

# The Director's Link

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## Expanding Perspectives

Paula Jorde Bloom

**Y**ou've probably heard the tale of the six blind men standing around an elephant, each feeling a different part of the animal. One touched the trunk and announced that an elephant was like a snake. Another took hold of the tusk and compared an elephant to a spear. Another felt the leg, declaring that an elephant was like a tree trunk. Still another placed his hands on the side of the elephant and exclaimed that the beast was like a wall. The fifth, holding the elephant's ear, compared the animal to a large fan. The last blind man took hold of the tail and announced that an elephant was like a rope. John Saxe's poem concludes:

*And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion,  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong.*

It is such a simple notion that we all perceive the world differently; yet we often act like the blind men of Indostan, firmly convinced that our view of the world is the one and only truth. How blind we are in recognizing the validity and value of different perspectives and points of view. Our perceptions become our reality—the only reality.

### Different realities

The process of perceiving the world and making sense of it is highly personal. Each of us observes different things and focuses our attention on different aspects of what we see. In the world of perception, the same thing can mean something entirely different to different people. Our deeply

held values and past experiences strongly impact what we focus on, how we make sense of what we experience, and the meaning we attach to different events.

We each have separate realities about the world because we each take in different information and then interpret the information in our unique way. The irony is that once we have formed an initial impression about a situation, a person, or an event, we tend to look for evidence to support our view, and end up filtering out information that might contradict it.

Think about of the magazines and journals you subscribe to, the lectures you attend, or the radio talk shows you listen to. My guess is they all fit a pattern reinforcing your beliefs and point of view about the world. Seldom do we take time to read articles, attend lectures, or listen to broadcasters who would challenge us to think about the world in different ways. Seldom do we get out of our comfort zone to look at the world through different eyes.

Our perceptions shape our paradigms about the world. A paradigm is the lens we use to filter new information and the data we take in. It is a model or scheme that helps us organize and understand something better. People experience a paradigm shift when they get married, become parents, or learn they have a serious illness. If you were promoted from classroom teacher to program director, you surely experienced a paradigm shift in the way you viewed your role, the scope of your responsibility, and the nature of your co-worker relationships. Paradigm shifts cause us to view the same world in a dramatically different way.

*Continued on page 2*

"I've been talking too much. Your turn. Tell me what you think about what I said..."



### Three Perspectives

When we talk about point of view, it is helpful to think of three different types of perspectives: egocentric, allocentric, and macrocentric. An *egocentric perspective* is our own unique point of view, shaped by our past experiences, cognitive capacity, deeply held values, and formal education.

As early childhood educators we are familiar with the term *egocentrism* as an important developmental stage of early childhood. Children in the preoperational stage of cognitive development believe that everyone thinks as they think and acts as they act for the same reasons. But egocentrism doesn't disappear as children move into the concrete operations stage of cognitive development. It is part of our cognitive process across the life span.

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*“Reality is partly what you see it to be (the eye of the beholder) and partly what you make it to be (the I of the beholder).”*

H. B. Gelatt

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Adults are often guilty of narrow, egocentric thinking. We have difficulty seeing clearly someone else's point of view and perceive our perspective to be the only valid one. If you've traveled to England, did you ever think, “Why do these people have to drive on the *wrong* side of the road?” If you've traveled to France, did you ever say, “Everyone here speaks a *foreign* language.”

An *allocentric perspective* is being able to see another person's point of view. The root *allo* means *other*. An allocentric perspective allows us to experience empathy for others; to be able to “get inside their skin” and feel what they feel. Developing an allocentric perspective takes skill and patience. It involves deep listening—really trying to see the world through a different lens. As a director, you can help expand your staff's allocentric capacities by asking them questions that move them out of their narrow perceptual frames.

Finally, a *macrocentric perspective* is being able to see the big picture—how one's actions intersect with those of

others. It is like viewing the landscape from above, a bird's-eye view. Have you ever driven in the fast lane of an expressway behind a driver going only 40 miles per hour who is oblivious to the fact that other motorists are flashing their lights and passing on the right? That motorist lacked a macrocentric perspective, the ability to see how his actions impact those around him.

A macrocentric perspective is not easily achieved. It requires having the capacity to be part of the picture while simultaneously being able to step outside of it and see all the connecting elements. Consider, for example, the teacher who asks you for a raise, “a measly 25 cents an hour more.” From the teacher's perspective, that quarter seems like a reasonable request. From your perspective, however, it is clear the teacher has a limited understanding of the big picture. A small raise of 25 cents per hour for one person can have significant ramifications regarding compensation equity for other staff and maintaining the center's delicate balance between revenue and expenses.

### Closing the Gap

At work and at home, most interpersonal problems exist because one person's reality isn't another person's reality. Disagreements that escalate into all-out conflict seldom have to do with facts; they almost always have to do with differences in perception about the meaning and importance of different events. The changing landscape of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse populations served by early childhood programs only adds to the potential for misunderstanding.

Reflect on ways that you can expand your staff's capacity to appreciate and respect different perspectives. What are some of the things you can do to help them understand the concept of different realities? What are some things you can do to promote allocentric and macrocentric perspective taking? And what are some of the things you can do to help close the gap when differing perspectives exist? The suggestions included in the Director's Toolbox on page 3 will help you get started.

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*Paula Jorde Bloom is the Michael W. Louis Chair of the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership. This article was adapted from her book [Leadership in Action: How Effective Directors Get Things Done](#).*

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#### Our Mission

*The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training, technical assistance, research, and public awareness.*

<http://cecl.nl.edu>



# The Director's Toolbox

## Expanding Perspectives: From Theory to Practice

Leaders of early care and education programs must have the ability and skill to help people understand and appreciate the value of different perspectives. Here are a few things you can do:

### ✓ **Help teachers suspend judgment on what they observe.**

When most of us observe children or adults in different situations, our tendency is to evaluate the observed behavior by the “goodness” of what we see. In other words, is the behavior consistent with our way of doing things? Instead, encourage staff to ask, *How can I account for what I am observing?* or *Why is this person doing or saying what he or she is doing or saying?*

### ✓ **Model tolerance.**

To be tolerant, one must embrace the notion that different points of view are not only important, they are essential in growing, thriving organizations. Tolerance goes hand in hand with flexibility—a willingness to consider that there is often more than one solution to a problem.

### ✓ **Engage in learning conversations.**

A learning conversation begins with the premise that we each have something to gain from hearing the other’s opinions on an issue. “Share with me your feelings about this issue” or “Help me understand your perspective regarding this situation” are good ways to launch a learning conversation.

### ✓ **Help staff disentangle intent from impact.**

We have all made the mistake of assuming that we understand someone else’s intentions. Not surprisingly, we are often wrong in the assumptions we make. We infer intentions from the impact that an action or behavior has had on us. And frequently we assume the worst. Intentions are invisible. It is only through a learning conversation that we can really understand someone’s intent.

### ✓ **Encourage staff to read books and articles with different points of view from their own.**

For a lively staff meeting, engage in role-play activities in which staff defend positions contrary to their own beliefs and point of view.

### ✓ **Embrace diversity as an organizational goal.**

Working with colleagues who have different backgrounds, family traditions, and experiences broadens people’s frames of reference and exposes them to new ways of thinking. If you recruit and hire as diverse a staff as possible with respect to gender, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences, you increase the group’s potential for personal insight and growth.

### ✓ **Help staff see that most innovative ideas come from borrowing, adding, or combining old ones.**

Being open to modifying one’s way of looking at the world offers possibilities for new and better ways of doing things.

From: Bloom, P.J. (2003). *Leadership in action: How effective directors get things done*. Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons. Reprinted with permission.

# Planning Ahead

## Professional Development Opportunities

### Taking Charge of Change

***Weeklong institute July 31 – August 5, 2006 with follow-up retreats on November 16-18, 2006 and May 9-12, 2007***

This early childhood leadership training focuses on individual, organizational, and systemic change as well as the director's role as change agent. Through interactive learning, group discussions, guided reflection, reading, and writing, participants explore the components of quality early childhood programming and how to implement change to achieve program goals. The training consists of a six-day residential summer institute and two follow-up retreats over the course of ten months. Mentors will be available for consultation during the year to assist participants in pursuing center accreditation.

**Location:** McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$350, includes housing, food, and materials

Space is limited to 28 participants and priority is given to directors whose programs serve IDHS-funded children. Application deadline is May 31, 2006.

*For an additional fee, participants may receive undergraduate or graduate credit (ECE525, Strategies for Supervision and Staff Development and EPS526, Organizational Theory, Group Dynamics, and Leadership Applications).*

### Program Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

***August 21-23, 2006***

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 reliability of instrument, interview protocol for collecting data, how to score indicators and items, and how to develop a computer-generated program profile. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors.

This three-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 and help center directors improve the quality of their programs.

**Location:** McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$650, includes all texts, handouts, breakfast and lunch

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

*For an additional fee, participants may take the training for 2 s.h. of graduate credit (ECE582C Workshop/Early Childhood Program Evaluation).*

### Fall Management Institute

#### **Board Development - A Key to Your Program's Strategic Planning Success**

***October 13-14, 2006***

Center directors and their governing boards are partners in ensuring that program goals are met and operations run smoothly. Participants will learn how to work with their boards to identify and address organizational challenges and to develop a strategic plan that considers the big picture both inside and outside their organizations. The institute will also present strategies to identify a board's particular strengths and needs, and for determining the most appropriate activities to enhance a board's functional capacity.

The featured presenter is Joyce Dudley, founder of Dudley Hamilton Associates. A former deputy commissioner for the City of New York, Ms. Dudley is a skilled strategist providing organizational and leadership development coaching to her clients.

**Location:** McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$199, includes all institute materials, breakfast and lunch

*For an additional fee, participants may take the training for 2 s.h. of college credit.*

**For more information, contact Debra Trude-Suter at [debra.trudesuter@nl.edu](mailto:debra.trudesuter@nl.edu) or (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056.**

## NLU Courses for Directors

Summer Term begins June 26, 2006

### Online Courses for Directors

**ECE510** (3 s.h.)  
Child, Family, and Community

**ECE512** (2 s.h.)  
Early Childhood Curriculum

**ECE525** (3 s.h.)  
Strategies for Supervision and Staff Development\*

**EPS526** (3 s.h.)  
Organizational Theory, Group Dynamics, and Leadership Applications\*

*\*these two courses are offered in conjunction with Taking Charge of Change*

**For more information about the Early Childhood Administration degree program, contact Douglas Clark at [douglas.clark@nl.edu](mailto:douglas.clark@nl.edu) or (800) 443-5522, ext. 5062**

## Strategies for Promoting Children's Social and Emotional Development



Join us for an  
online discussion in May

Mary Louise Hemmeter, associate professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University will host the fourth in a series of online discussions sponsored by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership. Dr. Hemmeter teaches, writes, and conducts research related to effective instruction and promoting children's healthy social emotional development.

**Monday, May 22 –  
Saturday, May 27, 2006**

Guest expert:

Mary Louise Hemmeter  
*Center on the Social and  
Emotional Foundation for  
Early Learning*

**Check out the Center's Web site (<http://cecl.nl.edu>) for information about how to log on and updates about future online guests.**



## Join us at NAEYC in June!

Faculty and staff from the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership will be among the presenters at the NAEYC Professional Development Institute in San Antonio. If you will be attending, be sure to visit us at the following featured workshops.

**Sunday, June 4, 2006**

**Widening the Lens:  
Looking at Quality from a Program Administration Perspective**  
*Teri Talan and Jill Bella*

**Connecting Family, Friend & Neighbor  
Caregivers with Early Learning Standards: The Case in Illinois**  
*Douglas Clark, with Valerie Krajec and Dawn Ramsburg*

**Wednesday, June 7, 2006**

**Work Smarter Not Harder: Technology Solutions  
for Effective Early Childhood Program Management**  
*Tim Walker, with Fran Simon and Shelton Mercer, III*

**Online Learning in Early Childhood Education:  
Best Practice, Great Teaching, and How to Make It Happen**  
*Douglas Clark, with Kathleen Sheridan and Leslie Curda*

# LEADERSHIP Connections

May 11-13, 2006 • Chicago Marriott O'Hare



*Judy Harris Helm*



*Pat Williams*



*Elizabeth Gardner*



*Rosita Lopez*



*Madelyn Swift*



*Kerby Alvy*



*Roger and Bonnie  
Neugebauer*



*Walter Gilliam*



*Marsha Howard*



*Dan Hodgins*



*Bob Lewis*



*Stacie Goffin and  
Valora Washington*



*Judy Jablon*

## Still Time to Register!

### Conference Package Includes:

#### Thursday

Opening Luncheon and Keynote  
Public Policy Forum  
Networking Reception  
Spotlight on Best Practices  
Pamper Yourself Activities

#### Friday

Continental Breakfast  
Skill-Building Clinics  
Box Lunch  
Marketplace  
Meet the Authors  
Afternoon ice cream treat

#### Saturday

Continental Breakfast  
Seminars  
Closing Luncheon and Keynote

#### Plus

Executive tote bag  
Photo directory of conference participants  
Yellow pages of professional resources  
Raffle prizes and gifts

**All this for only \$375**  
**Special group rates also available.**

**Register online at**  
**<http://cecl.nl.edu>**

## Earn a Graduate Degree in Early Childhood Administration Online

**Next Cohort Convenes June 19-23, 2006**

Applications are now being accepted for NLU's Early Childhood Administration (ECA) program offered in an cohort format. The next cohort will convene June 19-23, 2006 for a weeklong residency in Wheeling, IL. Two follow-up residencies are scheduled for May 2007 and May 2008. Throughout the remainder of the 24-month sequence, ECA degree requirements will be delivered via online coursework, making this program accessible to early childhood professionals throughout the country. For more information, contact Douglas Clark, the ECA program director at [douglas.clark@nl.edu](mailto:douglas.clark@nl.edu).

