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Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education

Stacie G. Goffin and Valora Washington, 2007

Teacher's College Press

New York, NY

128 pp., ISBN 978-0-8077-4793-3

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In *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*, the authors define integrity as the willingness to speak and act on behalf of what you know is right. By calling the question, "What defines and bounds early care and education as a field?" these women challenge the early care and education field to define and delineate its boundaries. Goffin and Washington call for a "leadership manifesto" (p. 4) by posing six questions that force members of the early care and education field to decide:

1. What is the early care and education field's defining intent?
2. Does the field's intent vary by setting or by auspice (e.g., centers and schools; regulated family child care; license-exempt family, friend, and neighbor care)?
3. What chronological span describes the ages of children served (e.g., birth to the start of kindergarten; birth to age 8; prekindergarten through grade 3)?
4. What is the field's distinctive contribution and competence as a collective entity?
5. Is early care and education a single/unified field of endeavor or a field comprising subfields (such as health care)?
6. To what extent are we, as a field, willing to hold ourselves accountable to one another and to be held publicly accountable for results in return for the autonomy to deliver programs based on the field's knowledge base?

One useful feature of this book that will help the field during decision-making is the chart of the history of the field in Appendix A. This chart shows that over the last several decades the field has grown tremendously. Currently, the field is being defined from the bottom-up with state and local initiatives cooperating to creatively use their resources and funding. Although states have made tremendous efforts in building the local infrastructure of our field, the authors charge us to take a national focus, with the federal government taking on some of the responsibility for early care and education.

One of the reasons for the field's growth is that we have done an excellent job of convincing parents, policymakers, foundations, and business owners of the benefits of early care and education. It is now common for funders, economists, health care professionals, and even CEOs to know of the compelling cost-benefit ratios of classic studies like the Chicago Parent-Child Centers, the Perry Preschool Project, and the Abecedarian Project. However, the authors point out that even our biggest accomplishments might pose a future problem if the field continues to waiver with uncertainty and indecision. For instance, Goffin and Washington refer to a performance gap. The performance gap is the distance between the results we have attributed to early care and education and the field's ability to deliver these results due to the lack of quality in some of our current programs (p. 28). The authors offer the harsh--yet accurate--criticism that the field has failed to own up to the disparity in quality. This disparity in quality may come back to haunt us once funders, policymakers, and program evaluators conduct longitudinal studies expecting to see the same long-term benefits for which the field has become famous.

The truth is that very few (if any) of current early care and education programs have the standards, array of services, or the longevity of the three classic studies. As a field we fail to openly talk about the limitation of all of the current programs in comparison to the classic programs. Even more so, we are afraid to seriously consider what raising the standards would mean for the field. The authors pose the question of whether early childhood teachers should be required to have bachelor's degrees. All of the classic programs employed teachers with bachelor's degrees. The authors do not have an agenda or preconceived notion for such a question, but they recognize that by mandating such a requirement some programs (or sectors) would take a "loss." The field has historically not been willing to make tough choices that would result in any program or section taking a loss, but this avoidance behavior is not acceptable, especially in light of the fact that we are going to be held accountable for the benefits we have promised to produce.

This book is for those who are committed to growth in early care and education, and it should be required reading for all leaders in the field. The tone is inspiring because the authors remind the reader that leaders are not always those who are in positions of authority, but those who are fighting against the established norms. The authors argue that our goal should be to stop relying on individual leaders and move toward a community of diverse leaders who are committed to adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership necessitates that we begin to engage in reflective examination that may require us to acknowledge the field's shortcomings and failures as well as its successes.

Reviewed by Stephanie Curenton

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