

Writing It Down

A look at the role of the director as writer

by Donna Rafanello, coordinator, Mentor Writing Project

We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.

— Ernest Hemingway

Susan began her day at her desk writing a letter to a parent, reminding her of

their upcoming appointment. She was interrupted by her lead teacher's request that she review the week's lesson plan. From there she turned her attention to the draft job announcement for an infant teacher that had to be called into the local newspaper and a performance review of her cook. Still awaiting her attention was the landscaping contract for the play yard, the

invitation to the annual spring fundraiser, and the revision to the employee handbook.

The job of the early childhood director requires that we become comfortable in performing a wide variety of tasks. Being a director demands skills in many different areas, as well as the ability to focus our attention in many directions at once.

While we undoubtedly have heard this broad description of the director's job before, very little attention has been focused on the number of work-related tasks that involve writing. *Did you ever stop to think about how many times in any given day that your job requires strong writing skills?* Here's an inclusive, but by no means exhaustive list, by category, of the writing tasks required of us in our jobs as directors. How many of these do you accomplish on a regular basis? What additional writing tasks would you add to the list?

✓ Program Operations and Facilities Management

Efforts related to the daily operation of the early childhood program with an emphasis on the care and education of young children, family support, and the maintenance and upkeep of the facility. Activities may include:

- Correspondence
- Curriculum
- Contracts/letters of agreement
- Program evaluations
- Child and family assessments and plans
- Program reports

✓ Staff Management and Human Relations

Efforts related to the recruitment, hiring, development, and evaluation of program personnel. Activities may include:

- Job announcements
- Classified ads
- Job descriptions
- Employment contracts
- Staff evaluation form
- Performance reviews
- Letters of reference
- Employee handbook
- Job application

✓ Family Relations

Efforts related to enrolling and communicating with families about their participation in your program. Activities may include:

- Enrollment forms
- Correspondence
- Parent handbook
- Newsletters
- Invitations

✓ Fiscal Management

Efforts designed to raise funds from diverse sources to support program and organizational goals.

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- Foundation and government grants
- Invitations to fundraising events
- Direct mail campaigns
- Annual reports

✓ Marketing and Public Relations

Efforts designed to increase awareness of your program with the specific goal of increasing enrollment, attendance at program-sponsored events, or public awareness of your work, or developing community awareness of the needs of young children and their families and the services that you offer. Activities may include:

- Program brochures
- Newsletters

- Program flyers/announcements of upcoming events
- Manuscript submissions
- Presentations
- Press releases

✓ Advocacy

Efforts designed to express your professional opinion/expertise on a topic related to the care and education of young children.

- Letters to the editor
- Correspondence with elected officials
- Political action

What this list makes clear is that the director's job requires strong written communication skills. To be effective in our roles as administrators, we must be

able to communicate our ideas in writing in ways that can be understood by others. This is no easy task. Given the importance of writing to our effectiveness as directors, it is surprising then to learn that few of us have received any formal instruction in writing. Rather, as with many director tasks, we have learned on the job. This can leave us feeling insecure or ineffective in performing our communication tasks and contribute to poor job satisfaction.

With the launch of the Mentor Writing Project this year, we hope to do three things:

- Raise your awareness of the many ways in which the job of director requires strong writing skills.
- Help you to identify those areas in which you could benefit from a writing coach.
- Provide the resources and encouragement you need to publish your writing.

For those of you ready to take the next step in your professional development, the Mentor Writing Project encourages you to submit your article ideas and manuscripts-in-progress and to partner with a writing coach to help you realize your dream of publishing your writing.

We encourage you to avail yourself of the resources and talents of the Mentor Writing Project. Your input in the early stages of the Project will shape the direction that it takes: responding to your requests for help with your writing is the express purpose of the Mentor Writing Project. We look forward to the opportunity to work with you on the writing tasks that you face everyday as the director of an early childhood program.

Talent is long patience.
— Gustave Flaubert

CALLING ALL ASPIRING WRITERS

Child Care Information Exchange has launched an exciting initiative to recruit new writers for the magazine and to cultivate writers in the field. Coordinated by Donna Rafanello, frequent contributor to *Exchange* and published author, the Mentor Writing Project will offer an online writing group (LISTSERV), one-on-one mentoring, and periodic how-to articles on the writing tasks of directors. The Mentor Writing Project represents an exciting way to bring new, diverse voices and perspectives to *Exchange* and to nurture the writing talents of directors in the field.

- Do you have unique insight into the challenges facing directors of early childhood programs?
- Have you enjoyed successes in your role that have something to teach other directors?
- Have you toyed with the idea of writing for publication but don't know where to start?
- Have you begun organizing an outline for an article but need help pulling it together?
- Do you need assistance with the mechanics of writing?

Consider taking the next step in your professional development by contacting the Mentor Writing Project with your ideas and articles-in-progress. In turn, you will receive individualized support from a writing coach who will guide you through the process of organizing, writing, and submitting your articles for consideration by Exchange's editorial staff. Look for more information and updates on the Mentor Writing Project on the Exchange web site www.ChildCareExchange.com and in future issues of the magazine.

To inquire about the Mentor Writing Project, contact writingmentor@ChildCareExchange.com.

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