

Broadening your internal center view

Responsive Interactions and Guidance

Objectives

- Leaders will be able to see how their role directly and/or indirectly influences their centers and the family they service.
- Leaders will look at their role as an asset to the organization by learning key concepts that lead to educational excellence.

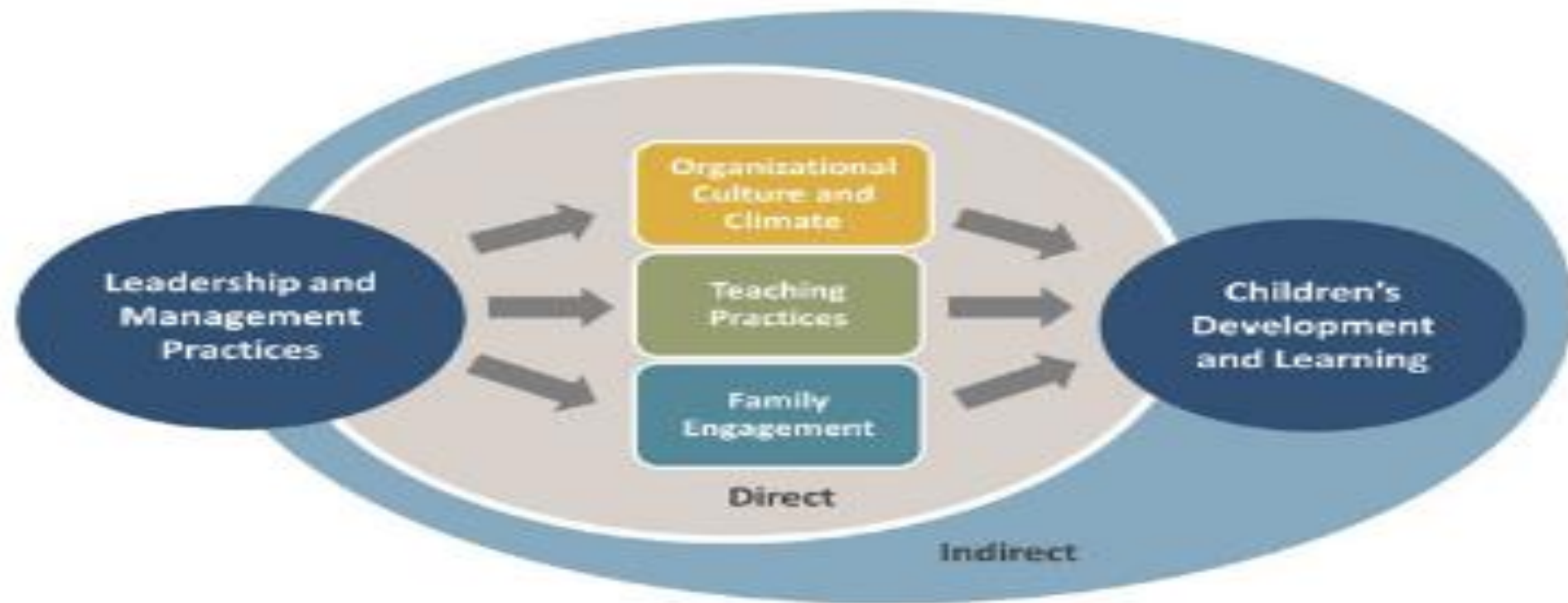
What does a strong leader look like? (Activity)

- **Great leaders** are people in which others have confidence and respect. They have clear goals but are very open to alternative perspectives. They care about the people who work with them but are capable of making hard decisions when necessary. They are self-confident without being loud, aggressive or dominating.

Strong Leaders

- Strong leadership is a vital component of any thriving organization, and early care and education programs are no exception. An emerging body of research confirms the pivotal leadership role early childhood administrators play in their centers' quality equation (Bloom & Bella 2005; Lower & Cassidy 2007; MCECL 2010; Rohacek, Adams, & Kisker 2010; Dennis & O'Connor 2013).

The Early Childhood Administrator's Influence



How do you influence your climate?

- Clarity
- Commitment
- Standards
- Responsibility
- Recognition
- Teamwork

Assessing your climate

Leadership Inventory

Leadership skills		Exhibited by . . .	
The ability to . . .		Few	Many
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listen attentively and respectfully ■ Ask thoughtful questions that expand other's understanding of an issue ■ Understand another person's point of view and unique perspective ■ Facilitate a meeting, providing a balance between getting business done and encouraging full participation ■ Write a concise, persuasive document that clearly communicates information to the intended audience ■ Make a presentation that clearly communicates necessary information on an issue or topic ■ Keep informed about new trends in the field ■ Synthesize important information from documents and reports ■ Make decisions based on relevant data and consider the consequences of those decisions for different stakeholders ■ Stay on task with a project, from initial conceptualization through implementation and evaluation of the outcomes ■ Provide feedback to others in a direct, respectful, and supportive manner ■ Receive feedback without becoming defensive ■ Complete high-priority tasks with the effective use of time ■ Organize space and materials to facilitate the efficient use of time ■ Show concern and empathy for others, with an appropriate level of emotion ■ Defuse conflict by resolving complaints and grievances in a professional manner ■ Intervene to stop gossip ■ Collect and analyze data to benchmark program improvement efforts ■ Ask challenging questions without putting the person on the defensive ■ Find common ground on thorny issues ■ Know when to advocate for personal preferences and when to defer to a group's wishes 			
Adapted from P.J. Bloom, A. Hentschel, & J. Bella, <i>Inspiring Peak Performance: Competence, Commitment, and Collaboration</i> (Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons, 2013), 111. Reprinted with permission.			

Your effect on Teachers

- Teachers impact children's experiences directly by their daily actions in the classroom, but center directors impact children's development and learning by structuring the conditions that support teacher effectiveness. The decisions they make related to hiring, supervision, professional development, and performance appraisal all influence teachers' capacity to carry out their roles. Even routine decisions about work schedules affect whether teachers have time to work together to strengthen their practice and promote each other's learning.
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Instructional Leaders

- As instructional leaders, directors influence classroom practices by providing feedback to teachers, allocating resources for professional development, establishing peer learning teams, and promoting reflection. This is particularly critical in early care and education settings because many teachers enter the field with little or no preparation (Nicholson & Reifel 2011).

Family Engagement

- In high-quality programs, directors implement policies and practices that honor differing family structures, involve parents and guardians in decisions relating to their children, and regularly solicit families' feedback about the quality of their children's experiences. When family engagement is a high priority, directors actively seek parents' support and assistance and work to reduce barriers, such as families' lack of transportation to the program and differing languages in home-school communication. They encourage teachers to make families a visible presence in their classrooms, and to make the life of the classroom visible to families by documenting children's daily experiences.

Cultivating leadership in others (Let it go)

- While many early childhood administrators readily embrace this broader concept of leadership, putting it into practice is another matter. Some have difficulty sharing their power, preferring instead to keep tight control over influence and decision-making authority. Others are not confident that staff can live up to their expectations. And still others are reluctant to share leadership authority because they worry about overloading staff with administrative responsibilities when teachers' primary focus should be on teaching (Talan 2010). The irony is that by strengthening a program's overall leadership capacity, administrators are more likely to improve staff morale, build a collaborative spirit, and reduce disruptive turnover.

Minefield

The participants are asked to blindfold one team member and then create a 'minefield' of obstacles to negotiate around or over. Using only specified communication techniques, for example only being able to use the words left, right, forward, and backwards, the other participants must guide the blindfolded person through the 'minefield'. This activity can be set in an elaborate outdoors environment or simplified in a regular office space; it is great for enhancing communication skills and building trust.

Conclusion

- There is no getting around it: virtually everything early childhood administrators do in their leadership roles directly or indirectly influences their programs' trajectories toward excellence. But administrators who take a broad view of their role understand the importance of expanding the lens, viewing leadership as an organizational asset. They see their program as a place for learning about and practicing leadership at all levels of the organization. This approach yields rich dividends for ensuring the sustainability of programs and contributing to the leadership capacity of the early childhood field.