

Interaction

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Pedagogical Leadership and Rough and Tumble Play

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PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP AND ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

Leading the Way and Supporting Big Body Play

Pedagogical Leadership and Rough and Tumble Play

by Frances Carlson

The desire for practices that will result in the highest quality early education and care for young children is at the forefront of many conversations across early education communities all over the world. Many feel that an understanding and implementation of pedagogical leadership can affect this level of quality and bring about the changes needed to ensure all children receive this high quality of care and early education. So, what is pedagogical leadership, and how does it specifically impact the way center administrators lead their early education programs? According to Coughlin & Baird (2013):

Pedagogy can be defined as the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports that understanding of learning. Essentially it is the study of the teaching and learning process. *Leadership* is often defined as the act of leading or guiding individuals or groups. If we are to combine these two we are offered the notion of *pedagogical leadership as leading or guiding the study of the teaching and learning process* (p.1).

Fonsen (2013) found that, for pedagogical leadership to be effective, the director must be able to:

- share leadership and trust with the teachers;
- ensure everyone in the organization is able to share the responsibility of the program's quality; and
- exhibit professionalism in the way he or she carries out the leadership role.

In my work as an educator, author, and child care administrator over the past 32 years, I have practiced pedagogical leadership, especially in my work with implementing rough and tumble play in early care and education programs. My work has centred not only on what young children would do in my centres, but also on *why* they should do it. When training administrators in how to support a program of big, rowdy, rough play, I have focused on how they should support it within the context of their current programs, how they can forge policies and procedures that are supported by both established early learning standards and legislated rules and regulations, and how they can and must foster partnerships between themselves and teachers, as well as between the program and the families the program serves.

Sharing Trust and Leadership

The first step in pedagogical leadership involves the centre administrator and the program's teachers sharing a belief in the practice. This shared belief will not be the result of a memo, a staff meeting, or an e-mail. Instead, this shared belief will be the result of many opportunities for all to share experiences, commonly held beliefs, and research. To implement a program of big body play (Carlson, 2011) for example, both the administrator and teaching staff should reflect on their own childhood experiences with rough body play, as well as on the experiences with young children in their care. They should acknowledge the positive outcomes of such experiences and the potential hazards and risks involved when children play this way. Next, both administrator and the teachers should reflect on what they feel in their heart about the way young children play and what they already share as a commonly held wisdom about children's play and their development. Last, the administrator should make available to all teaching staff the current and benchmark research that supports the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language benefits for children when they play roughly with their bodies. These oft-held conversations and times for reflection are absolutely necessary for the administrator and teachers to share beliefs, and trust each other to implement any programmatic changes that result from these conversations. Time is often stretched in centres, though, and so technology can be used to assist in these times for reflection and sharing. Create a blog or a wiki that all can access, and encourage all to take advantage of these sites to share at a time convenient to them.

Shared Responsibility for Program Quality

The second component of pedagogical leadership is the shared responsibility for program quality. Again, using big body play as an example, the administrator should not make programmatic decisions in isolation, and then informing teachers and families through an e-mail or a sign on the front door. Instead, bring the question to the table – in a staff meeting, perhaps – and allow everyone the opportunity to problem-solve and offer opinions about the best way to proceed. If the director and teachers have already established shared leadership and trust through the process outlined



above, then teachers will feel more responsibility for the overall program quality because each was instrumental in determining how that level of quality can be achieved. In my experience, teachers know their own classrooms better than anyone, and their experience and expertise will typically result in excellent suggestions in establishing new policies or procedures, as well as in the best ways to implement a programmatic change. Without this shared responsibility for program quality, there ultimately is no program quality.

Directors as Professionals

The last component of pedagogical leadership is the professionalism with which the administrator collaborates and forms bonds with the families the program serves. To do this well, view families as equal partners in program quality, much the same way you have now learned to view the teaching staff. Acknowledge that families do want best practices for their children and are partners in the excellence the program achieves. Communicate often with face-to-face conversations, documentation of children's learning that you display in entryways and in corridors, with password-protected websites where specific program information can be shared, and with invitations to staff development opportunities so families can learn what we are learning. Realize that families should have some say in the policies programs develop, and should be given ample (at least two weeks) notice about programmatic changes. Share with families the same research you share with teachers to help grow a shared belief about what the program does, and why.

Operating an early care and learning program through the lens of pedagogical leadership must seem like a time-consuming process, one full of conversations and differing points of view. It is. In a program led by an administrator who practices pedagogical leadership, the focus isn't on the director being "in charge" but, instead, on the director leading a charge of developing trust and a shared belief in quality and what quality looks like, entrusting teaching staff to be equally responsible for program quality, and conveying a sense of professionalism throughout. The result will be a program where all stakeholders – administrator, teachers, and families – share beliefs about what their high-quality program can look like and be, and everyone works together in collaboration to achieve it. Young children deserve no less.

Frances Carlson has a bachelor's degree in English from North Georgia College and a master's degree in early childhood education from Concordia University. She has worked as the center administrator for child care programs in Oklahoma, Italy, and in Atlanta, Georgia. She has led four child care programs through the NAEYC Accreditation process. Currently, she is Lead Instructor for the Early Childhood Care & Education Department at Chattahoochee Technical College in Georgia, and was recognized for excellence in teaching by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) and by the Lighthouse Institute. She authored the NAEYC books, *Essential Touch: Meeting the Needs of Young Children* (2006) and *Big Body Play* (2011), and directed and produced the DVD, *Expect Male Involvement: Recruiting & Retaining Men in ECE* (2009) and *An Afternoon with the Experts: Gartrell on Guidance* (2014).

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Pedagogy: A Hot Topic

by Brigitte Insull

Having spent 40 years working in the child care environment I have to say that at no time has early learning received as much attention as in the last decade. What shifts if we see children as competent and capable? What if hallways *are* meant for running? Why should we talk about pedagogy?

So how do we come to best understand early learning in terms of children's play and that learning and play occur in simultaneous harmony within meaningful social relationships. I believe that this is where our desire to explore pedagogy comes to the forefront. Play is, and pedagogy are, about possibilities and both are ever-evolving.

Historically, the term pedagogy comes from the Greek and refers to the art of teaching...the method of teaching...the act of imparting knowledge and skill. As we have moved to a greater understanding of this term so have we moved to better understanding the principles, style and values that we embed into our pedagogy. For example, research and reflection by Early Childhood Educators into children's ideas, thinking and interests has impacted greatly on current practice. The overwhelming transition from theme-based practice to a more emergent practice is evidence of this. How we document children's work in a pedagogical manner is another example of this shift. How we work in collaborative harmony with children to establish an environment and community that is comfortable and meaningful for all members is yet another example. We understand that well-designed environments don't just happen; they evolve over time.

And so we begin to see our pedagogy develop. We begin to reflect on everyday experiences...to follow the thinking of the children and educators in an effort to see the "extraordinary in the ordinary". (Shafer, 2002) As we identify with and use the term "pedagogy", I believe that