

Reflections on Transitional Leadership

Part I | The Exiting Leader

By Paula Jorde Bloom

Today marks an important milestone in my life—my retirement from National Louis University (NLU). I came to NLU 30 years ago, lured from a faculty position at Mills College in Northern California with the exciting opportunity to develop and implement a new graduate program in Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy. I had been a center director so I knew firsthand the challenges of administration and the need for leadership training in the field. No one else in the country was doing it.

I think of my work at NLU as a unique partnership. From my perspective, it has been the perfect fit for my entrepreneurial spirit and scholarly interests. Shortly after joining the faculty I received a small \$600 grant from NAEYC to launch the Early Childhood Professional Development Project and conduct a reliability and validity study of a new organizational climate assessment, the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES).

Fast forward 30 years. That small grant-funded project has morphed into the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, a vibrant and innovative organization with an expanded mission, an exciting array of initiatives to support the early childhood workforce, and a \$5 million annual operating budget.

It's been an exhilarating and professionally fulfilling ride. I look back with immense pride on the impact the McCormick Center has had in bolstering the confidence and competence of early childhood leaders across the country. And I am excited about the future of the McCormick Center. Sue Offutt and I have worked closely for four years to ensure a smooth, seamless transition. She has assembled an awesome leadership team and professional staff whose dedication and commitment to the field is unsurpassed.

Folks have asked me what I will miss the most in my retirement from NLU. Clearly the camaraderie, laughter, and playful spirit of my colleagues at the McCormick Center is at the top of my list. Today was a classic example of why. This morning I arrived to find some creative additions to my office—a goose sitting on my printer, Slinkys and assorted critters hanging from the ceiling, and a typewriter instead of my computer. Lots of laughter and warm hugs to send me on my way. Yes, I have been so blessed to have been part of such a great place to work.

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