



Taking Charge of Your Own Learning

by Susan Harper-Whelan

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Quality early care and education is essential for optimal development of young children with and without disabilities. One factor consistently associated with quality is the amount of early childhood education the child care provider or teacher has completed. However, in spite of increasing requirements and incentives for ongoing professional development, there is a persistent gap between what providers/teachers *know* and *learn* about good early childhood practices and what they actually **do** in their programs.

Trainers and instructors have a responsibility to provide meaningful activities in workshops and coursework. It is also expected that it will take focused work on your part for you to consistently **use** the knowledge and skills you have acquired. A clear understanding of some of the barriers to learning and change will help you move forward with the implementation process of any new idea. The following is a discussion of five potential barriers and their impact.

Past experiences have a powerful impact on how you relate to children today. You have many past experiences that guide your current practices, and you may not always be consciously aware of their influence! You are being influenced (positively and negatively) by what happened to you as a child, at home, child care, public school, and college classrooms. Your experiences as a parent, child care provider, or teacher also have an effect. Continuous reflection on the “fit” between what you *believe* professionally and what you really do in your program can help you become more aware of, and address, past experi-

ences that are shaping your current behavior.

Your learning style impacts your ability to implement new ideas. Professional development activities tend to rely on reading and “lecture” to transmit ideas. While this is an effective method for a few, many learners need to “see” a new idea in practice or try it out with the opportunity to get feedback in order to really understand the concept. Knowing your own learning style helps you seek learning experiences that match your preferences. When the instructor’s teaching style and your learning style match, you are more able to incorporate new ideas into day-to-day practice.

Dispositions have a significant influence on a learner’s ability to seek and try out new ideas. Particularly, your willingness to take risks and make mistakes, seek change and challenge, engage in ongoing reflection and self-evaluation, and seek peer feedback and support have a significant impact on your willingness to complete the hard work it takes to implement new practices.

Program climate influences your ability to implement new ideas by creating a positive or negative environment for adult learning. If a program director or parent board is extremely critical, or if “quiet, smooth” days are valued, you may hesitate to take the risks involved in trying a new strategy. Other climate issues in an early childhood program that can effect change include availability of resources, feedback, and planning time. It is important to advocate for the value of lifelong learning and to request a supportive learning environment.

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Letter from the Editor

Hello, readers. Thanks for joining me in another go-round of *The Rhode Island Early Childhood Newsletter*. This year's exciting theme will be *leadership*, a broad-based yet simultaneously individualized topic. Upcoming issues of the newsletter will focus on college students as future leaders, and leadership seen as an action, not just a position.

One new change to the format: Issues will now be named seasonally (fall, winter, spring, and summer) as opposed to the former usage of months. This new format will allow for more flexibility and creativity—incidentally, two hallmarks of a strong leader!—within each issue. Another new piece is the addition of various quotations by renowned educators and thinkers focusing on the capacity of leadership.

We all have it within us to become leaders if we are intentional about it. Part of the responsibility is *wanting it* as well as *nurturing it*.

I hope these next four issues will start a dialogue as you continue on your path toward leadership, in whatever form(s) it may be.

Joseph Morra, Editor

Statewide and National Calendar of Professional Development Opportunities

Tuesdays, October 16 - 30, 2007

Independence Square Building,
Kingston

CHILDSPAN's Three-part
Workshop Series:

*Creating Peaceful Early Childhood
Classrooms*

Contact Jessica Baéz: (401) 721-6401

Saturday, November 3, 2007

Johnston High School, Johnston
CHILDSPAN's

Keys to Quality Conference:

*Creating Caring Communities
(with keynote speaker Mary Cowhey!)*

Contact Joseph Morra:
(401) 721-6404

Wednesday - Saturday,
November 7 - November 10, 2007

Chicago, Illinois
CONFERENCE:

NAEYC's Annual Conference
Go to www.naeyc.org for more
information.

Tuesdays, November 27 -
December 11, 2007

CHILDSPAN, Pawtucket
CHILDSPAN's Three-part

Workshop Series:

*Forty Ways to Improve the Lives of
School-Age Children*

Contact Jessica Baéz: (401) 721-6401

Saturday, December 8, 2007

CHILDSPAN, Pawtucket

Four-Hour Intensive:

*What's So Intentional about
Teaching?*

Contact Jessica Baéz: (401) 721-6401

Thursday, December 13, 2007

RIAEYC Office, Cranston

Meeting:

*2008 Rhode Island Early Childhood
Conference Planning Committee*

Contact Nancy West or Kim Ash:
(401) 467-1219

CHILDSPAN News by Shevaun Keogh-Walker

It's hard to believe that the summer is over. As the opportunities for long days at the beach, summer barbecues, and extended daylight hours have come to a close, new opportunities and exciting possibilities are developing! In light of the new and innovative ventures in Rhode Island, it is fitting that this year's theme for *The Rhode Island Early Childhood Newsletter* is a celebration of the many facets of leadership.

As many of you may already be aware, this fall CHILDSPAN will spearhead the effort to complete the Core Competencies document for all early childhood, school-age, and youth practitioners and administrators in the state. This document will help to define the basic knowledge, observable skills, or dispositions that people should know and be able to demonstrate at each career lattice level. In order to review, update, and complete this document, participation from practitioners, administrators, and allied organizations will be essential. We have assembled the review team in order to begin this very important process.

CHILDSPAN's Advanced Leadership Institute entitled *Moving Our State Forward: Systems to Support Professional Development, Intentional Teaching, and Research-Based Practice* reflects the commitment that Rhode Island has to promoting and supporting quality programs and qualified staff. This advanced institute will be held on September 28, at Amica Center in Lincoln, RI. It is a full day of professional development for highly experienced educators and will be presented as a cohort model. Topics include research-based practice for infant and toddlers; designing optimal environments that improve teacher interactions with preschool children exhibiting challenging behaviors; and social cognition, emotional competence, and the school-age brain. It should prove to be a very exciting day!

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Professional Resource Review

by Mary Ellen McGuire Schwartz

Vance, Emily and Jiménez Weaver, Patricia. (2002). *Class Meetings: Young Children Solving Problems Together*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Written by teachers and for teachers, this book is based on the class meeting experiences of the authors. For these reasons, *Class Meetings* is a wonderful, hands-on resource for early childhood classroom teachers to develop and/or enhance class meetings where young children can create a sense of community, solve problems together, foster life skills, and develop respect for one another.

The book provides a step-by-step guide to facilitating and supporting meetings in preschool through the early grades. *Class Meetings* focuses “on problem solving and making the classroom a safe, positive environment for children” to promote constructive interactions and learning (p.11). The four major components of class meeting—opening, acknowledgments, problem solving, and closing—are presented and discussed. The authors aptly state that their suggestions for format and routines do not require rigid adherence to by teachers; rather, teachers should use various elements that fit their own classroom and children’s needs. Insightful vignettes are strategically found throughout the book, adding to the usefulness and understanding of the ideas and concepts presented.

Resources and suggestions are provided for setting the tone, creating ground rules and guidelines, promoting cooperation, giving acknowledgments, recording kind acts, introducing problem solving, and using “I-feel” statements. A list of children’s books for building conflict resolution skills is included. The use of class

meetings in different contexts, including the project approach, bilingual class meetings, small meetings, and negotiation chairs are discussed. *Class Meetings* is an excellent resource to begin the process of developing community in the classroom.

A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.

--Harry S. Truman

Taking Charge...

(continued from page one)

Support and active involvement in ongoing professional development provides the intensity of the learning experience necessary to facilitate and maintain the use of new and better practices in your program. Identifying a clear goal and seeking many learning opportunities (books, journal articles, courses, workshops, conference sessions, etc.) about a topic over time facilitates deeper understanding and enhances your ability to really change practice. At the same time, active involvement in professional organizations, utilizing peer mentors, and engaging in regular and focused discussion and problem-solving with program staff members support enhanced understanding, and ultimately result in permanent change.

Reprinted from the Summer 2002 issue of *Child Care Plus+*

Early Childhood Resources in Rhode Island

Aquidneck Island Directors' Association
Pam Griffiths, 683-0991

Child Care Support Network (CCSN)
Kristine Campagna, 222-5372

Children's Friend and Service
Beth Sousa, 276-4336

CHILDSPAN: Rhode Island's Child Development and Education Training System
Shevaun Keogh-Walker, 721-6400

Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island, Inc. (FCCRI)
Maria Belliard, 461-8908

Options for Working Parents
Sandra Gaspar, 946-2300

Providence After School Alliance (PASA)
Elizabeth Devaney, 490-9599

Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island (PCARI)
Katherine Begin, 728-7920

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP)
Joyce Butler, 490-9960

Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance
Sarah Cahill, 331-2869

Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC)
Jennifer DeFrance, 467-1219

Rhode Island Child Care Directors' Association (RICCDA)
Kathie Sandberg, 334-0100 x238

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Elizabeth Burke Bryant, 351-9400

Rhode Island School-Age Child Care Association (RISCCA)
Charlotte Boudreau, 444-0750, x102

Rhode Island Head Start Association
Mary Nugent, 437-0018 x103

Rhode Island Head Start Collaboration Project
Lawrence Pucciarelli, 462-3071

Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN)
Vivian Weisman, 727-4144

URI, CE, Children, Youth, and Family 4-H Program
Marilyn Martin, 277-5255

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255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

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INTERNET AT:
WWW.CHILDSPAN.NET

Internet Information

by Katie Sudol

The Action Alliance for Children's (AAC) web site (www.4children.org) provides a wide array of information for child advocates in the areas of health and welfare, families, and hot topics. It offers tips, grassroots efforts, and trends in policies relative to both the industry and families. Based in Oakland, California, the AAC provides local information such as available funding sources; however, it also supplies relevant information that can benefit advocates in any region of this country. The AAC also publishes the *Children's Advocate*, a bimonthly magazine published in both English and Spanish. Archives are available in these languages, as well as Chinese.

Under the *Resources* link, children's advocates and service providers can find information on key issues affecting children and families, such as children's self-esteem, family violence, and model early childhood programs. You can also order violence prevention videos via this link. The *New Resources* page highlights current trends and is updated periodically. As of this writing, information for immigrant children's rights to resources and an article regarding the benefits of play in the lives of children were available. The *Get Involved* page provides opportunities for advocacy, jobs, and internships. A roundtable opportunity is available for becoming more involved in AAC.

This site is a definite for individuals interested in violence prevention, family engagement, and hot topics related to the advocacy of young children.

CHILDSPAN News

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As we move further into the fall, the Keys to Quality Conference rapidly approaches. This year's theme is *Creating Caring Communities*. Mary Cowhey, award-winning teacher and author, will be our keynote speaker. The conference will be held on November 3, at Johnston High School, and will have professional development opportunities for practitioners working in infant, toddler, preschool, school-age, and youth programs. There will also be an administrators' strand focusing on leadership needs.

It is exciting to start a year with new and innovative plans. As always, CHILDSPAN strives to support you all in the essential work that you do. There is nothing more crucial than to help our children and youth develop and thrive! Thank you and good luck!