leadership choices in early care and education
by Stacie G. Goffin and Valora Washington

building self awareness: valuing ourselves and our roles as models in children’s lives
by Janet Humphryes and Stone Wolfsong

come to the edge; find the possibilities
by Angel Stoddard

yoga for the educator
by Andy Wichlinski

training suggestions
by Kay Albrecht

A new Out of the Box Training Kit will be available this summer based on the article:
Building self-awareness: Valuing ourselves and our roles as models in children’s lives
by Janet Humphryes and Stone Wolfsong

This issue of Beginnings Workshop introduces you to the complexities of the field of early care and education. Stacie G. Goffin and Valora Washington get things started by probing our field’s purpose, identify, and responsibility and challenging each of us to find answers for ourselves.

Valuing ourselves as role models comes next by Janet Humphryes and Stone Wolfsong.
The fine art of self-reflection and self-assessment come next as Angel Stoddard encourages us to find the possibilities. Andy Wichlinski wraps it up by reminding us to breathe — deep, healing breaths as we tackle the challenging topic of professionalism.

For reprint permission, contact Exchange, PO Box 3249, Redmond, WA 98073
(800) 221-2864 • info@ChildCareExchange.com.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NANCY LESSARD
leadership choices in early care and education

by Stacie G. Goffin and Valora Washington

After more than a century of evolution, early care and education is in transition. No longer is it a narrow endeavor of relative obscurity and of limited interest to leaders from outside of the field. Early care and education has become of interest to K-12 leaders seeking to bolster school reform efforts; to corporate entrepreneurs and stockholders looking to capitalize on the number of mothers in the labor force; and to economists, legislators, and governors striving to implement cost-effective, high-impact policy change.

While not limited in impact to the work of center directors, this evolution significantly alters the realities and leadership challenges faced by directors of early care and education programs.

The field’s attempts to grapple with these momentous shifts have made apparent its lack of consensus about its work and the disagreement that characterizes our efforts to find common ground.

The time for leadership work is now

The concept of early care and education as a public good and an integral part of our national infrastructure appears to be approaching a threshold of acceptance. Yet becoming fully accepted in this way will require the early care and education field to organize itself so it can fulfill the public’s emerging mandate. Not waiting for our answers, policy makers and others who historically have expressed little interest in our work have begun driving the formative system-building efforts that currently are underway in many states. Unknown, however, is the extent to which, as a field, we will significantly inform and influence this decision making.

This is a significant time for early care and education, and it is a defining moment for the field’s future. If those of us in early care and education want to be more than just observers of this moment in the field’s evolution, we need to establish a firm foundation for the field’s future and its value as a specialized field of endeavor.

We think it is time to call the question: What defines and bounds early care and education as a field? Providing answers to this question challenges the early care and education field to hold the mirror up to its own behavior and examine the ways in which its

This article is based on excerpts from the authors’ recent book, Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education, published by Teachers College Press.
responses to change too often are hindering the field’s progress and minimizing its effectiveness as agents of change on behalf of young children, families, and the early care and education field.

This is a field-wide leadership issue of paramount importance to us as a field. Having a central role in shaping the field’s future is contingent on our being able to provide an answer to this seminal field-defining question of definition and boundaries. That is why, drawing on terminology from parliamentary procedures, we believe it is time to “call the question.” The field’s indecision has gone on far too long — and too much hangs in the balance.

Consider: We are not even capable of providing a collective response to the question of what to name our work — early care and education, early education and care, early childhood education, early education and child care, early care and learning, educare, early learning, early education — providing concrete evidence of our confusion about the purpose of our work and public evidence of internal divisions.

**A new kind of leadership is needed**

Despite its many accomplishments, the field has largely been unwilling or unable to develop a coherent definition of itself and its work. The ability to find consensual answers to central questions about the field’s purpose, identity, and responsibility will determine its ability to go forward with a clear articulation of its collective competence and responsibility to children and families — answers essential to creating a coherent early care and education system and responding in a unified way to the many policy discussions presently taking place across the country.

Pre-existing answers do not exist for the field-defining questions we are posing. Consequently, we believe the field’s issues are best understood as adaptive challenges and as issues in need of adaptive leadership. Coined by Heifetz and his colleagues (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linksy, 2002), adaptive work is required when:

- a gap exists between one’s espoused values and one’s practices
- answers to the identified challenge don’t pre-exist
- conflicting values co-exist, and the conflict needs to be resolved

Choices have to be made, which often involves loss.

A basic premise undergirds adaptive leadership work: Answers for the critical issues confronting us as a field reside within those of us who own the adaptive challenge. If we are to assume a greater leadership role on behalf of early care and education as a public good, and for the system that delivers it, we cannot rely on others to resolve our issues. This leadership work will have to be our work. As articulated by Linsky and Heifetz in their Foreword to Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education:

“But adaptation, and the process of doing adaptive work, is as much about conservation and preservation as it is about loss. The hard work . . . the field has to do is to have the will to identify what of all they have accomplished, what of all that has gotten the field to where it is today, what of all the values and loyalties that are currently honored, is so much of the essence, the core of the field’s DNA, that it needs to be preserved going forward. And then, what is the 10% or 20% of the current DNA that is expendable, and must be left behind in order to go forward and thrive in a new reality” (2007, p. x).

Engaging in adaptive work will not be easy, though. The field’s adaptive work will likely evoke difficult debate, painful decisions and choices, and the loss of some of the field’s historically cherished positions.

**The field’s adaptive challenges**

Earlier, we posed as a central uncertainty, “What defines and bounds early care and education as a field?” This uncertainty emerges from what we have defined as the field’s two adaptive challenges:

A performance gap that calls for closing the distance between an expressed commitment to children’s high quality early care and education and the field’s uneven collective competence.

A credibility gap that calls for closing the distance between the desire to be recognized as leaders on behalf of early care and education and the field’s self-protective behaviors.

As adaptive challenges, known answers for addressing these gaps do not exist. We believe that finding answers should become central to the field’s leader-
ship work and should focus on three defining issues: purpose, identity, and responsibility. As a field, we need to be able to respond to questions regarding the primary intent of our work (is it, for example, school readiness? social-emotional development? social justice?); the chronological scope of early care and education (is it, for example, birth to 5? birth to age 8? 3 years to 3rd grade? birth to age 14 and inclusive of school age care?); what one needs to know and be able to do to claim ‘membership’ in the field; and what we accept as our mutual responsibility to children, families, and society.

The unavailability of consistent answers to these field-defining questions present barriers to system design efforts, to the delivery of consistent high-quality early care and education, and to a shared identity as early educators. It reflects our internal ambiguity regarding who we are as an organized field of practice.

Change is not optional

Ultimately, our sense of urgency about the need for responding to the leadership challenge of articulating what defines and bounds the early care and education field comes from the following:

■ Despite the dedicated efforts of early care and education leaders, far too many children are in early care and education programs of mediocre quality (Early, et al., 2005; Helburn, 1995).
■ Too few policy makers fully understand the barriers that must be bridged if this empirical fact is to be changed.
■ Too few practitioners are prepared for their responsibilities (for example, see Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005; Hambre & Pianta, 2007; Marshall, Dennehy, Johnson-Staub, & Robeson, 2005).

At the same time, knowledge about the importance of childhood development and about children’s learning capacities has become more robust and available to the public. As a result, public expectations have risen regarding the educational contributions of early care and education, accompanied by increased public and private investments. In response, decisions of policy and practice are being made on the field’s behalf.

The early care and education field is being redefined. The fact of this transformation no longer is in question. Rather, the question is the extent to which early educators will have the opportunity to be part of — and influential in — this crucial work.

If, as a field, we rebuff the challenge of deliberating and responding to the defining choices around purpose, identity, and responsibility, others will feel empowered to make these choices for us. If, as a field, we avoid responsibility for doing adaptive work, we limit our present and future capacity to lead on behalf of early care and education. By failing to mobilize ourselves to do this leadership work at this time, we reduce our chances to shape the early care and education field so it can most benefit young children, and we lessen our prospects for being recognized as legitimate spokespersons for the focus and design of an early care and education system.

It’s a matter of integrity

We, as authors, recognize that by invoking the need for adaptive leadership work we are entering into uncharted territory. We recognize that by questioning the field’s performance, we are challenging its current conceptualization of its leaders and practitioners. Nonetheless, we believe that significant breakthroughs require the collective and reflective self-examination characteristic of adaptive work.

We have reluctantly concluded that the field’s unbending adherence to long-standing positions no longer is productive. It is time to take a stance on how, as a field, we will effectively deliver on our mission and make a difference. Despite the rhetoric and expressed convictions, field-based research and experience make abundantly clear that all too often:

■ Those of us in the field resist doing what our knowledge base says is necessary for achieving good results for children.
■ We are willing to tolerate poor performance by our colleagues.
■ We hesitate to improve ourselves and our programs if doing so involves too much effort or cost.
■ We postpone change and thus defer its benefits to future generations.

We acknowledge the many issues confronting early care and education. Yet addressing the disparity between our promises and our practice is essential if the early care and education field is to have integrity, defined by Carter (1996) as “the courage of our
convictions [and] the willingness to speak and act on behalf of what we know is right” (p. 7).

This is our work. Clearly, it is time for those of us who identify with the early care and education field to resolve enduring ambivalences about our work and make decisions about moving forward. Without it, the field’s integrity is at stake. With it, the field’s adaptive challenges offer an exciting and timely opportunity to engage with one another to advance the field on behalf of children.

References


**Search for answers:** These authors present a compelling reason to search for answers to the defining choices for our field — purpose, identity, and responsibility. Where can these conversations and discussions take place in your program? Who should be involved in having them? Make this adaptive work your work!

**Disparity between promises and practices:** On page 42, Goffin and Washington propose four disparities between what we know as early childhood educators and what we do. Sit down with stakeholders and your staff and talk candidly about these four disparities. Seek to understand how they affect you, your teachers, the children and families you serve, and the community in which you live. Then, collaborate on a plan to rectify the disparities in your own program.

**Share your journey:** Creating answers for these field-defining questions will be a journey. Keep a record of your pathway and share it and what you learned for your program with others, thereby encouraging further adaptive work.

**Get the book:** Order the book Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education. Add it to your teachers’ professional development library and consider a book club to read it together.
building self awareness: valuing ourselves and our roles as models in children’s lives

by Janet Humphryes and Stone Wolfsong

Think about the most recent day you spent with the children in your setting. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being a GREAT day, how would you rate it? Now think back to when you walked into that environment that day. On the same scale, how would you rate your well-being? Are the two ratings similar?

What we bring into the environments we work in sets the tone in a most powerful way.

The outer world is like a mirror reflecting back whatever you give from within.
Give love, and the world loves you back.
Give peace, and the world becomes more peaceful.
Give light, and the world will be a little brighter.
— Unknown

Did you bring love, peace, and light into your environment that day? Perhaps these qualities are missing in your life, which makes it then nearly impossible to bring them into the lives of others. The messages you hear working in the field of early childhood are not always messages of love, peace, and light — from society, from stressed parents or administrators, from disconnected children, and too often from our own selves. These messages weigh us down, burden us, strip us of the joy life has to offer — and, through us, they do the same to the children we spend our days with.

“The condition of our consciousness registers directly into the child’s consciousness and it is accordingly translated into well-being or distress.”
— Polly Berends

Dealing with children’s challenging behaviors has become the most requested topic for ongoing early childhood professional development in the nation today. Children’s mental health is indeed a concern, as needs to be the mental health of all those adults who set the tone in these children’s environments. Did you know that there is a direct correlation between your mental health and the mental health of the children? Of course you do; you’ve heard this before. Did you know that taking care of yourself is a sign that you value you? And, when you demonstrate that you value you, the children learn to value themselves as well.

There is an unspoken myth in the field of early care and education: the people in the field are needed to nurture children and keep on giving without needing anything in return — ever. Such a myth has contributed to the burnout of so many potentials! The airline message of “parents putting on their own oxygen mask before assisting their child with theirs” sheds wisdom on life itself. If we do not refuel, renew, take care of ourselves, we cannot be expected to do anything but hinder the lives of the children entrusted to our care, and perhaps even burden them with our own personal challenges. We want to have positive relationships with children, and thus we need to nurture that positive relationship with ourselves first. So let’s take a look at how we can enhance such a relationship. The following exercises are offered to increase your awareness, ability, responsiveness, and aliveness. Just as athletes exercise for top form, so must those engaged in working with children exercise to become complete and joyful beings.

Physical and emotional nutrition

Regular and nutritional meals, 8 to 12 glasses of water (64 - 96 oz.), a bit of exercise, sufficient rest (breaks) and sleep, relaxation and enjoyment, and time with significant others, are the basics of a daily healthy lifestyle. If any of these are missing from your life, make a commitment to add one per month,
e.g., every Saturday during the next month, plan a nutritional dinner menu for the week and shop for what you need; make a daily mental note of how many glasses of water you drink and take a few more sips each day; look at the television listings to find out what time a yoga show is on and engage in it; observe what you typically do to relax and enjoy life, note how much time you devote to it, and add a few more minutes each day; and so on. Loving, caring, and attending to yourself in your everyday life is the first step toward self-awareness and valuing yourself.

**Breathe**

Breathe. Breathe deeply. As you inhale, air is drawn in through your nose, warmed, humidified, cleansed (a bit) and vital oxygen is delivered through your lungs and blood to all parts of your body. Exhale, and waste products and toxins are released from the body. Oxygen is essential for optimal functioning of the brain, nerves, glands, and internal organs. The brain requires more oxygen than any other organ; without an ample supply, thinking becomes sluggish, and negative thoughts, depression, and irritation increase. Oxygen purifies the bloodstream, benefiting every part of your body and mind. Practicing deep breathing in the morning creates an increased breathing capacity all day. The benefits include relaxation of the mind and body, weight control, healthier lungs, rejuvenation of the glands and the skin, better digestion, and improved health of the nervous system.

**Connect with nature**

Have you ever been awed by the grandeur of a mountain, a magnificent redwood, or the pound of ocean surf? Have you ever pulled your car to the side of the road to admire a rainbow? The enchantment of these moments is our connection to nature’s intelligence. Reconnecting with nature connects, renews, and fulfills us, helping us feel rejuvenated, appreciative, and more peaceful. Put the magazine down and take the next five minutes to go for a walk around the outside of your home or office, or watch the clouds go by. . . . How did it feel?

**Journaling**

Keeping a personal journal is another effective way to build self-awareness and self-value. Journaling gives you insight into how and why you think and behave. It helps you understand the emotions that are influencing your actions, and helps you ponder and respond more effectively to challenges. Journaling involves simply putting pen to paper and writing whatever comes out without correcting, analyzing or critiquing. Practice makes it easier. It could involve lists, responses to quotes, special events pages, current events, genealogy pages, travel diaries, dreams, tender moments with children or lovers, important issues you are facing, affirmations, and religious or spiritual explorations. Some write letters they will never send. A favorite could be a Joy Log, in which things that make you smile and feel alive are entered. The journal can be used to record your blessings and activities that bring you joy, thrill, and passion. It can also be used to record your accomplishments — the things you are proud of — which often go unnoticed. The peace of mind that comes from journaling allows you to connect more fully to yourself and to those around you. Take a moment and write down a few of your thoughts about this article thus far.

**Play**

Play has many benefits for adults. Adults who play live longer, are healthier, have better memories, are smarter and, most importantly, happier (Sutton-Smith, 1998). Adult play can take many forms — some of us play in ways that test our physical skills: we climb rocks, bicycle, hike mountains, swim, canoe, or engage in sports. Others enjoy strategy games like chess, and others like word games and puzzles. Some of us get together with friends for Bunco games, tailgate parties, movie nights, book club discussions, or pondering the mysteries of life. Some of us play quietly, joyfully collecting stamps or memorabilia, writing, sketching, photography, learning.

“*How we play is related, in myriad ways, to our core sense of self. Play is an exercise in self-definition; it reveals what we choose to do, not what we have to do. We not only play because we are; we play the way we are. And the ways we could be. Play is our free connection to pure possibility. It is a day on the beach.*”

— Brian Sutton-Smith

Play is not trivial. The ability to play benefits our individual lives, and it benefits our families, our co-workers, and especially the lives of the children we care for because it reconnects us to the excitement of life. Play also helps connect us
to each other. Do you play? Describe your play. Do you play enough?

**HeartMath**

Studies from The Institute of HeartMath® (www.heartmath.org) have shown that when the heart and the mind are coherent, that is, working harmoniously together, we perform better, experience less stress, are more emotionally stable, enjoy greater health, and feel, generally, more positive and connected. HeartMath® provides the tools to bring our hearts and minds into coherence. One of these tools is appreciation. We all know how to use this tool and yet rarely choose to. Take a moment right now and think of something you appreciate: the sun’s warmth, your health, the challenging child who brings you the opportunity to learn more about yourself, the red light that offers the occasion to admire the sky’s beauty, etc. Ask children what they appreciate, write all they say on an accumulative list each week, and send the list home with a different child each week to encourage families to do the same. End each day as you lay down in bed, appreciating something about yourself, bringing your awareness to how truly wonderful you are.

**Brain Gyms**

Brain Gyms® are from the field of Educational Kinesiology, a practical and dynamic system that uses simple body movement to integrate the functions of the brain. They are the creation of Dr. Paul Dennison and his wife Gail, after 20 years of research in the fields of education, health, and personal growth. They were originally developed to correct learning disabilities and now are used internationally by people who wish to create definite positive change in their lives. Brain Gyms® are a series of quick, fun, and energizing activities that are effective in preparing any learner, of any age, for specific thinking and coordination skills. They can also be used to help calm emotions. Beginning every day with a routine of Brain Gyms®, and doing them when stressed, promotes focused and productive classrooms where children and adults enjoy learning.

For more information on Brain Gyms®, go to www.braingym.com

**Creative expression**

Creativity is a reflection of the joy of life expressing itself through you. It can be expressed through art or any other form: a beautiful classroom, a dance, a poem, a story, a clay pot, a garden, a song, a painting, woodworking, a table setting, a newsletter, responding in creative ways to children, or in the creative choices offered to children. Creative expression leads to self-awareness in the instances when you let go of concerns about your capability, and enter into the moment when thoughts stop, judgment ceases, and your essence flows. In this process of letting your inner self flow through, you become more aware of yourself, and your processes, which bring more under-
standing, creativity, and flexibility. Every being possesses the ability to be creative, and we can add creativity to anything and everything we do. Even what some consider mundane tasks can be enlivened through creative expression, such as in this photograph of flower petals left on a bedspread by a housekeeping staff member in México — an exquisite gift of joy!

“It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look. To affect the quality of the day — that is the highest of arts.”
— Henry David Thoreau

Think for a moment how you could creatively affect the quality of your day.

Love and joy

Love and joy attract love and joy. Everything around you reflects back to you the nature of your energy and thoughts. Connect to the love and joy that is within you, no matter what your circumstances, and you will gift children with the knowledge of the love and joy within them.

“Find something to be happy about every day, and every hour, even if only for a few minutes, and if possible moment-to-moment. This is the easiest and best protection you can have.”
— Gregg Braden

Being in a state of love and joy, allowing love and joy to permeate every cell in your body, enlivens and heals quite miraculously. Love and joy are indeed the fountain of youth! What do you most love to do? What brings joy to your soul? GO DO IT NOW!

“Go out into the world today and love the people you meet. Let your presence light new light in the hearts of people.”
— Mother Teresa

Unique paths to awareness

You may have found a path to awareness that works best for you: music, meditation, playing an instrument, dance or other types of creative movement, painting, designing beautiful environments for children, inspiring others, etc. There are many unique paths to awareness. Find yours and open yourself to a world of wonder — the wonder within you!

“No matter how brilliant our attempts to inform, it is our ability to inspire that will turn the tides.”
— Jan Phillips from Marry Your Muse

In summary

Knowing how we are feeling at any given moment, and why we are behaving as we are is the goal of self-awareness. Without that awareness, change becomes impossible. Self-awareness gives us the freedom and the opportunity to change our lives and behaviors consciously and actively. Without self-awareness, our challenges rule our days and relationships. In our lack of awareness, we may not believe that we have any challenges; we see them only in other people, including children. On the other hand, we may perceive that only we have such inadequacies, believing that everyone else is better and more capable than we are.

Lack of self-awareness, thus, inhibits our connection to others. Our inability to see ourselves clearly fogs our ability to see others authentically. This leads to enormous feelings of disconnection, an illusion though it is. There is no doubt that we live in an interconnected universe. Every thought changes everything around us, and reflects our self back to us. When we live in the illusion that we are disconnected, when we are not aware of our own feelings and reasons for acting as we do, we are blind to the effects of our thoughts and actions on the people and children around us. We do not accept responsibility for our role in what we create.

Self-awareness is the realization that we are responsible for how we feel and act, and for the models we set for others. Self-awareness also brings the realization that change is possible, and that choices abound — including the choice to be joyful. Personal joy emanates from our hearts outward. It transforms the energy in our environment and relationships. It moves our world one step closer to peace and harmony. Self-awareness is the ultimate act of responsibility. It is the gate to change. It is the door to connection. It is the home of joy.

End each day as you lay down in bed, appreciating something about yourself, bringing your awareness to how truly wonderful you are.
Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fears, our presence automatically liberates others.”

References and resources

www.joy-fullconnections

Using Beginnings Workshop to Promote Professionalism
by Kay Albrecht

The connection: The connection between our mental health and the mental health of the children we teach is a strong one. Work with teachers to identify ways to value themselves in tangible ways that lead to increased positive mental health.

Just do it! There is at least one idea in each section of this article that is just perfect to try out. So, start at the beginning and just do it. Then, figure out ways to help your teachers do the same. Be a good model first, then see what happens.

Be the solution: Support teachers in including nutritional meals and snacks; plenty of water; a bit of exercise; sufficient rest, relaxation, and enjoyment; and time with significant others any way you can. Be creative and figure out ways to walk with teachers as they get plenty of physical and emotional nutrition.
Imagine standing at the very edge of a cliff.

Are you inspired by the beauty that spreads out before you?

Can you feel the upward draft of the wind, attempting to carry you with it?

Or are you frightened by what’s out there? Do you fear falling? Failing?

Right now, today, you might find yourself at the edge of all the possibilities that lay ahead:

Do you aspire to finish your degree?

Applying all your senses, can you imagine your dream center?

Do you visualize a community coming together to support young children?

Whatever you dream can become real! Today can be the day you step off the edge and soar with the wind carrying you and your program to new heights. Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (1998) surmise, “Those who actively work with a bold vision create programs that stand out from the grim statistics on mediocrity.” What is your vision? Where do you begin when you’re ready to explore new ventures beyond the mundane paperwork and day-to-day tasks of operating an early childhood program?

**Self-reflection**

Reflective practice is not new to the field of education. Teachers and teacher educators have been incorporating it into their professional development for years. “Reflection is not simply looking back and taking stock: it incorporates thought about the past and present, along with plans for the future” (Killion & Todnem, 1991 as cited by Trumbell et al., 2001, p. 94). As program leaders, directors can also benefit from this practice. According to Betty Jones (1995), professionalism is defined by reflection on practice. When directors and administrators include reflection in their daily practice, continuous improvement is made real. Seemingly small, incremental changes add up to big transformations. A self-reflection journey can begin by:

- Evaluating where your program is currently and where you would like to see it grow; moving beyond the “good enough” into the quality you desire.
- Reflecting on the personal attitudes or supervisory practices that affect your effectiveness; quality teachers are a result of quality directors.
- Learning more about yourself and your program; understand how others perceive the program.
- Connecting with other directors to explore practices and/or attitudes that affect professional practice; there is strength in numbers.

**What Can I Do Today?**

Purchase a fun notebook or journal and a special pen. Schedule 10 minutes a day to reflect. Start writing.

**Self-assessment**

Before you step out to the edge, you need to look inward and critically reflect not only on how you manage, but also on why you manage in a particular way:

**Systems.** When you develop efficient and effective systems, you’ll have more time to work toward your vision. For example:

- Does your system for budgeting work effectively?
Is your system for managing paperwork efficient?

Management style. Skilled directors balance managing tasks with leading people:

■ Do you take control of situations and fix problems or do you empower staff, offering open-ended questions to encourage their own problem solving?

■ Center directors play three key roles: manager, mentor, and leader. Which come naturally to you? Where do you need to grow?

Explore how your strengths impact your center’s effectiveness. Margie Carter and Deb Curtis’s Visionary Director (1998) is an excellent resource to further explore the manager, mentor, and leader in you. One excellent tool many directors find useful is the Program Administration Scale (PAS) (Talan & Bloom, 2004). Talan and Bloom (2004) report, “The genesis of the PAS was the growing professional consensus that early childhood program quality should be viewed through a broader lens.” The PAS rating scale considers many elements of early childhood program administration including fiscal management, program planning, family partnerships, and marketing. The data you gather from this assessment can help guide yourself — and program improvements.

What Can I Do Today?

■ Write down your systems step by step and evaluate them for efficiency and effectiveness.

■ Reflect on your decision-making style and make a conscious effort to include staff in the decision making process.

■ Read The Visionary Director and explore your leadership roles.

■ Examine your program through the lens of the Program Administration Scale (PAS).

When you determine where you are, you can build on your strengths and passions, and address your weaknesses. Now imagine all the possibilities out there. Let’s look at three.

Lifelong learning:

Exploring professional development opportunities

■ Do you feel like you’re drowning in paperwork?

■ Are your days spent putting out fires?

Did you receive specific training to be a director?

The Professional Child Care Administrators Credential (or director credential) is an excellent place to start if you want to further your education and professional skills. After taking just one of the six classes, you’ll not only gain a wealth of knowledge and strategies that will assist you in managing and leading your center, you’ll also become part of a network of directors who support one another. The director determines the quality of a center. High-quality directors create high-quality centers.

Do you have staff who find it difficult to work with children who have challenging behaviors? It’s possible that the teacher in you often steps in and takes care of the situation; but the supervisor in you needs to step back, offering encouragement and support to the teacher, possibly suggesting a course in child guidance or social-emotional development of young children. As the teacher’s skills increase, others will see the positive outcomes and want to learn more as well. This takes time, but you’ll find that continuous learning is contagious; your center will grow into a community of learners.

Developing a professional portfolio is another avenue toward professional development. Again, this is very common practice among teachers and can be very insightful for directors as well. A director portfolio can showcase your education and experience as well as document the evolution and improvements of a center or program. For example, a professional portfolio might include a resume, samples of staff team-building activities, and flyers from events you’ve organized.

Maybe you’ve had your fill of trainings and courses and are ready for a different challenge. Many of us entered the field of education because we love to teach. How about teaching a course at a community college or Child Care Resource and Referral Agency? Have you sat in workshop sessions and thought, “I could be a presenter”? Now is the time to explore those avenues by submitting a workshop proposal to the organizers of a local conference.

Maybe writing is your thing. Try writing an article for a local newspaper on an early childhood topic. Draw on your child development knowledge and experience. You could write an article for an early childhood journal; Exchange magazine has a great mentor program (www.ChildCareExchange/mentor)!
What Can I Do Today?

- Research scholarships available in your area to explore continuing your education.
- Help your staff create professional development goals that include participation in professional conferences, workshops, or college courses.
- Purchase a scrapbook or 3-ring binder and start gathering mementos you want to showcase in a director’s portfolio.
- Write an outline for an article you would like to submit for publication.

Raise the bar: Center upgrades

In *The Visionary Director* (1998), Carter and Curtis write:

“Guiding early childhood programs with a vision requires more than management skills. A manager is focused on the people, problems, and tasks at hand, using technical skills to address them. Beyond that, working with a vision requires developing oneself into a leader who inspires others to participate in and expand the vision” (p. 22).

Raising the bar requires a vision. Does your vision include major changes such as landscaping the playground or starting a summer camp? Does it include smaller changes such as reworking your parent handbook or offering only low-sugar, low-salt snacks for children? If, in your efforts to develop a vision you’re feeling stuck, review your scores from the Program Administration Scale (PAS). These can give you a direction. Choose areas for improvement that speak to your heart; those are the ones where your passion is the strongest. Then develop and prioritize a list of strategies to raise those scores.

If there are major changes you would like to make within your program, such as landscaping the playground to fit with your vision of natural materials, writing a grant would be a great next step. When searching for grants, I have found it helpful to talk with people in the area to identify local foundations, as well as contacts at local American Legion and Lions Clubs. An Internet search is another way to locate prospective funders. Grants don’t have to be large to cover the costs of many center projects. There are several small grants available that will give you the money necessary to make improvements in your program.

Many programs have Donors Forums and other supports for non-profit managers.

Perhaps what you really need are new computers or a software program to assist with program operations. If this is the case, talk with other center directors to see which software programs they use, as well as how user-friendly they are. Connecting with other programs in your area brings us to the next place to view possibilities:

What Can I Do Today?

- Make a vision board: a visual display of what you plan to accomplish. For example, designate a space on a bulletin board, the front of a cabinet, or the edging around your monitor and attach inspirational phrases, pictures of outdoor equipment you want to purchase, or clip a logo of a college you plan to attend.
- Explore grants available to support your program improvement efforts.
- Connect with other directors in your area to share ideas.

Find the leader in you: Community involvement

When you’re dreaming of possibilities, you might be drawn to community involvement. The relationships you build within the center are only part of the puzzle, connecting with the community is another piece. Building relationships and making connections in the community can have a huge payoff: reduced struggles with recruitment and enrollment and increased support in volunteers and donations. There are a variety of collaborative ideas available within your program and out in the community. Many programs offer family events, such as Touch-a-Truck, where county workers or a local stone quarry bring big trucks for the children to explore. Bulldozers are their favorite! Look at what your local town is known for and expand on those things that make it unique. For example, if your town has weekly stock car races, you could expand that by having a driver bring the car for the children to explore and then build their own derby cars. This is a great avenue to increase father involvement. Professional athletes could be invited to talk with parents or read to the children. Here in Wisconsin, we’ve had the Green Bay Packer players stop by the center and connect with families — always a big hit!
Collaborating with the local school district is another way to foster community involvement and begin building the bridge between your center and local schools. Have you considered inviting school representatives to participate in parent-teacher conferences with children who are entering kindergarten? What better way to prepare children and the school for the upcoming years? Partnering with the school district to host a booth at their annual Child Development Days by bringing activities for the children to do, like hollow blocks, is another great way to be involved in the community. This makes a great marketing activity as well. The key to community collaboration is the impression your connections are making. Promoting a positive image of your program has far-reaching effects.

**What can I do today?**

- Start a Director’s Book Club. Paula Jorde Bloom’s *Leadership in Action* (2003) and Carter and Curtis’s *The Visionary Director* are two great choices to get you started.
- Host a lunch for area directors to discuss current events in the world of ECE.
- Elicit ideas from your staff and plan a family event.
- Introduce yourself to the elementary principal or local early childhood instructors.
- Sometimes the edge is right in front of you and all you have to do is leap!

Sometimes you have to force yourself to go to the edge. Once you’re there, can you see the beauty that’s out there? Are you ready to take that leap of faith?

There are two necessary attributes to achieve success and fulfill your vision: zeal and risk taking. According to Merriam-Webster, zeal is “intense emotion compelling action.” Many people refer to it as passion. I prefer zeal because it requires action rather than simply strong emotion. Risk taking can have negative connotations, but I agree with T. S. Eliot who said, “Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go.” Taking a risk requires a willingness to put yourself out there, to accept that you’ll make mistakes, to be comfortable with not having all the answers. That’s where all the possibilities lie, in the realm of not knowing. When you know the answer, you walk away from the edge. You believe you already know what’s out there and cease to see the possibilities.

Come to the edge with zeal. Create a bold vision. Take a risk. Enjoy the journey and know that others will follow.

**References**


**Additional resources**


ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington, DC.

For information regarding scholarships or the director credential check out the Registry Alliance website [www.registryalliance.org](http://www.registryalliance.org)

Do it today!! Take the first step mentioned in the article then follow along one step at a time. You can do it! And, the process will make a difference.
Teachers and administrators working with students, parents and staff are under constant stress in the workplace. Yoga can help. Yes, even in the workplace.

So what is yoga? Yoga means union or yoking. It means to unite the mind, body, and spirit. While there are many forms of yoga — hatha yoga, or the physical postures which many have come to know — is only a part. These physical exercises are the oldest practical system of discipline. And today, these still have tremendous practical value for the average person.

One needn’t be double jointed or extremely flexible to enjoy its benefits. Simple breath work is its secret ingredient. Through the breath, we can gain control over our bodies as well as our minds. With breath awareness, especially in the postures, you can gain release over common stressors, develop muscles, promote suppleness and well being.

If you practice yoga regularly, you will start to see many beneficial effects. Some of the side effects include a focused mind, as well as a sense of peace and ease. Yoga is also the oldest known method of stress reduction. It is often known to lower blood pressure as well as increase energy levels.

Here is a quick primer on breath as a healer through yoga. First, close your eyes and notice how you’re now breathing. Don’t try to change it, just observe. Do this for just one minute. Chances are your breaths are short as well as shallow. Also, you might notice that your breath is noticeable only at the chest. This is indicative of hyperactivity and chronic stress.

Now let’s place the left hand just below the collar bones on the chest. Place the right hand on the belly, just below the rib cage. With the breaths that follow, do this: First, breathe only through the nose. When you inhale, feel the breath drawn down to the right hand and feel it move outward. As you fill the lungs, notice the left hand only slightly rise. This is the use of the diaphragm in yogic breath. If you can do this consciously for at least five minutes, you’ll see and feel a noticeable difference in you demeanor.

The breath is a great aid when doing the physical postures and participants often observe how their practice grows easily when the breath is applied. Sit in your chair, and as you twist from the hips to look behind you, deeply exhale. Hold the twist for several breaths, and notice how each exhalation, deepens the twist. Inhale to release the twist to center. Now try a forward bend in your chair using an exhalation. Again inhale to rise.

Know that you can do the breathing practice anywhere: playground, at your desk, simply standing in line, or before any important conference or meeting. Enjoy and know that there is much more to be experienced.

Take a deep breath! You may need the recommended deep breathing as you tackle the topics in this issue of Beginnings Workshop. Try it — you may find learning more about breath as a healer can support the journey.

Using Beginnings Workshop to Promote Professionalism by Kay Albrecht