

A Director's Calling: Decisions That Shape the Lives of Children

Kidz Central
Station

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It Takes Quality

Without a doubt, the decisions an early childhood education director makes—from how much to spend on flowers to staffing changes—have a profound impact on the culture and life of a school and its students. Many of these decisions are invisible to a parent's eye. They happen behind the scenes while the director is at home, riding to work on the train, or simply in conversation with his/her team. But these decisions matter. They impact children's daily lives, their emotional experiences, and what they learn every day.

When you select a school or a childcare center for infants and toddlers, you are really choosing the director. In essence, the director becomes the parent when the parent is away. He or she oversees the tone and content of the teachers' language, the selection of classroom materials, and the composition of teams. Directors make sure a center is safe and clean, and most importantly that the children in their care enjoy lives filled with the challenges and joys they deserve.

It Takes Time

It takes time for a director to put down roots in a school and shape the culture. At first, depending on the institution, he or she may be faced with a smoothly functioning machine or the director may need to manage a team that has been functioning poorly for a very long time. He or she needs to work with a strong vision, a supportive team of administrators, and a have a constitution of steel. The best directors always make the job look easy—they walk through the center with an air of comfort and belonging, even when serious and difficult decisions are about to be made.

Here are some of the ways a center director may impact the life of your child:

Building a Teacher Community: The director selects who spends time with your child every day. Directors therefore are faced with the task of determining if each and every teacher is right for the school and their particular positions. Are they knowledgeable about the age group? Do they understand and share the values of the school? Are they patient and kind? Do they find the children fascinating? Are they aware enough of the whole classroom to keep all of the children safe? Selecting (and dismissing) great teachers is an art, and something directors learn over time.

Assessing Teacher Performance: There's a lot of media debate on how best to assess teacher performance. Should it be accomplished through formal means like testing and portfolio reviews? Or perhaps through special tools developed by the school? No matter the approach, the director decides what excellence looks like. He/she also helps teachers become better at their jobs. Parents only see a small portion of a teacher's abilities. The director is the only



one who has a 360-degree vantage point to determine teacher effectiveness.

Managing A Budget: Directors with a strong vision make ongoing financial decisions that impact daily activities and ultimately the quality of a center. Will the children bake every week? Will musicians visit the school to play live music? Will each class have a pet, visit the apple orchard, or ride in a buggy throughout the neighborhood? Funding always shapes what the children do, who the teachers are, and what a center looks like. Directors control the purse strings.

Building a Beautiful Environment: Each director faces his/her own unique challenges when it comes to building a center's environment. A director either inherits an environment they can adapt or, less often, he/she must build one from scratch. Either way, with support from a board or corporate office, the director makes many small and large decisions that impacts the creation of spaces for children. The environment can either infuse everyone with good feeling and a sense of order and belonging, or undermine a school purpose and sense of cohesion. Don't underestimate the power of place in children's lives—it lies at the heart of their learning.

Access to the Outdoors: We hear a lot about the importance of children getting outside. In effect, how contact with nature positively impacts their physical and mental health. Directors determine where and when children go outside. They answer questions such as: Will the school have its own outdoor play space? How often will each class go outside? Will there be a set schedule? Can teachers go out whenever they want? How far can the children walk to a playground? Will they go out in all kinds of weather?

Margie Carter and Deb Curtis have written extensively on what makes a “visionary director” (Carter and Curtis, 2009)—one who has all of the practical, personal, and educational tools to shape a center. They point out that it can take up to 18 months for a director to be truly rooted in a school's culture and feel an organic sense of acceptance, faith, and control over the life of the center. Directors should be lifelong learners and model that stance for teachers and parents. By bringing all of us together—a community of children, teachers and parents—the director sets the magic in motion and masters the magic over time. When parents select a center, they choose that director's particular brand of magic, which may be newborn or beautifully aged over time.

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Founded by a NYC mom of two young children, Kidz Central Station uses technology to solve the problem so many busy parents face—how to find, book, and manage their children's classes, camps, local family events, and birthday parties. Kidz Central Station offers more than 3,000 classes, camps, and birthday party options representing hundreds of NYC's top activity providers. With a sophisticated search engine and class reviews, it is easy for parents to find the best classes for their children, sign up for a trial class, and directly enroll.

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