

Taking the Lead

By Cecelia Alvarado

Taking the Lead (TTL) was a national early childhood leadership initiative, funded by the Early Childhood Funder's Collaborative from 1997-1999. Its goal was to build the capacity of the early care and education field to improve program quality by improving access to leadership development opportunities, building infrastructure and expanding skills of new and existing leaders in the field. *TTL* involved ten sites around the country including the two mentioned below: The Spanish American Union, Springfield, MA and the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals, Minneapolis, MN.

The following are two excerpts from our *Taking the Lead* Publication [The Power of Mentoring](#):

Emerging leaders and mentors came from Spanish-speaking, Latin American backgrounds; holding meetings in Spanish helped participants express themselves freely. The diversity and richness within the group added a sense of cultural pride. SAU Executive Director, Maria Morales-Loebl reflected, "Folks wanted to promote more cultural education as a part of their work. When they talked about quality early care and education, they talked about teaching culture. It's important that we know our history, our culture. The meetings had *el sabor latino* (Latin flavor). I was so inspired by these Latino women who had such a passion for their work, which got articulated in the ways they talked about their relationships to each other, the children and the parents. This work between us was very sacred."

The (MN) site also discovered that sometimes forming Leadership Circles by language and culture best supported emerging leaders' growth. In Circles, participants needed to be able to listen and express themselves on very deep levels. Emerging leaders could not benefit from Circles if they were challenged by differences in languages. Also, emerging leaders from ethnic groups that had recently immigrated to the U.S. benefited greatly from single-culture Circles. Leadership Circle Facilitator and Peer Mentor Van-Anh T. Hoang reported, "In our Circle we spoke in Vietnamese about the differences between the U.S. and our ways... we solved problems together – what worked, what didn't." In the Somalian Circles, Leadership Circle Facilitator and Peer Mentor Huda Farah identified "a sense of unity, a certain level of understanding between us because of

our shared language, culture and religion. Being with other Somalians helped me to see the needs of my community more clearly. It pushed me to do more, to try and find solutions, to help my fellow Somalians” such as creating culturally appropriate child care centers/family child care homes in the Somali community.

To order the full document, *The Power of Mentoring*, log onto <http://institute.wheelock.edu/inststore/inststohome.html>

Reprinted by the Early Childhood Equity Alliance with permission from the author & The Wheelock College Institute for Leadership and Career Initiatives