

# Stages of Director Development

by Mary Ann Anthony

**M**ost child care directors have some college education, often a degree in child development or early childhood education, and sometimes a master's degree. Their education and training prepares them for working effectively with young children in a classroom setting. Often the most successful teachers begin looking for a career ladder and seek out the opportunity to direct a child care center. While this is an appropriate career advancement, their preparation has not provided them with the management skills and knowledge they need to be successful administrators. Success as a teacher does not guarantee administrative success.

New child care directors must acquire several new competencies at the same time that they are establishing their authority and leadership. They must learn how to achieve results through the work of others, and how to address a wide array of employee personal issues. They must learn to be supportive while separating employee personal needs from the center's operating needs. New directors must establish credibility by being highly visible to

staff and parents. Arguably the most important skill a director develops is that of communication — effective listening skills, open channels of communication, regular feedback to staff, letting people know where she stands on issues, and being able to admit mistakes. Is it any wonder that turnover is high in the field?

Just as Piaget identified predictable stages of development which every young child experiences, and Lilian

Katz has identified four stages of development for teachers of young children, there are predictable stages of professional development which all child care directors experience. These stages can overlap and vary in duration, and directors may regress to a previous stage if they change jobs or if significant aspects of their job change.

Each director approaches the job differently, based on her background and previous experience, but careful attention to the developmental tasks and needs for professional development and support at



*Mary Ann Anthony has been a director and manager in for profit and non profit child care since 1977, most recently as vice president of operations at Mulberry Child Care Centers in Needham, Massachusetts. She currently serves as director of the child care division for Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Boston, where she is responsible for the operation of nine child care centers and three family child care systems serving over 1,000 children.*

each stage can enhance success, increase job satisfaction, and prevent burnout.



## **STAGE 1** **Organizing/Surviving** *(approximately the first year)*

The new director is working hard to understand the new role and expectations. She has lots of enthusiasm and energy, frequent anxiety, and is easily overwhelmed. The first month is the hardest! The new director is very self-critical and seeks support from many sources. She uses trial and error frequently where there are gaps in knowledge and information. The new director is concerned to appear to be in control, but is not yet comfortable with authority.

### ◆ **Developmental Tasks**

1. Master the basic organizational tasks of the job.
2. Learn to cope effectively with the crises that arise (and they **will** arise!).
3. Formulate a new self-image as an administrator.
4. Learn new skills while managing her own level of stress.
5. Become focused on doing whatever it takes to get the job done, instead of focusing on the clock.
6. Recognize the importance of commitment to the job.

### ◆ **Professional Development Needs**

1. Frequent direct feedback.

2. Must learn how and when, and from whom, to ask for support.
3. Lots of new information — business practices, budgeting, organizational structure, policies and procedures, supervision.
4. Assistance with stress management and wellness.



## **STAGE 2** **Managing and Focusing** *(about the second year)*

The stage two director has mastered the organizational tasks and is ready to tackle some areas of development in depth. This director now accepts leadership with ambivalence, and is more comfortable with authority. He is more confident and relaxed, and centers his concerns more on others than on himself.

Although the stage two director still has high expectations for himself, he is less idealistic, and has a more realistic idea of what a supervisor can and cannot change. He is able to differentiate supervision to better meet the individual needs of his staff, and can discuss problems and concerns more objectively. He may feel isolated.

### ◆ **Developmental Tasks**

1. Focus on managing specific areas in depth, e.g., staff development, curriculum, parent involvement.
2. Develop broader areas of expertise.
3. Learn effective time management skills, such as delegation, and how to say “no.”

4. Seek sources of support outside the center.

### ◆ **Professional Development Needs**

1. Visit other programs.
2. Attend workshops and conferences in specific areas of professional development.
3. Access to a variety of professional publications.



## **STAGE 3** **Leading and Balancing** *(third or fourth year)*

The stage three director is confident and secure in her role. She recognizes and respects the strengths of staff members, and is willing to share authority. She sees problem solving as an ongoing task, and is less emotionally burdened by problems. The stage three director is more concerned with ideas, groups, relationships, and broad issues, rather than detail.

### ◆ **Developmental Tasks**

1. Balance people and tasks.
2. Identify own strengths and limitations.
3. Develop an effective and forward looking vision for the center.

### ◆ **Professional Development Needs**

1. Acquire information on personality type and style to

- gain awareness in working with staff and parents.
- 2. Learn about other programs' visions, policies, procedures.
- 3. Become engaged in evaluating the program, perhaps through accreditation.



**STAGE 4**  
**Advocating and Mentoring**  
(fifth or sixth year)

The stage four director is professionally mature, but is particularly vulnerable to burnout between stages three and four. He has by now encountered and dealt with virtually every problem and challenge in the job at least once, and is looking for the next mountain to climb.

◆ **Developmental Tasks**

- 1. Mentor others, staff or other directors; share professional expertise.
- 2. Move into an advocacy role and become active in professional organizations.
- 3. Avoid burnout; find new challenges and refocus energy to feel productive.

◆ **Professional Development Needs**

- 1. Engage more in sharing and giving than in "taking in."
- 2. Find new projects and challenges through professional linkages — teaching a course, giving workshops, writing, publishing, consulting.

- 3. Start another child care center, or expand the existing program.

**For Further Reading**

Caruso, J. J., and Fawcett, M. T. (1986). *Supervision in early childhood education: A developmental perspective*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Early Childhood Directors Association (1987). *SOS kit for directors: Supervising, organizing and supporting staff*. St. Paul, MN: Resources for Child Caring.

Jorde, P. (1982). *Avoiding burnout: Strategies for managing time, space, and people in early childhood education*. Washington, DC: Acropolis Books Ltd.

Katz, L. G. (1972). Developmental stages of preschool teachers. *The Elementary School Journal*, No. 23, pp. 50-54. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Piaget, F. (1986). Piaget's theory of director development. *Child Care Information Exchange*, No. 50, pp. 10-13. Redmond, WA: Exchange Press Inc.

Storm, S. (1985). *The human side of child care administration*. Washington, DC: NAEYC Press.

Wadsworth, B. (1977). *Piaget's theory of cognitive development*. New York: Longman, Inc.