

The Director's Link

Published by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University

Winter 2007

Becoming a Self-Mentor

Paula Jorde Bloom

Socrates summed up the secret to a meaningful life in two simple words—"Know thyself." Self-awareness means knowing your needs and values, your strengths and limitations, your passions and your idiosyncratic quirks. It means having a deep appreciation of what makes you a unique specimen on this planet. On a deeper level, self-awareness means knowing how you react in different situations and accepting full responsibility for your feelings and actions.

Having a better understanding of oneself is the first step to having a better relationship with others. This is because self-awareness provides a window to expand our understanding about other points of view and perspectives. While the importance of self-awareness is readily understood by most people, achieving it is easier said than done. Even Benjamin Franklin acknowledged this when he wrote in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, "There are three things extremely hard: steel, diamonds, and to know one's self."

The reason self-awareness is so difficult to achieve is that it involves an ongoing assessment of the assumptions, beliefs, values, and the mental models that shape our behavior and guide our actions both at work and in our personal lives. The goal of this kind of reflection is not merely to see

who we are and better understand ourselves today, but to envision what we might become tomorrow. It is a life-long process—a journey of self-discovery, meaning making, and identity shaping. It is the journey of becoming a self-mentor.

Why Self-Awareness is So Important

The importance of self-awareness is based on George Kelly's construct theory, first published in 1955, and his notion that every person is a psychologist. Kelly believed that people's common sense ideas and their own theories about life and relationships are enormously rich sources of knowledge about human affairs. The central thesis of his approach is that we do not merely react to events; we are in charge of what we do in the world and have the potential to recreate ourselves.

Two other social psychologists have been influential in promoting the self-awareness movement of personal psychology. In his 1987 book, *Beginning with Ourselves*, David Hunt calls the approach inside-out psychology. He contrasts this to the outside-in approach which leaves human affairs to the experts. The same year, Donald Schon published his seminal work *Becoming a Reflective Practitioner*. This book gave credence to the idea that achieving professional competence is a dynamic process involving continual inquiry and renewal.

Being self-aware is at the core of what Howard Gardner refers to as intrapersonal intelligence or what Daniel Goleman refers to as emotional intelligence. Self-awareness is the capacity to be introspective and examine thoughts

Continued on page 2



and feelings. It means being aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood. Self-awareness includes:

- affective awareness – knowledge of one's feelings, attitudes, moods, and outlook;
- ethical awareness – the ability to set one's principles and moral priorities;
- self-regulation – the ability to monitor one's thoughts, actions, and behavior; and
- metacognition – the ability to be aware of one's thought processes.

Self-awareness also means having a clear picture of our internal motives; those things that drive us to say what we say or do what we do. Peeling away the layers of our motivations is not always a comfortable process, but it is a necessary step if our goal is to become an authentic leader known for personal integrity. Central to this process is gaining absolute clarity about what we perceive our purpose is in life and how we define success.

Becoming a Reflective Practitioner

The capacity to reflect and engage in candid introspection is at the core of achieving self-awareness. Reflective practitioners think creatively, imaginatively, and, at times, critically about what they are doing. Individuals who use a variety of reflective approaches have a better awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and can better understand, monitor, and adjust their behavior in personal and professional interactions.

There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self.

—Aldous Huxley

John Saban and his associates have identified three different types of reflection. The most common they refer to as reflection-on-action. This is simply a replay of an experience to review, revisit, or recall what has happened—kind of like replaying a videotape. Reflection-in-action refers to a kind of out-of-body experience where we watch ourselves act and simultaneously reflect about the decisions we are making. A third type of reflection is referred to as reflection-for-action.

This is a predictive process for forecasting how we will use what we have learned from reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. It involves consciously adjusting our behaviors based on our reflections.

Using Self-Assessments to Build Self-Awareness

There is certainly no shortage of formal and informal self-assessment tools to help build self-awareness. Some are quick snapshots—a questionnaire that can be taken in ten minutes and scored independently. Others are quite lengthy and must be administered by a certified psychologist or trainer.

At the risk of oversimplifying, self-assessment instruments can be divided into two broad categories of awareness building: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive assessments compare a person's traits to those of a model teacher or administrator and diagnoses the individual's strengths and weaknesses in relation to that ideal. Descriptive instruments, on the other hand, are the ones that say, "This is your type, your style, your preference. It is no better or worse than any other, just different."

From Reflection and Self-Awareness to Self-Mentoring

It is one thing to be self-aware, to acquire information from reflection and formal and informal self-assessments, and quite another to apply that information into concrete behavioral changes.

No doubt about it, the most effective professionals hold a transformational view of human growth and change. They see themselves as active agents in describing, interpreting, and shaping their behavior. In other words, they are self-mentors.

The great Roman philosopher Cicero is credited with saying, "No one can give you better advice than yourself." That is really the premise of self-mentoring. Self-mentoring is essentially self-directed learning. It means intentionally developing or strengthening those aspects of who you are and who you want to be. Self-mentoring requires that you not only get an accurate picture of your real self—who you are now—but also a strong image of your ideal self—the person you aspire to become.

One vital aspect of self-development, stresses Richard Boyatzis, a leader in the

The Director's Link is made possible by funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, and is distributed free of charge to early childhood directors in Illinois.

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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>



Becoming a Self-Mentor

The job of becoming a self-mentor is really about developing the disposition of life-long learning and self-transformation. It is about taking charge of your life and taking responsibility for your choices. Self-mentoring means becoming fully aware of what you really want in all areas of your life and being able to invent new possibilities to unleash your passions.

A Few Questions to Get You Started

Ask yourself...

- What's really important to you? What do you value most?
- What qualities do you most admire in others?
- How do you define personal success? When have you felt most successful?
- How have you used your knowledge, skill, and special talents to make a difference in the world?
- When have you felt most energized and excited about work? When have you felt most depleted and discouraged about work?
- Is there something you've always longed to do, but never quite had the courage to do?
- How do you handle adversity? Are you quick to blame others when things don't go well or do you take ownership for the outcome of your decisions and actions?
- When do you feel like time flies? When do you feel like the minutes drag on for eternity?
- When do you feel most at peace?
- Do you feel you have achieved a reasonable sense of balance in your life between your personal and professional pursuits?
- Would people consider you to be a compassionate and kind person?
- Do you know how to regulate your emotions or do your emotions get in the way of your interpersonal relationships?
- If you had unlimited time and resources, what would you choose to do?
- Do you often find yourself comparing yourself to others?
- What do you want more of in your relationships? What do you want less of?
- How would you describe your favorite co-worker? How would you describe your least favorite co-worker? How are these individuals different? How are they like or not like you?
- What legacy do you want to pass on?

Adapted from Bloom, P. J. (2007). From the Inside Out: The Power of Reflection and Self-Awareness. Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons (www.newhorizonsbooks.net).

Planning Ahead

Professional Development Opportunities

Family Child Care Institute—Program Quality Evaluation

February 23-24 and May 12, 2007

This Family Child Care Institute provides an introduction to program evaluation, stressing the importance of ongoing assessment to improve program quality and practices. Participants will be introduced to the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (FCCERS-R) to assess the learning environment, as well as other measures to assess the quality of business practices, parent satisfaction, and community responsiveness. In addition, participants will learn about the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) Quality Standards for Accreditation and how to begin the self-study process for accreditation.

Institute presenters will be Ida Butler, President of the Illinois Association for Family Child Care and Barbara Sawyer, Director of Special Projects for the National Association for Family Child Care.

Locations: February 23-24, 2007	Saturday, May 12, 2007
Heartland Community College	Chicago Marriott O'Hare Hotel
Community Commons Building	In conjunction with Leadership Connections
Room 2401	
Normal, Illinois	

Fee: \$99, includes texts, materials, and meals (breakfasts and lunches).

Participants can earn two semester hours of graduate credit by paying an additional fee.

Program Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

March 26-28, 2007

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 reliability of the 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, and meals

Participants may receive 2 semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, Workshop/Early Childhood Program Evaluation) by paying an additional fee.

Computer Training for Early Childhood Administrators—Beginner Course

April 10-11, 17-18, 24-25, 2007; Sessions convene from 8:30am–12:30pm each day.

Administering an effective and efficient early childhood program in today's world requires expertise in computer technology. Let us help you improve your computer skills and integrate technology into the management of your child care program. This beginner course, funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), consists of six class sessions for a total of 24 hours of hands-on instruction. There is also an additional online component and follow-up assignments to reinforce the skills you have learned.

Location: Heartland Community College, Normal, Illinois

Fee: \$75, includes text and all course materials

Participants may receive 2 semester hours of graduate credit (ECE534, Technology in Child Care Administration I) by paying an additional fee.

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

NLU Courses for Directors

Spring term begins April 2, 2007

Online Courses for Early Childhood Administrators

ECE538: (2 sh)

The Early Childhood Administrator:
Individual and Organizational Perspectives

FND503: (3 sh)

Historical and Philosophical Foundations
in Early Childhood Education

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

New This Year!

Special Train-the-Trainer Workshop Highlights Preconference Agenda

Are you using or interested in adopting *Innovations—The Comprehensive Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Curriculum*? Join author Dr. Kay Albrecht to learn how the *Innovations* series helps teachers fully incorporate all components of the curricula. Designed for directors, trainers, technical assistance consultants, and college instructors familiar with the *Innovations* curriculum series, this 6-hour session will provide you with all of the information you need to use *Innovations* materials to meet your training, assessment, and professional goals. Participants should bring their copies of the *Innovations* curricula or may purchase the books at the seminar.

Fee is \$150 and pre-registration is required. Lunch is included.

 **LEADERSHIP
Connections**
May 10-12, 2007

Register on line <http://cecl.nl.edu>

"Opening Minds"

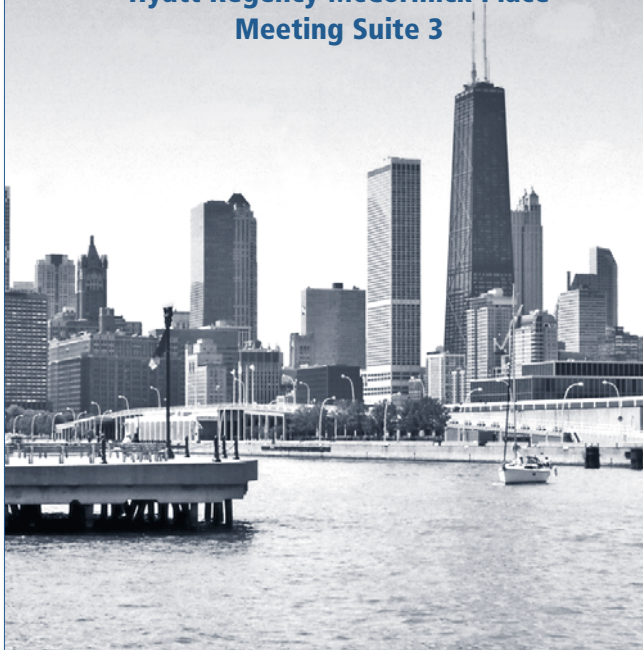
Join us at the Chicago Metro AEYC Conference

at a suite talk for early childhood administrators

Thursday, January 25, 2007

4:00-5:30pm

**Hyatt Regency McCormick Place
Meeting Suite 3**



Take Time Out to Chat with the Experts Online in 2007!

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership hosts nationally renowned early childhood experts on its Web site. Join the discussion to chat with the people who have written the books and helped shape early childhood policy and practice. Each expert will be the featured guest for a week-long open discussion on issues of interest to early childhood center administrators.



Monday, February 12—Saturday, February 17

Guest expert: Judy Harris Helm
Author, trainer, and early childhood consultant
Professional Portfolios for Early Childhood Educators

Monday, March 5—Saturday, March 10

Guest expert: Danielle Ewen
Director of the Child Care and Early Education team at
the Center for Law and Social Policy
Family Child Care: Providing Quality Everyday



Monday, April 16—Saturday, April 21

Guest expert: Chip Donohue
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of
Continuing Education
Effective Practices for Teaching and Learning Online

Monday, May 21—Saturday, May 26

Guest expert: Holly Bruno
Partner, Bruno Duraturo Keynotes and Consulting
Legal and Ethical Issues in Early Childhood



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

New this year! Half-Day Computer Workshops

Improve your computer skills and integrate technology into the management of your child care program.

A Beginner's Guide to Web Site Development and Design

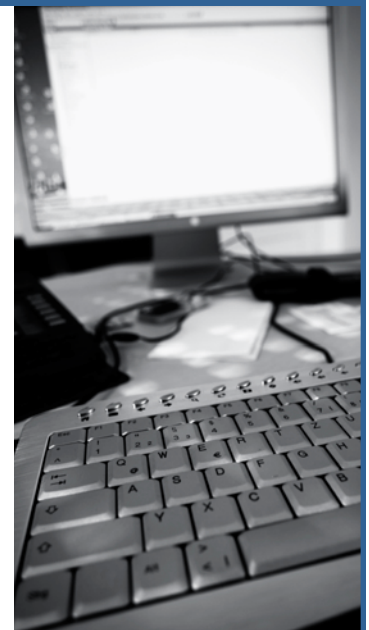
Friday, March 23, 2007

8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

National-Louis University, Chicago campus, Room 4038

Learn the basics of HTML, Web authoring tools, graphics, and design principles that you can put to use immediately.

Fee is **\$35**. Participants will receive a certificate of attendance.



Space is limited – Sign up soon!

Continued from page 2

self-directed learning movement, is striking a balance between what it is about yourself you want to preserve, and what it is you want to change. His research shows that people that successfully change in sustainable ways cycle through the following stages:

- First, they create an image of their ideal self. They ask themselves the question, "Who do I want to be?"
- Second, they come to terms with their real self. They ask themselves, "Who am I? What are my strengths—where do my ideal and real overlap? What are my gaps—where do my ideal and real differ?"
- Third, they are deliberate in crafting a learning agenda. They ask themselves, "How can I build on my strengths while reducing my gaps?"
- Fourth, they experiment with and practice new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery. They ask themselves, "What subtle adjustments can I make to refine and expand my repertoire of skills and abilities?"
- Finally, they develop trusting relationships that help, support, and encourage each step in the process. They ask themselves, "Who can I count on to give me direct and candid feedback and keep me on track?"

Self-Mentoring Strategies

Self-mentoring means cultivating your own professional growth through reflection, networking, and seeking out appropriate resources. The process clearly requires motivation and self-discipline. Here are a few strategies to consider:

- *Observe the behavior of individuals you admire.* Effective leadership is both an art and a science; leadership behaviors can definitely be learned. If there is a person you admire for their listening skills, study the precise behaviors that exemplify good listening. Observe the person's body language and the specific probing questions they ask.
- *Talk to individuals you consider to be experts in the field.* Don't be bashful. If there is person you admire for their knowledge in a specific area,

McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership

Happy New Year from the faculty and staff



contact the person and ask for his/her advice and resources to build your own expertise in this area.

- *Read, read, read.* Subscribe to journals and magazines that enrich your understanding of different topics of interest. Don't limit yourself to professional journals either. Some of the best wisdom you can get will be from literature in the fiction section of your bookstore. Most important, though, don't just read things that reinforce your point of view. Read articles and books that challenge your assumptions and promote a contrary point of view.
- *Pursue formal coursework.* While demonstrated competence will get you promoted to higher levels of responsibility in your job, it is probably the formal degrees or certificates you hold that got you the job in the first place. Consider taking formal courses that will help you attain the degrees, certificates, and certifications that will enhance your vita and open doors to new opportunities.
- *Take risks.* Be bold and audacious and stretch your comfort zone. Challenge yourself to try new things and risk the awkwardness of not being perfect at something.

- *Cultivate a diversified portfolio.* Don't just focus on the bolstering your intellect; your emotional, physical, and spiritual sides are just as important. A balanced life has diversity and coherence.
- *Be open to feedback.* Listen fully. Be open to receiving any message—compliment or criticism—as helpful data in understanding yourself better.

In Sum

Socrates was right! The quest for excellence begins with an inner quest to discover who we are—our passions, values, talents, personal resources, and even those foibles and annoying habits we might prefer not to acknowledge. The insight that comes from self-awareness will help you appreciate the unique gifts you have to offer your organization, the importance of surrounding yourself with others who complement (and not necessarily compliment) your unique skill set, and new areas you can target for personal and professional growth.

Paula Jorde Bloom holds a joint appointment as the Michael W. Louis Endowed Chair of the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership and Professor of Early Childhood Education at National-Louis University.