

Review

Ethics in pre-school administration

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Ethics is the standard of behavior, pointing out how people act in different situations. Ethics is an indispensable part of education. Besides being crucial for every step of education, it also has a distinctive meaning for the pre-school education period, accepted as the initial step of the education. In pre-school educational institutions, the administrator is responsible for building and promoting the values of ethics. This paper presents a conceptual framework about ethics in pre-school administration. However, it emphasizes the ethics policy about administration, and gives a brief summary on the administrator's ethical responsibilities on community, staff members, students and families, and indicated the ethical dilemmas faced by preschool leaders. It is important for the administrator to train him/ herself as an ethical leader, in order to study and to research this subject.

Key words: Ethics, preschool educational institutions, ethics in pre-school administration.

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of information technology, in which we have a massive change in each area, there are brand-new economic, social, and cultural formations which will directly affect our way of life. At the same time, as a universal system, ethics, which is a necessity to be human and to live in dignity, settles into our lives and comes into prominence every single day.

Ethics, is defined as a systematic effort, aiming at the individual and social moral experience to make sense by determining the rules related to human beings, the values to be followed and the character traits deserving to be developed in life (De George, 1999). Additionally, ethics is expressed as the standards of behavior pointing out people (spouse, friend, parents, citizen, teacher, etc.), how to act in various different situations (Ozmen and Gungor, 2008).

As ethics and education complement themselves mutually, ethics has a special affinity with education. In social life, ethics and education are seen as two important elements that should be together, for change and development to be useful to all community members and to create the social cohesion and trust (Ozmen and Gungor, 2008). Ethics is crucial in every step of education. Ethics should specially be emphasized, by considering the age group and the developmental characteristics in the early childhood education period, accepted as the initial step of the education.

Today, modern development and learning theories accept the early childhood education period, not only as a period in which children need care and protection; but also as a life stage, in which the learning is at utmost level. The family environment is not adequate to meet the development and learning necessities of this period, the pre-school educational institutions, a social and professional education environment, come into question (Kocyigit, 2010).

Early childhood period is one of the most critical stages of life, by being effective in forming and shaping of the personality, acquiring and developing the basic knowledge, skills, and habits. The basic knowledge, skills and habits, provided in early childhood years, are able to raise awareness in educational, social, and emotional life of the child (Akduman, 2010). The early childhood education service, which should be directed by a systematic organization that is scientifically serious and cannot be left up to chance, is the most crucial step in the whole educational system (Ari and Tugrul, 1996).

In pre-school context, all school staff are responsible for creating and maintaining a community, conducive to academic, emotional and social learning, but the administrator is the primary architect and promoter of the values and standards that ensure everything and everyone in the school building function according to the highest ethical standards (Harsh and Castro, 2007).

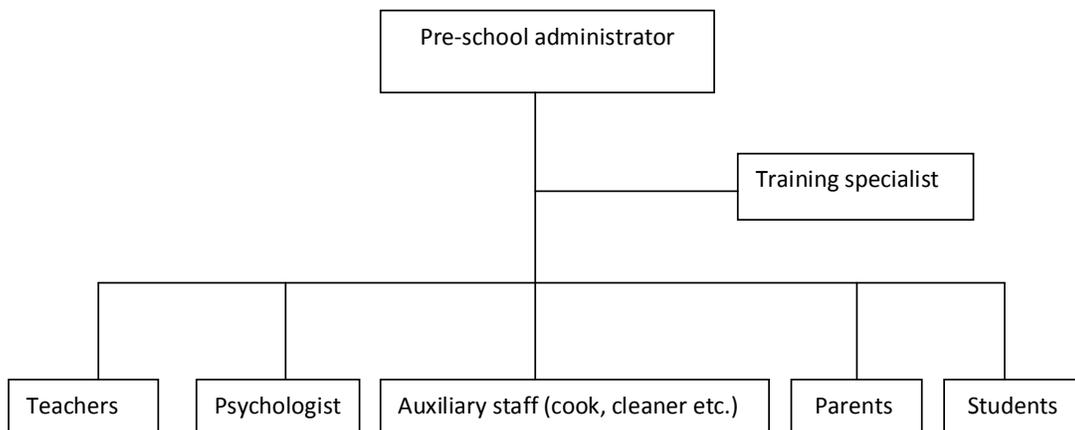


Figure 1. Organizational structure in pre- school educational institution (Poyraz and Dere, 2001).

Looking at pre-school education perspective, there are few books in education administration literature that address the ethical dimensions of leadership. Moreover, empirical studies of ethical practice by educational leaders are rare, resulting in the paucity of quantifiable data that can prove or disprove assumptions about ethical leadership (Flumerfelt et al., 2009). Furthermore, such a gap in extant literature, raises concern that, a lack of ethics training leaves school administrators illequipped for the realities of the array of ethical dilemmas they can expect to encounter on the job (Beck and Murphy, 1994). Few administrators have been trained to deal with these conflicts. Until very recently, ethical issues were given little attention in preparation programs (Beck and Murphy, 1994). As a result of the literature scanning, it is understood that the afore-mentioned information is supported and it is concluded that there are a few studies in the field of ethics in pre- school administration.

However, to create effective pre-schools and manage them fairly, it is only possible with the codes of ethics. Therefore, it is thought that every study, which can contribute to this area, will also contribute to the effective school management. The main purpose of this paper is to draw a general picture about ethics in pre-school educational institution administration.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In order to establish an organizational structure, it is necessary to determine the steps in organization, the degrees of authority and the responsibility of step, and the relationships between them (Kocyigit, 2010). As a result of allocating the positions and the authority in the organization, a hierarchical structure is formed. The bottom to top sequence of positions coming out of the duties, emerges this structure (Kocyigit, 2010)(Figure 1).

For pre-school educational organization to live, and be effective, and for ethical structure to be protected, the

line relationship and the allocation of positions and the responsibilities play a fundamental role. The organizational structure in pre-school educational institutions is somewhat flat in comparison with the other institutions and the informal structure of organization, predominates. The relationships should be directly open and candid, but still, should have limits (Poyraz and Dere, 2001). The relationships at school should be based on the shared values rather than the bureaucratic rules. The value of sharing is expressed as listening, understanding, respect, honesty, plainness and sensitivity. While the administrators are maintaining the management by using their bureaucratic authority, they should support the relationships with their professional and moral authority (Kocyigit, 2010).

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN ADMINISTRATION

Educational institutions are anthropocentric and they provide services. In the administration of these human and service centered institutions, reaching an appropriate decision is related to expectations about people and the correct and right insight, besides the knowledge and the skills of administrator. If administrator's decision process is based on a system, his/ her decisions make him/her reach ethical results without external influences.

The most disappointing factor for teachers and other employees, is being suspicious of their honesty and impartiality. Ethical principles allow administrators to stay out of the actions and the decisions open to debate, the inaccurate but attractive approaches. The ethical principles in school administration are further mentioned (Balcan, 2010).

Developing a vision appropriate for the philosophy of education

An administrator who has not developed a vision

appropriate for the philosophy of education, will probably suffer from inconsistency in human relations and the decision process. Education administrators should execute the vision that they have developed. This execution should be done with tested principles, not with emotions.

Applying a strong ethical leadership

The administrator is the main determinant in creating the ethical atmosphere at school. All the decisions that the administrator make, create the ethical atmosphere of the school. If the administrator overlooks the inefficient education at school, this situation causes an atmosphere, in which the community and the students are deceived. The school administrator should ask him/ herself these questions: "What is the thing that we want to achieve at school?" "What are the responsibilities of the school to the students and the community?" "Why are the behaviors of teachers and students at school important?". Giving answers to these questions is important to determine the purpose and the atmosphere of the school (Balcan, 2010).

Eliminating the discrimination

The discrimination should not be tolerated at school. The administrator should deal with the discrimination as an ethical and educational problem, and should take precautions against every discrimination inclined towards the student, the staff, and the parents.

Evaluating the effective pre-school education as a duty

Ignoring the quality of education at school, harms good teachers, students and community. The school administrator should be conscious of this and pay attention to this.

Improving relations with society

Many people involved in school, do not feel themselves as a part of the school. Good and effective school administrators establish a good relationship and interaction between the school and the community. If the school becomes a warm and attractive place, students, teachers and parents feel that, they are in demand at school. The effort to create a school community, based on shared purposes and values, should be the primary purpose of the education administrator.

Balancing the rights of all groups

Balancing the rights of different groups at school is a difficult task. What is important here is, giving equal rights to every group ethically.

The decision required by everyone is not always the right decision

The administrators should distinguish between the decisions required and expected by everyone and the right decisions. The right decisions do not always comply with the expected decisions. The conscious administrators deal with problems in all aspects and they do not ignore the ethical problems.

Making the decision right for the school members as distinctive

The administrators making the decision only right for the organization as distinctive, forget that, they have to meet the requirements of the members of organization. Thus, schools ignore families' complaints, and do not consider the requirements of students. The administrators are seen as just the ones engaged in certain tasks. The primary purpose of the school administrator is to serve. The purpose of serving is seeking an answer to these questions: "How can we help students, teachers, and parents?" "How can we improve the ways of helping students, teachers and parents?" and working in this direction.

Making the courage in ethical issues an integral part of the roles of school administrator

Ethical behavior is impossible in the absence of ethical courage. Pre-school administrator may assert that his/her behavior is ethical, but if he/she loses his/her ethical courage when he/she comes up against furious parents, senior administrators, teachers or any other group, he/she cannot defend his/ her behavior. The education administrator can say "No", when the school or the organization rules are violated.

The integration of ethical behavior, honesty and moral actions

An ethical atmosphere at school cannot be created, if the pre-school administrator does not share the ethical values with juniors. The education administrator should develop a set of ethical principles based on the values of community, and he/she should share this with the other members of the school. The school administrator should also be an ethical leader. It is important for administrators to adopt the ethical principles as a way of behavior, in order for education to reach its determinate goals.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRESCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

In pre-school educational institutions, the administrator

bears responsibility for the community, the staff, the students and the families, in applying the ethical principles. The administrator should approach these groups with sensitivity and should be aware of the ethical responsibilities.

Ethical responsibilities to community

These are the responsibilities, such as, developing qualified programs that meet the needs of community, collaborating with various institutions and professions working for children, raising awareness of the parents about child development and education, and providing necessary arrangements for students to receive a qualified education. These responsibilities should be fulfilled and intended for the community. (Myers, 1996; Bekman, 1998).

Ethical responsibilities to staff

In business environment, the human dignity should be respected, the professional satisfaction should be developed and the positive relationships should be established. (Fetih, 1999; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Luthans, 1992; Daft, 1991). Establishing environments and relationships, which provides for professional needs and supports the productive tasks, and maintaining these, are among the ethical responsibilities of administrator (Simsek, 1999). The ethical responsibilities of administrators to the staff are stated as:

- i. Responsibility of respecting the employment right.
- ii. Responsibility of fair wage payment.
- iii. Responsibility of providing employee's right to speech.
- iv. Responsibility of not preventing worker's right to form an association and to strike.
- v. Responsibility of respecting the right to the confidentiality of private life.
- vi. Responsibility of creating safe and healthy conditions and upgrading the quality of working life.
- vii. Responsibility of not making any discrimination among the employees.
- viii. Responsibility of providing employee's right to involve in decisions.

Creating policies and working conditions, supporting mutual respect, competence, prosperity and self-esteem, creating a trustful and candid climate for employees to function in the fields of children, families, and early childhood care and education, and making effort to give equivalent pay (salary and fringe benefits/ payments), are important (Fetih, 1999 ; Kaiser and Rogers, 1993).

The administrator should make use of employees'

education, training, experiences and expertise in decisions concerning children and programs. He/she should provide safe and supportive working conditions that will allow employees to fulfill their responsibilities, ways of well-timed and non-threatening evaluation, ways of written complaints, constructive feedbacks, and opportunities to develop professionally.

Employees who do not meet the standards of institution, should be informed about their problematic aspects and if possible, they should receive help in improving their performance. Recruitments and promotions should be based on the ability to fulfill the responsibilities of the current position and the success records. In recruitment and promotion possibilities, nobody should ever be discriminated on the basis of race, ethnic origin, religion, sex, national origin, culture, disability, age or sexual preferences (Feenley and Kipnis, 1998).

Ethical responsibilities to students

Being aware of the basics of early childhood care and education, keeping the information current with the help of education and in-service training, attributing the program applications to, up-to-date information about child development and related disciplines, being aware of, and respecting the uniqueness and the potential of each child, creating and maintaining safe and healthy environments which encourage their social, emotional, mental, and physical development, supporting the right to learn and to play within the context of early childhood education, providing support services for disabled children and protecting the resources are very important in ethical pre-school administration (Fetih, 1998).

Ethical responsibilities to families

This involves; developing relationships based on mutual trust with families, while supporting child-rearing responsibilities, emphasizing and improving the talented and the strong sides; respecting every family's reputation, culture, language, traditions, and beliefs; respecting the family's right to make a decision about their own children and their values about child-rearing; explaining each child's development to the family within the framework of developmental perspective; helping families to understand the importance of appropriate early childhood practices and to appreciate; helping families to develop children's understandings and their skills as parents; creating support networks for families, participating families with the other families, the program staff, the communal resources, and the professional services, by creating relation opportunities are important in terms of ethics (Fetih, 1998).

The administrator should develop written policies to protect confidentiality of childrens' records and to

determine under which circumstances to reveal these. These policy documents should be given to all the program staff and the families. Revealing children's records to someone other than the family, the program staff and the consultants who have privacy obligation, must be depended on the permission of family (except in cases of abuse or negligence). When the family members have dissidence, by working clearly, in order for them to make the right decision, the observations about the child should be shared and, defending only one side should be refrained (Fethi, 1998).

Evaluating the criticisms and the complaints from families

Although the administrators do not like complaints, the complaints are presented clues about the necessary arrangements. A complaint is the case of being bothersome, after having worked diligently to produce a service that is believed to be valuable and the opposite side informs that, those efforts are inefficient in meeting his/her requirements (Barlow and Moller, 2009). Although the families may seem unfair, the information that they want to convey is very crucial for the institution. Therefore, every single complaint should be considered as a gift and should be handled seriously (Barlow and Moller, 2009).

Barlow and Moller (2009) suggest a formula consisting of eight steps to evaluate the complaints as gifts:

1. Instead of perceiving the complaints and the criticisms as injustices, consider them as new opportunities to improve your institution and respond to them by saying "thank you."
2. Explain why you find the feedback important.
3. Apologize for the mistake.
4. Promise that you are going to do something for the solution of the problem immediately. Take on responsibility.
5. Search the case. Acquire the necessary information.
6. Correct the mistake.
7. Check whether the person complaining, is satisfied or not.
8. By taking precautions against the problems that may be occurred in this direction, prevent the similar problems before they occur.

Generally, the family expects these, after they have given the child to an early educational institution (Bilgin, 2010):

- i. To know that the child is safe at school.
- ii. To know that the teacher is competent enough to meet the child's requirements.
- iii. To know that more positive improvement will take place in child's relationship with the parents.
- iv. To be aware of the discipline and attitudes at school.

If the parents' requirements in these subjects are met, the

complaints will lessen and the parents will become supportive. The cooperation and the communication between the school and the family are important factors in preventing the possible problems, and in solving the problems (Bilgin, 2010).

ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED BY PRESCHOOL LEADERS

In school settings, leaders may often be faced with choices that causes ethical dilemma. Ethical dilemma is not a selection between right and wrong. It requires making a selection among the verifies that seem reasonable (Balcan, 2010). Seeking answers to the questions such as: "What kind of a procedure the administrator should apply for an employee, who is good at work, but disapproved by the community because of his/ her behaviors in the social life?" or "How should the administrator treat a child ,who broke the school window, but who will be ashamed of this because his/ her family does not have financial power to pay it?" is an ethical dilemma for the administrator.

Kidder (1995) states three methods to evaluate leaders' dilemmas from different perspectives. One is to anticipate the consequences of each choice and attempt to identify who will be affected, and in what ways. Another approach uses moral rules, assuming that the world would be a better place if people always followed certain widely accepted standards (such as telling the truth). A third perspective emphasizes caring, which is similar to the golden rule: "How would we like to be treated under similar circumstances?"

There is no ethical "cookbook" that provides easy answers to complex dilemmas (Lashway, 1996). In order to take appropriate decisions against complex dilemmas, it is necessary for the administrator to be conscious in the field of ethics. This is only possible by reading the necessary documents, making an effort in practical life, and being educated in this subject.

CONCLUSION

Preschool education is a service that should be directed by a serious scientific and systematic organization. In preschool settings, the administrator has a key role on the values and standards that ensures everything and everyone in the school building function according to the highest standards.

Being aware of the ethical principles and behaving in this directon, are indispensable for an effective preschool educational institution. While the administrator decides towards the ethical principles, he/she should be aware of the responsibilities to the community, the staff, the students, and the families and should take these factors into consideration. He/she should not perceive the

complaints and the criticisms from families as disturbing elements, on the contrary, should consider them as feedbacks of arrangements to be done to improve the institution.

Administrators' receiving in-service-training or presenting informative resources to the administrators by authorized persons should be considered and evaluated as elements that will positively impact the skills in the field of ethics. The employers may encourage the administrators to participate in seminars, bear the cost of seminars for them to participate and develop a premium system to support the activities to improve themselves.

In order to be an ethical leader, the school administrator should look for ways of providing research and professional development because, an administrator without adequate knowledge and skills related to his/her profession, cannot apply the ethical principles required by the profession and will have difficulty in deciding the ethical subjects about his/ her profession.

By improving themselves ethically, the school administrators will contribute to the staff for adopting the ethical approach by being a model to them. Thus, ethical school leaders will support the idea of emphasizing the ethical approach in pre-school education area and will accelerate the proceeding to the ethical schools and the ethical community.

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