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The leadership roles of the child care centre supervisor in Singapore

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The Leadership Roles of the Child Care Centre Supervisor in Singapore

Winnie Tan
M.Ed.
1997

**The Leadership Roles Of the Child Care Centre Supervisor in
Singapore**

By

Winnie Tan. B.A. , Grad. Dip ECS

**A Theses Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of**

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was; (a) to describe the current situation of child care provision in Singapore; (b) to define the meaning of leadership and the responsibilities involved in effective leadership in a child care setting; and (c) to investigate and describe the leadership roles that child care centre supervisors need to perform in the day to day running of their centres from the perspective of the child care supervisors. A total of 15 supervisors from the private sector were interviewed in-depth. They were asked to describe all facets of their leadership roles in their centres. The results of this study suggest strongly that the child care centre supervisors are relatively young and inexperienced. Most of them have very little training in management and leadership skills. Many have acquired management and leadership knowledge through trial and error. Therefore, more systematic and effective training needs to be employed before most of them can become effective leaders in the child care profession.

This study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge which helps potential early childhood educators of Singapore to better understand the requirements of the leadership roles of child care supervisors.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

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Table of Contents

Page

Chapter One Introduction

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Overview	1
1.2	Background to the Study	2
1.3	Context of the Study	2
1.3.1	Increase in female participation in the labor market	3
1.3.2	Forms of Subsidies	4
1.4	Legislation Governing Child Care Centres	5
1.5	Main Providers of Child Care Services	6
1.6	Training received by Supervisors	6
1.7	Significance of the Study	7
1.8	The Purpose of this Study	9
1.9	Glossary of Terms	9

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.0	Introduction	11
2.1	Leadership Defined	11
2.1.1	The Art of Leadership	13
2.1.2	Characteristics of Motivator Leaders	14
2.1.3	Key Elements of Effective Leadership	15
2.2	Roles and Responsibilities of Child Care Supervisors in Singapore	16
2.2.1	Roles and Responsibilities of Managers	16
2.2.2	Leadership Roles in Child Care Centres	20
2.3	Management Roles	22
2.4	Early Childhood Research in Singapore	25
2.5	Conclusion	29

Chapter Three Conceptual Framework and Methods

3.0	Introduction	30
3.1	Conceptual Framework	30
3.1.1	Applying the Ecological Systems Theory in a Child Care Setting	32
3.2	Method of Investigation	34
3.2.1	Design of the Study	34
3.2.2	Sample	35
3.2.3	Instruments	35
3.2.4	Procedure	37
3.3	Validity	38
3.4	Setting	38
3.5	Data Analysis	39
3.6	Conclusion	39

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

4.0	Introduction	40
4.1	Profile of Child Care Supervisors	40
4.2	Preparation of Supervisors for the Leadership Role	43
4.3	Technical Function	47
4.4	Staffing Function	48
4.5	Client Oriented (Educational) Function	52
4.6	Public Relations Function	60
4.7	Cultural Symbolic Function	63
4.8	Analysis of Functions	66
4.8.1	Aspects of Leadership Roles that were most/least enjoyed, most/least time consuming and most/least difficult	70
4.9	Preparedness of Supervisors for the Leadership Roles	75
4.10	Conclusion	78

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusions

5.0	Introduction	81
5.1	Summary of the Research Findings	81
5.2	Perceptions of Supervisors regarding their leadership roles	83
5.2.1	In-Service Workshops for Supervisors	84
5.3	The Need to Promote developmentally appropriate programs to parents and the public	85
5.4	Child Care Supervisors in Singapore	85
5.5	Recommendations	86
5.6	Recommendations for Future Research	91
5.7	Conclusion	92
	References	95
	Appendix 1	100
	Appendix 2	102

Figures and Tables

Page

Figure 1	Hierarchical Model of Management Functions	17
Figure 2	Ecological Systems Context	30
Table 4.1.1	Age Group of supervisors interviewed (number of years old)	40
Table 4.1.2	Educational Level	41
Table 4.1.3	Number of years as supervisor in child care centre	41
Table 4.1.4	Number of years as teacher before becoming a supervisor	41
Table 4.1.5	Nationality and Languages spoken	41
Table 4.2.1	Awareness of responsibilities before becoming a supervisor	43
Table 4.2.2	Aspects of supervisor's role most prepared for	44
Table 4.2.3	Aspects of supervisor's role least prepared for	44
Table 4.2.4	Usefulness of the administrative training received by supervisors	44
Table 4.2.5	Areas in which supervisors want training	45
Table 4.3.1	Technical Task	47
Table 4.4.1	Ways in which supervisors encourage team building	48
Table 4.4.2	Types of in-service training provided by the supervisors	49
Table 4.4.3	Ways of managing staff conflict	49
Table 4.4.4	Ways to maintain a positive working environment	50
Table 4.5.1	Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility in addressing the needs of parents and children	53
Table 4.5.2	Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility concerning the program in the centre	54
Table 4.5.3	Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility in terms of assuring the quality of care in the centre	55
Table 4.6.1	Community Outreach	61
Table 4.6.2	Dealing with Government officials over matters concerning the centre	61
Table 4.6.3	Promoting the centre's services to the public	61
Table 4.7.1	Active spokesperson for Early Childhood Profession	63
Table 4.7.2	Public Presentations concerning the Profession	64
Table 4.7.3	Using Mass Media to promote Quality Child Care	64
Table 4.7.4	Involvement in professional organisations (name of organisations)	64
Table 4.8.1	Technical Function	66
Table 4.8.2	Staffing Function	67
Table 4.8.3	Client Oriented Function	67
Table 4.8.4	Public Relation Function	68
Table 4.8.5	Cultural and Symbolic Function	68
Table 4.8.1.1	Aspects of Leadership role enjoyed most	71
Table 4.8.1.2	Aspects of Leadership role enjoyed least	71
Table 4.8.1.3	Most Time Consuming Tasks	72
Table 4.8.1.4	Least Time Consuming Tasks	72
Table 4.8.1.5	Most Difficult Tasks	73
Table 4.8.1.6	Easiest Tasks	73

Table 4.9.1	How well prepared were the supervisors for the leadership roles?	75
Table 4.9.2	Leadership functions that were prepared the most	76
Table 4.9.3	Leadership functions that were prepared the least	76

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the current situation in respect of child care provision in Singapore. This chapter describes the background and context of the study in detail together with the various factors that influence the child care scene in Singapore. Possible influences on the child care scene in Singapore include female participation in the labor market; available forms of subsidy; the main providers of child care services and the training received by the child care supervisors. Lastly, the significance of this study is discussed along with potential benefits to the child care profession of improved leadership by child care supervisors.

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of child care supervisors in Singapore of their leadership roles. As more and more child care centres open in Singapore, more and more people are needed to enter into supervisory roles and to provide leadership in the child care centres. However, many of these supervisors may lack the necessary training and experience to competently fulfill these leadership roles (“Urgent need”, 1994).

1.2 Background to the Study

1942 was the origin of child care provision in Singapore, ostensibly to care for dislocated children during the war. This function changed during the post-war period to the provision of care for children whose mothers were needed in the labor force for the reconstruction of the country. The Department of Social Welfare provided these services. In 1977, there was a change of government policy to prevent direct control of operation of these centres. These centres were then transferred to the National Trade Union Congress, which is now one of the main providers of child care services in Singapore. In the meantime, during the same post war period, other providers (profit and non-profit organizations) also entered the child care field.

There are two kinds of child care programs in Singapore. The first is provided by kindergartens which usually offer 2 to 4 hour programs for children aged 4-6 years, five days a week. The second is provided by child care centres which offer full day or half day child care services for children aged 30 to 72 months of age for 5.5 days a week.

1.3 Context of the Study

Singapore in the past two decades has undergone tremendous changes in the educational arena. Schooling in Singapore has become very competitive even at the pre-primary school level. Academic emphasis is so obvious that some early childhood programs include tests and examinations to see if children are learning

from the programs. Many parents are anxious and concerned about the quality of the early childhood programs received by their young.

According to data supplied by the Singapore Census of Population (1990), of the children below 12 years of age, 60% are below 7 years of age. Therefore the provision of child care for children below 7 years of age is vital to Singapore in meeting the needs of such a large percentage of children.

In 1981, there was a total of 1,166 children enrolled in child care centres in Singapore but by 1995, the number had increased to 25,800 children. In less than one and a half decades the number increased by nearly 25 fold which is a significant increase in a relatively short space of time. This figure is expected to continue to increase ("Big money", 1994). The Community Development Minister of Singapore (Abdullah Tarmugi) announced recently that the number of child care centres will increase in the future. The present figure of 376 centres of 30,900 places will increase to 495 centres of 37,000 places by the year 2000. This clearly demonstrates that child care centres will come to play an even more significant role in child care provision for parents in Singapore in the near future.

1.3.1 Increase in female participation in the labor market

Since the independence of Singapore in 1965, there has also been an increase in female participation in the labor market. Many of these women are in the age group where they are likely to be mothers ("Study Effects", 1996). Thus to support women's participation in the labor force, the Ministry of Community

Development in Singapore has been directing and advocating the development of child care centres in Singapore since the early 1980s.

To further support women's participation in the labor force, the government in 1987 decided to subsidize the cost of centre-based child care. These child care subsidies gave rise to a huge increase in the supply of child care centres. In 1981, there was a total of 1,166 children enrolled in child care centres, but by 1995 the number had increased to 25,800 children of whom nearly half were enrolled in private centres.

This national effort by the Ministry of Community Development is aimed at providing an affordable and sufficient number of child care centres to meet the growing needs of working parents, as well as to encourage married couples to have more children. This is part of the government's strategy towards "economic self-sufficiency and economic growth" (Feeney, 1992, p.167).

1.3.2 Forms of subsidy

In 1987, the government introduced two major forms of child care subsidy. For the non-profit organizations and workplace centres, three kinds of support are given. Firstly, a one-time subsidy is given to cover the cost of conversion of space to child care use and for physical facilities and equipment. Secondly, an expansion grant is given to those centres that are increasing in size. Thirdly, additional subsidies are available for centres that are incurring losses for the first

few months. According to the statistics of 1994, a total of \$677,384 in capital grants was disbursed to these non-profit organizations and employers.

The second type of subsidy is available for all users of child care services and it comes in the form of fee subsidies for parents using the child care services. This is only a partial subsidy. For all full time child care programs, parents receive a subsidy of \$150 and for half day programs \$75 per month. These subsidies go directly to the child care centres and they are fixed regardless of the fees charged by the child care centres. This subsidy is only available for up to the fourth child of every household. A total of \$31,627,310 was disbursed to parents as child care subsidies in 1994.

1.4 Legislation Governing Child Care Centres

The Ministry of Community Development (MCD) regulates all the child care centres in Singapore and mandatory powers are given to the MCD to supervise the child care programs in Singapore.

All child care centres in Singapore are governed by the Child Care Centres Act and regulations. In this Child Care Centre Act of Chapter 37A 1988 (S'pore), s.160/88 (129) all child care centres have to be licensed and to adhere to the criteria prescribed in the Act and Regulations for the operation of Child Care Centres. Hence, explicit regulations and rules are given to all child care providers in Singapore and they are strictly complied to by all.

1.5 Main Providers of Child Care Services

There are five main child care services in Singapore. They are the People's Association (PA); National Trade Union Congress (NTUC); Voluntary Organizations (VO); Workplace centres and Private centres.

An examination of the figures compiled in 1995 reveals that private child care centres have the most children enrolled compared to the other four organizations. Private centres have a total of 11,098 children enrolled compared to 1,174 children enrolled in PA, 2,057 in NTUC, 7,617 in VO and 1,560 in Workplace child care centres. Private centres make up about 60% of the total number of centres in Singapore. Their growth compared to other countries is also relatively high. In 1981, there were only 66 children enrolled in private child care centres but by 1995 this figure had increased by 168% to 11,098. Private child care centre supervisors are the subject of investigation in this study since it is the private child care sector that is the major provider of child care in Singapore and this trend is likely to continue in the future.

1.6 Training received by supervisors

According to the Ministry of Community Development, a qualified supervisor must be at least advanced trained with any of the recognized institutions in Singapore. Such a qualification for a supervisor seems minimal, considering that the course is only 18 to 20 weeks long on a part-time basis; twice weekly and three hours per session. The leadership roles that a supervisor needs to perform are usually very demanding. A supervisor's job does not only consist of

implementing programs (such as the curriculum) but also taking charge of the day to day operation of the centre. This means that the child care supervisor has to bear the responsibility of being the administrator, the finance manager, the public relations officer (to handle parents and staff), maintenance officer (in terms of health and safety), as well as the program coordinator (curriculum and the on-going activities) etc. This is a multi-task job that requires much expertise and is very demanding.

1.7 Significance of the Study

As stated previously, economic considerations largely determined the growth of the child care system in Singapore. Also, "...the original task force recommendations stated that day care of children be recognized as a developmental service with tremendous potential for influencing and strengthening the lives of children and families" (cited in Feeney, 1992, pp162-163).

However, it must be recognised that unlike other commodity services, providing a child care service is not a simple task. The primary clients are young children whose healthy development depends greatly on the quality of care received in their early years. Where and how they spend their early years are important determinants of healthy growth. Thus it is vital that young children receive high quality care.

However, the child care subsidy, together with the growing need for child care services, has encouraged many to enter the child care business, while possessing little prior knowledge of the operation and management of child care centres. Therefore it is important for the supervisors of child care centres to be knowledgeable about the roles that they need to play in the daily operation of their child care centres.

Child care centre supervisors are the people who directly influence the quality of child care services provided in the centres under their charge (Caruso, 1991). One of the main factors that contributes to quality service delivery in child care centres is the part that supervisors have to play as leaders (Schweinhart, 1988; Jording, Richardson & Flanigan, 1992). Efficient and effective leadership in child care centres directly contributes to the quality of child care service in the centres (Hayden, 1996).

Compared to our Western counterparts, the training received by early educators in Singapore, especially the ones in supervisory roles, is minimal. The duration of these training courses varies from six to nine months on a part-time basis (usually three hours per session, twice a week). In view of the considerable responsibilities that a supervisor of a child care centre needs to take in relation to these young children and their families, and the leadership roles that they are required to perform, such training would appear to be barely adequate. Also, many people may have entered this industry with a view to making profits but lacking any early childhood knowledge or experience.

Therefore it is important to investigate the range and complexity of roles that these child care supervisors are required to fulfill and the preparation that they have received to equip them for this task.

1.8 The purpose of this study

1. To investigate and describe the leadership roles that child care centre supervisors need to perform in the day to day running of their centres from the perspective of the child care supervisors.

2. To use this information to contribute to potential child care centre supervisors' knowledge of the requirements of their leadership roles.

Thus the research question for this study is :

What are the child care centre supervisors' perceptions of their leadership roles in Singapore?

1.9 Glossary of terms

In the context of this study, the major terms are defined as follows:

Leadership roles:

Roles relating to the total operation of the centre such as purchasing, budgeting, record keeping, filling out forms and writing reports dealing with technical aspects of running the centre (Hayden, 1996) and incorporating managerial and educational leadership roles as well as providing motivation, advocacy and vision.

Managerial leadership roles:

Roles that deal with staffing issues; recruiting, staff training, job orientation, staff conflict, staff appraisals etc. They also deal with client oriented issues; working with parents, children and the community and officials; as well as public relations.

Educational leadership roles:

These include roles concerning programming; planning, “vision sharing”, quality service delivery and efforts to challenge and encourage staff.

Supervisors:

People who are in charge of the day to day running of the child care centres.

Child Care centres:

According to the Child Care Act of Chapter 37A 1988 (S'pore), s 160/88 (29), a child care centre is defined as “any premises at which five or more children who are under the age of seven years are habitually received for the purposes of care and supervision during part of the day or for longer periods”.

Pre-primary education:

Any form of education which children receive prior to entering into primary schools.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, leadership is defined and the art of leadership discussed. The roles and responsibilities of child care supervisors in Singapore are discussed and a model of management functions which may be applied to the leadership roles of child care supervisors is presented. Finally, recent child care research related to the leadership roles of child care supervisors is presented.

It is important to investigate the leadership roles of those people in charge of child care centres in Singapore, since child care centres are increasing by “leaps and bounds” but quality service delivery is by no means assured (see appendix 1 for statistical growth of child care centres in Singapore).

2.1 Leadership Defined

Many people hold different perceptions and understanding of what constitutes a good leader. But what exactly is a leader? Following are some definitions of leadership.

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader” (Depree, 1989, p.11).

“ Outstanding leaders are future oriented. They love to dream about what could

be and involve others in their dreams” (Manske, 1990, p.3).

“...leadership is a relationship that exists between persons in a social situation, and persons who are leaders in one situation may not necessarily be leaders in other situations” (Adair, 1984, p. 7).

“The best of all leaders is the one who helps people so that , eventually, they don’t need him...The best leader doesn’t say much, but what he says carries weight. When he is finished with his work, the people say, “It happened naturally” ...Lao Tzu (cited in Maccoby, 1981, p.12).

“The seed of good leadership comes from a combination of personal skills, talent, and character” (Manning & Haddock, 1989, p.9).

“Effective leadership depends upon the agreed meanings which members of the organization attribute to particular behaviors” (Smith & Peterson, 1988, p.196).

“Vision is the commodity of leaders, and power is their currency” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p.18).

“Leadership can be described as a process by which one person sets certain standards and expectations and influences the actions of others to behave in what is considered a desirable direction” (Rodd, 1994, p.2).

2.1.1 The Art of Leadership

Many believe that leaders are leaders from birth and there is no such thing as training to be a leader. "Leadership skills are ...a matter of birth. ...No amount of learning or yearning can change your fate" (Bernis & Nanus, 1985, p.5). However, this "Great Man" (Bernis & Nanus, 1985,p.5) theory of leadership fails to define leadership when many great events of history have made leaders out of ordinary people (Adiar, 1984).

According to Max Depree, leadership is an art and not a subject that can be learnt but can be cultivated over time and gained through experiences.

There are two important factors that a leader in any organization needs to be aware of in order to be successful; to strike a balance between work performance and work relationship (Rodd, 1994). These two factors are inseparable as each affects the other. Effective leadership in early childhood settings is therefore to provide high quality service delivery and to ensure a positive working environment.

There are four major leadership styles which can be found in early childhood settings (Neugebauer, 1985). These are the task oriented leader; the relationship oriented leader; the motivator leader who places equal emphasis on task and relationship; and the unleader who places little emphasis on both task and relationships. According to Neugebauer, the democratic motivator

style of leadership is the most desirable kind of leadership and the most successful type in early childhood settings.

2.1.2 Characteristics of Motivator Leaders

Motivator Leaders are usually warm and flexible in their dealings with people and associates. This characteristic enables them to lead with the full support of their subordinates. They are also sensitive and creative, as well as always giving encouragement and frequent feedback to their subordinates. They usually show confidence in the abilities of their staff and trust their capabilities. These leaders are also characterized as hardworking and very committed and dedicated to their jobs.

Motivator leaders also involve the staff in goal setting and in important decision making. They encourage staff to evaluate their own performance and are usually supportive and non-judgmental of their staff members. These leaders facilitate two-way communication channels with staff and make sure that these channels of communication are always open. They are also confident in their own decision making and problem solving and are not fearful of risk taking (Rodd, 1994). All these characteristics mentioned are usually found in a Motivator leader of an early childhood setting. They are people who are able to balance work performance with concern for people and working relationships and morale in the centre.

2.1.3 Key Elements of Effective Leadership:

The three key elements of effective leadership are:

1.) The provision of vision and challenging members to achieve it

“Vision is...the first critical dimension of effective leadership. Without vision there is little or no sense of purpose in an organization.” Vision alone on the part of the leaders is not enough, for they have to appeal to the members also. The members must be able to see the leader’s vision as their own vision, for only then can the vision become a reality (Manske, 1990; Smith & Peterson, 1989; Bernnis & Nanus, 1985).

2.) Development of a team culture

Staff members must feel a sense of belonging to the centre. Such a culture has to be developed in any centre that seeks to be successful. The members must feel proud to be a part of the team. Group cohesiveness and pride is necessary for outstanding performance (Manske, 1990).

3.) Facilitate and encourage communication

“Just as any relationship requires honest and open communication to stay healthy, so the relationships within corporations improve when information is shared accurately and freely” (Depree, 1989, p.101).

In the words of Depree, “Leadership is an art “...a belief, a condition of the heart...The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice” (Depree, 1989, p.148).

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities of Child Care Supervisors in Singapore

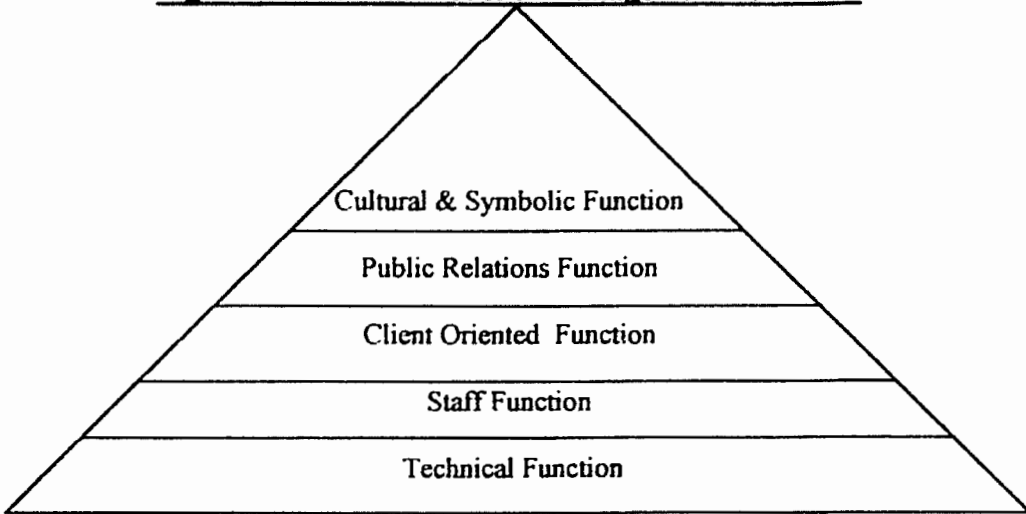
In recent years, a guide book has been introduced to all potential child care operators in Singapore explaining how to set up a child care centre. Although very explicit rules and regulations are given to child care operators concerning the physical set up of the centres (see Appendix 3 for details) little information is provided on the roles and responsibilities of a supervisor in the operation and management of a child care centre in Singapore, let alone in the provision of leadership.

The job description of a child care centre supervisor provided by the Ministry of Community Development in the guide book is that the “main job responsibilities (of supervisors) are to plan and direct the programme of a child care centre”. However, empirical observation would indicate that the roles and responsibilities of a child care centre supervisor in Singapore go far beyond the planning and direction of the centre programme.

2.2.1 Roles and Responsibilities of Managers

Sergiovanni (1984) provides a hierarchical model of management functions which may be applied to the leadership roles of child care supervisors.

Fig 1. Hierarchical Model of Management Functions



According to Sergiovanni (1984), there are five hierarchical levels of management functions that a child care centre supervisor may face. The basic level needs to be fulfilled before a supervisor can move on to the next level. All these functions are likely to be incorporated into the leadership roles reported by the child care supervisors.

1. Technical Function

The most basic level is the technical level which includes responsibilities relating to financial management, record keeping, developing the centre's time-table and recruiting staff. "Technical management represents the basic activities which form the foundation upon which all other management activities must rest. It is not possible to run an effective centre if technical aspects have been neglected or mismanaged" (Hayden, 1996, p. 880). Thus, it is vital for supervisors to be able to handle all the technical obligations of a child care centre before the supervisor can effectively and efficiently manage the centre.

2.Staffing (Human) Function

The second level is the staffing level which includes responsibilities in relation to team building and professional development, and creating a positive working environment in the centre.

At this level the supervisor takes heed of the working relationship of staff members in the centre. It is the supervisor's role to provide a healthy working environment for the staff in the centre. This means that all staff members in the centre need to feel a part of the centre. "Staff members who feel that this is their centre and their program will feel more self assured and will be more enthusiastic about assuming responsibility" (Sciarra & Dorsey, 1979, p.4).

This is a very important role because the supervisor is "responsible for developing and maintaining a sense of community among staff. Morale will be higher and the environment will be more conducive to growth for all involved if there is a "we" feeling- a sense of belonging" (Sciarra & Dorsey, 1979, p.4).

This "sense of belonging" needs to be developed by the supervisor who manages the centre. Effective teamwork and high morale in child care centres have a direct influence on the quality of services provided in the centre (Rodd, 1994; Haverkamp & Everts, 1992). This is so because the supervisor has a direct impact on the working environment of the staff who in turn contribute to the quality of services provided for the children (Jorde-Bloom, 1988).

3. Client Oriented (Educational) Function

The third level, which is the client oriented function level relates to the business of the centre. It includes responsibilities that cover programming, planning, quality assurance and dealing with families and children.

At this level the supervisor addresses the needs of the clientele group which consists of the children enrolled in the centre and the parents of these children. This is a very important function as it deals with the client-oriented issues, which if not handled properly, may affect the business of the child care centre.

4. Public Relations Function

The fourth level is the public relations function level. It deals with community outreach, net working, dealing with government officials and developing a positive image of the centre that “sells” the centre to potential parents.

“Most administrators (supervisors) do not view public relations as a high priority. They see themselves primarily as educators. That they are . However, as educators of the public, as well as children, parents, and staff, there is a need to be public relations specialists, too” (Gould, 1991,p.61). Many supervisors see themselves establishing “public relations” with the parents of currently enrolled children only and they seldom see the relevance of having external communication with the public in general, or even with prospective parents.

However, there is an increasing need for supervisors to take a more active role in the education of the public concerning child care, in an effort to improve the quality of child care services in general.

5. Cultural and Symbolic Function

The top level of the hierarchy covers the cultural and symbolic functions. At this level, leaders now act as advocates for the early childhood field. They have moved out of their direct service delivery roles and become spokespersons for their profession. This is the highest level of function and the hardest to reach for most supervisors. At this stage, the supervisors create the most impact on the child care profession.

They may also serve as role models for those considering joining the profession (Hayden, 1996). It usually takes many years for a supervisor to “mature” to this level.

2.2.2 Leadership Roles in Child Care Centres

One of the main factors contributing to quality service delivery in child care centres is the part that supervisors have to play as leaders (Schweinhart, 1988; Jording, Richardson & Flanigan, 1992). Efficient and effective leadership in child care centres directly contributes to the quality of the child care services provided in the centres (Hayden, 1996). The supervisor in a child care centre has a direct impact on the kind of working environment existing in the centre.

The quality of the working environment in turn affects the job satisfaction of the staff which ultimately influences the quality of care given in the centre.

Studies have shown that positive interaction between the staff and the leader play an important role in motivating staff to excel in their jobs (cited in Havercamp and Everts, 1992). In order to have “a motivated staff, the centre director (supervisor) must be an effective facilitator who serves as a coach, guide and supporter of staff” (Havercamp & Everts, 1992, p.28). To be an effective and efficient leader, the supervisor has to fulfil multiple roles. They must be able to balance concern for work, task, quality and productivity with concern for people, relationships, satisfaction and morale within the child care setting (Rodd, 1994).

“The director’s role in an early childhood program is both central and complex. In a number of powerful ways, the director influences the factors that determine the quality of services for young children. This causal connection is usually an indirect one. The director shapes the work environment for the teaching staff who in turn provide the direct link to the children. The elements of this equation are important to keep in mind because considerable evidence exists to demonstrate that the quality of the program for children is inextricably tied to the quality of work life for staff ” (Jorde-Bloom, 1988, p. 9) which is largely determined by the leader of the child care setting!

However, many times, early childhood educators are superb “leaders” with little children, but when they rise to leadership positions they lose their

competence (Click & Click, 1990). "Early childhood professionals appear to be somewhat uncomfortable perceiving themselves as directors, coordinators or leaders of groups of adults..." (Rodd, 1994, p.2). This may be due to a lack of necessary training, knowledge and experience so that when they rise to become leaders they experience a great deal of stress. One study carried out in New England "showed that fewer than 10% of supervisors had degrees in early childhood education. Only 50% had prior experience in early childhood education before becoming supervisors" (cited in Caruso, 1991, p.22). Many directors and other supervisors have learnt about their leadership roles through trial and error and thus experience much hardship in the process, with many resigning from the post as a result (Caruso, 1992, p.23).

Other child care professionals, on being promoted to leadership positions, reveal anxiety concerning their role, and this situation is sometimes further aggravated by unclearly defined job descriptions (Rodd, 1994; Hayden 1996).

2.3 Management Roles

There is a paucity of research investigation into the management roles of child care supervisors. One of the few available studies is that by Hayden (1996) who investigated the management of early childhood services in Australia. Hayden surveyed 191 child care centre and preschool directors in Sydney. Fifty-five directors were also chosen at random to be interviewed later.

The following findings were reported:

1. Significant need for administrative training for child care directors

A large percentage (41%) of supervisors were found to have less than 2 years of field experience before taking on the role of supervisor. Many of the supervisors interviewed advised students aspiring to become administrators to teach for at least 2 years before taking on the role.

According to Hayden, leadership is an art that needs time to develop. She implies that staff in child care settings lack inspirational leadership role models which could make an impact on the profession. Hence, there is a need for child care directors to have special training in administration that is specialized to the field of early childhood education.

2. The administrative training should be made more accessible

Only 49% of the supervisors surveyed had taken any in-service courses and out of these 40% had taken one course only. It would seem that the supervisors did not have ready accessibility to leadership training. However, despite the low participation rate, the value attached by the supervisors to these in-service courses was high.

3. The training of administrators should include pre-service and in-service training

The pre-service training should be an introductory course to administration. Only 46% of the respondents viewed pre-service administrative training as useful. The majority of the respondents think that administrative training is

more relevant to practicing administrators. It seems that pre-service student teachers are so concerned with obtaining teaching skills that they may have failed to see the importance of administrative training. Also, in-service training should be made more available to teachers possessing some teaching experience. Post-graduate training in management with recognized credentials should be offered to directors. This kind of training can come in the form of distance education in administrative courses. Such an educational mode would allow the directors to learn administrative skills at their own discretion. This kind of flexibility would allow the directors to meet their work commitments and to study at the same time.

4. Directors seem to be unaware of their job demands

78% of the respondents stated that they knew about their job descriptions before taking on the role as director through informal and formal means such as written job descriptions and watching a predecessor. However, many were not aware of the *substance* of their role. They were not really prepared for the long working hours and the amount of responsibility and work load that was demanded of them. Also many felt that they were best prepared for the technical and human factors of management and there was an implication that many lacked the skills and exposure to lead well in the “higher level” of management function such as in client related issues and in public relations.

5. Constraints faced by directors

The development of a sound administrative course alone will not alleviate the needs of child care supervisors. Other supports (for example higher pay after

training or a recognized credential) need to be present too, for training in administration to be worthwhile for directors

2.4 Early Childhood Research in Singapore

No investigation into the leadership roles of child care supervisors has been conducted in Singapore. In addition, it should be noted that results from western countries may have limited relevance to the Singaporean context due to its distinctively different cultural mix and education system. Therefore this research study seeks to investigate the leadership roles of child care centre supervisors in the Singaporean context.

Related studies that have been conducted in Singapore have investigated factors affecting the quality of preschool programs. Sharpe (1991 and 1996) investigated parental involvement in preschools and how it affects the quality of pre-school education.

There were two phases to her 1991 study. In the first phase, 74 preschool teachers and 935 sets of parents were surveyed to assess teachers' attitudes towards communicating with parents and parents' needs and expectations of preschools and teachers.

There seems to be a difference in expectations between the parents and the teachers. Most parents want the education program to be more academic. They

are very worried that the programs provided in the pre-schools may not sufficiently prepare their children for primary school.

The survey showed that parents want to be more involved in their children's education. Parents want their opinions to be taken notice of and require more information concerning their children's progress. The teachers as a whole also have a problem conveying their concerns about children with language and communication problems to their parents. They are fearful of handling these children, and of telling the parents about their children's problems. This first research phase clearly indicated a need for better communication between parents and teachers.

The second phase sought to investigate the most appropriate pattern of parental involvement for Singaporean preschools. Although both parents and teachers view involvement as desirable, the nature of the involvement has varied support. Teachers do not want parents in schools, other than to provide resources and materials, but parents want to be more involved in the administration and programming of the centres.

However, both groups support the idea of a home program for children, better communication, and organized parental involvement. It will be interesting to ascertain the degree of emphasis placed on parent work by child care supervisors in the present study.

A further analysis of these findings was carried out in terms of income, educational level and age of the parents. Some very interesting results were found. It seems that education level and income of the parents have a direct effect on the willingness of parents to voluntarily participate in the preschools. Parents from the lowest income group and the least educated group did not want to be involved in the preschools of their children. Most of the most educated parents wanted communication with teachers to improve and wanted help with how to teach their children at home.

In Sharpe's 1996 study, 144 teachers and supervisors were asked about their interaction with parents and parental involvement in the day to day activities of the centre. Teachers on the whole were not concerned with parental involvement in the centre, except for assistance with voluntary activities organized for the children. Only 51% of the kindergarten teachers were in favor of such involvement, 81% of whom were senior teachers.

Nevertheless, both studies suggest that better communication needs to be established between pre-school teachers and parents, since many conflicts arise between both parties due to a lack of communication.

Seng Seok Hoon (1994) investigated the quality of Kindergarten education in Singapore in relation to parents' views and expectations. 437 parents from 10 kindergartens were surveyed to ascertain the qualities that parents look for in kindergarten education. The target population for this study consisted of parents with at least one child already enrolled in a kindergarten.

The research findings revealed that:

1. Parents in Singapore place very high value on education. Many parents aspire to their children entering universities and many parents see kindergarten education as a chance for their children to receive formal education before their “real” education in primary school.
2. Kindergarten is regarded as a place whose main function is to let children acquire basic cognitive skills and language competence.
3. Most parents regard quality of service as the most important factor in their choice of a kindergarten for their children. Good facilities, qualified staff and a program that has an academic emphasis are indicators of level of quality. There is also a higher expectation of quality in private kindergartens.
4. All parents are prepared to pay up to 30% more than their current rates for their children’s pre-school education.
5. Parents from high socio-economic status (SES) have a strong preference for private kindergartens, whereas parents from low socio-economic status prefer kindergartens that are run by the government.
6. Parents from the higher income group have more definite expectations of kindergarten education compared to parents from the lower income group.

7. The high SES parents rate cognitive skills, social skills and discipline training in kindergarten as more important than do parents of low SES. Socio-economic factors have an impact on the choices and decisions parents make concerning the type of kindergarten in which they would enroll their children.
8. Most parents in Singapore emphasize the academic side of the curriculum and expect their children to be trained in both languages (Mandarin and English) and to become emotionally and physically independent.

2.5 Conclusion

It is acknowledged that parental values and expectations are likely to have important implications for the leadership roles of child care supervisors. Although the factors influencing pre-schoolers' development in Singapore and parents' and teachers' perspectives of quality service delivery are known, there has been no systematic investigation into the roles and responsibilities of child care supervisors in Singapore. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating the perceptions of child care supervisors in Singapore of their leadership roles.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

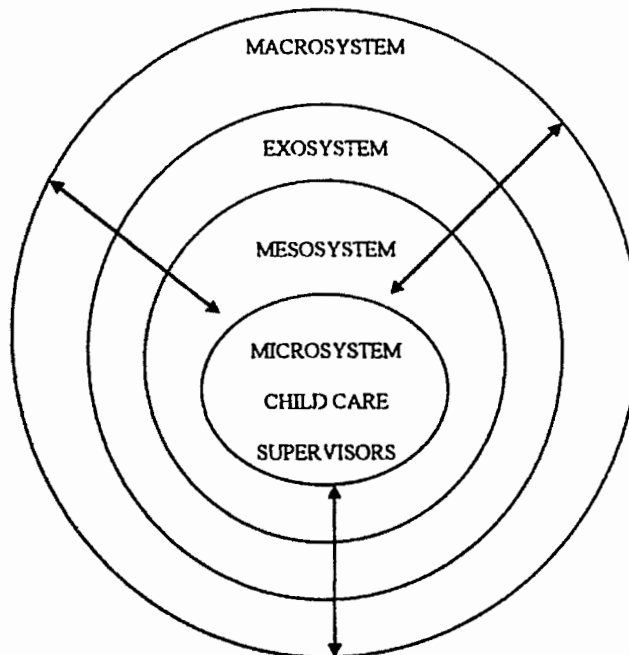
3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework used in this research study. The design of the study, sampling and data collection procedures are also described in detail in this chapter.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

In the context of this study, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been used as the conceptual framework. Bronfenbrenner provides the following four nested systems of influence on an individual's development (fig 2). These systems of influence may also affect a child care centre supervisor's perceptions of his or her leadership role in the centre.

Fig 2. Ecological Systems Context



These four nested systems include the following:

- 1) The Microsystem which involves the roles, activities and relationships in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics.
- 2) The Mesosystem which involves two or more settings that may link together and the differences and different influences between these settings.
- 3) The Exosystem which links together settings and influences that the individual is not actively involved in. Nevertheless, the individual is affected by events created by this setting.
- 4) The Macrosystem which exerts a stronger influence still and contains those societal beliefs and issues that characterize the environment in which the individual lives.

Child care supervisors do not perform their roles in a vacuum but rather within the context of interrelated ecological systems. Applying Brofenbrenner's model to the context in which a child care supervisor works, it may be seen that the leadership roles of child care supervisors are likely to be influenced by the following environmental factors: influences that in turn are likely to be reflected in their perceptions of their roles

3.1.1 Applying the Ecological Systems Theory in a child care setting

- 1) The Microsystem here refers to the supervisors' own personalities, ambitions and aspirations as supervisors.

When a supervisor first becomes the leader of a child care centre, he or she will bring to the centre skills and a set of beliefs which will affect their role in the centre. These "personal qualities" of the supervisor will influence the setting and vice versa.

- 2) The Mesosystem encompasses the working environment in terms of working incentives, working relationships among staff, as well as relationships with parents and the community.

The human and physical resources in the centre play a role in the leadership behavior of the supervisor. This includes the workplace culture of the setting in terms of working relationships among staff members and their communication patterns. The relationship between the parents and the supervisors also plays a part in influencing the style of leadership in the centre.

- 3) The Exosystem refers to the government legislation and policies concerning the supervision and running of child care centres. Government regulations and laws concerning child care administration and service delivery will influence the way a supervisor leads the centre. For example, if the regulations implemented by the government are very

unfavorable for the running of child care centres, this will create stress and conflict in the child care setting which will ultimately affect the service delivery of the centre.

- 4) The Macrosystem includes the societal beliefs and attitudes towards the role of a supervisor of a child care centre, as well as local customs. Societal beliefs and attitudes towards child care affect the way societal members perceive the role of a supervisor. If a society believes that early childhood education is a waste of time for young children, the role of a supervisor of a child care centre may be demeaned. Such a negative attitude towards child care may discourage the profession and affect the way supervisors perceive their roles in the centres.

Each of these systems is interdependent and exerts a large influence on the leadership roles of child care supervisors, as well as on the perceptions that they hold of themselves in these roles, through the interaction of these interdependent systems. Therefore, it is likely that many of these influences will be cited as reasons for child care supervisors holding particular perceptions of their roles, formulating particular policies, prioritizing their time in a particular manner, or of advocating on behalf of their clients or profession and so on. The influence of these ecological systems on child care supervisors' perceptions will be incorporated into the discussion of the results of this study.

3.2 Method of Investigation

3.2.1 Design of the study

This research is a descriptive study which seeks to investigate child care supervisors' perceptions of their leadership roles in Singapore by means of interviews, using an interview schedule specially formulated for the purpose.

"When a researcher wishes to get a picture of present conditions as a normative basis for making judgements or decisions, the approach is generally a descriptive one...Many important decisions in education can be better made if descriptive data are available" (Cook & Lafleur, 1975, p.51).

Therefore this study set out to answer the question; "What are the child care centre supervisors' perceptions of their leadership roles in Singapore?" using descriptive means since descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out 'what is' (Borg & Gall, 1989).

"Descriptive research involves collecting data in order to...answer questions concerning the *current status of the subject*. A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are...Descriptive data are typically collected through a questionnaire survey, *an interview*, or observation" (Gay, 1992, p.13).

Since there has not previously been an investigation into the leadership roles of child care supervisors in Singapore, a guiding interview schedule has had to be especially formulated and developed for this study (Gay, 1992).

Hence in the absence of information on the role that child care supervisors in Singapore play, a descriptive research investigation is appropriate to get a

“picture” of the current perceptions that child care supervisors in Singapore hold in regard to their leadership roles (Gay, 1989).

3.2.2 Sample

In this descriptive study, a small number of participants was selected so that detailed and rich data could be collected (Rissmiller, 1991 and Patton, 1990). This would not be possible with a large scale survey or questionnaire which would also be too expensive and time-consuming (Gay, 1989).

Thus a total of 15 child care supervisors from the private sector comprised the sample for this study.

The sample was chosen on the following criteria: supervisors have had no less than two years’ experience in running a child care centre in Singapore; have no less than five staff members working with them; serve more than thirty children in their centres; work in a private, profit- making centre; and are able to speak clear and fluent English. The criteria were set so that the supervisors selected would be comparable and have had sufficient experience as supervisors to be able to describe all facets of their leadership roles.

3.2.3 Instruments

An interview schedule of questions was used to gather background information and to probe the subjects’ perceptions of their leadership roles.

“Interviews have been used extensively across all disciplines of social sciences and in educational research as a key technique of data collection” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p.79).

The interview schedule followed the suggestions given by Gay (1989) for the construction of an interview guide: “ The interviewer must have a written guide which indicates what questions are to be asked and in what order, and what additional prompting or probing is permitted...In order to obtain standardized comparable data from each subject, all interviews must be conducted in essentially the same manner...Most interviews use a semi-structured approach involving the asking of structured questions following clarifying, unstructured or open-ended questions” (Gay, 1989, p.255).

The interview schedule which was piloted and refined with three child care supervisors was divided into two parts.

Part 1 consisted of the more structured questions which collected the background information on the subjects.

Part 1A collected the information concerning the profile of the subjects (e.g. age, gender, nationality, qualifications, years and types of experience, languages spoken, preparedness, support available etc.).

Part 1B provided information on the centre (e.g. number of groups, children’s ages, staffing details, funding etc.).

Part 2 of the interview schedule directly probed the supervisors' perceptions of their leadership roles in relation to the technical area, human functions, client orientated functions, public relations and cultural and symbolic functions (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Appropriate open-ended questions were used in part 2 to increase the richness of the data collected (Patton, 1990). This was done by encouraging the informants to describe their perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards their leadership roles as supervisors in child care centres. The second part of the interview schedule was in the form of a semi-structured interview. "...It allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p.83).

3.2.4 Procedure

Personal phone calls were made to randomly selected private child care centre supervisors, enquiring about their interest in the study. Only those who were willing and gave approval to be interviewed were included in the study. Consent forms were then given to these supervisors and upon signing these forms, interviews were conducted. An information sheet concerning the nature of the study was also given to these supervisors so that they were clear about the research that was to be conducted and the significance of their contribution as informants.

The subjects were individually interviewed in-depth for about an hour at a convenient venue and time nominated by the informants, ensuring that the setting was free from interruption and distraction. All fifteen participants gave their consent to the researcher for the interview. Data were collected through tape-recording and also spot-note taking.

3.3 Validity

To accurately depict the reality described by the participants, any personal bias, pre-conceptions and knowledge on the researcher's part were recognized. Thus, bracketing was carried out by the researcher prior, post and during each interview to avoid biases and presumptions from intruding into the research findings (Munhall, 1994). No attempt was made to influence the participants' descriptions and their responses were presented clearly from the perspective of the participants. Data from the study were also reviewed by an experienced staff member of a university Early Childhood Studies Department.

3.4 Setting

The data were collected either in the homes of the participants or within the compound of the child care centres. Comfort, privacy, freedom from interruptions and distractions were the main priorities when choosing settings for interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews using the schedule especially formulated for the purpose. (Appendix 2) Data were coded, categorized and presented using descriptive statistics. That is, the data were grouped into categories and presented in tables giving raw scores and percentages and supported with anecdotes from the subjects.

It is acknowledged that the findings of this study will relate only to child care supervisors in the private sector. Other agencies such as the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the People's Association (PA) may have some additional or different influences on their supervisors' leadership roles over and above those discovered in this study. However, due to the high concentration of private child care centres in Singapore, any differences are likely to be minor.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the context of this study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which was applied to the roles of child care supervisors. Descriptive methodology was used to investigate child care supervisors' perceptions of their leadership roles in Singapore by means of semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule specifically formulated for the purpose and piloted with a small number of child care supervisors.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected by means of semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule. Part 1 of the interview schedule collected background information on the subjects to provide a profile of the child care supervisors (e.g. age, gender, nationality, qualifications, years and type of experience, languages spoken, preparedness, support available etc). Part 2 of the interview schedule directly probed child care centre supervisors' perceptions of their leadership role in relation to the technical, staffing, educational, public relations and cultural symbolic functions in their centres (as mentioned in chapter two). This chapter therefore reports the supervisors' perceptions and attitudes towards their leadership role in their centres. Information concerning the supervisors' experiences, training, preparedness and commitment to the profession is then reported. The effect on the child care industry in Singapore of these mirosystem factors is also discussed.

4.1 Profile of Child Care Supervisors

Table 4.1.1 Age Group of supervisors interviewed (number of years old)

Age Group	26-30	31-35	36-39	40-45	46-50
15(100%)	6 (40%)	4 (26.66%)	1 (6.66%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.66%)

Table 4.1.2 Educational Level

Educational Level	Intermediate Certificate	Advanced certificate	Diploma	Degree	Master Degree
15 (100%)	1 (6.66%)	6 (40%)	6 (40%)	1 (6.6%)	1 (6.66%)

Table4.1.3 Number of years as supervisor in child care centre

Category	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years
15 (100%)	4 (26.66%)	4 (26.66%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.33%)	2 (13.33%)

Table 4.1.4 Number of years as teacher before becoming a supervisor

Category	0-1 years	2-3 years	4-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years
15 (100%)	2 (13.33%)	6 (40%)	4 (26.66%)	2 (13.33%)	1 (6.66%)

Table 4.1.5 Nationality and Languages spoken

Category	Mandarin and English	English, Tamil & Malay	English
Singaporean and all females (15) (100%)	13 (86.66%)	1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)

It seems from table 4.1 that the largest number of supervisors are relatively young for most of them are 35 years old and below (66.66%). The supervisors on the whole are trained, as most of them (about 93.33%) have attained an Advanced Certificate and above in child care. The cohort overall reported some experience as a supervisor for all of the respondents reported three or more years of experience but more than half (53.33%) of the supervisors had worked

in the field for only 1-3 years before taking on the role of a supervisor. It appears that the demand for supervisors is much greater than the number of experienced staff available, which explains why many supervisors have taken on the position with very little experience. This also explains why so many supervisors take on the role of supervisor at a young age (66.66% of the respondents are below 36 years old).

The training of the supervisors in Singapore is very minimal compared to their counterparts in Western countries where supervisors are usually university trained and this training takes about three to four years of full time study. Most of the supervisors in Singapore have received training in the Advanced or Diploma courses but these training programs are usually on a part-time basis. At present, the in-service training courses provided by the institutions for Advanced training in Early Childhood Studies are about 6 months' duration. They are all on a part-time basis and operate for 6-8 hours weekly, depending on the courses that are taken. The diploma training is of approximately two years' duration and is also on a part-time basis, operating for around 6-9 hours weekly.

The large majority (93.33%) of the supervisors speak two or more languages and all supervisors speak English. This is because English is the official language in Singapore and the government implements a policy of bilingualism in Singapore so that most Singaporeans speak at least two languages. This may explain why the parents in Singapore put so much emphasis on their children acquiring language competence (Seng Seok Hoon,

1994) especially in English since it is the official language. Most of the programs introduced in these centres place an emphasis on English with more than half of the curriculum time being spent on activities or lessons that concentrate on building the children's command of English. More teachers are engaged in teaching English- related subjects than mandarin-related subjects in child care and kindergarten settings.

Also, all of the supervisors interviewed were females which suggests that the child care industry in Singapore is dominated by females. Very few males want to be involved in a profession which is pre-dominantly 'monopolised' by females and risk social stigma (Lambert, 1992).

4.2 Preparation of Supervisors for the leadership role

The supervisors were questioned regarding their awareness of their responsibilities, preparation for the leadership role and prior training before taking on the role of supervisor. Some subjects gave more than one response and all were recorded.

Table 4.2.1 Awareness of responsibilities before becoming a supervisor

Categories	Number of responses	Percentage
No understanding	7	46.66%
Have previous training	2	13.33%
Already have experience	6	40%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.2.2 Aspects of supervisors' role most prepared for

Aspects	Number of responses
Prepared for all things	6
Interpersonal relationships; parents and teachers	5
Curriculum planning and teaching	4
Office work	3
Total	18

Table 4.2.3 Aspects of supervisor's role least prepared for

Aspects	Number of responses
Problems with parental demands and co-operation	6
Problems with staff; communication, conflict and management	6
Nothing	3
Handling Ministry of Development	2
Paper work	1
Total	18

Table 4.2.4 Usefulness of the administrative training received by the supervisors

Categories	Number of responses	%
No training, on the job training	4	26.66%
Yes but not helpful	10	66.66%
Yes very helpful	1	6.67%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.2.5 Areas in which supervisors want training

Categories	Number of responses	%
Training in staff management	8	53.33%
Training in working with parents	3	20%
Training in child management and curriculum planning	3	20%
Training in administrative skills	1	6.66%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.2.1 reveals that the majority of the supervisors (46.6%) possessed very little understanding of their leadership role before becoming the supervisor of their centres. Rodd (1994), Caruso (1991) and Hayden (1996) reported a similar finding of most supervisors of child care centres having limited knowledge of their responsibilities before taking on the leadership role in their centres. Many supervisors learnt their “trade” through trial and error. Very few were given training as supervisors prior to them taking on the role as indicated in Table 4.2.1 where only 13.33% of the supervisors received training in the centres before becoming the supervisors of their centres. Thus, many experienced hardship and difficulties in the process (Caruso, 1992). This is indicated by the following response when asked what the supervisor knew of the role before taking up the position.

“Nothing at all, I have to learn everything by myself even write up my own roles and duties, it was not easy at first...”

Most supervisors (6 responses) thought that they were prepared for all things

but this may have been due to the fact that they had received such minimal training (indicated in Table 4.2.2) and as a result had prepared themselves mentally for every sort of task expected of a supervisor. Other supervisors (5 responses) were most prepared for working with parents and teachers. In Singapore, the supervisors are required to work very closely with parents and staff in the centres and hence it is important for them to prepare themselves well to work in partnership with parents and teachers. Since many supervisors (86.67%) were teachers for more than two years before becoming supervisors (see Table 4.2.4) many would already be familiar with the importance of working closely with parents and colleagues before becoming supervisors.

Notwithstanding, many supervisors (12 responses) reported being least prepared for problems arising with parents and staff. It seems that issues of dealing with staff and parents are most pressing for the supervisors. This is also reflected in Table 4.2.5 where a large percentage (73.33%) of the supervisors wanted more training in management skills with an emphasis on training in interpersonal skills; dealing with staffing issues and working with parents. This is put forward by this response:

“Yes more training in human resource management especially in handling difficult staff and parents.”

Many supervisors revealed that they received very little help in their administrative training (66.66%) and some mentioned that they had received no administrative training before becoming a supervisor (26.66%). The majority (93.33%) of the supervisors were either not trained or sufficiently well trained

in administrative skills before becoming supervisors of their centres. It seems that insufficient administrative training is given to child care supervisors which in turn may affect the smooth running of their centres. In the words of one supervisor,

“The Advanced course is not sufficient, the day to day running of the centres is very different from the course, it is also too wide and does not cover enough things!”

4.3 Technical Function

The supervisors were questioned on the technical function of their leadership role. All of the supervisors mentioned that they are required to deal with fee setting, budgeting, record keeping, report writing, hiring and firing of staff and developing schedules and rosters. However, some supervisors delegate some of the administrative tasks to their assistant supervisors or senior teachers.

Table 4.3.1 Technical Tasks

Category	Manage it themselves	Leave it to others
Fee Setting	15 (100%)	0
Budgeting	15 (100%)	0
Record Keeping	13 (86.67%)	2 (6.66%)
Writing reports	13 (86.67%)	2 (6.66%)
Hiring and Firing Staff	15 (100%)	0
Developing Schedules and Rosters	10 (66.66%)	5 (33.34%)

As shown in Table 4.3.1, most supervisors manage all of the technical tasks themselves and this may explain why many supervisors suffer “burn out”. Many of the supervisors report not having sufficient staff to whom they can delegate some of the administrative tasks.

4.4 Staffing Function

The next set of questions in the interview schedule probed the ways in which the supervisors handle the staffing function of their leadership role. The four components of the staffing function which were looked at specifically were ways in which the supervisors handle team building, in-service training, resolving staff conflict and maintenance of a positive working environment. Some of the subjects gave more than one response and all were recorded.

Table 4.4.1 Ways in which supervisors encourage team building

Categories	Number of responses
Informal: have lunch with staff, give moral support to staff, encourage open communication and discussion	12
Formal: workshops, meetings, encourage team work like having buddy system	7
None, difficult to talk to staff	1
Total	20

Table 4.4.2 Types of in-service training provided by the supervisors

Categories	Number of responses	%
Formal training such as giving workshops and having discussion groups	2	13.33%
Informal training usually done during spare time and normally to orientate new teachers	8	53.33%
Sending the teachers out for training or inviting outside trainers to train the teachers	5	33.3%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.4.3 Ways of Managing Staff Conflict

Category	Number of Response	%
Mediator role; help staff to solve their conflict	8	53.33%
Non-involvement; encourage staff to solve their own conflicts	6	40%
No conflict	3	20%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.4.4 Ways to maintain a positive working environment

Category	Number of response
Informal outings: lunches, barbecue, picnic, function, trips etc.	11
Looking after the welfare of the staff and showing concern for them	8
Recognition of staff effort	4
Encourage team work	3
Being a role model	3
Staff meetings	2
Encourage staff development	2
Shorter working hours	1
Higher pay	1
Showing impartiality	1
Total	37

It may be seen from Table 4.4.1 that the majority of the supervisors encourage team building through informal methods such as having lunch with staff and talking to the staff (12 responses). Very few of the supervisors (7 responses) enhance team building through formal ways such as workshops and having a buddy system in the centres. This may suggest that the supervisors are not very aware of other strategies that may be used to enhance team building. This is suggested by the following responses,

“All the staff are co-operative, any problem they will discuss with me, normally don't have much problem...”

“... go for staff outing, depends on the time.”

All of the supervisors interviewed provided some training for their staff either through formal or informal ways or by sending the staff out for training. Only a few supervisors (13.33%) gave in-house training themselves, the majority of the supervisors providing training informally (53.33%) or sending staff out for training (33.33%). Also, most of the informal in-house training is conducted for new teachers, whereby the senior teachers orientated new teachers to the centre.

Table 4.4.3 reveals that a large number of supervisors (53.33%) attempt to solve staff conflict by playing the mediator role while 40% of the supervisors encourage non-involvement in staff conflict, believing that it is better for the staff to solve their own problems. Thus the two dominant beliefs held by child care supervisors in relation to staff conflict resolution is in mediation or non-involvement.

Informal outings such as having lunches or barbecues have been quoted the most by supervisors as strategies to maintain a positive working environment (11 responses). Another popular strategy is showing care and concern for staff as a way to maintain a positive working environment in the centre (8 responses) (Table 4.4.4).

It has been found that a fun-filled, challenging and caring working environment is fundamental to the building of a cooperative and empowering spirit among staff members and their centre supervisors (Havercamp & Everts, 1992). Hence the findings suggest that the supervisors in Singapore realise the importance of building a positive working environment which is essential for the success of their centres.

4.5 Client Oriented (Educational) Function

A series of questions was asked to ascertain the perceptions that supervisors have concerning their responsibilities towards the needs of parents and children; programs that are implemented in the centres; and assuring the quality of care in the centres. Some subjects gave more than one response and all were recorded.

**Table 4.5.1 Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility in addressing
the needs of parents and children**

Category	Number of responses	%
Building rapport with parents; know parents' needs and partnership with parents	10	24.4%
Encouraging open communication with parents; talking to them about the centre and their children, giving feedback about their children's progress	9	22%
Informal parent education; talk to the parents about child discipline and parenting skills	6	14.6%
Counselling parents; give advice to parents who have problems with children	6	14.6%
Educating children and providing a holistic curriculum for the children	5	12.2%
Formal Education: workshops and mini lectures to improve parenting skills	3	7.3%
Helping parents with special needs children	2	4.9%
Total	41	100%

Table 4.5.2 Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility concerning the program in the centre

Category	Number of responses
Academic emphasis	8
Meeting parental needs	5
Appropriate early childhood program; recognition of individual uniqueness, importance of play to children , cultivation of positive attitude	4
Teaching survival skills	3
Evaluation, discussion and innovation of program with the staff	3
Leave programming to head teachers and assistant supervisor	1
Total	24

Table 4.5.3 Supervisors' perceptions of their responsibility in terms of assuring the quality of care in the centre

Category	Number of responses	%
Communicating with the parents; encouraging suggestions from the parents about the centre, getting feedback from the parents, encouraging partnership with the parents	10	25%
Regular monitoring and checking in the centres	8	20%
Ensuring that the program and the centre is well run; maintaining a clean environment and the availability of teaching materials	7	17.5%
Ensuring the quality of the teaching staff; employing trained teachers, sending staff for courses and training the teachers	7	17.5%
Doing surveys and having checklists and discussion with the teachers to evaluate the centre's and the children's progress	5	12.5%
Positive teacher-child relationship	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

In addition to quality child care assurance, scrutiny of the above Tables reveals that many supervisors (10) mentioned that it was their responsibility to meet the needs of parents by building rapport with parents and forming a partnership

with them. Many also mentioned communicating openly with parents and giving them feedback about their children as one strategy to address the needs of parents (9). Most supervisors reported meeting parental needs through informal means like talking to them and telling them about parenting skills, child discipline and the progress of their children. There were three supervisors only who mentioned using formal ways to meet the needs of parents by providing workshops and mini lectures. Five supervisors mentioned that they met the children's needs through the implementation of a wholistic curriculum. Only two supervisors mentioned the provision of help to parents with special needs children. This is not surprising since the integration of special needs children into normal classes is still not very prevalent in Singapore. Most of the supervisors feel that the way to meet parents' needs is through open communication and the building of warm rapport with them. Only six supervisors mentioned being available to the parents and acting as counselors to the parents.

Quite a few supervisors (8 responses) think that their responsibility towards the program implemented in their centre is to ensure that the curriculum has an academic emphasis. Four supervisors only mentioned implementing a developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum as their responsibility. Sharpe (1991) and Seng (1994) in their studies also reported that the pre-schools in Singapore (which include the childcare centres and kindergartens) place a very heavy emphasis on academic performance. This seems to be the dominant culture in Singapore which in turn is likely to influence the supervisors' programming. A few supervisors also mentioned that meeting

parental desires influences programming in their centres. All the supervisors are in private child care centres and meeting parental demands is vital to the success of their business. Only three supervisors mentioned that constant evaluation, discussion and innovation of the programs with the teachers in the centre is necessary to ensure quality. This suggests that childcare supervisors in Singapore do not see evaluation and innovation of their programs as important as making their programs academically based and meeting parental wishes. This is reflected in the following responses,

“It is necessary to prepare the children for future academic pressure because if you don’t prepare them now to face reality it may cause stress to the children in the future anyway.”

“Have to prepare the children for school, need to prepare them for our educational system and also to show the parents that you know what they want and try to compromise with their expectations.”

These responses suggest that the supervisors are conforming to the demands of parents and society to provide early childhood programs that may not be appropriate to the developmental level of some young children, since there is an overwhelming emphasis on academics in Singapore.

There is also very keen competition among parents to obtain a place for their children in good primary schools. Many parents are so anxious to gain a place

for their children in popular schools that they will queue outside the school in the very early hours of the morning in order to enroll their children. The anxiety to secure places in good schools does not only apply to primary schools, for parents are also concerned that their children should receive a pre-school education which will prepare them well for success in primary school. Some parents are so anxious to secure a place in popular pre-schools (e.g. childcare centres and kindergartens) that mothers enroll their children as soon as they become pregnant. Parents in Singapore do not seem to mind paying expensive school fees (as high as a \$1000 a month) for their young children as long as they are convinced that the programmes in these schools are good and will prepare their children for primary school. Many parents in Singapore are quite prepared to pay for "extras such as better child-teacher ratios, and learning programmes for music, reading and writing and speech and drama". For many parents the main aims of pre-school education are twofold: to acquire language and social competence for Primary One (" \$1000 a month", 1994). This phenomenon further explains why there is a very real incentive for child care supervisors to concede to parental demands concerning programming in their centres.

Table 4.5.3 further shows that accommodating parental needs is an important factor in order to ensure quality in the centres. Many supervisors (66.66%) mentioned that communicating with parents and encouraging feedback from parents is imperative to ensure quality in childcare centres. This finding demonstrates the influence of the microsystem and illustrates how parents' opinions and beliefs influence the supervisors' perceptions of what constitutes

a high quality child care centre. This may be dangerous because the supervisors may exchange suitable programs or activities for parents' approval of an alternative which may not be appropriate for young children. For example, many parents in Singapore do not believe that children can learn through play and this may have an effect on the types of programs that are "allowed" in the centres in which their children are enrolled. The following response indicates this,

"Need to have an academic emphasis, I am willing to try new things with the programs to see if it works. If the parents like it, it is fine by me."

Some supervisors (17.5% responses) mentioned that having trained staff as teachers is an important factor for ensuring quality in the centres. This is an encouraging trend because it is generally accepted that quality care depends on the calibre of the teaching staff. However, 46.66% of supervisors commented that maintaining the cleanliness of the centres and the availability of teaching resources are the most important factors in ensuring quality care in the centres. It would seem that these supervisors equate the physical resources of a centre to the quality of care provided.

Other supervisors (20%) stated that constant monitoring and checking in the centres to see how the staff and children are progressing is essential to maintain quality of care. Many supervisors claim that it is important for them to be available in person in the centres to ensure quality care, as explained by these supervisors.

“I need to keep an eye on them like a police woman and make whatever changes are necessary to uphold the standards in the centre.”

“Is important to be physically here and be available to make sure that the centre is running well.”

Five supervisors reported that they used formal strategies such as surveys, checklists and discussion groups to evaluate the progress of the centres and the children. It would seem that formal methods are not popular among childcare supervisors in Singapore to evaluate the quality of care provision. Only three supervisors stated that maintaining positive teacher-child relationships is a factor contributing to quality care in their centres. This seems to suggest that the teacher-child relationship is not a high priority for the supervisors when it comes to quality care provision in the child care centres. Studies have found that positive teacher-child relationships have a role to play in the delivery of quality childcare programmes. Also, research has shown that quality childcare includes an environment where the carer nurtures the children and interacts with them positively (Phillips, McCartney & Scarr, 1987).

4.6 Public Relations Function

The next set of questions in the interview schedule was designed to determine the perceptions of the supervisors of their role as public relations officers in their centres. Questions were asked about community outreach dealings with government officials and their promotion of the services that they provide: a role that fits within the exo- and macrosystems context (Bronfennbrenner,

Table 4.6.1 Community Outreach

Category	Number of Responses	%
Yes, rarely about once a year	1	6.67%
Yes, only once a year	6	33.33%
No, never	8	60%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.6.2 Dealing with Government officials over matters concerning the centres

Response	Number	%
Yes, always (with MCD)	15	100%

Table 4.6.3 Promoting the centres' services to the public

Response	Number	%
Yes, occasionally	2	13.33%
Yes, rarely	4	26.66%
No, never	9	60.00%
Total	15	100.00%

The majority of the supervisors (60%) do not perform any community outreach for their centres. Only a small percentage of the supervisors (33.33%) reported providing a community outreach program once previously, while the remainder

reported never (60%) or rarely (6.7%) performing community outreach.

Clearly, childcare supervisors in Singapore do not perceive community outreach to be part of their role as indicated by the following comment:

“No, have never done it before, don’t see the need of doing community outreach for the centre.”

All the supervisors stated that they have had some dealings with government officials, mostly with the Ministry of Community Development (MCD). Compulsory visits are made by the MCD officials to check on the child care centres and centres are required to provide monthly reports on the number of children receiving subsidies from the MCD. Such contact with government officials is mandatory.

Most of the supervisors do not promote the services of their centres to the public (60%). A very small percentage of supervisors (27.7%) hold an annual open-house to introduce their centres to potential parents. Other supervisors promote their services occasionally, giving bi-yearly newsletters or distributing brochures to the public. It is clear that supervisors do not need to resort to advertisements to attract potential clients, as promotion of the centres’ services is usually accomplished through word of mouth. This suggests that the demand for childcare services in Singapore is so great that supervisors do not need to use advertisements and other promotional gimmicks to sell their services. This is reinforced by the following response,

“ Never need to advertise, people knew about the centre through word of mouth. Anyway, there is a long waiting list for the centre.”

4.7 Cultural Symbolic Functions

The supervisors were also questioned regarding their perceptions of themselves as spokespersons for the early childhood profession in Singapore. The supervisors were asked if they had given any public presentations, used mass media to promote quality childcare in Singapore, or belonged to any professional organisations. If they were members of professional organisations, they were asked if they held any executive positions.

Table 4.7.1 Active spokesperson for Early Childhood Profession

Response	Number	%
Yes, always	1	6.66%
Yes, occasionally	1	6.66%
Yes, rarely	2	13.33%
No	11	73.33%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.7.2 Public Presentations concerning the Profession

Response	Number	%
Yes, always	1	6.66%
Yes, only once	3	20.00%
No	11	73.33%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.7.3 Using Mass Media to promote Quality Child Care

Response	Number	%
Never (total)	15	100%

Table 4.7.4 Involvement in professional organizations (name the organizations)

Response	Number	%
Yes	7 (mostly with Association of Child Care Educators)	46.66%
Yes and involved in the committee	2 out of 7	(13.33%)
No	8	53.33%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.7.1 reveals that the majority of the supervisors interviewed are not active spokespersons for the early childhood profession in Singapore (73.33%).

Only a very small percentage of supervisors have acted as spokespersons previously (20%) and one only reported that she is a regular spokesperson for

the profession, giving regular talks in churches and public libraries.

Most of the supervisors (73.33%) stated that they had never given public presentations concerning their profession. Twenty percent had given a public presentation once before while one supervisor only reported giving regular public presentations. None of the supervisors interviewed had made use of the mass media to promote quality child care in Singapore. Moreover, slightly more than half (53.33%) of the supervisors interviewed do not belong to any professional organization and of those who are involved, two only are committee members. These data indicate a very low level of involvement of child care supervisors in professional organizations in Singapore.

Many of these supervisors are also not involved in the Cultural Symbolic Function and most appear unaware of the importance of this function.(See Chapter Two). In the cultural symbolic function, the supervisors come out of their direct service delivery roles and become spokespersons for their profession. The results above suggest strongly that most child care supervisors in Singapore have not yet progressed to this top hierarchical level of management. Indeed, according to Sergiovanni (1984) many supervisors seem to be quite unaware of this function as part of the role of a child care supervisor. These findings also indicate that whilst child care supervisors in Singapore are influenced by the exo and macrosystems, there is little attempt on their part to influence either government legislation and policies or societal beliefs and attitudes.

4.8 Analysis of Functions

The next set of questions probed the perceptions of supervisors of how well they managed the various functional roles: technical function, staffing function, client orientated function, public relations function and the cultural symbolic function.

Table 4.8.1 Technical Function

Response	Number	%
Yes, manage very well	3	20.00%
Yes, manage reasonably well	6	40.00%
Yes, can manage but need improvement; average	5	33.33%
No not well at all	1	6.67%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.8.2 Staffing Function

Response	Number	%
Yes, very well	3	20%
Yes, manage reasonably well	6	40%
Yes, can manage but need improvement; average	6	40%
No not well at all	0	0%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.8.3 Client Oriented Function

Response	Number	%
Yes, manage very well	5	33.33%
Yes, manage reasonably well	5	33.33%
Yes can manage but need improvement	5	33.33%
No, not well at all	0	0.00%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.8.4 Public Relations Function

Response	Number	%
Yes, manage well	4	26.66%
Average	4	26.66%
Not well ,need to improve	3	20.00%
Not necessary	4	26.67%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.8.5 Cultural Symbolic Function

Response	Number	%
Yes, manage well	3	20.00%
Average	5	33.33%
Not well, need improvement	4	26.67%
Not necessary	3	20.00%
Total	15	100.00%

The above tables reveal that the majority of the supervisors manage the first three levels of management functions well. A large group of supervisors stated that they can manage the technical function (60%), staffing function (60%) and client oriented function (66.67%) quite well.

However in the last two management functions, most supervisors' performance is average and they feel that they need to improve. For the public relations function (Table 4.8.4) seven supervisors (46.66%) responded that their performance is average and some (20%) mentioned that they do not manage

this function well and need to improve. Some of the supervisors (26.67%) stated that they consider this function to be redundant and they do not see a need to be involved in it. Only a small number of supervisors (26.66%) think that they perform this function well.

In relation to the cultural symbolic function (Table 4.8.5), most supervisors (60%) think that they are either average in this function or have not done well and need to improve. Only three supervisors (20%) responded that they have managed well in this function. A further three supervisors (20%) responded that it is not necessary for them to be involved in this function because they do not see the relevance of this function to them as child care supervisors.

Therefore, it may be seen from these data that most of the supervisors are able to manage the first three levels of management functions much better than the last two functions. These results suggest that supervisors in Singapore still need to work on the lower levels of the management hierarchy (i.e. the technical function, staffing function and the client oriented function) before they can direct their attention to the last two levels of the management hierarchy (i.e. public relations function and the cultural symbolic function) (Sergiovanni, 1984). The lower level issues of management function need to be consolidated and competently dealt with by the supervisors before they can address the needs of the higher levels of the management hierarchy. "Tasks which fall into the technical and human areas must be addressed (highly competently) before there can be lasting success at the upper levels of the hierarchy. In other words, the lower levels of the management hierarchy represent the foundation upon

which upper levels can thrive” (Hayden, 1996,p.84). This solid management foundation on which the supervisors in Singapore may build would appear to be missing. This may explain why some supervisors do not see a role for themselves in the public relations and cultural symbolic functions because they are still tackling the issues at the lower level of management.

This is indicated by one of the supervisors,

“ I don’t see the need for me to deal with this, need to focus on my own child care centre first, anyway cannot find the time also!”

4.8.1 Aspects of leadership roles that were most / least enjoyed, most / least time consuming and most / least difficult.

This section investigated those aspects of their leadership roles that supervisors most and least enjoyed. Questions concerning which tasks were the most and least time consuming and most or least difficult as perceived by the supervisors were also asked. Some supervisors gave more than one response and all were recorded in the tables.

Table 4.8.1.1 Aspects of Leadership role enjoyed most

Category	Number of response
Staffing function; developing staff, training the staff and sharing ideas with staff	7
Teaching the children	4
Working with parents; communicating with parents and developing relationship with them	3
Planning curriculum	2
Interacting with people	2
Enjoy all aspects of the leadership role	2
Did not enjoy any aspect	1
Total	21

Table 4.8.1.2 Aspects of Leadership Role enjoyed least

Category	Number of Response	%
Administration work	7	46.67%
Staff management	4	26.67%
Dealing with difficult parents	1	6.66%
None	3	20.00%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.8.1.3 Most Time Consuming Tasks

Category	Number of Response	%
Administration work	6	35.3%
Curriculum planning and preparing for lessons	4	23.5%
Staffing issues; recruitment and training	4	23.5%
Financial management	1	5.9%
Physical maintenance of centre	1	5.9%
Nothing in particular	1	5.9%
Total	17	100.0%

Table 4.8.1.4 Least Time Consuming Tasks

Category	Number of Response	%
Simple Administration work; filling out forms and making phone calls	5	33.33%
Delegation of simple tasks to staff	2	13.33%
Curriculum planning	1	6.67%
Nothing, all the tasks are time consuming	7	46.67%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.8.1.5 Most Difficult Tasks

Category	Number of Responses	%
Dealing with staff issues; recruiting new staff, dealing with negative attitudes, firing staff, shortage of labor	9	47.4%
Planning curriculum	1	5.3%
Dealing with parental demands	4	21.0%
Dealing with Ministry of Community Development	2	10.5%
Administrative work; doing accounting and using computer	3	15.8%
Total	19	100.0%

Table 4.8.1.6 Easiest Tasks

Category	Number of Response	%
Teaching children and planning curriculum.	5	31.3%
Working with teachers; sharing idea and talking to them	4	25.0%
Dealing with parents; building relationships with parents	3	18.7%
Everything is easy	2	12.5%
Nothing is easy	2	12.5%
Total	16	100.0%

Although many supervisors mentioned being least prepared for difficulties in dealing with staff (Table 4.8.1), many still reported enjoying the staffing function most (7 responses), followed by teaching the children (4). This is no

surprise since most of the supervisors were teachers before they became supervisors. Many stated that they enjoyed administrative work the least (47.67%), and some also stated that the administrative work consumed most of their time (35.3%). However, some supervisors (33.33%) found the administrative work the least time consuming provided that they performed simple administrative tasks like filling out forms and making phone calls. The majority of the supervisors (46.66%) said that all the tasks were time consuming and they could not think of any task that required the least amount of time. This strongly suggests that the supervisory role in a child care centre is very time consuming and requires a large degree of dedication and commitment on the part of the supervisors.

Nearly half of the supervisors (47.4%) reported that the most difficult task that they needed to perform was in dealing with staffing problems such as recruiting new staff, handling staff conflicts or poor attitudes (Table 4.5.1.5). Thus staffing issues seem to pose a great challenge for many supervisors indicating that training in this area would prove to be advantageous to the supervisors. Further, training in interpersonal communication skills would prove helpful to most child care supervisors in Singapore since many supervisors (68.4%) reported having problems dealing with either staff or parents. Difficulty dealing with government officials (10.5%) may also be lessened with good interpersonal relationship skills.

Many supervisors (31.3%) remarked that they found it easy to plan and teach lessons (Table 4.8.1.6). This is to be expected from those supervisors with

considerable teaching experience prior to becoming supervisors of centres.

4.9 Preparedness of supervisors for the leadership roles

The last set of questions in the interview schedule investigated the preparedness of the supervisors for their leadership roles and the leadership functions for which the supervisors felt most and least prepared.

Table 4.9.1 How well prepared were the supervisors for the leadership roles

Category	Number of Responses	%
Very prepared	7	46.67%
Quite well prepared	2	13.33%
Prepared but need improvement; average	3	20.00%
Not well prepared, need more training	3	20.00%
Total	15	100.00%

Table 4.9.2 Leadership Functions prepared the most

Category	Number of Responses	%
Client oriented function	9	45%
Staffing function; working with them, guiding them, training them	6	30%
Public relations function; Working with people as a whole	3	15%
Technical function	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Table 4.9.3 Leadership Functions that were prepared the least

Category	Number of Responses	%
Staffing function; staff conflict, staff expectations	5	33.33%
None	4	26.67%
Technical function	3	20.00%
Public Relations function	2	13.33%
Client oriented function; dealing with parental demands	1	6.67%
Total	15	100.00%

It may be seen from Table 4.9.1 that most supervisors (60%) perceive themselves to be very or quite well prepared for their leadership roles in the centres. Most supervisors think that they are most prepared for the client oriented (educational) function or working with children and parents (45%) (Table

4.9.2). The function for which supervisors felt least prepared was that of staffing (33.33%) (Table 4.9.3).

On the other hand, more than half of the supervisors (75%) rated the human factors of management such as the staffing function and the client oriented function as those for which they were best prepared (Table 4.9.2). No supervisor reported being prepared for the public relations function or the cultural symbolic function. Also, most supervisors reported that they were least prepared for the staffing and public relations functions (Table 4.9.3). The implication of these findings is that although the supervisors feel well prepared for the human factors of management such as dealing with co-operative and competent teachers, they still experience difficulty in dealing with difficult teachers. Staffing issues can prove to be very intricate and complex at times requiring specialized interpersonal skills which tend to come with years of experience and specialised training which most of these supervisors have not had. The 'lower levels' of management function "have a generic base, and are most easily learnt. 'Higher level' management functions ...are more reliant upon content knowledge of the service. The implication is that a good generic manager can learn the 'trade' at the more basic levels of the management hierarchy, but a solid grounding in early childhood training and experience is needed to 'lead' in the higher areas" (Hayden, 1996, p.66).

However, some of the supervisors are still least prepared in the technical function (20%). The implication is that this group of supervisors will need considerable training in the lower management levels before they can progress

to the higher levels of management function.

4.10 Conclusion

The results of this study concerning the perceptions of child care centre supervisors in Singapore of their leadership role reveal that the child care supervisors in Singapore on a whole are very young (more than 60% are under 35 years of age and are relatively inexperienced for 53.33% have worked less than four years as supervisors. Most of the supervisors had very little understanding of their leadership role before becoming supervisors (53.33%) and many also found the administrative training that they received to be unhelpful (66.66%) and stated that they had to learn how to manage the centre through 'trial and error'. These results point to a deficit in the microsystem or personal qualities that child care supervisors bring to their role (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Most supervisors have a basic idea of how to build a positive working environment in their centres and most of the strategies that are applied are informal ones such as group outings and staff lunches. Many supervisors seem to place considerable emphasis on building good relationships with parents and there is an emphasis on academics in programming. Thus there would seem to be considerable awareness of Bronfenbrenner's (1967) mesosystem in relation to the creation of a positive working environment and building positive relationships with parents. There does not seem to be an awareness of the importance of Public Relations and Cultural Symbolic Functions on the part of child care supervisors, as there is little involvement in activities related to these functions. These functions would be part of the macrosystem according to

The general cohort of supervisors is more prepared for the lower levels of management functions such as the technical function, staffing and client oriented functions. Indeed, the majority of the supervisors report managing the technical (60%), staffing (60%) and client oriented functions well (66.66%). In fact, in general, most supervisors think that they manage well as child care supervisors.

Although many of the supervisors interviewed mentioned that they are mentally most prepared for roles like staffing and client oriented functions, they are still struggling with the human factors of management such as staffing and parental issues in the child care centres when they have to deal with difficult staff or parents.

Many child care leaders in Singapore have yet to see the Public Relations and Cultural Symbolic Functions as important aspects of their leadership role. It is in these roles that child care supervisors have greatest opportunity to exert an influence on the exosystem and macrosystem (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Many feel that as long as they are fulfilling the basic role of supervisor within the centre, then they are fulfilling all of their leadership functions in the profession. Many supervisors are completely unaware of the range of functions involved in leadership management. This explains why many were of the opinion that they managed well as supervisors although they had not fulfilled the higher levels of management function (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Thus many child care supervisors in Singapore perceive their roles as supervisors primarily as running the centres and ensuring their 'survival' as businesses. There would appear to be a general unawareness of the extent and complexity of their management and leadership roles. There is an urgent need for training opportunities, particularly in relation to research findings on quality child care provision, in interpersonal relationship skills and in management functions, so that child care supervisors in Singapore may serve as "ambassadors" for the early childhood profession, thereby gaining greater social and political credence and support and exerting greater influence on the exosystem and macrosystems.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the research study and provides implications from the findings, as well as recommendations for the child care profession in Singapore.

5.1 Summary of the Research Findings

1. Overall, the findings from this study indicate that child care supervisors in Singapore generally perceive themselves as adequate leaders in their centres. However, there is a general lack of awareness of higher level management functions, with many child care supervisors failing to see the relevance of their responsibilities in the public relations and cultural symbolic function, where supervisors step out from direct child care service delivery to become active spokespersons for the child care industry. Another implication from the findings is that the supervisors may be too comfortable in their management positions to realize that their leadership roles as child care supervisors mean more than just assuring the 'survival' of the child care business. There is little attempt to provide true professional leadership in the early childhood field.
2. The research reported here has established that the child care supervisors who participated in this study are young (66.66%) and thus may need to gain more training and experience before they are able to reach the higher

levels of the management hierarchy (Serviganni, 1984) or to provide leadership in the child care field. The investigation also found that most of the supervisors hold an advanced certificate or diploma in early childhood education, qualifications which fail to equip the supervisors for the more challenging leadership roles of a supervisor.

3. This investigation discovered that many of the supervisors experienced difficulties in handling staffing issues and parental demands. Some supervisors in Singapore may have problems in communicating with staff members and parents. Many of the supervisors do not use formal strategies to enhance team building and a positive working environment. Many of the supervisors perceive meeting parental demands as their first priority, fulfilling their client oriented function and accommodating parental preferences when planning programmes in their centres.
4. This investigation also indicates that many of the supervisors in this study are very much influenced by the Mesosystem in the child care setting (according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory). The relationship between parents and the supervisors plays a part in influencing the style of leadership in the centre. Due to the heavy academic emphasis by parents in Singapore, many of the supervisors are compelled to plan their programs to emphasize academic learning so as to attract more enrolments in their centres

5. Most of the supervisors interviewed do not see the relevance of public relations and cultural symbolic functions in their leadership roles. Many think that involvement in these functions is redundant and unnecessary for them as child care supervisors. Despite the fact that many supervisors do not involve themselves in the higher levels of management functions public relations and cultural symbolic functions), the majority still think that their performance as leaders in the centres is satisfactory and adequate. This implies strongly that these supervisors may be unaware of the higher levels of management functions that they need to fulfill in order to become leaders in the child care profession (Sergiovanni, 1984).

5.2 Perceptions of supervisors regarding their leadership roles

The interview data reveal that the supervisors in Singapore perceive themselves to manage adequately as 'leaders' in their centres. When asked how well they manage each of the management functions (technical, staffing, client oriented, public relations and cultural symbolic functions) more than half (about 60%) mentioned that they manage each of these functions well. There would appear to be a general unawareness of the full range of management functions inherent in the provision of leadership as a supervisor of a child care centre. In addition, many supervisors find the role of managing the lower order functions, particularly in relation to making a profit, staff relations and meeting parental demands and expectations, so tiring that there is little time and enthusiasm for public relations and outreach activities.

5.2.1 In-service workshops for supervisors

At present, to qualify for the supervisory role, the candidate must have at least 3 GCE "O" level credits including a pass in English and a minimum of 2 years work experience in a child care centre or a related establishment. The supervisor must also finish an advanced training course with an institution recognized by the MCD and hold a first aid certificate recognized by MCD. Such qualifications are seen as minimal considering that the course is only 4.5 to 5 months long on a part-time basis; twice weekly and three hours per session.

Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the supervisors need to have more training, especially in the area of human resource management. Techniques for dealing with difficult and uncooperative staff are particularly needed since many supervisors reported problems when dealing with difficult staff members.

Another area of need is in interpersonal communication skills. Many supervisors not only face problems dealing with staff but also with parents who are demanding. In-service workshops in the area of interpersonal relationships and communication skills would be particularly useful for supervisors. The training would need to be provided in the form of in-service workshops because of the heavy schedules that supervisors face. Also, experienced

supervisors are likely to be more receptive to management and leadership training than teachers embarking on pre-service courses.

Besides training in the human side of management functions, many supervisors also need training in the administrative functions. Courses need to be designed especially for the child care field since generic courses on administration do not usually address the demanding issues faced by child care supervisors.

5.3 The need to promote developmentally appropriate programs to parents and the public

The findings of this study also suggest that the programming in the centres places too much emphasis on academic performance. Such an emphasis on academic excellence places inappropriate demands on young children. Many supervisors are pressured by parents to plan their programs with undue emphasis on developing academic skills before many children are developmentally ready. Hence, it is time for early childhood professionals, especially supervisors, to advocate for developmentally appropriate programs for young children. Parents and the public in general need to be made aware of the potentially damaging consequences of an over emphasis on rote learning, drill, worksheets and workbooks before children have developed basic understanding. (N.A.E. Y.C Developmentally Appropriate Practice).

5.4 Child care supervisors in Singapore

From the Handbook of Statistics it may be seen that there is an increasing growth of child care centres in Singapore (see appendix 1). However, this growth exceeds the number of trained and experienced child care supervisors that is available in Singapore. As a result, many centres resort to employing supervisors that are less experienced and educated than is recommended. This definitely poses a serious threat to the provision of quality child care services in Singapore.

The reasons for this shortage are two fold. Firstly, the growth of child care centres has outgrown the number of supervisors, and secondly, there seems to be a lack of commitment on the part of many teachers in the field to become supervisors in the future. This is because many teachers who have entered the child care field are very young and lack genuine interest in early childhood education. Most have entered the profession because of the working opportunities available. They have little interest in staying in the profession and are constantly on the alert for alternative, higher paid jobs. Hence this explains why there is a short supply of supervisors in the face of high demand.

5.5 Recommendations

This study has determined how child care supervisors in Singapore perceive their leadership roles in terms of the technical, staffing, client oriented, public relations and cultural symbolic functions. The professional development needs of the supervisors are identified and the recommendations are presented below.

Given the data reported in the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Compulsory supervisory training

Since most supervisors in Singapore were relatively young and inexperienced when they first took on the role of supervisor, many learnt how to manage the child care centres through “trial and error”. Hence it is recommended that all potential supervisors receive some supervisory training before they officially become the supervisors of centres. A policy could be formulated by the government whereby all potential supervisors undergo an apprenticeship with an experienced supervisor for a period of at least three-four months, receiving training in the full range of leadership functions. This kind of training would be akin to the compulsory practicum that pre-service teachers need to complete before becoming teachers and would contribute to the provision of quality care in the centres.

Regulations are also needed to ensure that a teacher is not promoted to supervisor until serving a minimum length of time as an assistant supervisor and completing a specified administrative or management training course in child care. Such a regulation would ensure that all child care supervisors in Singapore possess adequate skills in the supervision of a child care centre before their appointment. This would go a long way towards avoiding the ‘painful’ lessons that many child care supervisors presently have to learn through the ‘trial and error’ management of their centres.

2. Recognition of training courses

Presently, little incentive is provided for supervisors who make sacrifices to undertake training courses despite their heavy work commitments. Such a commitment to professional development needs to be recognized by the government. Preference needs to be given to supervisors who have received training and consumers need to be informed through the media of the importance of the early years and of what constitutes a quality early childhood program.

3. Provision of correspondence courses

Since most supervisors have a very heavy workload and work long hours, correspondence courses would be more appropriate than course attendance for many supervisors. These courses would provide greater flexibility since supervisors could study child care related courses in their free time.

4. Raising the standard of supervisors

At present, to qualify as a child care supervisor in Singapore the requirement is very minimal (as mentioned in the previous chapter). In order to raise the standard of supervisors in Singapore the criteria set for supervisors needs to be raised accordingly. Instead of requiring an advanced certificate only to qualify as a supervisor, the standard should be set at a degree or advanced diploma level. More knowledgeable and skilled supervisors would ripple out into the centres, resulting in a higher quality of child care provision.

5. Preference given to credentialed supervisors

Employers could also be required to employ people with credentials in the administration of early childhood services. Administration of a child care centre is complex and wide-ranging and encompasses a hierarchical order of functions in order for the supervisor to provide effective leadership (Sergiovanni 1984, Hayden, 1996). Professional development in these leadership and management functions is needed before teachers assume the position of supervisor.

6. Introduction of higher degrees in early childhood management in the local universities

At present the local universities in Singapore (National University of Singapore, National Institute of Education and Nanyang Technological University) do not offer higher degrees in early childhood education. It would raise the image and prestige of child care supervisors, as well as increasing their abilities, if courses were made available by the government in these institutions. With higher degrees in early childhood education focusing on administration and management, it would draw more young people into the field of early childhood services, thus easing the current trend of people entering child care services due to job opportunities rather than because they are interested or attracted to the profession.

7 Encouragement of excellence in management of child care services

Awards could be presented to supervisors who have demonstrated excellence in the performance of their management functions. Such encouragement would

promote leadership and quality in the child care profession. Such initiatives could be carried out by the relevant government departments or distinctive child care related organizations such as toy companies or professional associates. Such an event of public recognition would promote awareness of the management functions inherent in the leadership role and would provide an incentive to child care supervisors to strive for higher standards.

According to the data issued by the Singapore Census of Population in 1990, there is a total of 513,240 children below 12 years of age and of this number 60% of the children are below 7 years of age (306,703 children). Thus it may be seen that child care for children below 7 years of age is of vital concern to Singapore since the largest percentage of children (below 12 years of age) comprises children between 0-6 years of age (see appendix 3 for details).

Therefore it is important that the child care supervisors in Singapore are fully aware of their responsibilities and their leadership roles in the profession. Unless the child care supervisors are fully trained and qualified they will not be aware that the provision of quality child care services consists of more than just fulfilling the wishes of the parents and children. The calibre of the supervisors is also directly linked to the quality of the child care services provided in the centres.

In order to raise the standard of child care services in Singapore it is important to raise the 'standard' of the child care supervisors. With minimally-trained

supervisors, the level of child care service delivery is unlikely to improve significantly in the near future.

8. Higher salaries for better trained supervisors

The salary scheme for child care supervisors in Singapore should be linked to their credentials and experience. Higher qualifications and greater experience should place supervisors on a higher salary level. Not only would this monetary reward provide a greater incentive to supervisors to remain in the profession and to engage in professional development, it would attract “new blood” into the profession which would provide a boost to the image of the profession.

The quality of child care services is heavily dependent on how the supervisors fulfill their leadership roles. Also, the calibre of the supervisors directly affects the quality of child care service delivery in the centres. Therefore it is very important that all supervisors have a clear understanding of what their leadership role entails; technical, staffing, client orientated, public relations and cultural symbolic functions.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Time and monetary constraints dictated that this study investigate the leadership roles of a small number (15) child care supervisors in Singapore employed in the private sector only and from their perspective. A study employing a large random sample would greatly increase the generalisability of the findings (Burns, 1979). In addition this study has investigated supervisors

in the largest child care service delivery sector: the private sector. Future research could investigate the situation pertaining among the other major providers of child care in Singapore: (PTA; NTUC) to see if there are any significant differences between them and or particular characteristics and needs within each sector.

Interviews conducted with the supervisors have provided a picture of their leadership roles from their perspective only (that is descriptive, subjective data). Observations in the centres of supervisors fulfilling their leadership roles would provide a more qualitative picture of how well they fulfilled their leadership functions.

Future research could also identify “best practice in leadership models” among child care supervisors with a view to informing the content of professional development courses for child care supervisors.

5.7 Conclusion

This study has determined the perceptions of child care supervisors in Singapore of their leadership roles and has made recommendations for change in child care policy and practice as well as for further research.

It has been found that child care supervisors in the private sector in Singapore are relatively young and inexperienced and possess minimal formal qualifications in Early Childhood. In particular, they possess little or no

training in leadership and management skills, having to acquire these on the job and largely by trial and error.

In terms of the three key elements of effective leadership described in Chapter 2 (visions, team culture and communication) it would appear that many considerable professional development in child care management skills is needed for supervisors in Singapore before they can aspire to acquire the art of leadership as described by Depree (1989).

The child care industry in Singapore is relatively immature. Many supervisors have yet to attain the knowledge and skills necessary for a child care leader in Singapore. Due to the high turnover rate of staff and the generally low morale in the profession there is still a long way to go before child care supervisors can become effective leaders in the child care setting in Singapore.

On top of the many external factors that limit the effectiveness of child care supervisors; in Singapore there is a need for increased awareness and reflection on personal inadequacies in terms of leadership skills and knowledge.

In summary, there are basically three factors that determine a good leader. A leader must possess the necessary administrative skills and be able to handle all problems relating to paper work and the daily operation of the centre. This is the most basic function.

Secondly, a leader must possess educational and management skills to handle all programming, staffing and parental issues. Most supervisors stop at this level many are not able to perform this function well. This may explain why there is a general lack of enthusiasm and poor communication among many child care workers in Singapore. Many supervisors have yet to see the need for a shared vision and to motivate staff to achieve it.

The last factor is public relations skills, for such skills enable a leader to have external communication with the public in general and to educate them about the essential components of quality child care in particular. Such skills enable the leader to become a spokesperson for the child care profession. This is by far the hardest task for most child care supervisors in Singapore. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for them to take on a more active role to improve the image of the profession and the quality of child care provision in Singapore.

In conclusion, it is important that child care supervisors see themselves as educators of children, parents, and staff: educating the community and the general public. This can only be achieved if they possess the skills and knowledge required of a leader in the child care setting.

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18.1 ENROLMENT IN CHILD CARE CENTRES BY TYPE OF PROGRAMME AND ORGANISATION

Period ¹	Total	Type of Programme						Number
		Full-Day Programme						Half-Day Programme
		Total	People's Association	NTUC	Voluntary	Workplace ²	Private	
1991	16,109	14,337	924	1,230	4,787	1,140	6,250	1,772
1992	18,732	16,613	869	1,486	5,391	1,254	7,613	2,119
1993	21,653	19,571	1,040	1,732	6,517	1,430	8,852	2,282
1994	22,945	20,663	1,126	1,902	6,996	1,469	9,348	2,062
1995	25,800	23,506	1,174	2,057	7,617	1,560	11,098	2,294
1990 IV	12,474	11,105	847	1,057	3,961	975	4,265	1,369
1991 I	13,224	11,635	869	1,039	4,188	958	4,561	1,589
II	14,613	12,827	931	1,174	4,506	1,038	5,178	1,786
III	15,646	13,697	931	1,212	4,743	1,087	5,724	1,949
IV	16,109	14,337	924	1,236	4,767	1,140	6,250	1,772
1992 I	15,665	13,772	816	1,193	4,620	1,059	6,084	2,003
II	17,039	15,072	878	1,316	5,053	1,144	6,661	2,017
III	18,215	15,945	886	1,394	5,248	1,216	7,201	2,270
IV	18,732	16,613	869	1,486	5,391	1,254	7,613	2,119
1993 I	19,097	16,870	864	1,514	5,690	1,296	7,484	2,227
II	19,992	17,770	929	1,591	6,118	1,300	7,774	2,222
III	21,100	18,763	1,054	1,712	6,362	1,390	8,225	2,337
IV	21,653	19,571	1,040	1,732	6,517	1,430	8,852	2,282
1994 I	22,206	19,758	1,001	1,692	6,666	1,426	8,771	2,447
II	22,636	20,246	1,026	1,765	7,029	1,476	8,951	2,390
III	23,797	21,279	1,136	1,863	7,296	1,540	9,444	2,518
IV	22,945	20,663	1,126	1,902	6,996	1,469	9,348	2,062
1995 I	23,654	21,200	1,040	1,671	7,279	1,466	9,544	2,454
II	26,173	22,667	1,164	2,006	7,641	1,513	10,333	2,516
III	26,334	23,753	1,196	2,110	7,848	1,627	11,070	2,581
IV	25,800	23,506	1,174	2,057	7,617	1,560	11,098	2,294

1 Data were as at 1st day of the last month in each period. From third quarter 1994, they were as at end of the period.
 2 Include 6 centres set up by employers at workplace but run by private operators
 and 1 workplace run by NTUC.
 NTUC = National Trades Union Congress.

Source : Ministry of Community Development

18.3 ENROLMENT IN CHILD CARE CENTRES BY TYPE OF PROGRAMME AND ORGANISATION, 1981-1991

Period (As at 1 Dec)	Total	Type of Programme						Number
		Full-Day Programme						Half-Day Programme
		Total	People's Association	NTUC	Voluntary	Workplace ¹	Private	
1981	1,166	1,166	64	875	161		66	
1982	1,406	1,406	60	890	421		35	
1983	1,862	1,734	133	771	741	35	54	128
1984	2,375	1,919	128	787	778	132	94	456
1985	2,918	2,157	263	642	829	215	155	761
1986	3,756	2,799	461	705	1,069	369	195	957
1987	5,659	4,537	601	779	1,874	626	657	1,122
1988	8,044	6,652	696	863	2,586	835	1,671	1,393
1989	10,201	8,633	836	1,014	3,249	866	2,668	1,568
1990	12,474	11,105	847	1,057	3,961	975	4,265	1,369
1991	16,109	14,337	924	1,236	4,787	1,140	6,250	1,772

Notes : Data for 1981 and 1982 were as at 31 March and those for 1983 to 1986 were as at 31 December

NTUC = National Trades Union Congress.

Include 3 centres set up by employers at workplace but run by private operators

Source : Ministry of Community Development

Appendix 2:

Interview Schedule

Part 1A: Background information on supervisors

1. Subject's name:

2. Age:

3. Nationality:

4. Languages Spoken:

5. Years and Type of Experience

Highest educational level:

6. How long have you been in the present position in this centre?

7. How long have you been working as a supervisor?

8. How long have you worked in a child care centre before you became a supervisor?

9. What did you know about this job before taking it?

10. What were you most prepared for when you entered into this supervisory role?

11. What were you least prepared for when you entered into this supervisory role?

Training of supervisors

1. Have you had any administrative training as a child care centre supervisor? If so can you elaborate?

2. How useful has your training been?

3. Do you think you need more training as a supervisor, if so in which area?

Part 1B: Centre Information

1.Number of groups in the centre:

Playgroup: Nursery 1: Nursery 2: K1: K2 :

2.Group Ages: PG: N1: N2 K1 K2

3.Staffing Details (numbers, roles, working hours):

4.Programs provided:

Part 2

Technical Functions

1. Tell me about what you do as an administrator of this centre?

In relation to the following areas;

a) Fee Setting,

b) Budgeting,

c) Record Keeping,

d) Writing Reports,

e) Hiring and Firing Staff,

f) Developing Schedules and Rosters.

Staffing Functions

1 Tell me about what you do as a manager in this centre?

In relation to the following areas such as;

a.) Team Building,

b.) In-service training for staff,

c.) Resolving of staff conflict

d.) Maintaining a positive working environment.

Client Orientated (Educational) Functions

1. What do you think are your responsibilities as an educational leader of this centre?

In relation to;

a.) Addressing the needs of parents and children,

b.) Programming,

c.) Assuring the quality of care in the centre?

Public Relations Function

1. Tell me about what you do as a public relations officer in this centre?

a) Do you perform any community outreach for the centre? (Yes / No). If yes, please explain.

b) Do you deal with government officials with matters concerning the centre? (Yes/ No). If yes, please explain.

c) What do you do to promote the services of the centre?

Cultural & Symbolic Functions

1. Are you an active spokesperson for the early childhood profession in Singapore?

(Yes / No). If yes, tell me about it.

a) Have you given any public presentations concerning the professions? (Yes /

No). If yes, tell me about it.

b.) Have you used the mass media to promote quality child care in Singapore?

(Yes / No). If yes, can you tell me more about it?

c.) Do you belong to any professional organisations? (Yes / No).

If yes, which ones? Tell me about your involvement.

d) Do you hold any committee positions in these organisations? (Yes / No).

If yes, what does this position entail?

Analysis of functions

1. How well do you think you manage in each of these roles?

a.) Technical

b.) Staffing

c.) Client-oriented function

d.) Public relations

e.) Cultural and Symbolic function

2. Which aspects of your leadership role do you enjoy most and why?

3. Which aspects of your leadership role do you enjoy least and why?

4. Which tasks are the most time-consuming?

5. Which tasks are the least time-consuming?

6. Which tasks are most difficult for you and why?

7. Which tasks are easiest for you and why?

8. How well do you think you were prepared for the leadership roles you perform?

9. Which of the leadership functions do you think you were most prepared for and why?

10. Which of the leadership functions do you think you were least prepared for and why?

11. Is there anything else you think I should have asked you about your leadership roles but neglected to do so?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your leadership roles?