

# The Rhode Island Early Childhood Newsletter



## Diverse Leadership, Diverse Lessons: A Personal Story

by Laura Mason Zeisler

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Leadership in early childhood education has many levels with paths to become a leader, and many ways of demonstrating leadership. Becoming a leader has been a profound learning experience for me. I love to learn. Some of the lessons learned were challenging ones, but each was worth the energy, effort, and ultimate result. Had you asked me in the early 1980s if I would see myself as a leader, I would have answered with a definite "no." Some children exhibit leadership capacity early, as is described in a number of leadership articles in *Young Children* and *Beyond the Journal*, both professional journals of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Others, like me, may have been shy as children, and gradually grow into becoming a leader. Each of us has unpredictable potential.

There are a variety of leadership opportunities in early childhood education in Rhode Island and beyond. Becoming involved in our community is an enriching experience. Just as our day-to-day work makes a difference in the lives of young children and their families, so does the leadership work we do. *Paso a paso...step by step*. This article shares some of the lessons I have learned, and hopefully stimulates you to look at your own strengths and issues to see what you may choose to champion. If you are interested in learning more about leadership in early childhood education, please read the resources highlighted in this issue.

A series of small steps ultimately led me to become such a vocal advocate for high-quality professional development and resources in Spanish for Spanish-speaking early childhood educators; for more GED and adult basic education classes in Spanish in Rhode Island, especially in Providence; and for responsive, culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate practice. I have been fortunate to receive the support, encouragement, mentoring, and shared knowledge from many extraordinary early care and education professionals, and the opportunity to share what I have learned with others and watch them expand their own leadership efforts.

I vividly remember going to an Association for Education International Rhode Island (ACEI-RI) Chapter conference in 1984 at the Henry Barnard School. There, Rose Merenda and Ruth Whipple, veteran teachers active on the steering committee for the RI Early Childhood Conference (RIECC), encouraged me to write a proposal for a workshop for the upcoming spring conference. Who, me?! Presenting that spring was my first step to becoming a leader, and sharing some of my experiences and expertise. Soon I was serving on the Board for ACEI-RI chapter and on the RIECC Steering Committee.

Rose and Ruth nurtured each Board member to become successful in our assigned roles. While chairing the Program Subcommittee for ACEI-RI, I listened to their suggestions of possible speakers with awe.

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## Letter from the Editor

Happy late spring, readers. Thanks for opening another issue of this newsletter. Our theme of *leadership* has generated a number of good articles, expanding this issue to six pages.

Our lead article offers a personalized account of how leadership capacity can be built. The author acknowledges—similar to how I did in my letter in the last issue—that it was a diverse and committed group of early childhood professionals who encouraged and motivated her to take those scary first steps toward leadership. It is an inspiring article.

Take advantage of the multiple book reviews in this issue, all focusing on leadership skills. Lastly, note that our state's quality rating system—BrightStars—offers an update on its important work.

Stay tuned for our summer issue. Until then, enjoy the green richness that spring offers us!

**Joseph Morra, Editor**  
[jmorra@childspan.net](mailto:jmorra@childspan.net)

## BrightStars Pilot Underway

by Tammy Camillo

BrightStars, Rhode Island's child care quality rating and improvement system, is now piloting its quality standards in programs throughout the state. The project is working with evaluation consultants to ensure that a random sample of child care centers, family child care homes, and school-age programs are represented in the pilot. Beginning this fall, BrightStars will review pilot evaluation data to determine if changes need to be made to its standards and/or criteria.

During the pilot year, the BrightStars Steering Committee is continuing to provide guidance for the project. In addition, BrightStars is working to ensure coordination with other agencies/programs offering services to Rhode Island's child care community. The BrightStars quality rating and improvement system was developed by a team of local early childhood and school-age care professionals and reviewed by national experts. The program was created to improve the care and education of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in Rhode Island. States with strong child care quality rating systems see significant improvements in the quality of care and learning that children experience.

A BrightStars quality rating will provide accurate, reliable information about program quality to families and the community. This information can then be used by families to find high-quality programs. Programs proudly participating in BrightStars can use the rating system to develop benchmarks,

guide improvement, and access quality improvement tools and resources.

BrightStars is managed by the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children. For more information about BrightStars, visit the project's web site ([www.brightstars.org](http://www.brightstars.org)), or contact Tammy Camillo: (401) 467-1219, or [tcamillo@brightstars.org](mailto:tcamillo@brightstars.org).

## CHILDSPAN News

by Lucia Ramos

Do you know about CHILDSPAN's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?

In 1987, Children's Friend and Service (CHILDSPAN's lead agency) adopted the United States Department of Agriculture's CACFP to supplement the income of licensed family child care providers. In addition to providing financial reimbursement, the CACFP promotes healthy nutrition practices in participating family child care homes.

Funded by the RI Department of Education, the CACFP acts as a support for providers to enrich their knowledge of good nutrition and optimal child development. All participants are assigned a case manager who act as their link to CHILDSPAN, provide them with nutrition education and information regarding upcoming professional development, and support them in becoming better caregivers and educators.

You must be a licensed family child care provider to participate in CHILDSPAN's CACFP. Please contact Jeanne Bautista at (401) 721-6413, or via email at [jbautista@childspan.net](mailto:jbautista@childspan.net), for more information.

## Professional Resource Review

by Sheila Dandeneau

Kriete, Roxanne. (1999). *The Morning Meeting Book*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Many early childhood classrooms start their day with circle time or a morning meeting, which may include songs, calendar discussion, and weather observation. If you have ever felt that this part of the day was missing something or could use improvement, then *The Morning Meeting Book* is the book for you.

The author uses the Responsive Classroom ([www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)) approach, and explains the goal of morning meeting as a time that “allows us to begin each day as a community of caring and respectful learners.” The focus of morning meeting is on social development and growth, as it addresses two basic human needs: to feel a sense of belonging and to have fun. This idea is one of five central purposes of Morning Meeting, all of which are explained in excellent detail.

The book is organized into easy-to-read chapters and includes seven appendices of non-competitive activities, greetings, and photographs of actual morning message charts. The author explains the four components of morning meeting (greeting, sharing, group activity, news and announcements), why they are important, and when and how to introduce them into your classroom. I especially enjoyed the chapter on sharing, wherein the author offers a handful of strategies to use to avoid the “bring-and-brag” problems of show and tell.

Preschool teachers will gain new insight and ideas for their traditional circle times, while elementary teachers will learn how morning meeting can be incorporated into their daily routine. (The ideas in this versatile book may even be applied to upper grades.) Whether you are new to the field or are an experienced teacher, *The Morning Meeting Book* is a valuable tool for your classroom and a welcome addition to your resource library.

## Internet Information

by Joseph Morra

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) houses an informative web site available in both English and Spanish. Called Child Care Aware, it contains pertinent information for all professionals and leaders in the early childhood field. What I find especially useful are an extensive glossary of terms related to our field; a list of national organizations that focus on child development, health and safety, and accreditation; and a basic but well-written newsletter called *Are You Aware?* (A bonus: You can access issues from as far back as 2003.) Be sure to check out this information-rich site!

[www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)

*One person with  
passion is better  
than forty people  
merely interested.*

--E. M. Forster

## Early Childhood Resources in Rhode Island

*Aquidneck Island Directors' Association*  
Pam Griffiths, 683-0991

*BrightStars: RI's Child Care  
Quality Rating and Improvement System*  
Tammy Camillo, 467-1219

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

*Children's Friend and Service*  
Rosemary Dwyer, 276-4305

*CHILDSPAN: Rhode Island's  
Child Development and Education  
Training System*  
Joseph Morra, 721-6400

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

*Options for Working Families*  
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*  
Matthew Cox, 727-4144

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

## ***Diverse Leadership, Diverse Lessons***

*(continued from page one)*

They knew so many leaders, so many great presenters. I still have this image of Ruth with her index cards, at a RIECC meeting, to help us organize the workshop program. I remember the discussion about balance, and about the types of workshops participants likely would be interested in and need. I carry that lesson with me today, as I consider the professional development needs of our diverse community. These two leadership experiences nurtured my confidence and ability to take on other challenges.

Joyce Butler has mentored, supported, and inspired me in many ways. She taught me how essential **advocacy** is in our work as early childhood educators. When my relationship with Joyce began, I was a classroom teacher and had yet to make that connection between articulating what it is we do, why it is so important, and why public funding should support it. I was focusing on my day-to-day issues of working with young children and their families. Advocacy work has us reaching beyond that day-to-day work. Joyce emphasized how important it is to educate our legislators about the relevant issues, and to advocate for legislation and funding that will allow the fundamentals to be adequately and appropriately addressed. Stacey Goffin and Valora Washington's recently published book, ***Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education***, underscores how we need to go beyond our comfort zone, beyond our field, and build relationships and support for the infrastructure and financing of an early care and education system which reflects best practices as we know them.

Almost twenty years later, this advocacy work has not gotten any easier. The rate of reimbursement for subsidized child care has been frozen in our state the past four years. High quality has a price tag. We want to provide high-quality care for young children, yet the struggle for funding is becoming more desperate than ever. *Your involvement counts.*

Much of my professional life I have been drawn to diversity, anti-bias, and social justice issues. As part of my internal work, I recognized the connection with my Jewish heritage. My passion for equity and for making the world a better place is grounded in my traditions and culture. *Tikkun olan*, a Jewish law, is defined as "the healing of the world; world peace; social justice." This idea is reflected in my anti-bias advocacy work which started with chairing the Diversity Council for the New England Association for the Education of Young Children (NEAEYC). In 1992, I met with Latina early childhood education leaders from the Boston area at Wheelock College (convened by Dr. Edgar Klugman) to listen to what they said they wanted from NEAEYC.

Listening to these leaders, I learned how crucial it was that NEAEYC provide workshops directly in Spanish; participants lost something with interpretation, and participants whose first language was Spanish (and who were not fluent in English) would be more at ease, more likely to actively participate, and gain more information. Since that time, I have been a passionate advocate for professional development and resources in Spanish. In my work, I often serve as a bridge between people and resources by networking with Latino leaders at all levels, and use

what I learn to improve what is offered in our state. (One direct benefit: the dynamic, Luis Hernandez, co-chair of the NAEYC Latino focus group and literacy and diversity specialist, will be the keynote speaker at the *Temas Familiares* Conference, on October 18, 2008.)

Sue Connor, as President of NEAEYC, taught me how critical both relationship building and outreach with a personal touch are. She was able to engage greater participation with greater geographical representation through her leadership. She phoned NEAEYC delegates and let each individual know how important her/his voice was to the process and the discussion. (It is that personal touch, that outreach, which has been most successful in creating more work with Spanish-speaking early childhood educators.) Sue also sent out an agenda and relevant reading material in advance of our meetings, which made for effective use of our time and helped us focus on the goals for the meeting. She was an important role model for me when I served as President for Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC). She has a talent for breaking down a huge task into manageable components, and providing encouragement to enable people to tackle the job at hand.

Sometimes leadership means speaking out on issues and positions, standing by the principles and ethics of our field, even when it may be the *only voice with this perspective* at the table. Sometimes I would be recommending a particular approach as a delegate representing

*(continued on page five)*

## Professional Resource Review

by Christopher Salaun

Smith, Perry M. (1998). *Rules and Tools for Leaders: A Down-to-Earth Guide to Effective Managing*. New York: Avery Publishing Group.

Leadership in any field takes years to develop, sometimes decades to refine, but we want results *now*! In *Rules and Tools for Leaders...*, Major General Perry M. Smith distills a lifetime of success and failure into a simple, honest offering of boundless wisdom about how to take care of people. More practical than philosophical, the book's style is organized and accessible, an enlightening handbook meant to be read and re-read, and a certain anchor during any professional crisis. Though from a military background, Smith's universal insights ring surprisingly true for early childhood teachers and administrators, because, at heart, the business of leadership is about creating a shared vision and helping others live up to their potential.

The book opens with what the author considers his Thirty Fundamentals of Leadership, qualities every successful leader should strive for. There are, of course, expected references to concepts like time management and maintaining integrity, but Smith puts a fresh spin on other ideas, too, such as encouraging leaders to welcome criticism, give power away, and "squint with the ears." He challenges readers with a tough ultimatum: "Become more intentional with everything you do." The author's direct, heartfelt language, backed by poignant quotes and stories, evokes a strong desire to be magnanimous, decisive, and nurturing.

One of the most pleasant surprises in the book comes at its end, where Smith has compiled both a number of fascinating case studies, and a complete appendix full of user-friendly checklists and guidelines for navigating tough issues, including transitions, running meetings, and dealing with incompetence. Some of the livelier titles, like his "Phrases to Avoid Checklist," add humor to his passion. *Rules and Tools for Leaders...* goes a long way toward inspiring leaders, directors, and administrators, reconnecting them with the vigor of their earliest vision, and reminding them that leadership is not just synonymous with power, but is the "liberation of talent."

### **Janet Gonzalez-Mena is coming to Rhode Island!**

#### CHILDSPAN's Infant and Toddler Bilingual Institute

Saturday, June 14, 2008  
Bryant University, Smithfield

A half-day, bilingual professional development opportunity for infant and toddler staff, head and lead teachers, directors, administrators, home visitors, and mental health professionals.

Please call Joseph Morra at  
(401) 721-6404  
for further information.

*Supported by Children's Friend and Service and the Rhode Island Positive Educational Partnership*

### **Diverse Leadership, Diverse Lessons** *(continued from page four)*

the RIAEYC Board. Other times I might be providing ways to give voice to the many Spanish-speaking early childhood educators in Rhode Island and nearby states. It heartens me to know that others put themselves "out there" for a cause. Mark Carter, executive director of the National After-School Association, has said: "It's challenging because if your voice is outside the comfort zone of the majority of the people, then you either have to adjust to accommodate others or just stay the course assuming they will eventually understand." He suggests that you discover "your moral compass and know that it may be contrary to how an organization works. Understand that there are great rewards for leadership and incredible risks."

Just as Rose, Ruth, Joyce, Ed, Sue, and countless others encouraged and supported me, I also have enjoyed providing mentoring to others. I love watching these individuals use their natural talents—along with substantial effort—to make a difference in the lives of young children, their families, and their communities. These relationships are not one-way. I have learned, and continue to learn, from so many people. Goffin and Washington persuade us to assess how we are functioning as early childhood leaders so that we can impact the present systems and policy creation. What is your focus? How will you direct your passions and commitments? What way will *you* become a leader?

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## **Children's Literature Reviews**

by Erica Wilder

Lewis, Kim. (2006). *Hooray for Harry*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press.

The first page of this story sets up the problem: “‘Oh!’ said Harry. ‘My blanket is gone.’” Harry’s friends, Ted and Lulu, join in his search. The book’s text is simple and beautifully paced, walking both Harry (and the child listener/reader) through the problem-solving steps helpful in finding a lost item. Ted and Lulu prompt Harry to think back over each activity of the day—and how his blanket was used—as they try to figure out where it could be. This book provides a wonderful model for group problem solving that is accessible for young children. (Ages 2 - 5)

Jenkins, Emily. (2006). *Toys Go Out: Being the Adventures of a Knowledgeable Stingray, a Toughy Little Buffalo, and Someone Called Plastic*. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books.

Three toys—a stuffed stingray, a stuffed buffalo, and a red plastic ball—are the main characters in this collection of six related short stories. With a heaping dose of humor, Jenkins addresses issues big and small, like *What am I? Why did someone else get picked instead of me?* and *What will happen to me in the washing machine?* Each toy struggles with his or her own individual problems, not always getting along with the others, but sometimes finding help in unexpected places. The final story in the book brings the toys together as they search for the perfect birthday present for the little girl to whom they all belong. This book is a great read-aloud, and will provide much for adults and children to talk and laugh about together. (Ages 6 - 9)