In 1974 I began my work in Early Care and Education in the Migrant Child Care Programs in Michigan. I remember working from 6:00 AM to 6:30 PM, Monday-Saturdays. The migrant children didn’t come in with their parents; their parents were already working in the fields. The migrant camp buses brought all 26 preschool children and 10 infants all at once! On Saturday we had all of the children of the migrant camps at the program, as this provided opportunities for the parents to go into town, shop for food, and get away from the work week.

So what was interesting, meaningful, and relevant about that work for me as a young college graduate, as a teacher, and assisting director? It was the children, the staff, the “family sense” that we built over the six months the camps were open. We even designed a health clinic on Wednesday nights with area pediatricians, who would donate an evening a week from 6:00-9:00 PM to support the migrant families’ health care needs.

Well here it is 2007 and 33 years have flown by. As a former teacher, director, professor, researcher, and speaker, I have spent my life’s work supporting the development and growth of Early Care and Education Professionals. Some simple questions have always popped up for me over the years, especially as they relate to supporting directors and administrators of these programs:

■ What is interesting, meaningful, and relevant about your work in Early Care and Education?

■ What is it about your work as directors that excites you?

■ Why do you do what you do?

Over the years preparing teachers of young children from the Child Development Associates (CDA) Credential, the Associate’s Degree level, Bachelor Degree, Masters Degree, and Doctoral level has been exciting, rewarding, and challenging as the field of knowledge, skills, and dispositions has continued to grow, be refined, redefined, reorganized, and reemphasized. So I asked a number of directors, “Who are we in the lives of young children and their families?”

Why do directors do what they do?

“What is interesting, meaningful, and relevant to me as an education manager for a preschool program for 473 children over the last 33 years? My first thought is the excitement of working with young children, families, and staff and attempting to meet their growing needs in today’s changing society. I am energized when I keep myself updated with the new and current trends in the early childhood field and can explore these topics further with my staff and parents. I love having the opportunity to bring an exciting speaker to my program and see the impact it has on services for children. I love discussing educational topics and mandates with my peers and sharing that information with others in the early childhood field. Staying abreast of what is current on the local, state, and national level in the field, and having the confidence to speak out and advocate for children’s services in a non-friendly political climate. Over the years I have been inspired at trainings and conferences by many dedicated and compassionate colleagues in the field of early childhood. I am humbled to know many of
them as friends and peers. Head Start has been my avocation as well as my career and I am proud to have been a part of it. I will always remember the warmth and love of many caring children, parents, staff, and colleagues.”

Pat Souza, Education Director of the Montachusett Opportunity Council Child Care and Head Start Program (1973-2007), North Central Massachusetts

“When I was a Director this it what I felt:

- Connecting with the community and building lifelong relationships (i.e., school board and department, politicians, businesses, and colleagues/child care facilities)
- To create an environment that all levels of the child care company can communicate effectively; administration, sites, and families can communicate in a way that is comfortable to them (i.e., email, letter, memo, inter-office mail, or a traditional phone call). There are so many ways to communicate these days it is important to discover each personal preference and meet the need. Communication is the key to success and when it is tailored to each individual, the energy of communication will flow.”

Mary Ann Shallcross Smith, Ed.D, CEO, President Kids Klub, Inc., Dr. Day Care Family, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

“The most interesting thing to me about being a director of an early childhood program is that each day brings with it its own set of new challenges and experiences that enable me to build relationships with the children, families, and staff. From the brand new parent of an infant on their first day of child care, to the more experienced single parent with economic, emotional, and financial challenges; from the shy and reserved preschooler to the very active toddler who is learning how to use ‘his words’; from the new enthusiastic teacher to the more experienced and seasoned teacher. These interactions give me the opportunity to have a positive impact on so many people. In the 20 years that I have been in the business, I have been fortunate to work in places that support these relationship-building practices. One of my favorite things to do is to e-mail parents a picture of their child before they arrive at work when it’s their first day or at some point during the day so they can be a part of their child’s experience at the YMCA. I have received numerous thank you notes from parents who have said that gesture made the difference in how their day at work went. And how easy and simple it is for me because of today’s technology! I love being able to take advantage of resources and share them with other people. Whether they are based in research, technology, or my own experiences through the years. I believe that we are all put on this earth for a reason and we are very fortunate when we are able to live our days sharing our true passion — and that for me is helping our children, staff, and families grow and reach their potential.”

Mary Varr, Director, Child Care Director Garelick Early Learning Center Hockomock Area YMCA, Massachusetts

“I have the best job in the world!! Every morning I enjoy going to work. I am engineer, conductor, and participant of a play. I can fly airplanes, ignite imaginations, wipe tears, reassure adults, and guide the growth of ECE teachers. As directors we are honored by the families we serve as they entrust into our care their children to co-raise. I live up to that by making sure I walk the talk by professionally responding to the needs of children, families, and the community we have created.

What sparks my imagination and keeps the grey matter from going to mush is figuring out how to guide the discovery of teachers to reach new heights of quality interactions and care. I love walking room to room and seeing teachers at child level, discovery and open-ended questions, watching a child’s face light up when entering the room and being greeted by his teacher, and seeing the positive child-oriented activities and room set ups. The laughter and giggles when exploring a messy art day or jumping in puddles is a musical rhythm I never tire of hearing. I love challenging myself and the teachers I have the responsibility and goals of working with to reach for the highest standards of NAEYC and NAC accreditation.

Each time I run a training, present at a conference, or teach a course at the college I am able to stay current with the trends in early childhood and hopefully pass the vision, passion, and drive to the next wave of early childhood professionals. I always wanted to be a teacher. What fun it is to see a mission statement embodied and vitalized day in and day out. My daughter co-directs the center with me, my son teaches in the preschool classroom, and four alumni students now have completed their degrees and teach at Live & Learn as well. What a wonderful legacy I have been able to participate in seeing the gift of quality care re-given generation to generation.

I realize that adults in children’s lives are vital as role models, confidants, and guides. Why do I do what I do? I make a difference every day in shaping future communities of caring and enriching the lives of the families that join me every day in living and learning together.”

Johanna Booth-Miner, Director, Live & Learn early Learning Center, New Hampshire

So as administrators and directors, what excites you? What floats your boat? What is it about being a director that motivates you and keeps you in the game? Let’s keep this going as it helps us to reflect, reevaluate, and think more deeply about why we do what we do. Let me know by contacting me: wstrader@jwu.edu!
The New Hampshire Association for the Education of Young Children has held the Administrator’s Conference for the past nine years. Two years ago Vermont joined and they now have a two-state conference specifically for Administrators of Early Care and Education Programs. I had the opportunity to continue my adventure in asking our question and here is what some of the New Englanders had to say!

“*So, New Hampshire and Vermont! As Administrators and Directors, what is it that excites you, motivates you, ‘fires you up’ in being a director?”*

“What fires me up is when I see teachers, children, and parents having “ahaa moments” and when I see them loving our center or their time there.”
Jeanne Davis, Oak Hill Children’s Center, Pownal, Vermont

“Every day is different. It’s like being on a journey and every morning you wake, you are in a new place!”
Donna Bella, Edith B. Jackson Child Care, New Haven, Connecticut

“Well Bill . . . every day is an exciting challenge that involves all walks of life . . . no day ever repeats itself and I learn something new about myself!”
Gail O’Brien, Director, Early Years Child Care, Windham, New Hampshire

“The unique chance to positively impact the lives of children by inspiring teachers to create a caring community that is alive with rich learning opportunities.”
Susan MacDonald, Director of Children’s Services, The Children’s Garden, The Cambridge School of Weston, Connecticut

“I do this work because of the impact a natural caring, cooperative environment can have on the growth and development of a child, parent, and/or family. I love it when our parents gather with their children on our playground or around our pond for exploration and time to be together. I love it when parents take the time to play with their preschooler at the water table or when a parent of another child stops to say hello to a baby and calls them by name, which gets a big smile in response. I do this work because of the smiles, the comfort our program brings to those involved. I do this work because I can make a difference in maybe one family.”
Jan Richards, The Lily Garden Learning Center, Westmoreland, New Hampshire

“Knowing that the families of my center have chosen my program and that we have the honor of caring for their children.”
Amy Ligay-Plimptin Executive Director, The Children’s Early Learning Space, Duxbury, Vermont

“The fact I can go from parent conference, to plumber, to a “bear hunt,” to resource provider, to boo-boo lasser in about 15 minutes.”
Tina Cahill, ABC’s Childcare Center, New London, New Hampshire

“Each and every day I get to welcome children and families to the amazing Early Childhood Community we have created. That’s the best part of my job.”
Robins Ploof, Stepping Stones Children’s Center Inc., Burlington, Vermont

“What truly gets me fired up in early childhood education is that we are the integral part of children’s lives. As we spin the web that is ever woven into their lives, we can make a difference that will impact far into the future. Teach like the world depends on it.”
Sarah Miner, Live and Learn Early Childhood Learning Center, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

“It’s my passion for working with children that makes a difference in the life of a child and that when families choose my high quality program they are making an investment in their child’s future.”
Gerri Barrcus