

Valuing Differences

BY MARLEEN BARRETT, M.S.

Early childhood leaders are in the “people business.” Our profession is unique because we work with people of all ages. Engaging effectively with people who exhibit a variety of differences can be messy and challenging. Differences in perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and communication styles are just a few of the differences we manage every day. Despite the messiness of working with people, it can also be rewarding to come alongside them, get to know them, and learn to value the individual uniqueness that makes up the diversity of the people you work with. Working well with a variety of people is a leadership skill that can be learned and improved upon. As with other leadership skills, we can improve through experience, reflection, and practice.

WHERE TO START

Understanding yourself is key to working well with others. One way to understand yourself is to look at your own personality and behavioral preferences. Research has been conducted for many years on this topic, and it has resulted in a variety of tools developed to assist in knowing and understanding our individual preferences. The [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator \(MBTI\)®](#), [DiSC](#), and the [Enneagram](#) are a few tools used to help us understand ourselves and others. These tools have been widely used in business and organizations to help individuals understand their preferences and the preferences of those they work with. The McCormick Center has utilized the MBTI for many years with its employees. It allows us to have a greater understanding of our colleagues as well as ourselves.

In the past, I have used the assessments and had co-workers and family members complete them so we could reflect on them together to understand our unique personalities and differences. I utilized both the MBTI and DiSC assessments, as mentioned above. I found them insightful and helpful. I especially liked the tools from DiSC about how to effectively communicate and relate to each of the behaviors.

Over the past several years, those tools have been on my “back shelf,” and I have not been applying what I learned from them with the same amount of enthusiasm I once did. With the start of a new calendar year, I have committed to reviewing, reflecting, and incorporating the information in my work and personal relationships in 2023.

If you have yet to utilize any personality assessments, or it has been some time since you last completed one, consider doing one now. If you have access to any you previously completed, consider comparing the results and reflecting on any changes you might be noticing.

RESOURCES AND A BIT OF HISTORY

Carl Jung was a Swiss-born psychiatrist whose research in the 1800s centered on the concept that human behavior was not random but was predictable and classifiable. His research was incorporated into the work of two women, Katharine Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, who developed the MBTI.¹

This link, [Jung Typology](#), is a shortened version of the more complex MBTI and is a free resource. After completing all the questions, click on the “self-awareness and personal growth” box to read your profile and download the results.

Another resource is this [article](#) which ranks, from one person’s view, the “23 Best Personality Tests.” I knew there were several personality assessments out there, but I was surprised by the number mentioned in the article. However, I would also mention that the term “test,” which the author uses, is not what many of the researchers or product owners prefer to call them. I was a trained facilitator for the DiSC profile, and the instructions on the cover of the Personal Profile System read, “*The Personal Profile System is not a test. You cannot pass or fail....*” Assessment is a more accurate term, as there are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked in the tools. When we hear the word “test,” we tend to think there is only one correct answer. The article includes both paid and free assessments in case you want to explore more than just the Jung Typology.

There are many books available for a more in-depth look at personality styles. Here are three which I have found helpful:

Type Talk by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen
The Enneagram Made Easy by Elizabeth Wagele and Renee Baron
Wired That Way by Marita Littauer

IMPORTANCE TO LEADERSHIP

At the McCormick Center, our mission is to support early childhood administrators of center and home-based programs to improve skills that will increase their effectiveness as leaders. In our leadership academies, we deliver training sessions specific to the topic of appreciating individual differences. Research has shown that those who focused on understanding themselves and those they worked with enjoyed improvements in their communications skills, relationships, and team-building efforts.¹

Knowing your personality style and preferences will help you better understand yourself and your behavioral tendencies. You may also see these types of benefits as well:

- Understanding the differences between yourself and others
- Learning to appreciate and value the differences in people
- Increased collaboration with colleagues
- Improved relationships with friends and family members

Program leaders could consider adding an activity about understanding others to an upcoming staff meeting. For example, each staff member could complete the Jung Typology prior to the meeting and then debrief during the staff meeting. Staff may come away with a greater understanding of their colleagues.

I encourage you to join me in 2023 to discover your personality style and incorporate the knowledge gained to increase your appreciation of others and their differences.

¹ Kroeger, O. and Thuesen, J. (1988). *Type Talk*. New York, New York: Dell Publishing.

Marleen Barrett, M.S., serves as Leadership Training Specialist for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University (NLU), where she delivers, develops, and coordinates training materials for the McCormick Center Leadership Academies. She serves as a coach for academy participants. She holds a master's degree in training and development from Loyola University. Prior to working at NLU, she was the Director of Leadership Development for the American Farm Bureau Federation, where she conducted training programs on strategic planning, organizational skills, and team building throughout the United States.