

Early Childhood Executive Directors ~ Leaders and Managers of Change

By Jane Breckinridge and Elaine Ferguson

Change... while it is inevitable in child care, since 2000 in Nova Scotia, it could be said that it has been massively accelerated. So much so sometimes there has not been a lot of time to develop organizational systems to manage the changes before another significant innovation occurs.

The effects of the Early Childhood Development Agreement (2000), the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (2003) and Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Plan (2005) on the NS child care sector have resulted in innovation in policy, programs and funding at the system level. The innovations of the Stabilization Grant (2001) and the ELCC Plan (2005) have affected change in the roles and responsibilities of early childhood programs and practitioners. For instance, the system has moved to all licensed child care programs being eligible for grants and all subsidized seats being portable. These two innovations have affected the definition of the elements that make up the sector itself and have a significant impact on organizational systems for child care programs.

While Owners, Boards and their Executive Directors deal with integrating the broader system changes into their programs they also have to deal with the impact those changes have on their own organization's systems. Within their organization, they are expected to be the leaders of change in introducing the innovation and developing a plan to manage the change that the innovation causes. Executive Directors have been central to both the system and organizational changes that the ELCC plan has caused and have had to be skilled at shifting between the roles of leader of change and manager of change in the blink of the eye, explaining change to their owners and boards and redesigning the systems, (policy and services & programs, meeting legal/ professional sanctions, planning and managing finances) that the innovations affect.

With the transition of the ELCC plan components from projects to programs at the end of March 2010, EC Executive Directors, the managers of early childhood programs, will be able to focus more on the management of the change at the system, organizational and individual level.

(You can view the ELCC plan at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/ELCCProgram.html>).

Communication throughout the change initiative stages

Successfully implementing change is related to how we communicate change, how we continuously improve our change initiative, and how we normalize any such change initiative, integrating it fully into our programs. Throughout these three phases, communication is crucial, it is the constant in effective change.

As our lives are constantly changing, it is only natural, and somewhat expected, that sudden change can be met with resistance. The level and persistence of such resistance is related to a few key factors, some of which are outside of the control of leaders of change such as individuals' need for stability, and other factors people are dealing with in their lives. Strong communication is of paramount importance to creating a sense of trust. This trust is critical as not everyone who is impacted by change can be part of the decision making process. Trust in the individuals leading change allows individuals to relinquish their need for control. The needing to know 'why' we experienced when we were children remains with us throughout our lives. People need to know 'why' changes are being implemented. Knowing the reasons 'why' on its own will not create trust, but it is a good start. Acceptance of change can be facilitated by answering the following questions (Hall, 1975) in communications, presentations, proposals and discussions regarding the change.

- How can it be partially implemented?
- How will it be seen by others?
- How does it fit into the current system?
- What is the advantage over what is already in existence?

We are humans and as such will not get things 'perfect' the first time around. Leaders of change who are open to change themselves will be met with greatest success. Trust and credibility will be enhanced when Leaders listen and act on what is heard and are open to adjusting change initiatives as appropriate, continuously improving the change initiative. This takes us back to communication and the recognition that truly effective communication is mostly built on the ability to truly listen.

Leaders of change are often not those who are responsible for the long term 'normalizing' of changes, however in our sector, the Executive Director of an EC program is called upon to fulfill both roles in her program.

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Leading change requires Leaders, managing the resultant change requires Managers. The age old adage 'be careful what you wish for' is true in this last phase of the change process. Good Leaders build an environment of trust through communication. As the transfer from Leaders to Managers occurs, fear and resistance can overcome and impede the normalization of any change initiative. While this transitioning can be difficult, resistance can be minimized by ensuring there is a continuous quality improvement process in place and most importantly that communication remains.

Individual Adaptation to Change:

Centre directors are both the leaders and managers of change at the early childhood program level and are very aware that the individuals who implement and are affected by an innovation are crucial to the success of the change it precipitates. The implications of change to the sector and their organization's systems have to be dealt with positively at the level of the individuals (staff, children, parents) in their organization.

The perspectives of all individuals involved in change are critical in developing a commitment to making change a success. Whether the source of change is internal such as a new program approach, parent policy, or salary scale; or external such as the changes resulting from the development and implementation of the ELCC Plan; the responses of the individuals involved in the change affects its success. Identifying and understanding where those individuals may be in their adaptation to the change, as well as where s/he is, will assist the Executive Director in their communication regarding the change and choosing the strategies to implement it successfully.

Gene Hall (1975), in his Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) has identified seven levels of concern demonstrated by individuals who are in the process of adapting to a change. The individuals affected by the change may be at any of these levels at any point in time in the implementation of the change. To move through these levels, individuals reach a decision point. Leaders of change, whether they are owners or boards, directors, supervisors or colleagues, consider these levels and, following the sequence of the levels, address the concerns, concerns and considerations of individuals at each of the levels of adaptation to innovation.

Hall's (1975) levels of adaptation¹are:

Level 0: Awareness

"I am not concerned about the innovation."
Decision point: The individual decides to learn more about the innovation.

Level 1: Information

"What is it? I would like to know more about it."
 At this level the person is interested in information regarding the change.
Decision point: Sets a time frame to begin implementing the innovation.

Level 2: Personal

"How will using the change affect me?"
 An individual's fears and needs have to be addressed before they can go on to accept the change. To get beyond this level, issues such as time, scheduling, prestige, evaluation etc. need to be addressed. Not attending to these concerns is the main reason change fails.
Decision point: Begins to implement the innovation.

Level 3: Management

"How will this change be conducted? Who, What, When, Where, and How is the change being conducted?"
 I seem to be spending all my time in getting material ready."
Decision Point: Develops a routine pattern of use of the innovation.

Level 4: Consequences

"What are the benefits? Will it be worth the effort? How will my use of the change affect the children / parents / early childhood practitioners?"
 Until the first three levels of concern are addressed, individuals are not interested in discussing the benefits.
Decision Point: Reflects and evaluates the effects of the innovation

Level 5: Collaboration

"How can I work with others more effectively to get this done? I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other staff members are doing."
 Individuals at this level share information with others, help them through the change, and are committed to implementing the change fully.
Decision Point: Initiates changes to the use of the innovation by self and colleagues.

Level 6: Refocus; Refine

"I have some ideas about something that would work even better".
 The individual looks beyond the change for new ways to innovate. At this point the change has been accepted.
Decision Point: Begins exploring alternatives to or major modifications of the innovation.

EC Executive Directors have been dealing with changes at the broader system level of government funding, support and regulation which has precipitated change at the local system level of service delivery to children and families. Our sector's shared value of continuous growth and learning moves us toward continual improvement of our programs and services in response to needs, available resources and research, changing our approach to our services and practice. Change is inevitable in child care. By being aware of the process of change, the need for communication throughout the change process and what can be expected from the individuals involved in the change, we direct the change rather than the change directing us.

¹Hall, G., Louks, S., Newlove, B.W., and Rutherford, W.L. (1975) "Stages of Concern: Typical Expressions of Concern About Innovation", in *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. XXVI, no. 1, Spring 1975, p 5-10.

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An ECC Executive Director's Perspective on Changes since 2000~

We spoke to an Executive Director that has been in the ECCE sector for over 25 years and has held the positions of an ECE, assistant director and director. The changes that she chose to speak to were staffing and policy changes.

Staffing changes:

This past decade brought increased awareness of generational differences both in staff makeup and in theories about generational differences. This director saw differences in values, not so much as different values but what values trump other values. While one's family is important to a Boomer director, to a Gen Y staff person, chances are it is most important. The Boomer director often spends long hours at work, comes in on vacation days etc., while the Gen Y ECE might see taking a day off to spend with their family (often without pay) as an acceptable thing to do. Boomers advocacy was around money system survival and defining the system and Gen Y young women's advocacy is around more choices in career ladders, salary scales, and professional recognition. To Boomers, it sometimes seems that Boomers take care of things and Gen Y's are taken care of.

- The Boomers are starting to leave the sector. Many of them are the founders and designers of the system. They are thinking about their legacy, how they have influenced the design of the system and indeed in many instances built the system. "...a different era... one that won't come again." They are looking for stability in what is next and leaving something of worth when they leave.
- The middle group is also starting to think about what comes next. They started in child care in their 20's and didn't think about "after child care" at the time. Child care is challenging physically and emotionally in middle age and they are reflecting on what is next for them. They are thinking about their next career, what happens next in life, whether that is within or outside child care. They want their workplace to adjust and accommodate its values around their own values regarding children and family. While they would once come in on the weekend for spring cleanup when the centre was the focus of their life in their 20's, now their family activities trump the centre activities. This requires tweaking on the part of the centre director to get the activities done as well as provide an environment that will retain her staff.
- The youngest group is "...looking out the door". Many are looking for different things and easily move along from one centre to another. They are often committed to the profession first which doesn't always translate into a certain centre. Many have a strong support network outside of the centre in their parents and friends, and in

many cases, these relationships trump centre relationships. Adjusting the staffing plan to accommodate these short stays while ensuring that children have stable and strong relationships with their ECE's is a challenge facing directors.

Policy changes:

In policy changes the director spoke of funding and facility changes. Since 2000, the initiatives resulting from the Early Childhood Development Agreement and the Early Learning and Child Care Plan have brought in many changes which she sees have contributed to bringing "...child care out of crises".

- Facilities have been built or renovated to be specifically for children as a result of the ELCC Plan Expansion and Renovation grants. This expansion of spaces enhanced the number and kind of spaces for families and their children. During and shortly after when these grants were available, the change in school entry age and losing 4 year olds in their programs resulted in having to adjust the groupings of children and adapting the space for younger children. This affected staffing needs as well as income generation.
- Our director saw changes in the subsidy system since 2000 as constructive. Centres previously made appointments for families applying for subsidy and the centre fee system (income) was tied to the subsidy prior to the changes. Now subsidy is handled by the government. Government support of programs is through operating grants, separate from subsidy, and subsidized spaces is not part of the funding formula for programs. ECE programs are more independent in setting their fees to reflect the cost of providing care. Not having to perform the administration pieces of the process has reduced the work load of directors, and "families are still being served".
- The Administrator role and the Early Childhood Educator role have become more defined and there is an emergence of more career choices (licenser, consultant, teaching assistant, early intervention...) within Early Childhood Education and Care.

What has not changed significantly?

- The public perception of child care and its value
- The licensing act is still called the Day Care Act and as a group, the sector hasn't developed its name
- Equivalency to trained (1 credit, 25 hours WS, 2 years experience) continues to affect movement toward professional recognition and practice and the perceived value of training.

Overall, this director is managing the changes. In her wisdom regarding change and child care, she knows that the only thing predictable about change is that things will change.

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