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Leadership Perspectives from the World Forum Foundation Working Groups

by Kirsten Haugen

World Forum Foundation Working Group Coordinator

Leaders of the World Forum Working Groups (worldforumfoundation.org/working-groups) share several unique qualities:

- A passion to work for and with young children, addressing the most critical and challenging early childhood issues worldwide
- A willingness to thoughtfully engage differences in beliefs, priorities, resources, and strategies
- The capacity to build relationships not in spite of, but often because of, our differences
- The ability to infuse serious work with a spirit of playfulness, hope, and joy
- A heart and mind always ready to learn and change

Our Working Group leaders apply these characteristics on a completely voluntary basis, as they instigate World Forum events, projects and conversations that “promote an on-going global exchange of ideas on the delivery of quality services for young children in diverse settings.”

With this range of perspectives and experiences in mind, we’ve asked our Working Group leaders to reflect on the topic of leadership as it relates to their group’s particular knowledge, experiences, and aspirations. Seven groups offer the following insights on leadership qualities and strategies.

- Learn more and get involved: worldforumfoundation.org/leadership-provocation

Children’s Rights and Leadership



by Pamla Boulton, United States;
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Leadership has many definitions and many connotations in unique contexts and cultures worldwide. The World Forum Foundation Working Group on Children’s Rights believes that true leadership in promoting the rights of the child begins with a broad and deep understanding of what children deserve in the present and in the future to

develop as interdependent, capable citizens, who value and respect, feel part of, and contribute to the societies in which they live.

This belief provides a foundation for dialogue and actions that begin with an acknowledgement and respect for the uniqueness of each context and culture, broadening to utilize skills of communication, collaboration, and co-operation. The leader understands that steps towards progress and achievement may have the same goal but are likely to emanate from different points on the same trajectory, that they are incremental, often small and always intended to have an impact. While we work towards our goals, both short- and long-term, the leadership is fully aware that the impact of our dialogue and actions is felt when children experience an improvement in their circumstances, including increased visibility and recognition of the importance of their thoughts and ideas. The impact we seek requires careful listening and constant reflection, questioning, learning, mentoring, and positive, shared, purposeful engagement.

Leaders in children's rights understand that enabling dialogue and actions leaves a legacy of sustained commitment beyond the life and scope of any project and always aim for that goal.



The Vital Importance of Developing Leaders Who Promote Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Skills in the Early Childhood Field around the World

by Diane Levin, United States; Kishor Shrethsa, Nepal

The Working Group on Peace Building with Young Children (IWGPB) is dedicated to:

- helping young children begin to develop the foundations for peacebuilding and violence prevention, onto which increasingly sophisticated skills can be built through appropriate experiences with increasing age, a universal goal for all the children of the world.
- supporting and empowering children and families affected by conflict and violence in the world, a goal that affects only some of the world's children, albeit too many of them.

Believing it is vital that early childhood professionals throughout the world have specialized training to accomplish these goals, IWGPB recommends that:

- IWGPB and the early childhood community, including educators, caregivers, teachers, policymakers and researchers, work to provide effective and appropriate early childhood peacebuilding education to young children through commitment, collaboration, experimentation, and research and more, as well as through appropriate and effective peacebuilding training to early childhood educators.
- IWGPB and the early childhood field should work to create a corps of highly trained peacebuilding leaders who apply state of the art knowledge and skills, to provide high-quality peace building training to early childhood professionals around the world who incorporate peacebuilding activities into their work with young children and their families.
- Help individual countries create culturally sensitive early childhood peace-building leaders who work to make

peacebuilding training a basic requirement of early childhood teacher preparation and in-service training programs in their countries.

- Peacebuilding leaders work with families, policy makers, and the wider community to expand their understanding of how the foundations of peacebuilding are laid in the early years and to build support for efforts to promote peacebuilding in early childhood settings, homes, and beyond.
- Peacebuilding leaders also need to seek out state of the art knowledge on how to help children, families, and communities that have been affected by conflict, trauma, violence and war, heal — and provide leadership, training, and support to help other professionals develop these skills. IWGPB can take a leadership role in developing a network for sharing effective strategies, ideas, opinions and experiences as our knowledge about these issues grows.

Through comprehensive collaborative efforts, the IWGPB strives to build cross-cultural networks of knowledge, support, and advocacy for early childhood practices and policies that are culturally responsive in regions experiencing or emerging from violence or conflict. Because children are highly at risk of harm when conflict and violence occur, having knowledge, strategies, and resources ready to mobilize in order to protect and promote the survival and development of children must be a priority. IWGPB is committed to expanding our understanding of what it means to provide early childhood services in times of conflict, that support young children's wellbeing, development, healing, and peacebuilding. The IWGPB proposes an advocacy plan of action that incorporates diplomacy with an inclusive framework of diverse approaches in building peace that are sustainable at the community level.



Men in Early Care and Education: Leadership Statement

by Nick Terrones, United States; Ron Blatz, Canada; Jerry Parr, United States; Craig d'Arcy, Australia; Don Piburn, United States; Kenny Spence, Scotland; Henry Manani, Kenya

Leadership requires a strong understanding and ownership of one's identity: grounded in courage, confidence, and unfettered willingness to engage in collaboration. Leadership is rooted in relationships, and the belief

that healthy relationships are reciprocal. Astute leaders promote challenge, change, and celebrate differences. They nurture and respect the diversity of those they lead, while maintaining their own values and identities.

However, what can happen to leadership if there is an absence of diversity? We currently live in times of the most significant change to gender role expectations, and the single most effective tool to encourage global gender equality is to change societal expectations, beginning at the youngest ages. Young children continue to be cared for and educated by an almost exclusively single gender early care and education workforce. Like shining little mirrors, children reflect back what they see in us.

It is the Men in Early Care and Education Working Group's perspective that a single gender teacher and early years workforce serves to undermine the principles of self-determination, equal opportunity, and social justice. We have witnessed a similar issue in countries that limit girls' and women's access to education or employment opportunities — where educators are all male OR as is the case in western societies where early educators are almost exclusively female. It is clear that gender on its own is not the issue; rather it is whenever and wherever there is an imbalance that does not reflect the population and culture, harm happens. In the case of the early years workforce, it is the absolute right of children to have both men and women be their teachers.

It is important for the lives of children that we make progress in this area, and it should be done in the most public and transparent leadership arenas. This projects a very clear message that gender equality and workforce balance is what all young children can and must expect.

World Forum Foundation Voices of Hope Leadership Statement



by Martha Vibbert, United States; Noreen Huni, South Africa; Alice Kabwe Grollnek, Zambia; Rosette Serwanga, Uganda

Our Working Group within the World Forum Foundation is Voices of Hope for Children

Impacted by HIV/AIDS. Our mission is to directly link grassroots organizations that deliver care to young children and families affected by HIV/AIDS, and to share and promote evidence-based early childhood development (ECD) practices and approaches for young children affected by

HIV/AIDS and adversity. In accordance with our 'grassroots' and collectivist approach, we have depended entirely upon collaborative leadership that draws on the unique and valuable experiences of an informal and ever-shifting network of member voices — past, present, and future.

Key Concerns Requiring Collaborative Leadership on Behalf of Children Impacted by HIV/AIDS:

- More focus on children is needed as the new Sustainable Development Goals emerge.
- Even though antiretroviral treatment is available, treatment regimens for children are still a challenge and treatment adherence is even a greater challenge.
- More attention needs to be paid to neurological complications in HIV and HIV treatment, particularly for children who may have been on treatment since birth.
- Routine monitoring of early childhood development within HIV care settings (health, education, home) is necessary.

As a World Forum Working Group, we have assigned two co-chairs — each from a different continent and AIDS-related organization for children — to handle communications efficiently within different time zones and to exemplify the cross-cultural knowledge exchange that is crucial to joining hands in the fight against a global epidemic. We believe that these administrative leadership roles should rotate frequently. However, with respect to the content of our work, we draw on a wide circle of leadership voices... those who have attended conferences in the past, those who have spoken out on behalf of children and families with HIV/AIDS around the globe, and those who want to get involved. We have no membership constraints on participation or leadership. All are welcome to join in the chorus of voices, and all of us are leaders in keeping the flame of hope alive for children and families across the globe who are living with HIV/AIDS.



Leadership in the Context of Caring for Young Children with Special Needs

by Anne Sivanathan, Malaysia; Deepak Raj Sapkota, Nepal; Roberta Goldberg, United States; Cynthia Haihambo, Namibia

Children are the source of inspiration and joy for humanity, but children need quality environments and opportunities

to flourish. Efforts are being organized around the globe to develop child-friendly laws and environments where children can grow to their highest potentials. Geography, context, and culture shape these environments. Unfortunately, some create barriers, limitations, and challenges to the welfare of children. In fact, significant numbers of children die before they reach the age of five, and children growing up with disabilities and special needs are amongst the most vulnerable in many countries.

The Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006, is an agreement by countries around the world to ensure that people with disabilities are treated equally. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 20 November 1989, also affirms that all children, including those with disabilities and special needs, should be accorded dignified and fulfilling lives.

To protect these rights, we must foster leaders to address the challenges children with disabilities and special needs face. Teachers, special educators, community leaders, policy makers, and media contributors are the major players who must take into account the needs and current global situations of these young children. These leaders must be well informed and work in harmony despite their different locations to eliminate the developmental disparities amongst children around the world.

The World Forum Working Group on Inclusion strives to nurture leadership in our members and respective communities to ensure maximum development and opportunity for children. All of the members of the Inclusion group are leaders in their fields, in local or national child welfare and advocacy organizations, universities, youth centers, and communities. They adhere to the tenants of leadership and possess the qualities of leaders. Some members do not possess a title such as president, CEO, director, or superintendent, but every member behaves like a leader and assumes leadership in their everyday actions.

They aspire to be effective leaders by knowing their personal strengths and using them, and by being keenly aware of the needs of their constituency, children with special needs, whose rights are jeopardized by inequities in obtaining opportunities for growth. They know that leadership consists of certain fundamental qualities that can be learned and applied by anyone. It is not so much a matter of aptitudes as it is a matter of attitudes. They are transformational in that they move followers to accomplish more than they expected for the common good. "The

world looks for leaders, it looks for [individuals] who are original, able, and practical and all I have to say to a young [person] is simply to find out clearly all about a need in a certain direction and then lead on to the alleviation of it" (Gunsaulus, 1898).

The objectives, stated challenges, and planned implementation of our Inclusion Working Group goals reflect our understanding of these critical components of effective leadership. We must strive to foster these leadership skills in our group through education, professional development, sharing ideas, building accessible resources, empowering parents and families, the examples of our individual work, and by advocating for the change from pity to empathy to proactive support.



Leadership and Curriculum

by Diane Trister Dodge,
United States;

Larry Schweinhart, United States

Leadership related to curriculum takes place on several levels:

- The leadership provided by the Curriculum Working Group in developing the Universal Early Childhood Curriculum Principles to guide the selection and development of appropriate curriculum.
- The leadership provided by program directors in supporting teachers as they implement and adapt the curriculum.
- The leadership provided by teachers as they respond to children's interests and needs and involve children in creating meaningful curriculum.

In a previous article, we described the approach we took in developing the Universal Principles (worldforumfoundation.org/curriculum-principles). These principles are invaluable to leaders in ensuring that the curriculum they use is appropriate and will enable the program to achieve the vision. Here we address the second and third levels of leadership.

Curriculum Leadership at the Program Level: The Role of Directors

- Becoming knowledgeable about best practices and how the curriculum supports these practices.
- Involving staff and families in developing a vision and mission for the program. What hopes and dreams do

staff and families have for children? Why does the program exist?

- Leaders are passionate about the mission of the program and bring others along.
- They help everyone keep the vision in mind at all times.
- Promoting a sense of community and a core set of values for the program.
 - Core values shape how people treat one another, what work gets done, and how the work gets done.
 - Everyone's role is important and needed.
- Building positive relationships with every staff member.
 - Be a good listener and respond to concerns and suggestions.
 - Value and recognize each person's strengths and contributions.
- Providing ongoing support and coaching that is individualized.
 - Spend time observing in classrooms.
 - Identify what aspects of the curriculum are being implemented well and target support on areas where a teacher is struggling.
- Continually evaluating how well the curriculum is being implemented and if it is achieving positive results for teachers and children.

Curriculum Leadership at the Classroom Level: The Teacher's Role

- Becoming knowledgeable about the philosophy and all components of the curriculum.
- Planning purposefully for each day.
- Observing and listening to children to learn about their interests, strengths, and needs.
- Adapting the curriculum and creating new experiences that are responsive to children.
- Learning about children's families and involving them in curriculum planning and implementation.



Nature Action Collaborative for Children's Perspectives on Leadership

by Caroline Hudicourt, Haiti;
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Reviewed by Wil Maheia, Belize

Members of the Leadership Team for the Nature Action Collaborative for Children:
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As leaders of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children, we have committed to raising our voices to advocate for children's right to learn with nature daily. We know that if given a chance, children will fully grasp the importance of their natural environment and benefit from its gifts and messages. With more modernization and urbanization, there can sometimes be an out-of-balance focus on children spending a majority of their time indoors with technology, instead of enjoying a healthy balance between indoors and out. When experiences happen such as the recent earthquakes in Nepal, children will quickly come to see nature as something to fear, unless daily experiences with nature's uplifting wonder help them personally experience the other side of the story.

Connecting with nature is at the heart of developmentally appropriate education. It is our responsibility as leaders to help others understand this principle. Children in early childhood education settings deserve to be surrounded by beauty as they grow in their understanding of the world around them. All aspects of a child's development can be strengthened if they are allowed to learn with nature as part of their regular schooling. As leaders who care deeply about this issue, we believe it is our responsibility to create many ways to help early childhood practitioners, advocates, and families fully embrace the benefits that come when children spend daily time in effective, inspiring, nature-filled spaces.

As leaders, it is also our responsibility to sometimes travel the extra mile to meet others where they are today, and to help them craft creative solutions to problems they are facing in trying to bring more nature to children's days. We must work across professions, honor the perspectives of practitioners and families, and never forget to listen to the voices of children. Children have a deep intrinsic need to connect with the wisdom of nature, and they will do so if we don't take them too far away from their inner knowing.