

Topic: Build student skills to promote successful social interactions.

Zinsser, K. M., Denham, S. A., Curby, T. W., & Chazan-Cohen, R. (2016). Early childhood directors as socializers of emotional climate. *Learning Environments Research*, 19, 267-290. doi:10.1007/s10984-016-9208-7

Context

Most research addressing early childhood social-emotional learning (SEL) has focused on content and skills presented to children to support their developing self-control, emotional awareness, social skills, and basic problem-solving skills. Some research has examined classroom and teacher characteristics that encourage and promote young children's efforts to cooperate and communicate with others (Hamre & Pianta 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008). Little research has addressed school contextual factors such as positive school climate and their effects on promoting the social and emotional competence of children.

Purpose of Article

This study used an exploratory qualitative approach to identify the role that early childhood administrators play in formulating and maintaining a positive school climate in early intervention and early childhood settings.

Methods

Current and former administrators ($n = 12$, 91% female) in the field of early-childhood education were recruited and interviewed by phone or in-person. Topics discussed included administrators' background and experiences in early-childhood leadership positions, the responsibilities and qualities of successful directors, the role that emotions play in the management of early childhood programs, components of early childhood center climate, how directors contribute to or detract from a center's positive climate, and available training opportunities related to emotional climate development, leadership, and program management.

Results

Despite confirmation of the importance of administrators setting an emotional climate for their centers, many administrators indicated uncertainty about how they would go about doing that. Researchers used participant feedback and information from empirical literature to create The Positive Early Emotional Leadership model. This model clarifies the skills and behaviors demonstrated by center leaders that promote teacher emotional competence and well-being, job satisfaction and commitment, and child social-emotional learning. The skills and behaviors include modeling and attending to emotions, reacting and responding with sensitivity, and guiding and evaluating teachers with care and understanding.

Discussion

This article clarifies the administrator's role in building student skills that result in positive social interactions. Interestingly, this shift from easily-quantifiable structural variables to more interaction-based elements of good leadership mirrors recent changes in how classroom quality is assessed in that researchers and practitioners are increasingly focusing on the quality of teacher-student interactions (Pianta et al., 2008). When evaluating early childhood administrators, the authors suggest that it is important to consider the interactional quality of leadership practices and its impact on teachers and students.

How to Use This Article

For Instructors and Practitioners

Using the information in this article, instructors might ask their students to develop examples of what they might see or hear an administrator doing when modeling and attending to emotions,

reacting and responding sensitively, and guiding and evaluating teachers with care and understanding. Practitioners may want to interview administrators to determine their thoughts on how well they are prepared for building a positive school climate that promotes the social and emotional competence of children.

References

- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2007). Learning opportunities in preschool and early elementary classrooms. In R. C. Pianta, M. J. Cox, & K. L. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness and the transition to kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 49-83). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Mashburn, A. J., Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., Downer, J. T., Barbarin, O. A., Bryant, D. et al. (2008). Measures of classroom quality in prekindergarten and children's development of academic, language, and social skills. *Child Development*, 79(3), 732-749. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01154.x.
- Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom assessment scoring system: Manual preK*. Charlottesville, VA: Teachstone.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

Contact the ACCEPT Project

p: 704-687-8859

f: 704-687-3493

e: info@acceptproject.org

w: www.acceptproject.org