

# The Power of a Metaphor:

EHDI System Improvement Through Creative Communication

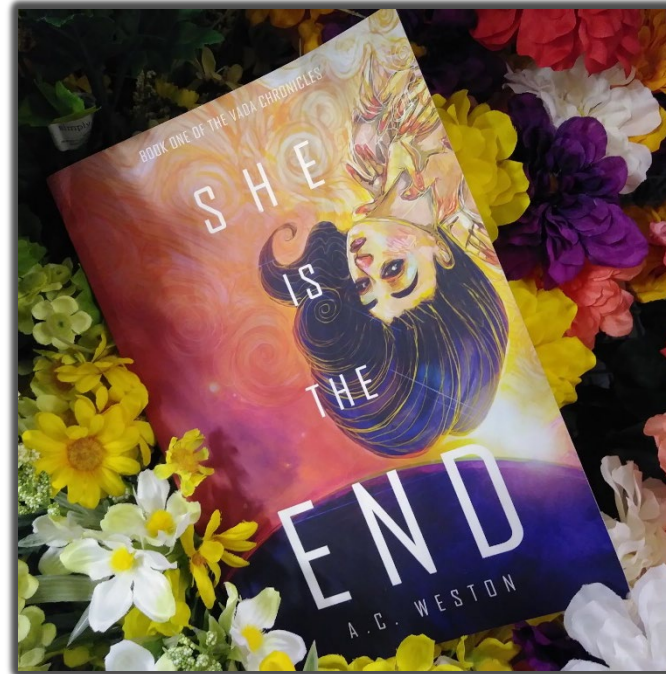
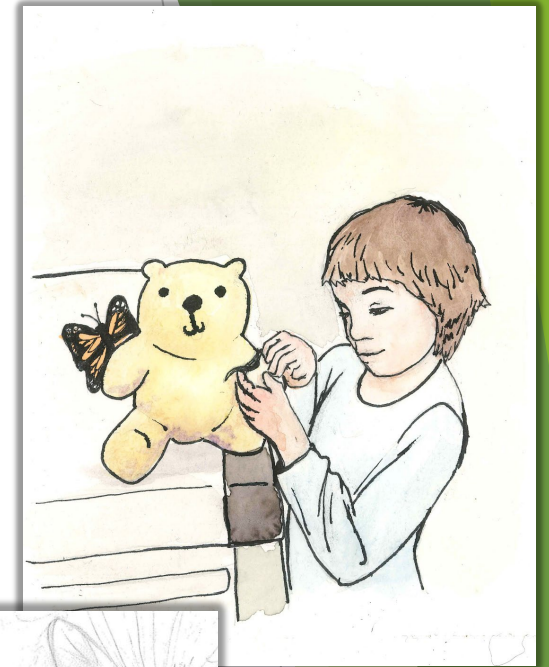
National EHDI Meeting 2019

Cara Weston



# Who Am I?

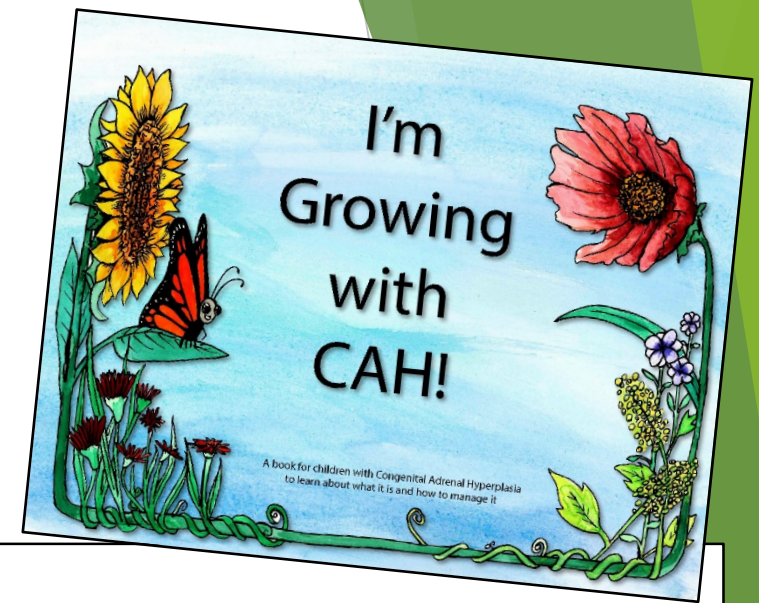
- ▶ Cara Weston:
  - ▶ Follow-up data coordinator at the MN Department of Health
  - ▶ Hearing
  - ▶ Author
  - ▶ Artist



# Metaphor in a children's book

- ▶ “I’m Growing with CAH! A book for children with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia”

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/diseases/cy/cahgrow.pdf>

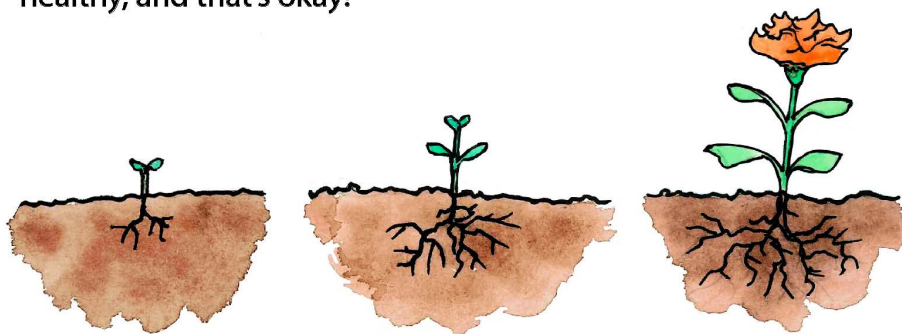


When flowers get the water they need, they can grow up healthy.

Kids are kind of like flowers.

Every flower needs water to grow, and some flowers need extra water.

Kids with CAH need different things to be healthy, and that's okay!




Your doctor also needs to check your blood to make sure everything is working the right way. They might poke you in the arm. Sometimes pokes make people feel stormy, but it's OK to feel that way!

Remember how flowers need water to grow? Sometimes the water comes from a storm. Storms might feel scary, but the water is still important!

This is one of my friends. She just got a poke, but she hugged her teddy bear to stay calm. There are lots of helpers to stay calm - just ask if you need one!



 What makes a poke easier for you?  
What makes you feel less scared?

# Activity Example

- ▶ I asked a series of creativity-inspiring questions in each unit meeting for our division
- ▶ Less than fifteen minutes each
- ▶ Incredible variety of answers and depths reached
- ▶ Each unit came up with at least one idea none of the others did
- ▶ New understanding of our work as a division

# Activity Example

## The Baseball Game Metaphor:

the kids  
the fence  
the boxes

## Equity

What is the difference between the three cartoons?



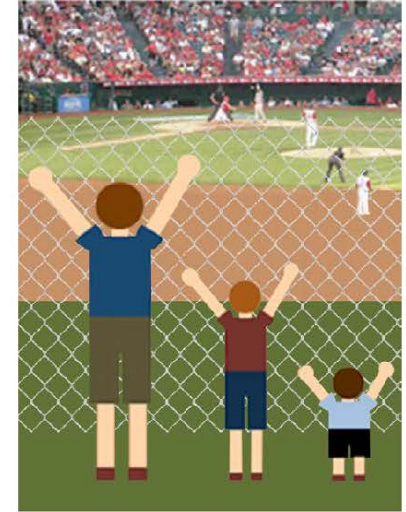
In the first image, three boys of different heights are standing on boxes of the same height to help them look over a wooden fence to watch a ball game, but the shortest boy cannot see over the fence. It is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports.

**They are being treated equally.**



In the second image, the tallest boy has no box, the second tallest boy has one box and the shortest boy has two boxes to stand on, so that they all are able to see over the fence at the same height. They are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game.

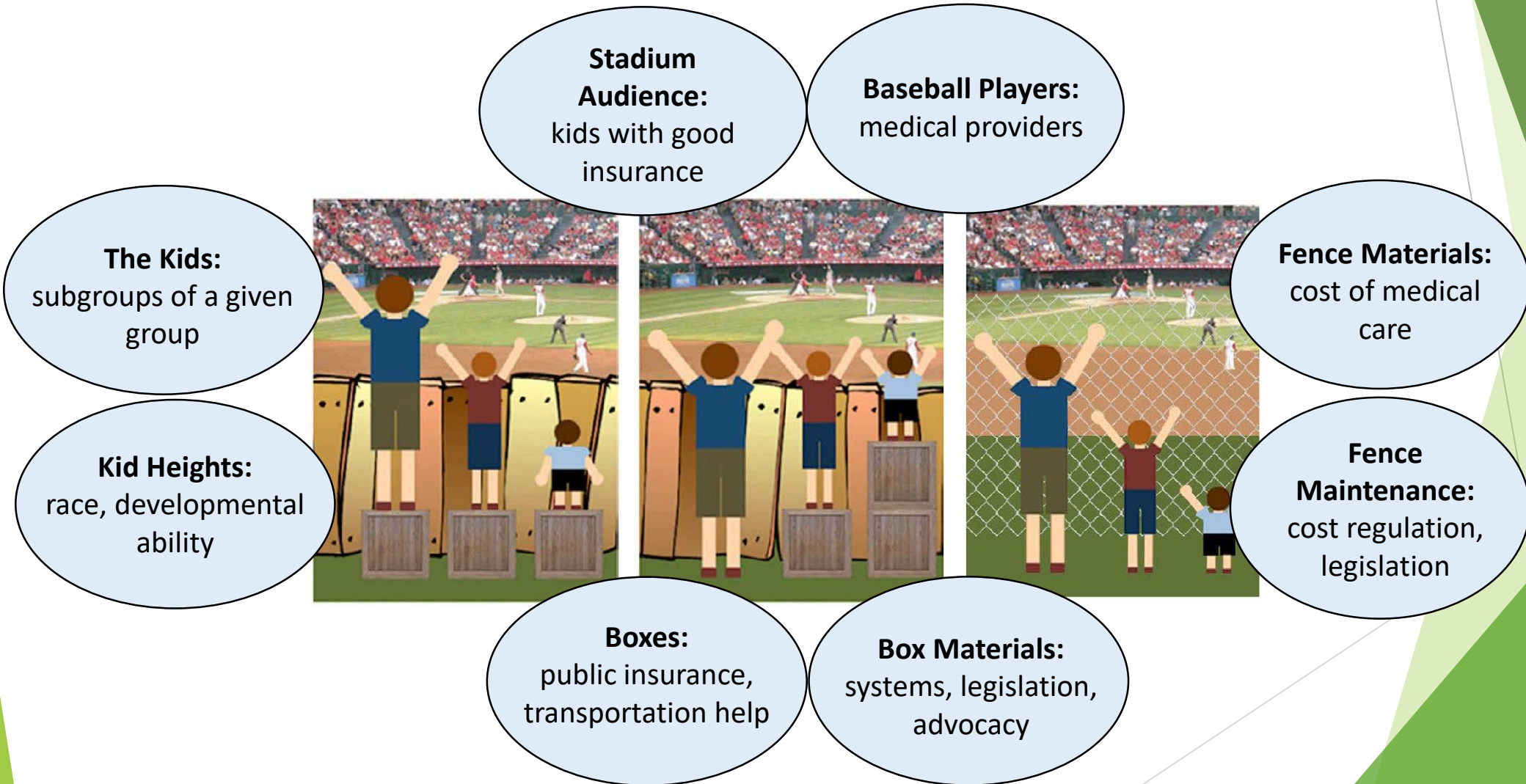
**They are being treated equitably.**



In the third image, the fence has been changed to a see-through fence. All three can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed.

**The systemic barrier has been removed.**

# If the game is a routine well child check-up...



# Activity Questions

1. If the baseball game is an office visit, what is the fence made out of for the people your program serves? What are the boxes made of? What affects how tall a person is?

## Fence:

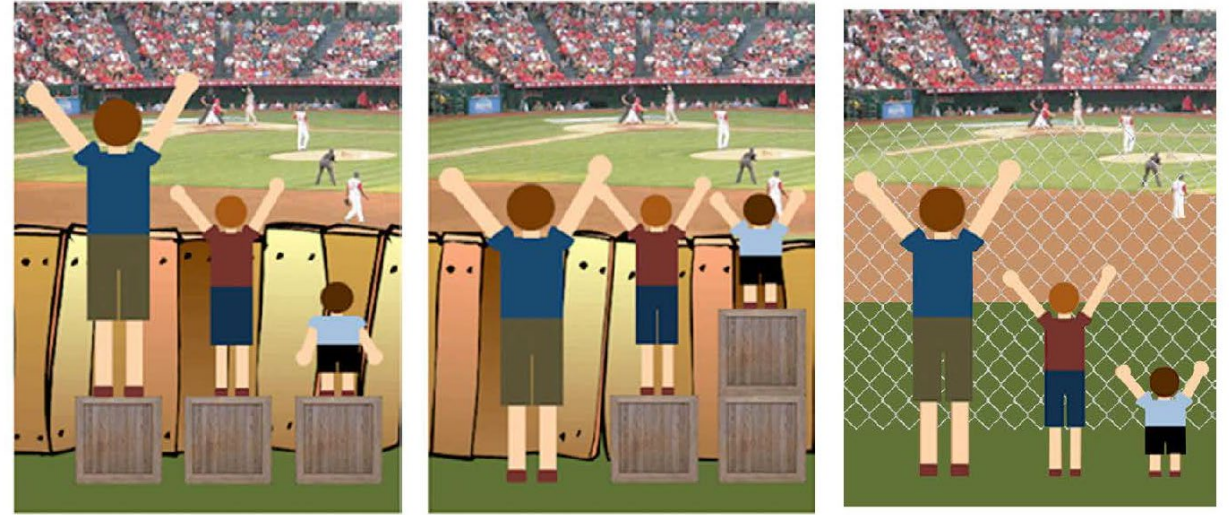
- Cost of care
- Lack of insurance
- Lack of transportation
- Location of care
- Lack of employee leave time
- Hours of the clinic
- Language and culture barriers
- Mental health status
- Negative previous experiences (racism, classism, trauma, etc)
- Lack of knowledge/education

- Lack of representation in research
- Social structures
- Unemployment/low pay
- Lack of welfare services
- Limited daycare options
- Incarceration
- Punitive policies for parents
- Child protective services
- Lack of care coordination
- Provider miscommunication



# Activity Questions

1. If the baseball game is an office visit, what is the fence made out of for the people your program serves? What are the boxes made of? What affects how tall a person is?



## Boxes:

- Interpreters/translations
- Friends and family/community
- Disability accommodations
- Available transportation
- Hours of the clinic
- Language and culture supports
- Insurance coverage
- Social work
- Professional development of providers, LPH, etc
- Community health workers (reimbursed)
- Local programs/non-profits
- MDH programs
- Public health research
- Safe communities
- Safe, affordable housing
- Integrated systems



# Activity Questions

1. If the baseball game is an office visit, what is the fence made out of for the people your program serves? What are the boxes made of? What affects how tall a person is?

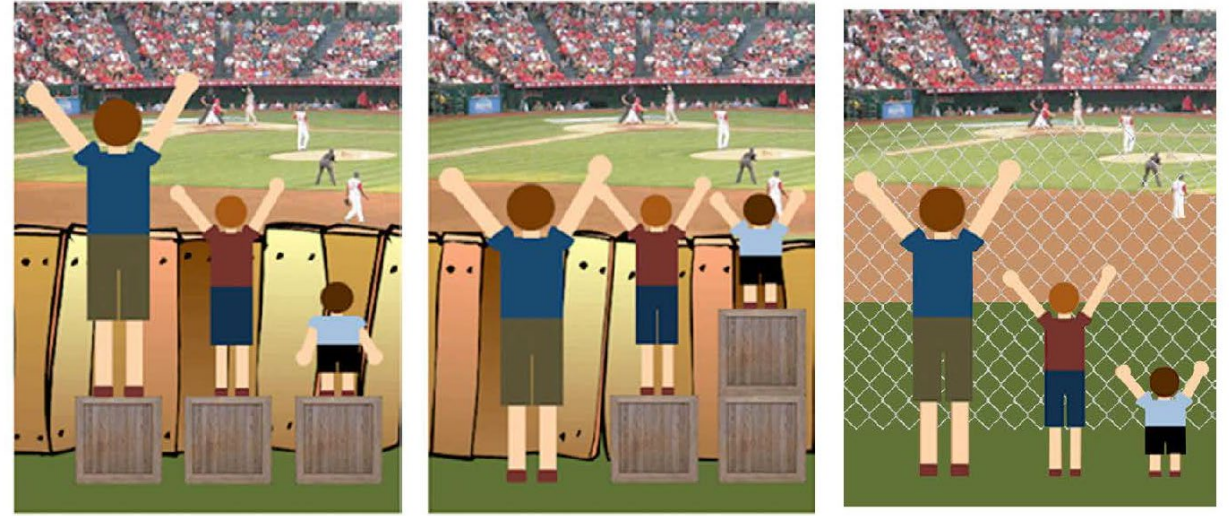


Height of the children:

- Income
- Education
- Knowledge of healthy development and developmental milestones
- Race
- Historical trauma
- Chemical use (family/societal)
- Socioeconomic factors

# Activity Questions

1. If the baseball game is an office visit, what is the fence made out of for the people your program serves? What are the boxes made of? What affects how tall a person is?



“Boxes show up, the fences get taller in America.”

“Sustainability: what if the box only exists for half a game? What about seeing more than one game?”

“Is the fence bad?” (Doctors, nurses, and staff deserve to be paid for work)

“Who knows the game is happening? Who wants to watch another game instead?”

# Activity Questions

2. Where does MDH come into play in this scenario? Do we make the boxes? Do we tear down and construct new fences? Where are we part of the metaphor?



“MDH should be tearing down fences, but we mostly build boxes.”

“All of it.”

“MDH is mostly the first picture, but over time this has been changing.”

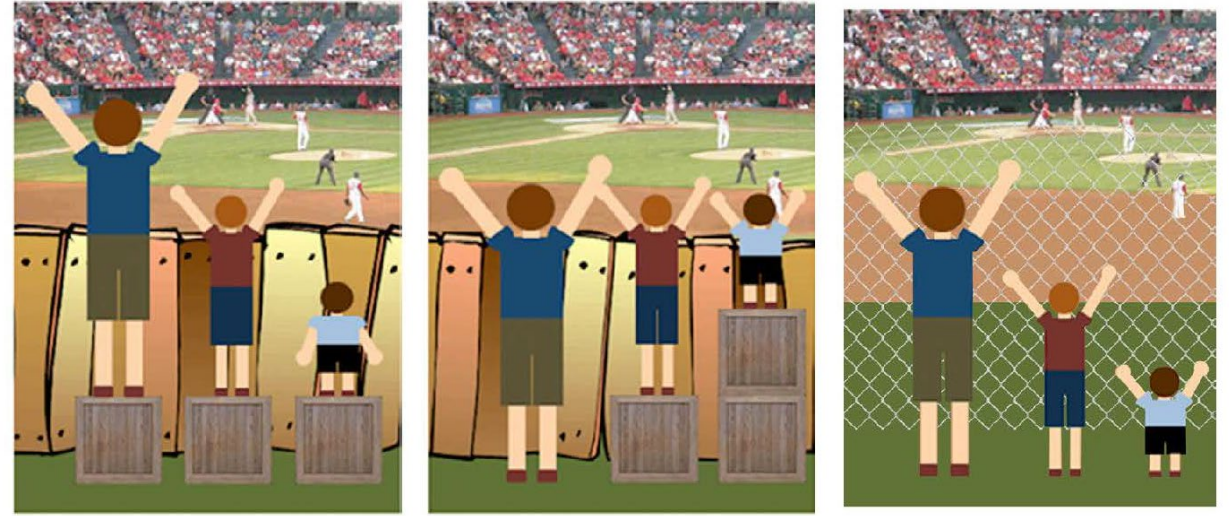
“We have to deal with people’s prejudices.”

“We create new boxes, help others construct other boxes”

“We make materials kits and hand them to people to put together themselves (like an IKEA bookshelf)”

# Activity Questions

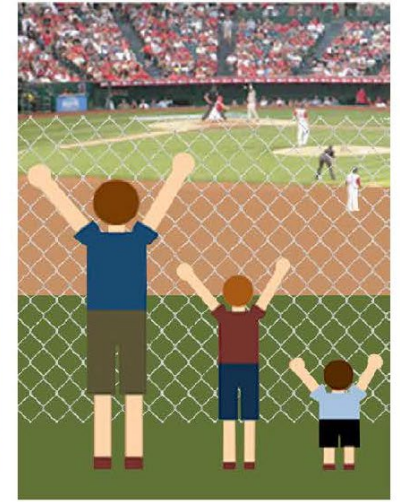
2. Where does MDH come into play in this scenario? Do we make the boxes? Do we tear down and construct new fences? Where are we part of the metaphor?



- Lower staff turnover means strong, positive bonds with other organizations
- MDH has our own baseball games that we're also trying to see - we have some programs that are "shorter" than others
- Sometimes MDH helps build a fence without considering the people trying to see the game, how tall they are
- In the stadium seats: who decided that some people get to sit down?
  - How much effort is put into keeping people out of the stadium versus letting them in?
  - MDH needs to help the people in the stadium realize the importance of bringing others inside

# Activity Questions

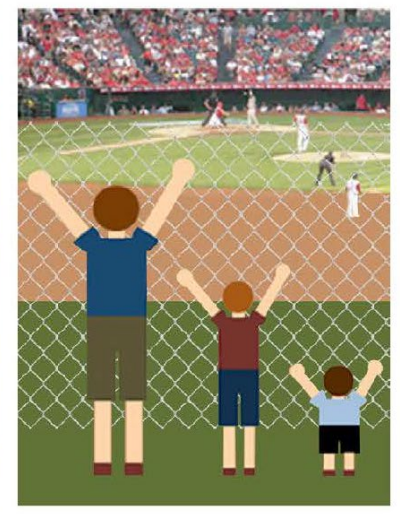
2. Where does MDH come into play in this scenario? Do we make the boxes? Do we tear down and construct new fences? Where are we part of the metaphor?



- Part of our role at MDH is to simply take photographs like these images
  - Do surveillance, collect data
  - Report our findings
  - Gather input so we know whether we're building barriers or boxes
- Some of us are also players in the baseball game
- Sometimes we are not aware of when others are building their own set of boxes a few yards to the side; could be working together
- There will always be a portion of people who need boxes; goal should be to move from left to right
- What about trying to make everyone the same height?
- The fence was made by people, it is not an immovable or unchangeable thing

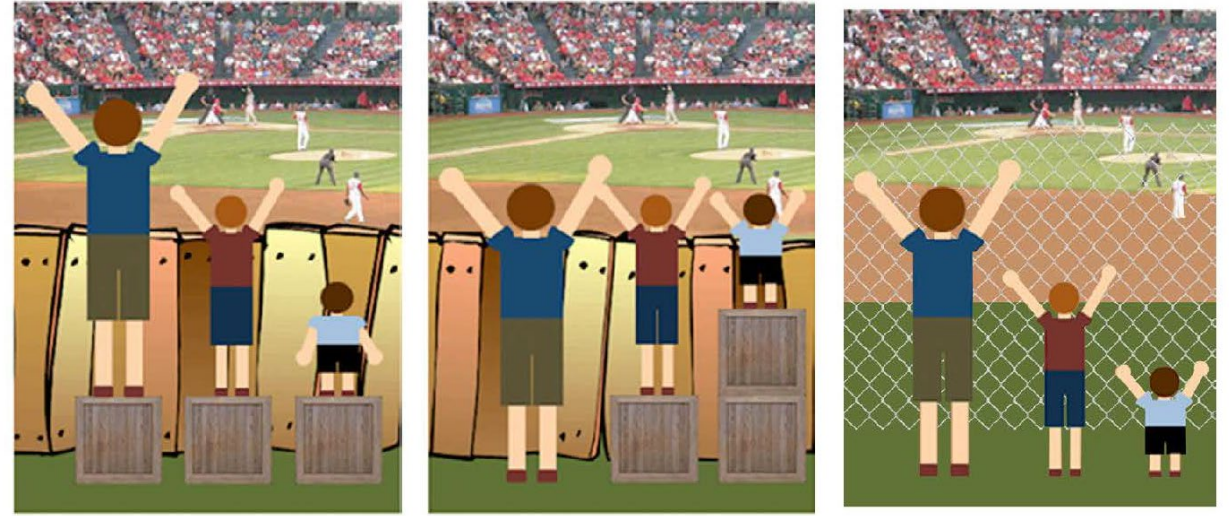
# Activity Questions

3. Come up with an example that is specific to your program.
- What is a baseball game for the people you serve?
  - Who decided that they wanted to see that game?
  - What is the fence for this game?
  - What are the boxes for this game?
  - What affected how tall different customers grew to be?
  - Where does the metaphor break down?  
When do these pictures just not work for the situation?



# Activity Questions

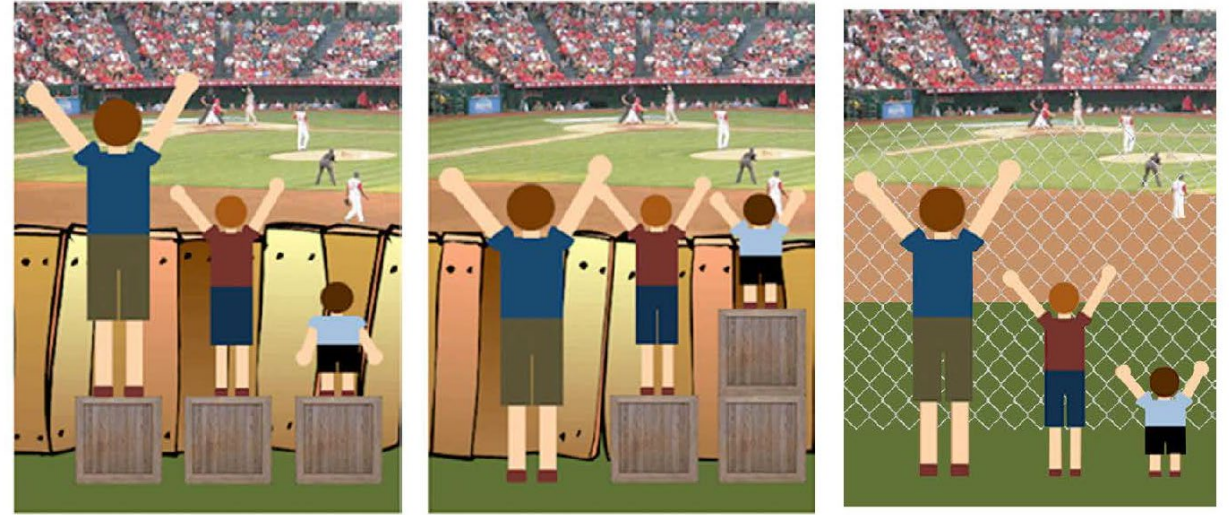
Where does the metaphor break down?  
When do these pictures just not work for the situation?



- We can't just have a "general fence"; it's different in every community
  - We have to talk about it - people within communities disagree, too!
- How can we even agree on what the fence looks like, let alone what needs to be done?
- Some people can't even get to the game, don't know it's happening
- What might bias the way we see the fence or the boxes? Can we recognize it?

# Activity Questions

4. How might this metaphor help you talk about the work you do? How might you use it in the future? Would this graphic be helpful for strategic planning, QI, communicating with stakeholders, something else?



- Motivate us to collect precise data so no child gets missed
- Ways to think about complicated issues in simpler terms
- Justification to help explain need for data sharing
- To share with stakeholders to generate discussion
- Use in planning, then come back to it later to help with evaluation
- Public health thinking may fall flat with some groups, metaphors can help us communicate better
- Think: when is MDH acting as the fence in the first picture?



# Extending the metaphor...

**This Game:**  
**A well child check**  
(what is screened, what  
questions are asked, what  
data is documented)

**The Sport:**  
**Primary Care**  
(how we, as a society,  
routinely care for children)



# EHDI system considerations...

Public health?

Race and ethnicity?

Legislation?

Other special health needs?

Parents and caregivers?

Audiologists?

Teachers?

Culture and language?

Interpreters?

Hearing technology?

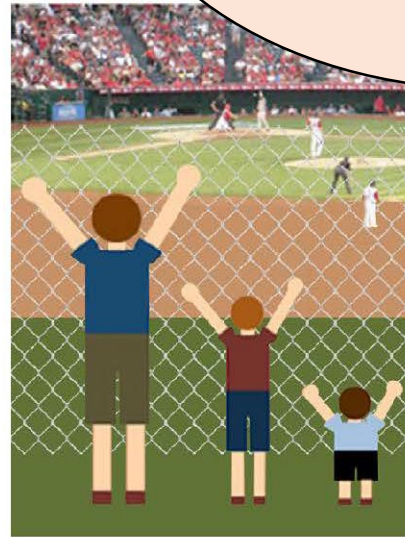
Hearing kids?

D/deaf kids?



# Extending the metaphor...

**This Game:  
Robotics club!**



# EHDI system considerations...

Public health?

Race and ethnicity?

Legislation?

Other special health needs?

**This Game:  
Robotics club!**

D/deaf kids?

Hearing kids?

Hearing technology?

Interpreters?

Culture and language?

Teachers?

Parents and caregivers?

Audiologists?



# EHDI system considerations...

**This Game:  
Robotics club!**

**D/deaf kids?**

**Public health?**

**Race and  
ethnicity?**

**Legislation?**

**Other special  
health needs?**

**Hearing kids?**



**Parents and  
caregivers?**

**Hearing  
technology?**

**Interpreters?**

**Culture and  
language?**

**Teachers?**

**Audiologists?**

# EHDI system considerations...

**This Game:  
Robotics club!**

**D/deaf kids?**

**Public health?**

**Race and  
ethnicity?**

**Legislation?**

**Other special  
health needs?**

**Hearing kids?**



**Parents and  
caregivers?**

**Hearing  
technology?**

**Audiologists?**

**Interpreters?**

**Culture and  
language?**

**Teachers?**

# EHDI system: levels to consider

- ▶ Individual
- ▶ Team or program
- ▶ Organizational
- ▶ Partnerships between organizations
- ▶ Three or more stakeholders or groups
  - ▶ Policies, legislation, and recommendations



# Reflections

- Metaphors can help us:
  - understand each other's work
  - prioritize next steps
  - explain why we do certain things
  - understand why something isn't working
- No one metaphor is perfect for all programs
- Sometimes we can get lost trying to define different elements, disagreeing on scale or scope
- Metaphors won't work for everyone; multiple approaches are needed
- Value multilingual people
- Recognize that all languages evolve continuously
- Go in assuming you have biases and be ready to think through them





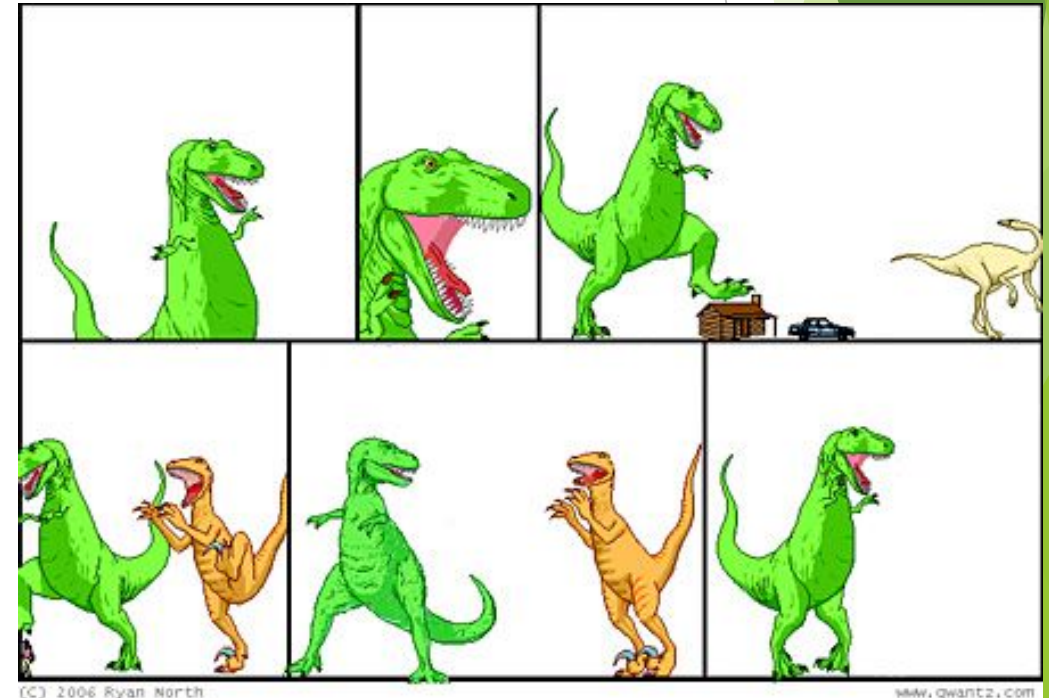
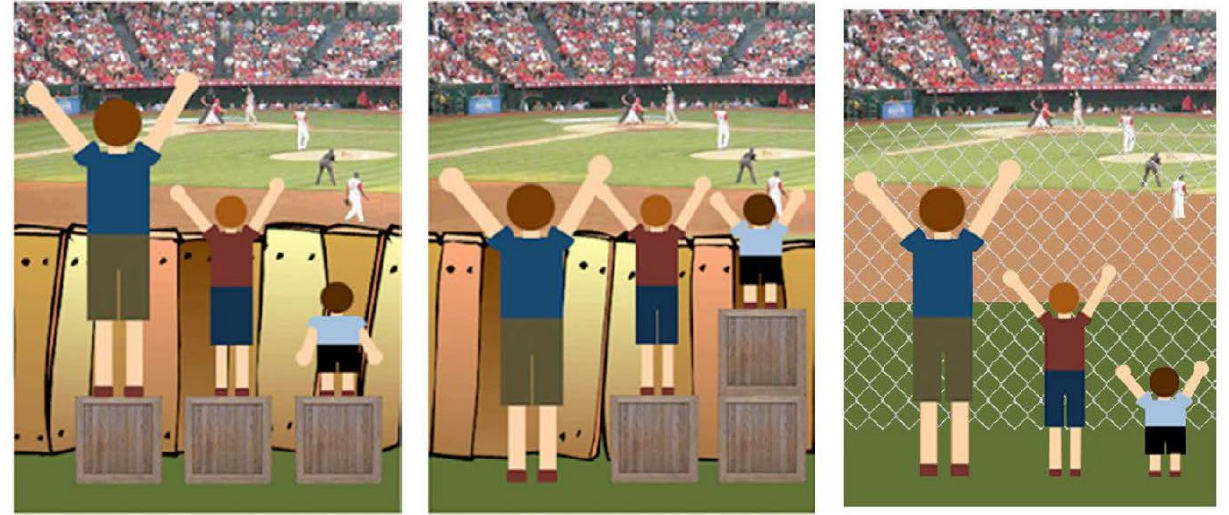
# Reflections

- ▶ As metaphorical complexity increases...
  - ▶ Consider cross-cultural issues
    - ▶ Race
    - ▶ Ethnicity
    - ▶ Country of origin
    - ▶ Don't rely on stereotypes to make connections
  - ▶ Extended metaphors can become lost in translation
  - ▶ Sometimes metaphors can help create distance to discuss difficult topics
- ▶ Consider changes across time



# Reflections

- ▶ We can pair metaphors with other strategies to ensure we are succeeding at communication
  - ▶ Teach-back
  - ▶ Toys and physical props
  - ▶ Spontaneous drawings, group drawings
  - ▶ Memes
  - ▶ Storytelling - hypothetical and real-life



# Questions for Further Thought...

- ▶ Where in the metaphor do you participate?
- ▶ Is there a certain aspect you'd like to work toward contributing more?
- ▶ What about outside of your main sphere? (Family, schools, art, sports, religious communities, etc?)
- ▶ What metaphor do you connect best with? Is there one you might use in the future to help communicate your ideas?
- ▶ Interested in doing a similar activity? Further questions?

**Email me: [cara.weston@state.mn.us](mailto:cara.weston@state.mn.us)**

Thank you!