What are Values and Beliefs?

A value is a deeply held view of what we believe to be important and worthwhile. A belief is slightly different from a value. It is our personal conviction that certain things are true and that certain statements are facts. Our personal values shape our beliefs about what is important to pursue, how we treat others, and how we choose to spend our time.

Our core values and beliefs cut across all aspects of our lives. They serve as a point of reference, a kind of moral compass for making daily decisions. They give rise to our fundamental commitments, the things in life that we consider worthy for their own sake. While our values and beliefs certainly reflect our family upbringing and cultural backgrounds, they are also shaped by personal experiences, education, and societal influences.

Values and Beliefs in Practice

The values and beliefs teachers embrace impact their view of children and the importance of the early years, their perception of the appropriate role of the teacher in the classroom, their expectations for families, and their understanding about how learning can best be supported. Take a slice of a typical day in any center in any town and you'll see how teachers' differing values and beliefs play out in practice. Morning arrival is a good example.

One teacher will formally greet parents with a handshake and polite conversation about the previous evening's activities before turning her attention to welcoming the child into the classroom. Another teacher will kneel and embrace the child first, focusing attention exclusively on her student before greeting the parent. For still another teacher, the morning ritual might emphasize procedural expectations like 'signing in' and ensuring that personal belongings are put in the right cubbie with little outward demonstration of affection to the child or parents.

Morning transitions in some classrooms are purposefully short and sweet—a quick embrace as the parent heads out the door or a goodbye kiss blown through the classroom window. The emphasis in these classrooms is helping children achieve self-reliance and navigate independently into the learning environment. In other classrooms, parents are encouraged to linger around and read a story or make a play-dough creation with their children before saying goodbye. The emphasis in these classrooms may be on cultivating parent-teacher partnerships. The morning transition dance, to be sure, is a rich expression of teachers' values and beliefs about their role and how to best support children's development.

Giving Voice to Values and Beliefs

In Bill Ayers' book *The Good Preschool Teacher*, much of the focus is on the beliefs of the six teachers who are profiled. Anna thinks of herself as a substitute...
mother and struggles to achieve an intensity and investment in each child that will support, nurture, and challenge. Chana thinks of herself as a person who understands what makes separations successful experiences from which to grow and build. Joanne's strongest belief is that children need to be empowered—that they need to be able to make decisions for themselves. For Darlene, patience is the key attribute of a good teacher. Michele emphasizes the importance of order and organization and productive work for children. And finally, Maya infuses her teaching with a strong belief in the importance of warmth and respect.

The rich, descriptive profiles drawn by Ayers underscore the importance of looking at the values and beliefs of teachers in order to understand the meaning they give to their work. It is a central task of directors to listen closely to teachers and give voice to the values and beliefs that support their teaching practices. Through attentive listening, directors can assist teachers in identifying, clarifying, and articulating the values and beliefs that they bring to their present role.

But giving voice to teachers' different values and beliefs is only the first step in creating a true learning community built on reflective practice. Directors must also create the climate for open dialogue where different perspectives can be negotiated. Staff meetings are the perfect time to devote to this kind of exploration.

One way to stimulate the discussion is to invite staff's perspectives in response to some provocative statements. Here are a few to get you started:

- Too much praise can make children self-centered.
- It is disrespectful for children to call teachers by their first names.
- Boys are naturally better at math than girls.
- Children should be put in time-out when they misbehave.
- Responding too quickly to a crying infant will spoil him/her.
- It is important for children to eat everything served on their plates.

It is crucial in such discussions that directors avoid judgment. If teachers feel threatened with criticism and moralizing, they will become defensive and shut down. The goal in these discussions is to give voice to teachers' values and to also help them identify the source of their beliefs.

Another way to stimulate discussion is to share a vignette that can prompt different responses. The following scenario can serve as an example.

The co-teachers in a three-year-old classroom were helping a new group of children acclimate to their program. Their goal for the first month of the new school year was to familiarize the children with the daily routines of the classroom and help them separate from their parents without too many tears. One child, Sofia, was having a particularly hard time. When her mother left, Sofia retreated to a corner, curled up with her favorite doll, and sucked her thumb. Sofia's family only spoke Spanish while the two teachers only spoke English.

In a meeting with their director, the co-teachers expressed their concern about Sofia's behavior and discussed different strategies for handling the situation. One teacher felt strongly that Sofia just needed time to assimilate into the new environment. She was confident that if they were patient, Sofia would come out of her shell and begin interacting with the other children. Her co-teacher felt equally strong that the center should hire a Spanish-speaking aide to work with Sofia. She believed that Sofia's lack of participation was proof positive that she was linguistically isolated. The first teacher replied that this would be counterproductive since Sofia ultimately needed to learn to speak English at the center and making a special accommodation for her would only slow down that process.

After you've shared the vignette, ask your teachers how they would recommend that the situation be handled.

Finding Common Ground

Finding opportunities for teachers to articulate their deeply rooted values and identify the experiences they've had that have shaped their current belief system can be a powerful way to help them understand there are often multiple "right ways" to approach the important work they do as early childhood educators. Achieving consensus on a center's collective values and beliefs is an ongoing process; it is not something that can be achieved in one staff meeting or even one focused retreat. The goal is that over time the group will not only expand their tolerance and understanding of different values and beliefs, but that they will find common ground on center-wide, agreed-upon priorities and practices.
Assessing Values and Beliefs

This assessment can be used in a variety of ways. In the interviewing and hiring process, it can help your search committee understand the value and belief system of prospective teachers. This information will help ensure that the values and beliefs of newly hired staff are consistent with the shared beliefs and stated philosophy of the center. The assessment can also be used as a springboard for discussion at a staff meeting. Distribute it to teachers a few days before the meeting so team members have an opportunity to reflect on the different items. Whether it is used as a screening tool in the staff selection process or as a springboard for discussion at a team meeting, it is important to tell teachers that there are no right or wrong answers.

PART I. Complete the following sentences.

1. I think children are generally ________________________________

2. When children are unhappy, it’s usually because ________________________________

3. I get angry when children ________________________________

4. The most important thing a teacher can do is ________________________________

5. Children should not ________________________________

6. All children are ________________________________

7. I wish parents would ________________________________

8. When parents ________________________________ I feel ________________________________

PART II. Circle the five traits you would like children to be or have as a result of their preschool experience with you.

adventurous     appreciate nature     determined
affectionate    inquisitive          energetic
polite          respectful           friendly
altruistic      self-starter        obedient
caring         sense of humor        spontaneous
honest          industrious         persistent
assertive       creative            proud
certain         independent thinker   risk taker
cheerful        desire to excel      open-minded

Technology Training for Early Childhood Administrators

The Center regularly offers full-day, interactive technology workshops for early childhood administrators. Each workshop provides six hours of hands-on training and follow-up technical assistance online. Funding is provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). The participant’s portion of the training cost is only $45. Enrollment is limited and priority will be given to administrators whose programs serve IDHS-funded children. Participants receive a certificate of attendance documenting 6 clock hours of training for use towards the renewal of the Illinois Director Credential (IDC).

Snazzy Snapshots: Digital Documentation in Your Program

Bring documentation and parent communication to life with a number of easy-to-use online tools. Learn how you can use your digital camera and sites like Shutterfly to create colorful, engaging portfolios, photo books, and free media-rich Web sites, sure to impress. Discover creative ways to incorporate your digital creations into your program as tools to help you communicate information with parents and staff and market your program. No desktop publishing, advanced computer skills, or Web design experience required.

Date: Friday, December 4, 2009, 9:30 am – 4:30 pm
Location: National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL

Date: Thursday, February 18, 2010, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Location: Blackhawk College Outreach Center, 301 Avenue of the Cities, East Moline, IL

For more information and to register online go to http://cecl.nl.edu/training/technology.htm.

Program Administration Scale—Assessor Reliability Training

January 12-15, 2010

The Program Administration Scale (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor Reliability Training includes an overview of the instrument, how to rate indicators and score items, the protocol for interviewing and collecting data, and procedures for verifying documentation. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors.

This four-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices.

Location: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership
National-Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: $1,025 includes all texts, materials, and meals

Hotel accommodations are available at the Candlewood Suites, adjacent to the Center. To make a reservation, call (847) 520-1684. Participants may receive two semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, Early Childhood Program Evaluation) by paying an additional fee.

Become a fan of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership on Facebook!
Planning Ahead

**Professional Development Opportunities**

**Family Child Care Institute—Best Business Practices**

*February 27 and May 15, 2010*

Managing a high-quality family child care program and sustaining a viable business can be challenging. This family child care institute, presented in collaboration with the First Step Fund and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), will provide you with the tools and techniques you need to improve your family child care business practices and get on the path toward accreditation.

Designed for current family child care providers as well as those who offer technical assistance and support to providers, the institute stresses the importance of professionally designed contracts, parent handbooks, and promotional materials that help family child care providers successfully market their programs, demonstrate best practices, and enhance business stability.

Institute presenter will be Dorothy Browning, National Curricula Manager for the First Step Fund.

**Location:** McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership  
National-Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** $199 includes texts, materials, and meals

Hotel accommodations are available at the Candlewood Suites adjacent to the Center. Call (847) 520-1684.

Participants may receive 3 q.h. of undergraduate credit (ECE335, Best Business Practices in Family Child Care) by paying an additional fee, completing a project, and engaging in an online discussion.

**For more information about these professional development opportunities, please contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu.**

You can also register online at [http://cecl.nl.edu](http://cecl.nl.edu).

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**Center Launches New Initiative to Support Family Child Care**

Thanks to a generous grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation, the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership is launching a new initiative to support family child care providers in Illinois. This project, Supporting Excellence in Family Child Care, will provide training for early childhood consultants and technical assistance specialists on how to use the *Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care* (BAS) to help providers improve the business practices of their family child programs and successfully participate in Quality Counts, the Illinois quality rating system.

Developed by faculty at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, the BAS was designed to serve as a reliable and easy-to-administer tool for measuring and improving the overall quality of business practices in family child care settings. The BAS assesses quality in ten areas: qualifications and professional development, income and benefits, work environment, fiscal management, recordkeeping, risk management, provider-parent communication, community resources, marketing and public relations, and the provider as employer.

Grand Victoria Foundation provides strategic funding to Illinois organizations working for lasting economic, educational and environmental change. Through grantmaking and leadership initiatives, the Foundation supports five elements of great communities: good jobs, a healthy environment, great places for kids, capable organizations and homegrown philanthropy. In 2009 the Foundation received the Critical Impact Award from the Council on Foundations, a national philanthropic association.

For more information about this initiative, contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056. For more information about the Grand Victoria Foundation, please visit [www.grandvictorialfdn.org](http://www.grandvictorialfdn.org) or call (312) 609-0200.
Join us in 2010 to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Leadership Connections and the 25th Anniversary of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership!

For more information about registration or sponsorship opportunities, contact Donna Jonas at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5058 or donna.jonas@nl.edu

SAVE THE DATES!
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