences that I had experienced the week before, you know, so I felt…it was a good feeling for me.” Nora has a strong belief in helping others. When it comes to teaching about young children and child development, “I just felt like, just as a human being we are on this earth, you know, as long as God wants us to be here [laughing] and you know while we’re here we might as well share whatever we have learned along the way to help make the world a better place.”

Administrative Style

Nora applied her early childhood education skills to her administrative style. She said, “I guess I always tried to treat staff using the same guiding principles that you use when you work with young children, to recognize what each staff person did well and then to use them where I could maximize their, you know, those things that they did well.” Nora shared an example of a staff member who was not able to sing. After discussing the issue with her husband, who is a
psychologist, Nora was able to focus on what that person was able to do well rather than on her weaknesses. She pointed out that this person was never late to work and always willing to help out in any classroom.

I feel like every soul that is on this earth, you know, they have good in them, you know, and they have skills that they can bring to the table that we need to emphasize their skill and just like with managing young children you need to emphasize what they do well and deemphasize what they’re not so good at. And, and I guess that’s what I try to do is to try to bring out the best and polish the best in every individual so that they can all excel and shine and deemphasize those things that they’re not so good at.

Nora respected her staff and valued them as human beings and as individuals. She explained, “…obligations to my staff would be to provide them with a working environment that recognized and appreciated them first of all as a human being who had their own family and their own trials and tribulations.” She further stated, “I tried to accommodate, you know, whenever they wanted time off. I tried to be accommodating to that, accommodating to what was going on in their family or their own personal life at that particular time.”

She viewed her staff as part of her extended family, explaining that “I considered the staff to be part of my own extended family and being understanding and being, you know to help them through tough times of crisis, to help them celebrate times of joy in their own families.” She further stated that the staff in turn supported her. Nora also viewed her staff as a team and tried to involve each person. She explained, “I saw them and tried to involve them as part of a team, not just as someone who operated in isolation but as part of a team.”

Nora did not have an assistant director. She mentioned that in hindsight, she does not wish she had one because she finds it difficult to delegate responsibilities.

I was director slash owner and I did everything, I mean I grocery shopped, I led circle time, I mopped. On the weekends, I scrubbed toilets, you know. No, it was difficult, all or nothing and for me…in fact it was difficult for me when I did hire a director and I went on to something else it was really difficult for me to still have an active role and I know
many times my director, not that I didn’t trust her, in fact she had a really outgoing personality and would just tell me “Now Nora, Stop. Don’t you trust me to do this?” [laughing]. And you know, she would call it to my attention not that I didn’t trust, you know, it was like…it was just hard for me to delegate.

Nora discussed her administrative weakness. She confided that she had weak business skills. She shared her concerns,

I guess when I look back at my own path that I took and my knowledge base, I look back now and I think the missing link for me in my growth and development and in my studies, I think the missing link for me was the business aspect of my business…but just from a business perspective, I wish I would have had courses and training in business management.

Nora’s style of administration is most closely aligned with Bloom’s (2000) unilateral decision-making. She, as the owner and director of the program, would make all the decisions. Sometimes, she would seek information or ideas from her husband, who was the co-owner of the program. Nora would make decisions regarding the policies, procedures, and curriculum of the program and informed her staff of these decisions. She made it a point to model the behavior she wanted to see in her program and enjoyed helping others learn about child development and early childhood education.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The researcher examined the career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles of six early childhood administrators. A small sample was chosen in order to develop an in-depth description and analysis of each administrator’s lived experiences. Data was collected through three interview sessions per participant. The minimum time for each interview session was one (1) hour.

The researcher investigated the stories of these early childhood administrators, searching for patterns in career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles. Narrative segments and categories within the interview-story were isolated, and larger patterns and meanings were determined. Using participant’s quotations that illustrated their own personal characteristics and administrative style reduced data and aided in the identification of categories. Coding categories were refined around emergent patterns that appeared to be significant. Similar aspects were grouped into categories then, associations among the categories were drawn.

This section is organized into two areas. The first area provides answers to the major questions of this study and presents an overview of each administrator’s career path, educational background, personal characteristics, and administrative style (See Table 3). This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What pathways did these strong administrators take in their career journeys?
2. What personal characteristics and experiences were expressed by the six early childhood administrators?
3. What administrative styles do strong early childhood administrators employ?

The second area is a refinement of Bloom’s Social System model (1991) that is based on the stories shared by the six studied ECE administrators.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>ECA Career Path</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Personal Characteristics</th>
<th>Administrative Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1st grade teacher</td>
<td>BS Human Ecology</td>
<td>Passion for young children</td>
<td>High expectations and high standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>2nd grade teacher</td>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td>Concern for children in her school</td>
<td>Children come first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dean of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for young children</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hires passionate teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Former Principal</td>
<td>2nd grade teacher</td>
<td>BA Elementary Ed.</td>
<td>Honest and genuine</td>
<td>Hires nurturing teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcox</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>1st grade teacher</td>
<td>MA Reading</td>
<td>Inherent desire to help others</td>
<td>Hires flexible teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K/1 combo teacher</td>
<td>Specialist in Admin. &amp; Supervision</td>
<td>Creative and innovative</td>
<td>Seeks accreditation of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K/2 combo teacher</td>
<td>w/ ECE minor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher as decision-maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Elem. PE coach</td>
<td>BA Elementary Ed w/ concentration in PE</td>
<td>Private person</td>
<td>Supportive and encourages teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitch</td>
<td>Church child care</td>
<td>Co-op nursery board</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong belief in families &amp; support families</td>
<td>Collaborative decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Views staff as family, not team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>family-like communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Former Director</td>
<td>Public relations</td>
<td>BA Home Economics w/ Early Childhood Ed &amp; PR</td>
<td>Committed to profession of ECE</td>
<td>Delegated decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey</td>
<td>Church child care</td>
<td>Special Ed. teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>High Standards/Accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>Financially dedicated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant director</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong work ethic, high expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>Director/Owner</td>
<td>Nursing Instructor</td>
<td>Licensed Practicing Nurse</td>
<td>Concern for families, children, and staff</td>
<td>Develop teachers as professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalton</td>
<td>Private child care</td>
<td></td>
<td>Child Development Assoc.</td>
<td>Playful and fun</td>
<td>Clear expectations &amp; accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tender-hearted</td>
<td>Respect for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Former Director/Owner</td>
<td>Caretaker in FOO</td>
<td>BA Vocational Home</td>
<td>Naturally drawn to ECE</td>
<td>Teacher as decision-maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Teen babysitter</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Naturally drawn to mentoring</td>
<td>Respect for staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private child care</td>
<td>Teen involved in 4-H</td>
<td>MS Child Dev. &amp; Family Relations</td>
<td>Strong belief in helping others</td>
<td>Staff is extended family &amp; team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7th grade science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty with delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home Economist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weakness- business skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unilateral decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As discussed in the introduction of this study, there is not a single way to become an administrator in ECE (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Mitchell, 1997). The administrators in this study each followed a different path to becoming an ECE administrator and each had different educational experiences. Carla was a teacher, a dean of students, then an assistant principal. Linda was a teacher then moved into the principal role. Naomi was an elementary physical education coach and served on her children’s nursery school board. Laura started her career in public relations, moved into special education, taught kindergarten, then became the assistant director. Tammy was a nursing instructor before owning a private child care center. Last, Nora was the caretaker in her family of origin, the neighborhood babysitter, a seventh grade science teacher, then a home economist.

Two of the six administrators were assistant directors before moving into the director’s role. Each of the administrators had different educational experiences. Three of the six held master’s degrees and the other three sought specialized education through professional organizations, technical colleges, or resource and referral agencies. Through the course of the interviews, it was evident that despite their educational preparation, all these administrators were knowledgeable in child growth and development and early childhood education. Also, despite their differences, all of the administrators were involved with professional organizations for professional development and networking opportunities. Seplocha (1998) also found the early childhood administrators in her study to have knowledge in child growth and development and early childhood education and to be involved in the early childhood professional community.
Personal Characteristics

The six administrators in this study shared personal stories that revealed a shared concern for children and families. The child care administrators emphasized their role in helping parents become better parents. They seemed to focus on helping parents understand developmentally appropriate practice and children’s developmental stages. The public school administrators touched upon the role of helping parents, but primarily focused on helping children achieve educational outcomes. These findings confirm the research of Edson (1988) who found women were motivated to become educational administrators by their concern for children.

Seplocha (1998) reported ECE administrators with quality programs had high expectations of themselves and their staff. This study confirms those findings. Laura implemented program standards before NAEYC had accreditation standards in place. She stated, “It was probably my own personal standard, if I was gonna do this then I was gonna do this the best I was capable of doing it, and why not do the best job we could do with every child and all children.” Carla’s program has NAEYC accreditation even though accreditation is not required of her school. She believes her expectations have sometimes had a negative impact on people. She said, “I think that was the thing with the people who left. You can’t work here—it’s hard ‘cause I expect a lot. I really do. I mean I have high expectations. I really do.”

Another personal characteristic shared by these administrators was a trust in their staff. This was evident during the first interview with Linda Wilcox when she discussed the importance of trusting her staff and creating an open environment. Administrators need to be able to trust that the teaching staff will care for the children and teach the children. Through their stories, each administrator revealed the respect they had for their staff and the work their staff did each day. Seplocha (1998) found this also to be true of the administrators in her study.
Administrative Style

The administrators shared the distinct administrative characteristics of believing in teamwork and taking care of their staff. These findings are consistent with those of Lunneborg (1990) who found female managers to employ a Beta management style. This management style is “relational, supportive, consensus building, tolerant of diversity and ambiguity, sharing, and open to change” (Lunneborg, 1990, p. 162). Similar to the women in Lunneborg’s study the administrators of this study gave public praise, demonstrated a sensitivity to subordinates’ needs, valued compromise, and valued teamwork.

Teamwork was referred to in different ways. The two elementary school principals referred to their faculty and staff as teams, while three of the four administrators who were associated with child care programs referred to their staff as a “family”. For these three administrators caring for children involved the whole “family” (a.k.a. staff) working together as a team. These three administrators viewed themselves and their staff as part of each child’s extended family who worked with the parent. They believed the child care provider and the family needed to work together as a team to raise the child.

These administrators described themselves as professionals and stressed the need to treat their staff as professionals. During her first interview, Laura said paying her staff higher salaries than the average child care provider and offering the staff benefits helped them to feel like professionals. She explained, “They [the staff] never thought about making more than 16 or 18 thousand dollars a year. They really never thought about benefits, insurance, or retirement programs. But I thought about that for them because if you don’t see yourself as a professional, no one else is gonna see you as such.” A sense of professionalism was also a common pattern in
Seplocha’s study (1998) who found that the six ECE administrators in her study encouraged and supported staff training and professional development. Reckmeyer (1990) found the administrators in her study had staff that were highly trained.

All of the administrators were involved in the ECE community through training and/or mentoring others such as student teachers, families, and other early childhood professionals. Nora shared how the students at the local vocational-technical college used her center as a practicum site. She also discussed sharing information with parents about child development and teaching young children. Linda discussed having interns at her school and helping them through their educational experiences. These administrators believed that helping others is important to their own personal growth and it will help the professionalism within the field of early childhood education grow. This finding is consistent with Seplocha’s (1998) finding who found the early childhood administrators of her study to be involved and connected to the ECE professional community.

The administrators in this study all involved teachers and staff in the decision-making process, to lesser and greater degrees. It was very important to five of the six administrators of this study to have staff involved in the decision-making processes, particularly for decisions about curriculum, classroom arrangement, and professional development. Seplocha (1998) found ECE administrators in her study also sought input from the teachers to help make many decisions and encouraged consensus among the staff.

Last, these administrators were skilled at leveraging resources for their programs when faced with barriers. For example, when Linda was faced with having to network the computers, she used members of the Navy to complete the task. Another example is when Naomi was faced with a facility that needed larger classrooms to accommodate the children; she enlisted the help
of her families who did the remodeling and painting. Seplocha (1998) found skills in leveraging resources to be a common characteristic amongst the administrators of her study. Reckmeyer (1990) found the administrators in her study used creative funding in order to overcome barriers.

Summary

So, why do individuals become early childhood administrators? What pathways do they take in their career journey? The journey to becoming an early childhood administrator for these women appeared to begin with concern for young children, especially concern for their growth and development. The pathway to becoming an early childhood administrator varied for the six individuals identified in this study. Each one began with a degree. Three furthered their formal education and received master’s degrees, and three sought professional development through informal opportunities such as professional organizations and resource and referral agencies.

What personal characteristics and experiences were expressed by the six individual early childhood administrators? First, as a collective, these administrators expressed a concern for children and families. Second, they had high expectations of themselves and their staff. Last, these administrators trusted their staff.

What administrative styles do strong early childhood administrators employ? First, these administrators shared the administrative characteristics of believing in teamwork and taking care of their staff. These six administrators provided a supportive environment that encouraged professional development. They felt personally responsible for helping the staff members to grow professionally and act as professionals. Next, all of these administrators were involved in the ECE professional community through training and/or mentoring others such as student teachers, families, and other early childhood professionals. They believe that helping others is important to their own personal growth and it will help develop professionalism within the field.
of early childhood education. Another administrative characteristic shared by five of the six administrators in this study, was involving their staff in the decision-making processes of the programs. Last, these six women are all strong women who utilized resources to improve the lives of young children and their families. These administrators all faced challenges and managed to rally resources to overcome these barriers.

Bloom’s Social System Revisited

This study developed descriptive profiles of six early childhood administrators who had been identified as strong leaders. These profiles were literary representations of each administrator’s career path, personal characteristics, and administrative style. Each profile is specific and unique to its particular place and time. Each administrator was interviewed and asked to share information about their career path, their program, and their experiences as an early childhood administrator. They told personal and professional stories that revealed the multiple roles they assumed each day and their management of the many interdependent components of their early childhood program. This qualitative study provided an opportunity to listen to the stories of these administrators (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1992) while enriching the literature with what is known about early childhood administrators and moving the field of ECE toward unity in the understanding of leadership. What follows is a proposal of refinement of Bloom’s Social System (1991) that is based on the stories shared by the participants. This researcher tries to capture the complexity of the interacting components of ECE programs by using the shared patterns that emerged from the data.

An early childhood education program can be viewed as a social system, characterized by social interactions within a given boundary that separates it from the environment. The larger outside environment (e.g., the values of the community, politics, etc.) affects the early childhood
education program and the social interactions within each program. The interconnectedness of multiple facets of the early childhood program managed by the administrator is demonstrated by Bloom’s (1991) social system perspective. Bloom (1991) proposed that the components of the early childhood social system included the external environment, people, structure, processes, culture, and outcomes (See Figure 1 in Chapter 1).

Bloom (1991) suggested the administrators of the early childhood program are the “gatekeepers to quality” because of their influence upon each component of the system. The early childhood administrators in this study shared their stories about their tenure as administrators. These lived stories confirm that educational administration is an open social system and “processes flow upward, from the teachers to administrators, downward, from administrators to teachers, and laterally, among colleagues and between school professionals, parents, and other agents internal and external to the school” (Greenfield, 1995, p. 62).

This discussion builds on Bloom’s (1991) social system model to propose a refinement of the model using the patterns that emerged from the six ECE administrator’s interviews (See Appendix D). Narrative segments and categories within the interviews were isolated to determine larger patterns and meanings. Through the course of the interviews with the six early childhood administrators, it was found that the patterns found within the narrative segments could be categorized into all components of Bloom’s (1991) model (i.e., external environment, culture, people, structure, process). The patterns were then sorted into the various social system components. This researcher discovered some of the patterns were interrelated and best situated in the intersections of Bloom’s proposed components (See Figure 2). This discussion will begin at the center of the refined model to first discuss the quality of the program and then move
outward through the various components of the model to end with a discussion of factors in the external environment.

![Diagram of Child Care as Organizations, Bloom’s (1991) Modified Model](image)

Figure 2. Child Care as Organizations, Bloom’s (1991) Modified Model

Program Quality

Upon examination of the data and careful deliberation on the model proposed by Bloom (1991), it is this researcher’s opinion that the quality of the ECE program appears to be found in the intersection of the people, structure, and processes, which are all influenced by the external environment (See Figure 2). Four factors in particular are situated within this intersection: the mission of the program; professionalism; human relations; and family involvement. Even though the administrators had vastly different programs, each one provided high quality care and education for young children. The administrators in this study were the “gatekeepers to quality”
because of their multiple roles and interactions with each component of the proposed social
system.

The data revealed all of the administrators had missions that involved providing a high
quality early childhood program for young children and their families. These administrators also
expressed the need to have an attitude of professionalism among their staff. These administrators
expressed in various ways the idea of the staff acting as professionals and increasing their
professional development. Professionalism appeared to contribute to having a high quality
program because all of the administrators valued their staff and their development.

The administrators of this study controlled human relations issues of their program. This
included having the power to hire and fire staff. All of these administrators shared stories of
hiring the right teacher. They discussed what qualities they looked for in a candidate and
contributions the individual could make to the whole program. These administrators also
discussed their decisions to fire certain individuals. Their decisions were based on the individuals
not contributing to maintain the high quality of the program. These administrators also discussed
the importance of having families involved in the program. The extent to which families were
involved with the program contributed to the quality of the program. These administrators
mentioned various ways families were involved with their programs. These stories revealed that
families gathered for socials, assisted in odd jobs, and communicated with the teachers on a
regular basis.

The Mission

All six programs had a mission to provide quality education and care to young children;
however, each one varied slightly as a characteristic of the auspice of the program. The two
administrators who were affiliated with a public school were held accountable for their actions to
superintendents and school boards. Their missions were developed in part by the school board and were approved by the superintendents. The two administrators who were affiliated with a church had missions associated with religious standards and were held accountable for their actions to church members. The members of the church approved the mission of the program. The two administrators who privately owned their own center felt they were primarily accountable to the children and the families they served because the children and families deserved high quality programs in their areas. Therefore, their missions were related to the particular needs of the children and families in their program.

The mission of the ECE program being a factor of the quality component of the social system is similar to the findings of Hallinger and Heck (1992). These researchers studied the principal’s role in school effectiveness through a meta-analysis. It was found that school goals were a mediating variable that consistently appeared as a significant factor interacting with principal leadership. These researchers maintained that leadership does affect school achievement even though it takes an indirect route. Thus, the director as the “gatekeeper to quality” does indirectly affect the quality of the program by setting goals and objectives that are aligned with the mission of the program.

Professionalism

Professionalism is a factor of the program’s quality. All the administrators referred to professionalism and the importance of treating their staff as professionals. These administrators were also very concerned with having a highly trained staff. Past research has found teachers’ education and experience to be related to classroom quality and effective teaching behavior (Arnett, 1989; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2001). Professionalism also included staff salaries, benefits, morale, and evaluation of the staff. Laura Ramsey discussed the importance of paying
the staff a high salary and providing benefits. She claimed the high salary and benefits helped the staff feel like professionals and acknowledged the importance of their work with young children. This finding is similar to that of Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, and Cryer (1997) who found staff wages to be a component of quality programs. In line with the characteristics of Participative Management (Bloom, 2000), all six administrators contributed to the staff’s level of morale by providing a supportive and encouraging work environment. The administrators also evaluated the staff on a regular basis and held the staff accountable for their actions, contributing to the staff’s level of professionalism. Therefore, similar to findings of past studies, having a highly trained staff, paying higher wages, and providing a supportive and encouraging work environment contributes to the teaching staff’s level of professionalism and in turn affects the quality of the program.

**Human Relations**

Another factor of the quality of the program that appeared to be highly influenced by the administrators was personnel management, or human relations. The administrators were responsible for hiring, firing, retention, and accountability of the staff’s actions. The administrator had direct control over hiring policies and procedures and filtered applicants for well-qualified candidates. The administrator also had direct control over the policies and procedures regarding firing and usually made the decision to fire an individual. All six administrators referred to directing some teachers find other jobs because they were not effective teachers of young children. Kontos and Wilcox-Herzog (2001) found teachers’ education and experience were related to classroom quality and effective teaching behavior. Therefore, the directors of this study through their human relations policies indirectly affected the quality of the program because they had control over hiring policies and procedures.
For all six of the administrators, team building appeared directly related to retention and motivating the staff to return year after year, because the staff felt they were a valuable member of the team. These administrators also allowed the staff to make decisions and have input into the program, which helped the staff become stakeholders in the team and program. Bloom (2000) discussed the importance of Participative Management, which is characterized as a process of involving those who are influenced by decisions, in making decisions. Through shared decision-making teams are built which improve job satisfaction and a greater commitment to the organization. Therefore, the director indirectly influences the quality of the program by involving the staff in the decision-making processes and building the team.

**Family Involvement**

A third factor of the quality component is family involvement. This factor includes expectations of family involvement, family activities offered by the programs, the extent to which families participated, and how families participated. This factor was not discussed in-depth by any one of the administrators, but was mentioned by each one. The administrators felt it was their duty to support families and to be a resource for families. For example, Naomi Fitch discussed her need to “help parents be better parents.” She further stated the importance of setting policies that allow families to spend more time together because children spend so much time in child care. Naomi said her center offers family picnics and family activities outside of school hours. Tammy also discussed the importance of having family picnics so that families of the program can socialize with one another and with the teachers.

Howes and Olenick (1986) studied the influences and interrelations of family dynamics and of varying quality of child care on the child’s social development. It was found that families enrolling their children in low-quality child care had more complex and stressful lives than those
who did not. It was suggested that children in low quality child care settings may be missing developmentally appropriate experiences which promote compliance and self-regulation because both parents and teachers were less involved and invested in the child’s compliance. Therefore, the director as the “gatekeeper to quality” can contribute to the program’s quality by implementing policies and procedures which include expectations of family involvement, family activities offered by the programs, the extent to which families participated, and how families participated.

The Intersection of People and Structure

The intersection of the people component and the structure component was not discussed by Bloom (1991). This researcher found the facilities of the ECE program to be situated within this intersection of those components because the facilities’ physical structure met the needs of the children within the program and could be adjusted by the administrators and teachers. In this study, the facilities of the program varied, based on the number of children being served and the ages of children being served. For example, the child care centers had physical facilities that included rooms which accommodated very young children (i.e., infants and toddlers). These rooms were different than rooms for older children because they had diaper changing areas, cribs, and toys that were appropriate for infants and toddlers. All of the programs, except for one, had individual classrooms. Nora Smith, private owner/director of a child care center, had an open-concept for classrooms because she felt this was the best way she could monitor what was happening within her center.

The Intersection of Structure and Process

The intersection of the structure component and the process component was not discussed by Bloom (1991), however this researcher found the policies and procedures of the ECE program
to be situated within this intersection. The policies and procedures are situated here because the administrator is responsible for writing and implementing the policies and procedures, while the staff and the families are expected to follow the polices and procedures. The policies and procedures of each of the ECE programs varied according to the auspice of the program; however, all of the administrators had written policies and procedures for both staff and families that were similar to one another. Staff policies included such things as program goals, staff responsibilities and expectations, and professional development. Family policies and procedures included such things as involvement, expectations, and activities.

The Intersection of People and Process

Bloom (1991) did not discuss the intersection of the people component and the process component. This researcher found professional development to be situated within this intersection because it involves the administrator, the staff, the families, and external community and the interactions between the administrator and the staff with each other, the families, and the external community. The administrators felt personally responsible for helping the teachers develop professionally and gain knowledge through professional development. Professional development included each staff member’s level of education, their personal qualities, and their level of involvement with the team. Levels of education included both formal levels of education and informal levels of education. There were more teachers who worked within the public school who had higher levels of formal education when compared with teachers who worked in the child care settings. There was one exception: an administrator who was affiliated with a church-based program stated that many of her staff had higher education degrees, including master’s degrees. For the other child care programs, staff had more informal education including
professional development through professional organizations and child care resource and referral agencies.

The People

This component of Bloom’s (1991) system consists of both individual people and groups of individuals within the center. The component includes individual’s personalities, values, attitudes, and personal behaviors, which interact with one another and the larger social system.

The people in this study include the administrator, the staff, the children, and the families being served.

The Administrator

The administrator’s behaviors included her leadership and management skills. For the six administrators in this study, leadership included high expectations for the staff’s professionalism and teaching. Each administrator also expected her staff to work as part of a team in the best interests of the children in their care. She supported teamwork and encouraged the staff to be decision-makers. Their management skills included management style and fiscal abilities. These administrators were skillful at creating successful programs on limited budgets. All the administrators expressed their concern about the high cost of running a high-quality program and making it affordable to families. All six administrators were very proficient at finding external support, whether financial or not, to administer a high-quality program.

The Staff

The staff are another factor within the people component. The administrators of this study reported that teachers who worked with young children needed to have at least four personal qualities: passion, communication, the ability work well as part of a team, and the ability to build relationships. When interviewing candidates, the administrators listened for references from the
candidates that referred to their passion; communication skills; ability to be part of a team; and ability to build a relationship with children, families, and other staff members. The candidates that referenced the four personal qualities were individuals who the administrators would hire to be part of their teaching staff. Confirming the findings of Reckemeyer (1990), individuals whom the administrators in this study hired appeared to be hired based on the personal qualities they would bring to the program rather than on their level of education. All of the administrators reported that the staff’s professional development was very important to the program because it helped to improve the program by indirectly providing the children with better educational experiences. These administrators frequently mentioned throughout the interviews, their responsibility to treat the staff as professionals and make professional development available to the staff.

The Families

In this study, families emerged as another important factor of the people component, but did not appear as critical for the public school based programs. Three of the four administrators who were associated with a child care program reported their obligation to support families and have a family-oriented program. These three administrators discussed the importance of family involvement in the program, the importance of the administrator’s relationship with the family, and the staff’s relationship with the family. Communication between administrator’s and the families appeared to be a critical factor for all six programs.

The Structure

Bloom’s (1991) social system model includes the structure of the ECE program. Bloom (1991) likened the structure of an organization to a frame of a house. The structure includes both
formal and informal arrangements of the ECE program. For this study, the structure of the ECE programs includes curriculum and NAEYC professional standards (See Appendix C).

**Curriculum**

A factor of the program’s structure is the curriculum. In the two public school programs, the curriculum appeared to be dictated by the school district. In one of the child care centers, the director developed the curriculum. In the other three child care centers, the curriculum was developed by the teachers. All of the administrators had curriculums for their programs that were based on developmentally appropriate practices, as described by NAEYC. This means the curriculum was based on each child’s physical age, developmental stage, interest, and cultural background.

**NAEYC Professional Standards**

Another factor of the program’s structure are NAEYC professional standards. All six administrators referred to NAEYC and the importance of meeting professional standards. Two programs out of the six were accredited through NAEYC. One program is working toward accreditation, while two administrators mentioned they were interested in accreditation but did not have time to find out more about it.

**The Process**

This component of Bloom’s (1991) system includes behaviors and interactions that occur both on an individual level and on a group level. Bloom (1991) claimed, “The processes of a center are the cement that holds it together” (p. 321). The processes of the program appear to produce a culture of the staff and the program, which make each program unique. This component appeared to be the most complex and not mutually exclusive because it involves factors from the other parts of the system (i.e., people and structure).
Instruction

A factor of the process component of the system is instruction. This factor includes instruction of the staff, children, and families. Staff instruction consisted of the administrator modeling desired behaviors and verbally communicating her expectations to the teachers in staff meetings. For all six programs, instruction of the children included three common threads. The administrators stated that above all was keeping the children healthy and safe because if the children were not healthy or safe they would not be able to learn. The second common thread was to challenge the children. The last common thread was to change teaching methods in order to meet the children’s needs. All of these administrators stated that instruction of the families included helping parents learn how to teach their children at home and helping parents understand how young children learn best. These administrators talked with parents and held workshops for parents about the importance of using hands-on activities to teach young children.

Relationships

Relationships are another factor of the process component of the system. In this study, it was found that families had a relationship with the administrator, the staff, and with other families. The level of the relationship varied from program to program. Other relationships that were made evident were among staff and the administrator, staff with each other, and staff with the parents. The relationship the administrator had with the staff was supportive and encouraging. These administrators discussed their role in nurturing the staff. Carla Williams, when referring to her relationship with her staff, stated that she felt like a mother hen who was taking care of her chicks. Three of the child care administrators stated the relationships the staff had amongst themselves had familial type qualities. These qualities include supporting one another, encouraging one another, and helping each other to grow as leaders. Naomi Fitch
discussed how sometimes the relationships among the staff also included gossip and jealousy. These negative qualities are also prevalent in some family relationships.

The relationships among the families and the staff were different from public school based programs and child care programs. For child care programs, three of the administrators stated the staff were part of the children’s family. Nora Smith stated that she and the staff were a part of the child’s extended family. The relationship between the administrator and the families appeared to be such that the families could use the administrator as a resource and as a support. Naomi Fitch stated that she felt as if she were a part of each child’s family and wanted to help parents be better parents.

Communication

Communication is another factor of the process component of the system. Communication in the program incorporates both explicit messages and implicit messages. The administrators of this study stated their explicit messages were sent via letters, memos, verbally, and through conferences. All of these administrators stated implicit messages were sent through their personal actions via modeling.

The Culture

The culture in Bloom’s (1991) system includes the values, norms, ethics, traditions, climate, and history of the program. The culture can be viewed as a by-product of the people, structure, and processes with influences from the external environment. For this study, the culture of the program was what made each program unique. All six early childhood administrators had some similar characteristics, but because they had different career paths, personal characteristics, and administrative styles, and their programs had different structures,
different levels of professionals, and different processes that were situated within different external environments, each program was unique.

The External Environment

Early childhood programs exist within the context of a larger environment. The environment can include “individuals, groups, other organizations, and even social forces” (Bloom, 1991). Early childhood programs are offered to society through various sponsors: community and government agencies, for-profit groups, employers, churches and synagogues, public schools, private institutions, and individual providers (Goffin, 1994). The administrators discussed the influences from the external environment. For example, Carla discussed how there are no private schools in her city. This means that all of the children in the city attend the public schools, so the public schools need to ensure there is enough physical space and teachers to accommodate the children in this city.

Auspice of the Program

In this study, four of the six administrators reported to a higher administration. The auspice of the program appeared to contribute to each administrator’s management techniques. For example, two administrators were asked to change the structure of the program in a way that was not in the best interest of the children. These two administrators refused to honor the request from the higher administration. All four administrators expressed the need to help higher administration understand that children learn best through a curriculum that is based on each child’s developmental needs, personal interests, and family background.

Colleagues and Peers in the ECE Community

For all of the administrators, colleagues and peers in the early childhood community appeared to be another common factor of the external environment. These colleagues and peers
served as mentors and resources for the administrators. Networking opportunities existed within
the professional organizations through conference venues, which provided a resource for the
administrators, as well as the staff. Professional organizations also set standards by which the
administrators were able to measure the quality of their own programs. Another resource was
higher education personnel who connected the administrators to knowledge about child
development and updated research information in the field of Early Childhood Education. These
findings are consistent with Seplocha’s (1998) findings who found the six administrator’s in her
study to be involved in the ECE professional community.

Barriers

A third factor of the external environment appears to be barriers. For this study, a
common barrier within the external environment is money. Each one of the programs had their
unique barriers, but these administrators were adept at finding resources to overcome the
barriers. For example, Naomi stated she asked parents to help with the remodeling of the child
care program. While, Linda asked the Navy to network the school’s computers. One director
who owned her center viewed her lack of education in fiscal management as a barrier. This
owner/director was able to compensate for her lack of fiscal management preparation by being
strongly motivated and was very dedicated to her business, and so she actively sought help in
fiscal matters. Seplocha (1998) also found the ECE administrators of her study to be resourceful.
She claimed, “ECE leaders are skilled in leveraging resources. They sought out additional
resources to support the program…They negotiated and knew where to go and how to get what
they needed” (p. 279).
Mentoring and Instructing Others

The last common factor of the external environment for the six studied administrators is mentoring and instructing other people outside the administrator’s own program. These administrators served as mentors and educators to others in the field of Early Childhood Education. This mentoring and education includes activities such as presenting at conferences, sharing knowledge about child development and early childhood education with members in the community, parents, and families. These administrators also allowed administrative/teacher interns into their programs in order to teach the interns about ECE.

Conclusion

Previous research has focused on the components of quality early childhood programs. However, the definition of quality can be controversial depending upon the component being studied and who has defined quality (Cryer, 2003). Cryer (2003) claimed, “Quality of early care and education settings can be defined from many perspectives and can include a variety of indicators. Any definition is likely to be challenged by those with differing priorities or perspectives” (p. 32). Past research has focused on the structural components that included measures of group size, adult-child ratios, and education and experience of the teachers or director (Howes, 1983; Howes & Rubenstein, 1985; Phillips & Howes, 1987; Russell, 1990; Dunn, 1993; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2001). Additional structural components that have been added to the definition of quality care have included staff wages, teacher turnover, and parent fees (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997).

Research expanded to include study of the processes of the program quality (Dunn, 1993; Elicker & Fortner-Wood, 1995; deKruif, McWilliam, Ridley, & Wakely, 2000; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2001). Some research has focused solely on the teachers and the effect of their
level of education on their interactions with young children (Arnett, 1989). Other researchers studied reciprocal relationships between children and their caregiver (Honig & Wittmer, 1985; deKruif, McWilliam, Ridley, & Wakely, 2000).

However, little research has been done on the administrator as the “gatekeeper to quality.” It is this researcher’s opinion that quality appears to be an elusive characteristic of an early childhood program. The uniqueness of each center causes the various definitions of quality to be unique. However, the quality of the program appears to be found at the intersection of the people, structure, and processes, all of which are influenced by the external environment. Additional research needs to be done to determine how much influence, whether direct or indirect, the early childhood administrator has on the overall quality of a program, including both structural components and process components.

Future research designs should consider the addition of a component that involves the study of administrators’ reflections and responses, as well as possible interviews with staff members, parents, and higher school administrators or other members of the external environment. This would provide a more in-depth description of the administrator’s role and role demands and her response to the role demands from multiple sources. Future studies should also include ECE administrators who have a reputation for being weak administrators. This would help to provide a more complete picture of strong and weak administrative skills. It is also recommended that future research designs should include a strong ECE administrator from a program that serves children and families from a low socio-economic status. Additional studies will help to build upon Bloom’s (1991) social system perspective, develop a greater understanding of the interconnectedness of each component, and help to create a sound theory for the field of Early Childhood Education.
Implications for Research and Theory Building

It is difficult to develop a rubric for quality in early childhood programs because of the uniqueness of each program that is a product of the people, the processes, the structures, and the culture which are all embedded within the external environment. A postmodern model that addresses the integrated and reciprocal nature of the components of the system should be developed and explored (See Figure 3). This new model can serve as a visual representation of VanderVen (2000) complex system theory of ECE programs as social systems that are unpredictable, interconnected, and have conditions that are not in equilibrium. The complex system theory gives special consideration to how patterns and connections change the system to be in a constant state of growth and change.

This new model should be unbounded in order to allow each component of the system to interaction in a more fluid fashion. In this model every component of the system interacts with every other component of the system. It is difficult to demonstrate this concept in a two-dimensional drawing, but the one circle of the new model in Figure 3 could feasibly be larger or smaller depending upon its interactions with the system, thus not being in a constant state of equilibrium.

Additional research can build upon the study of an ECE administrator’s knowledge, administrative style, and personal characteristics through a more in-depth study of the relationships among the system’s components as it relates to complex system theory (VanderVen 2000). For example, one can investigate if a poor interconnection among the systems exist, which would be demonstrated by none of the circles in Figure 3 touching one another or inside the quality box, when an administrator is not experienced or has low education. This can be studied through the administrator’s reactions and interactions with the components of the system.
This researcher is proposing that depending upon the administrator’s level of early childhood education and child development knowledge, administrative style, and personal characteristics the more or less the components of the system interact with one another. In other words the more the circles in Figure 3 constrict and overlap one another or expand and do not touch one another. Again, it should be restated that it is theoretically feasible for one or more of the components to be larger or smaller than the other components.

Theoretically three unique continuums could be developed (See Table 4) to represent ECE administrator’s knowledge, administrative style, and communication of personal characteristics. The endpoints of the continuum could represent very sophisticated and very naïve characteristics of the administrator. The continuum could represent how an ECE
administrator has the ability to move from somebody who has little knowledge of early childhood education or child development, makes decisions based on reflexes, and may be in the field due to the desire for money rather than a career to ECE administrators who are similar to the participants of this study who have internalized knowledge and can put theory into practice, utilize their staff in the decision making process, and are aware of their how their actions as a person impact the field of early childhood education.

Table 4: Proposed ECE administrator’s continuum of knowledge, administrative style, and communication of personal characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATIVE STYLE</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internalized knowledge of theory to practice</td>
<td>Delegated decision-making</td>
<td>Metacognitive awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultative decision-making</td>
<td>Nurturing and mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dictate all policies</td>
<td>Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education in ECE or Child Development</td>
<td>Policies &amp; decisions contradict</td>
<td>Desire to help children learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No theory or philosophy</td>
<td>Reflexive decision-making (putting out fires)</td>
<td>Money driven (not a career)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

This study has provided insight into six early childhood administrators’ career pathways, personal characteristics, and administrative styles. This research expanded the early childhood literature by focusing on the administrator as the “gatekeeper to quality.” Each early childhood administrator was interviewed and asked questions about the structural component, process
component, people component, and cultural component of their program. Using the concept of “gatekeepers to quality,” this narrative study developed descriptive profiles to discover the career choices, personal characteristics, and administrative styles of these individuals.

Each administrator arrived at her role through a different route. However, each one had education in child development and early childhood education. The personal characteristics and administrative styles shared by all the administrators included: concern for children and families, high expectations, value of trust, respect, sense of professionalism, belief in teamwork, nurturing the nurturer, and high demands. The administrative styles of the administrators did not include being authoritarian, hierarchical, competitive, or controlling which is consistent with past research findings (Lunneborg, 1990; Reckmeyer, 1990; Eagley, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Seplocha, 1998; Bloom, 2000).

Throughout the study the individuals stories, quotes, and epiphanies were sorted into categories using Bloom’s (1991) model as a guide (See Appendix C). A refinement of Bloom’s (1991) model was proposed based upon the patterns revealed in the data. The model assisted in explaining how the administrator serves as the “gatekeeper to quality” of the program. The six administrators of this study interacted with and influenced, to some extent, the components of the social system (i.e., their program) to ensure a high quality early childhood program.
REFERENCES


INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Teresa Buchanan, Education - Curriculum and Instruction
    Mary A. Sciaraffa, Education - Curriculum and Instruction

FROM: Robert C. Mathews
      Chair, Institutional Review Board for Research with Human Subjects

RE: IRB# 2329

TITLE: "Patchwork Pathways: Looking for Patterns of Leadership Qualities in Early Childhood Administrators"

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation : N

Review type: Full ______ Expedited  X  Review date: 09/23/2002

Risk Factor: Minimal ______  X  Uncertain ______  Greater Than Minimal ______

Approved  X  Disapproved

Approval Date: 09/23/2002  Approval Expiration Date: 09/23/2003

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated) ______

Number of subjects approved: 5

By: Robert C. Mathews, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.fas.lsu.edu/osp/irb
CONSENT FORM

Dear Early Childhood Administrator,

I am interested in learning about the career paths of early childhood administrators in South Louisiana. To learn more about early childhood administrators, I would like to find out about your beliefs about Early Childhood Education and the journey into your career. The study contains two parts: interviews and observations. I will be conducting the study at your convenience. Your answers will be confidential unless release is legally compelled. There is no known risk to participate in this study. Your participation in this study will help me to understand how and why individuals become administrators. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may change your mind or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I shall have the right to remove you from the study if you no longer work in an early childhood program. There will be no charge to participate in the study and no monetary or any other compensation will be given for your participation in this study.

Thank you,
Mary Sciaraffa
578-7882
247 Johnston Hall
M-F 10:00-3:00

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about participants’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers’ obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Name:__________________________ Signature:_____________________________________

Date:__________________________

Name of child care center:_____________________________________________________

Phone #:_______________________
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATORS

1. Study Title: Patchwork Pathways: Looking for Leadership Qualities in Early Childhood Administrators

2. Performance sites: Data will be collected in each early childhood administrators’ home and child care center

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm:
   Dr. Teresa Buchanan   Ms. Mary A. Sciaraffa
   (225) 578-2444   (225) 578-7882
   Curriculum and Instruction   Curriculum and Instruction

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to conduct a systematic inquiry into the development of ECE administrators and how they influence the contextual factors that support the quality of ECE programs.

5. Subject Inclusion: Administrators of Early Childhood programs


7. Number of Subjects: 3 to 5

8. Study Procedures: The study contains two parts: interviews and observations. The study will be conducted in the administrators’ homes or at the early childhood facility.

9. Benefits: Participation in this study will help gain understanding of how and administrators become administrators. Additionally, caregivers may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their management and leadership styles. The interest of the interviewers and researchers in the administrators’ practices may impact their job performance.

10. Risks: Minimal to None. It is possible that administrators will experience slight discomfort that is commonly associated with any type of self-evaluation. If administrators’ indicate discomfort, the interview will be postponed or terminated.

11. Alternatives: Alternative methods are not appropriate for this study. A laboratory experiment would lose more in validity than it might gain in control.

12. Removal: Subjects shall be removed from the study if they no longer work in an early childhood setting.
13. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose NOT to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty and will not jeopardize their treatment now or in the future.

14. Privacy: The results of the study may be published or presented at national conferences. The privacy of participants will be protected and their identities will not be revealed.

15. Release of information: The information about subjects may be reviewed by other investigators, but the identity of subjects will be kept secret.

16. Financial Information: There will be no charge to participate in the study and no monetary or any other compensation will be given for your participation in this study.

17. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about participants’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers’ obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Name: ______________________________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________________________

Date: _________________

Name of child care center: ________________________________________

Phone #: ______________________

The caregiver has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the caregiver and explained that by completing the signature line above he/she has given permission for the child to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader: _____________________________________ Date: __________
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You’ve been identified by early childhood scholars and experts as a person who has begun and supervised an excellent early childhood program. Your program has a reputation of being an outstanding example of what a good early childhood program should be.

I’ll be managing the LSU Child Care Center and my professors at LSU have asked me to focus this research on learning all I can about how you did what you have done. They think it might give me a leg up and help me in the future.

So, what I want to do is find out all about you and how you administered your program. It’s sort of like a biography. I’m interested in your life and how its affected your career, how you got into this position, your ideas about managing and leading a program, your ideas about early childhood education.

What we’ll do is start with some questions and I hope you will feel free to just talk.

I am interested in:

- You & your family
- Your career
  - Entry path- how & why
  - Development
  - Supports
  - Resources
- Your administrative style
- Leadership
- Management
ECE ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW

Demographics (check the tape recorder)

Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your family.

Tell me about your ECE career.

   e) What types of experiences did you have in ECE before becoming an administrator? (probes: Did you teach? What ages of children? Why did you decide to teach? What types of ECE programs did you work at?)

Tell me about what it means to you to be an ECE administrator. (probes: what is your educational philosophy? What is your management philosophy?)

Tell me about your journey into the administrative position. (probes: How did you get into the position? Why did you get into the position?)

Tell me about pivotal moments in your career as an administrator.

Tell me about decision-making practices in your career as an administrator.
BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

For the rest of the questions, consider your career path and your time as an ECE administrator.

What things in your life helped (or supported) you in your efforts to do your job? (probes: things at school, things outside of school, personal issues, education and/or training)

What things in your life hindered (or interfered) you in your efforts to do your job? (probes: things at school, things outside of school, personal issues, education and/or training)

How would you describe your relationship with your staff? (probes: what do you mean by that?)

How did parents influence your administrative style and practice? (probes: what do you mean by that?)

Tell me about your professional development- how did it influence your administrative style and practice? (probes: what do you mean by that?)

What kinds of things about yourself influenced your administrative style and practice? (probes: How are your management techniques influenced by your individuality, personality, and/or temperament? How do your experiences, likes, dislikes, influence what you do as an administrator?)

Is there anything else that presented barriers to your administration of the program?

Is there anything else that supported your administration of the program?

SPECIFIC ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

Tell me about the way staff was involved in your program. (if not already answered)

How did you assess staff progress and achievement?

How did you use that information?

How did you assess your progress and achievement?

How did you use that information?

Tell me about the way parents were involved in your program. (if not already answered)

Tell me about the way program sponsorship affected your program. (if not already answered)
LAST

What recommendations do you have for others?

Is there anything else you think I should know?
FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

What is the child/staff ratio per class (age level)?

Philosophy of working with the staff

Tell me about the implicit messages you send to your staff.

Tell me about the explicit messages you send to your staff.

What would you say your staff values from you?

Tell me about specific decisions that you’ve have to make for hiring people.
Is it on feeling or instincts that you hire people or based on their behaviors?

What are the levels of your staff’s education?

What is the range of staff wages? Who dictates these wages?

What were the specifics of the people who you had to ask to leave?
Is it on feeling or instincts that you let people go or is it based on their behaviors?

How do you measure “love” of children? Is it their language, behavior, etc?

Tell me about your support personnel? Assistant director?
Job responsibilities, etc.

What is involved in a high-quality program? What does DAP mean to you?

Why get accreditation? Why set high standards for your program, it is not compulsory?

Was there ever a time when you were asked to do something by the administration and you choose not to do it? Can you tell me about it? Why did you decide to rebel?

What is your process of dealing with barriers?

Who is responsible for the mission statement?

What made the mission statement so powerful?

Tell me about the implicit messages you send to parents?

Tell me about the explicit messages you send to parents?

What would you say parents value from you?
Why mentor others who are not your staff? Why do presentations for others who are not your staff?

What are your job responsibilities?

What would you say are your obligations to children?

What would you say are your obligations to staff?

What would you say are your obligations to parents?
INDIVIDUAL PROFILE

Name:

Occupation:

Education:

Career began:

Career ended, if applicable:

Career path:

Demographics of program:

Type:

Ages of children served:

Number of children served:

Number of classrooms:

Number of staff members (full-time/professional):

Number of staff members (part-time/paraprofessional):

Hours of operation:

SES:

Other info:
APPENDIX C

CROSS COMPARISONS OF THREE STUDIES INVESTIGATING
CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE DIRECTOR
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of ECE and Child Development</td>
<td>Experience and knowledge in ECE and CD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork- Director leads the team</td>
<td>Director was a leader</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>Creative funding</td>
<td>Skills in leveraging resources</td>
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<td>Creative and innovative</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
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<td>Professionalism/Staff development</td>
<td>Staff were highly trained</td>
<td>Staff development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for staff and staff appreciation</td>
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<td>Staff appreciation</td>
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<td>Help parents with parenting/families involved</td>
<td>Parents are involved</td>
<td>Great sensitivity of the voices of parents</td>
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<td>Involvement in ECE professional community</td>
<td>Involvement in ECE professional community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed to children and their education</td>
<td>Children are valued</td>
<td>An ethic of care</td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations and high standards</td>
<td>Have a firm philosophy</td>
<td>A focus on the big picture/High expectations</td>
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<th>Dissimilar characteristics</th>
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<td>Risk taker</td>
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<td>Giving nature/Likes to help others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holds staff accountable/evaluates staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate for young children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passion/Concern for young children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships were important</td>
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<td>Environment was flexible</td>
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<td>Clear structure and organization</td>
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<td>Ownership of the program</td>
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<td>A competent assistant</td>
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<td>Leadership in vision building</td>
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APPENDIX D

SOCIAL SYSTEM COMPONENTS

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<th>People</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Process</th>
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<td>Auspice of Program</td>
<td>Director/Principal</td>
<td>Auspice of program</td>
<td>Human Relations</td>
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<td>Families (for schools not CCs)</td>
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<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Hiring</td>
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<td>Colleagues/Peers (ECE community)</td>
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<td>Group interviews</td>
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<td>Community where program exists</td>
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<td>Policies</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Mission of program</td>
<td>Full-time staff</td>
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<td>• Colleagues</td>
<td>• Vision</td>
<td>• School/program</td>
<td>Qualities of Candidates</td>
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<td>• Peers</td>
<td>• Expectation of Staff</td>
<td>• Auspice of program</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Professional organizations</td>
<td>• Personal Mission</td>
<td>• Different needs to meet</td>
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<td>• Standards</td>
<td>• Belief in program</td>
<td>• Community focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Magazines/literature</td>
<td>• Concern for children</td>
<td>• Parent involvement</td>
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<td>• Committees/Boards</td>
<td>• Vision for staff</td>
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<td>• Auspices of program</td>
<td>• Family oriented/support for families</td>
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<td>• University</td>
<td>• Administrator’s development</td>
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<td>• Career</td>
<td>• Involvement</td>
<td>Firing</td>
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<td>• How began</td>
<td>• Expectations</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
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<td>• Parents/Families</td>
<td>• Choice to be in ECE</td>
<td>• Activities</td>
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<td>Professional Organizations</td>
<td>• Personal Qualities</td>
<td>• Attitudes</td>
<td>• Decision to Fire</td>
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<td>Higher Ed. Personnel</td>
<td>• Passion</td>
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<td>• Guide person in other directions</td>
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<td>Barriers</td>
<td>• Concern for children</td>
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<td>• Money</td>
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<td>• Committees/Boards</td>
<td>• Risk taker</td>
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<td>• Faculty</td>
<td>• Support for staff</td>
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<td>• Support for families</td>
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<td>• Other’s development (not staff)</td>
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<td>• Methods used in own program</td>
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<td>• Cultivates the culture/climate of staff</td>
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<td>• Health and Safety (1st issue)</td>
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<th>Professional Organization Standards</th>
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<td>o How to “teach” their children at home</td>
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<th>Relationships</th>
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<td>o With administrator</td>
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<td>Staff</td>
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<td>o With Administrator</td>
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<td>o Perspective</td>
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<td>o Nurturing administrator</td>
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<td>o Site-based management</td>
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<td>o Staff</td>
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<td>o Part of child’s family (children in their own class)</td>
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<td>o Resource</td>
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<td>o Part of every child’s family (not as much as staff)</td>
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Mary Aileen Sciaraffa was born on December 7, 1971, in San Antonio, Texas. She received her early childhood education in Laurel Heights Methodist Preschool, which was a developmentally appropriate program. She attended a public elementary school in San Antonio Independent School District. After elementary school, Mary Sciaraffa attended an all female Catholic junior high school and an all female high school. She was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Texas Tech University in May 1994. The following fall, Mary Sciaraffa enrolled in graduate school. She received a Master of Science in human development and family studies from Texas Tech University in December 1996.

Mary Sciaraffa’s past work includes Director of Children’s Programs at a battered women’s shelter from 1996-1997. She served as Director and Instructor in Early Childhood Education at Louisiana Technical College- Teche Area Campus from 1997-2003; Regional Coordinator for Volunteers of America-Partnerships in Child Care from 2000-2001; and, Early Childhood Consultant 2001-2002. During the dissertation process, she was employed as Director of the Louisiana State University Child Care Center, with responsibilities that include acting as university liaison on child care issues, working with university faculty to facilitate teacher training and research projects, and taking charge of policies, procedures, and the overall operation of the Louisiana State University Child Care Center.

She is an active member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Southern Early Childhood Association, and the National Coalition for Campus Children’s Centers. Formerly, she served as a board member for Louisiana Early Childhood Association. She has published articles in a professional journal, parenting journals, and has presented at local and regional professional conferences. She has authored and been awarded
several grants. Her research interests are in developmentally appropriate practices for infants and toddlers and early childhood education administration.