

Collaborative Leadership Institute History

The Collaborative Leadership Institute (CLI) was established in 2005, as a result of nearly a decade of discussion and planning among leaders in state agencies and early learning organizations who were concerned about a void in leadership development for the emerging field. There was concern that while there were passionate advocates and leadership in the field, the next generation of leaders was not apparent and no resources were being invested to build leaders from within. In addition, there was very little cross-discipline communication among programs, agencies and advocates, reflecting a fragmented and inefficient community of programs that benefit young children.

Efforts were made, unsuccessfully, to get a Lucent grant for a book-club style leadership program for community cohorts in 1999, but it wasn't until 2004 that, with the assistance and financial support of the Foundation for Early Learning (FEL), the CLI was established in a slightly different form. Partners in this initial effort included FEL, the State Division of Child Care & Early Learning, Head Start-State Collaboration Office, Washington State Head Start/ECEAP Training Consortium, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Washington AEYC, Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network, and School's Out Washington.

The objective of the CLI was to provide a leadership development program geared specifically for early learning leaders in Washington that would enable participants to enhance their leadership skills while developing relationships with others in their field from different disciplines. New and emerging leaders were sought from such sources as Head Start/Early Head Start; ECEAP; out of school programs; Resource and Referral; child care centers/homes; state licensors, health; schools; parent cooperative preschools; board members; affiliated businesses; and libraries.

Participants attend three 3-day in-person meetings over a 10-month period and are expected to complete a variety of activities during the interim, including completion of a major project. As part of their curriculum, students explore leadership research and literature, increase self awareness of personal leadership styles, enhance their understanding of early learning as a system, create change and make an impact in the field of early learning, and cultivate a broad range of strategies to achieve goals.

The CLI has completed two sessions and a third is nearing completion. The results have been very positive, though more recent follow-up with graduates is needed to assess outcomes. For the 2006 class for example, 57% expanded their role in community child and family initiatives, 38% indicated they had experienced career advancement since beginning the Institute, and 38% planned to pursue their next degree through higher education. All participants in both cohorts have a greater understanding of their own leadership style and potential, and developed a network of colleagues from other disciplines and types of organizations that will help them as they work to improve early learning and help children in Washington.

Here are some of the comments about CLI from graduates:

- “This has been a year of change and personal growth! And I am growing as a leader and person . . . These changes and other events have pulled and pushed me to look at my core. I am not sure if my project is “team work” or “personal growth.” I seem to be working on both.”
- “[B]ut I want you, and those who made this class available, to know you may have created a monster. I even stood up and expressed my views at a meeting of all the movers and shakers of [name] county the other day. Can you imagine that? Your gentle guidance has empowered me (for better or worse).”
- “Stories, respect, listening, understanding, reflection, power, management, diversity, compassion, service, modeling, vision, guide, authenticity, and of course, conversation are all words that have a new and enriched meaning for me because of the CLI . . . My life has changed because of this course. [CLI colleague] and I were talking today about how possibilities are happening right before our eyes. It's an exciting time and I feel blessed because I now know that I am capable of doing more than I ever thought possible. Thank you to all of you who have made this trip a reality for us. May your futures be as bright as the futures we all now face as a result of CLI.”
- “Another lesson that will continue to resonate with me is realizing that learning and leading are congruent; the two are harmonious. Before coming to the CLI, I had forgotten that leaders are learners. This preconceived notion had led me to believe that leaders are perfect. I thought that leaders already knew everything, that's why they were the leaders! Needless to say, that is not the case. As explored at the CLI, leaders are learners . . . Most importantly, as a result of the CLI, I learned that everyone, including leaders, makes mistakes; it's inevitable. But it takes a leader to reflect on the mistake, learn from the mistake, and carry that lesson with him for the rest of his life. Realizing that leaders aren't perfect, more specifically that I do not have to be perfect, has enabled me to move out of my comfort zone and take those risks (risks that I never would have taken before), recognizing and embracing the fact that it is acceptable for me to make mistakes.”
- “As I reflect on my initial Collaborative Leadership Institute (CLI) experience, one of the first things that I remember . . . is that the experience itself [was] more than some of my previous experiences with “learning events” involving the profession of childcare [where] I felt disengaged, bored and frankly thought why am I here? The CLI on the

other hand, seemed to be different from the start. One of the initial differences that immediately stood out to me was the readings... Having the chance to meet providers from all walks of life I really thought was an important piece. Hearing from providers that serve the entire state was another important piece of the CLI experience... My CLI experience . . . has caused me to be introspective, in regards to how I lead the center. What I left the first CLI event realizing is that I was a good manager, and a so so leader.”

- “Through my experiences in the Collaborative Leadership Institute, I began to realize that a leader comes in many different forms. One doesn’t have to be a dynamic superstar to be a leader. The Zander quote . . . shared with us . . . is one that will stay with me forever... “A leader does not need a podium; she can be sitting quietly on the edge of any chair, listening passionately and with commitment, fully prepared to take the baton.” Before the Institute, I saw myself as an organizer and coordinator, not as a leader. Having been a part of the Collaborative Leadership Institute, I now see myself as a leader and have comfortably taken on more leadership roles within my community and workplace.”
- “I have also been thinking about the impact this process will have on me and those around me. I had emailed my supervisor to let her know how much the training had meant to me and that I would be speaking at graduation. Here is her response: “Congratulations on this honor – and I am glad that you have found your participation to be so useful. Sometime, when we have time, I'd like to hear what you have changed about the way you think about things. Maybe it will help me, too. Congrats, [name].” Her short email spoke volumes to me. We are all facing challenges and would welcome any chance we might have to better ourselves and our work environment. It was sort of an epiphany when I realized that if I could empower my supervisor, perhaps some of the positive results of this training could work their way up the chain of command here. That makes me feel pretty good.”
- “CLI somehow got under my skin and has influenced me in ways that I didn’t really notice until I sat down to write this summation of my experience. I didn’t think it was having much of an effect because I’ve read and taken classes and attended workshops, etc. all having to do with leadership. I knew the difference, for example, between management and leadership and prided myself on being competent at both, which my position requires. However, I discovered I had a ways to go before the leadership/power coat, as you introduced Gendler’s metaphor to us in April, fit comfortably.”
- “R is for the Readings required and how they added reframing, depth, understanding, investigation and knowledge to my life . . . E is for the wonderful Experiences I have had with the Institute. This has truly been a blessing. Working in the early childhood field has been my passion . . . You have embraced, empowered, believed and strengthened me . . . F is for Fears and Frustrations that I went through in the process of this last ten months . . . L is for the Leadership skills I developed through this process . . . Setting new goals and understanding that sometimes life just gets messy . . . E is for the new Empowerment that has come from the readings, the facilitator, my fellow comrades in this adventure . . . C is for my Comrades, Coaches and Cash funder. To all of you. Thank you! . . . May I go forward believing in the good you have done for me and pass it forward to others. T is for the many great Teachers in this world. Children, families, advisors, facilitators, friends, colleagues and many, many others. I will watch, listen, engage and learn from you.

- How have I initiated leadership within my organization? “I have made staff decisions that I would not have prior to attending CLI; I initiated leading a study group and have volunteered to co-facilitate a committee; Our entire lending library is now done electronically, based on my suggestion and implementation; I’ve convened a group of ECE stakeholders from [area of the state] to collaborate on provider training/education issues; I have taken the opportunity to try new things and to share more openly; I began a series of ongoing “team building” activities and topic driven conversations; I have been able to work with employees who are interested in developing their leadership skills; I am speaking with more self-confidence and self-assuredness; [I have] created a buzz and got people talking about the issue[s] . . . I am now the . . . representative for the SEIU Local; I joined an international conference committee.”
- Have I gotten involved in state-wide child and family initiatives? “I’m involved with Washington Learns, Born Learning, and Building Bridges; I was a member of our local delegation team that attended Governor’s Summit for EL; I participate with an early literacy task force with other librarians across the state; my role in the Born Learning campaign continues to grow and I am excited to see where that goes; I was one of 25 family child care providers on the collective bargaining team for SEIU and Washington state; I now have a better idea of how I can participate directly and indirectly in state-wide issues. Being rural makes active participation costly in time and money. I now know how to make that happen anyway.”