

Chapter 11

Addressing Big Issues in Small Towns: Graduate Students' Leadership Projects in Rural Areas

Meredith Jones

University of North Carolina at Wilmington, USA

Susan Catapano

University of Nebraska, Kearney, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates how an online graduate program for early childhood education and care professionals prepares students to take on leadership and advocacy positions and initiatives in their respective communities. Before students graduate from the program, they must develop and implement an Advocacy Research Project to apply the knowledge and skills they gained throughout the program. Situated in North Carolina, the majority of students complete their ARP in rural communities. This chapter showcases four exemplar projects developed and carried out by students in rural communities. Finally, this chapter offers implications and suggestions for university faculty who aim to prepare students to take on leadership and advocacy roles in rural settings.

INTRODUCTION

A growing priority in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is to develop the next generation of leaders. This is especially true for rural communities that are losing community members to more suburban and urban locations. Leadership in early childhood education serves as a critical link in the well-being and development of children and families however, the term “leadership” is multifaceted and complicated. In the United States, the role of ECEC leaders can include a number of professionals who work in leadership positions that serve young children birth to age eight. This includes elementary school principals, early learning center directors, program directors, family childcare owners, and other

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2787-0.ch011

Addressing Big Issues in Small Towns

supervisors and administrators. Just as the role of “leader” can represent various people and positions, the responsibilities of ECEC leaders can be just as complex. Depending on the early childhood education setting, the respective leader is responsible for a multitude of duties to ensure their school or program operates successfully. Although there is differentiation between semantics one thing is true, ECEC leaders are the linchpin between ensuring programs have high quality staff to care for children and families; programs or centers that function and operate successfully; and classrooms that ensure the positive growth and development of children. More often than not, their leadership expands beyond their program walls and impacts the broader community.

In business and management fields, leadership is recognized as a key element in making sure an entity is “maximizing efficiency and achieving organizational goals” (Juneja, 2019). Leadership in the ECEC field is discussed at many levels. There are multiple training programs, state regulations, and conference sessions that focus on leadership training in early childhood. However, current leaders in the field lament over the graying of the field and wonder who the next generation of leaders will be. Defining what it means to be a leader in ECEC is difficult and the complex myriad of skills required grows and changes as the field does the same. The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University has developed a framework for Whole Leadership for Early Childhood Programs. This Framework highlights three, interdependent areas of leadership development, leadership essentials, administrative leadership, and pedagogical leadership (Abel, Talan, & Masterson, 2017). Each area of The Framework identifies skills, knowledge, and attitudes important for someone working as a leader in ECE. A review of this Framework notes tools for each area of leadership includes strategic planning, systems development, public relations, public engagement skills, cultural competence, communication skills, awareness of self and others, as well as many other attributes. This Framework provides an organized way to review, analyze, and assess what levels and categories of ECEC leadership students in rural North Carolina are applying.

Particularly for rural communities, it is imperative for leaders to have strong collaboration and trusting relationships with other community members (Picketts, 2009). Having close-knit relationships with friends, families, and neighbors is a common characteristic among rural residents and this carries over to their selection in childcare (Anderson & Mikesell, 2017). Rural families are more likely to depend on kith and kin to care for their children (Anderson & Mikesell, 2017; Katras, Zuiker, & Bauer, 2004). This suggests it is critical for professionals stepping into leadership roles to either have, or be willing to establish, close relationships with all citizens and develop a strong community presence.

BACKGROUND

The Master’s Degree in Education in Leadership, Policy, and Advocacy in Early Childhood (LPAEC) program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington is an online, graduate, program for early childhood professionals. The convenience of an online program attracts students from around the state and beyond. Not surprising, many students reside in rural counties and communities across North Carolina; given about 40% of the people in North Carolina are identified as living in rural communities (Knopf, 2018). The challenge of transportation and access to services and programs in rural communities makes this online program beneficial to allow students to further their education while remaining in their community. Furthermore, the majority of students in this program work full time in the ECEC field.

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/addressing-big-issues-in-small-towns/253065

Related Content

The Obama Effect: The Perception of Campaigning 2.0 in Swedish National Election 2010

Anne Kaunand Carina Guyard (2012). *E-Governance and Civic Engagement: Factors and Determinants of E-Democracy* (pp. 524-542).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/obama-effect-perception-campaigning-swedish/60095

The Role of Flexible Working Arrangements in Reducing Technostress and Job Tension That Negatively Affect Service Innovation Behavior

Ethem Merdanand Himmet Karadal (2022). *Handbook of Research on Cyber Approaches to Public Administration and Social Policy* (pp. 542-562).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-role-of-flexible-working-arrangements-in-reducing-technostress-and-job-tension-that-negatively-affect-service-innovation-behavior/299201

Adversarial Defense Mechanisms for Detecting and Mitigating Cyber-Attacks in Wireless Sensor Networks

Patel Janit Umeshbhai, Panchal Yash Kanubhai, Shaikh Mohammed Bilaland Shanti Verma (2024). *Enhancing Security in Public Spaces Through Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)* (pp. 26-38).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/adversarial-defense-mechanisms-for-detecting-and-mitigating-cyber-attacks-in-wireless-sensor-networks/347457

Knowledge Management in Public Construction Project Initiation

Marja Naaranojaand Lorna Uden (2014). *Building a Competitive Public Sector with Knowledge Management Strategy* (pp. 422-435).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/knowledge-management-in-public-construction-project-initiation/80126

Shared Practices in Articulating and Sharing Rationale: An Empirical Study

Lu Xiaoand John M. Carroll (2019). *Crowdsourcing: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1606-1635).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/shared-practices-in-articulating-and-sharing-rationale/226810