

# Leading Toward Becoming A Profession

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# Overview

- ❑ Why Structure ECE As A Professional Field of Practice
- ❑ What It Means To Be A Profession & What Makes Professions Distinctive
- ❑ Benefits of Structuring ECE As A Profession
- ❑ Leading For the Work Ahead

# To Start Us Off .....

## Norms

- ❑ Early Childhood Education is a fragmented field of practice – yet most reform efforts target field’s fragmented financing, delivery system and policies vs. fragmentation of its core function.
- ❑ Other than working with children – or on their behalf – few commonalities bind us in terms of shared knowledge, preparation, qualifications, commitments, & aspirations.
- ❑ Rarely do we think of individual roles as part of something larger than ourselves, our programs, or our separate sectors.

- *Leading Toward Becoming A Profession* is a **Leadership Manifesto.**
  - Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, Or Incrementally Improve What Isn't Working.
  - Argues For Deep System Change To Unify ECE As A Field Of Practice.

## Attempting To Redirect ECE's Trajectory By:

- Becoming Accountable As A Field Of Practice.
- Assuming Responsibility For Competent Practice Of Practitioners And The Results For Children's Learning And Development.
- Formally Structuring ECE As A Profession To Realize Consistency In Practice and Results Across Sites And Program Types.
- Developing Field-Wide Leadership & Shun *Reliance* On Public Policy For *Defining* The Field's Purpose And Structure.

- Most of Us Agree It's Time For Change.
- Where We May Differ Is Who Should Drive The Change And The Way To Get There.
- This Time It Should Be From Inside Out
  - ✦ This Time It Should Reform AND Re-Form ECE As A Field Of Practice.

- Not True ECE Is Not A System.
- ECE Is A System – Just Not One Functioning As We Want.
- Systems Generate Behaviors Their Structures Are “Designed” To Produce.
- The Only ‘Way Out’ Is Restructuring The ECE System.
- Restructuring ECE’s Occupational Configuration So A Profession Can Create A System Tailored To ECE’s Aspirations And Responsibilities.

# It's Time for Change From The Inside Out

- ECE's Fractures Undermining Field's Competence And Development.
- Many Current Approaches Further Fracturing The Field
  - Voluntary strategies not leading to practitioners *collectively* capable of competent practice.
  - ECE becoming increasingly and unnecessarily complex and burdensome to navigate and reform.
  - Layered interventions creating still further fragmentation – intensifying capacity issues, and deflecting focus and resources from practitioner and program effectiveness.

# It's Time for Change From The Inside Out

- Why Now?
  - Too many children are losing ground.
  - Too many children are not accessing their potential.
  - Big gains in knowledge exist BUT we're not applying them.
  - Increased expectations for our performance exist BUT we're not meeting them.
  - ECE is gaining credibility BUT not its practitioners.
  - Others are filling the leadership void and *reforming* ECE as a field of practice.

**ECE Can And Should Do Better As A Field of Practice.**

**But Not Only Because Others Are Calling For It -**

**BUT Because We Are Unified Around the Imperative to Do So -  
From the Inside Out.**

We have the energizing prospect of changing the future by restructuring ECE as a field of practice.

“A vocation(occupation) is not a profession just because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such” [John Goodlad, 1990, p.29.]

# Getting to Shared Understanding of Terms

## Typical Meaning of “Professional”

- Paid vs. Amateur
- Respectful
- Completes a job with skill and competence
- Provides reliable, competent service
- “Just plain good” [From Feeney, 2012]

# Getting To Shared Understanding of Terms

Professions are a uniquely structured occupation.

# Occupation

- Market- or employer-driven
- Service for hire – consumers/ employers can hire anyone they want
- “And other duties as assigned”
- Individually (vs. collectively) oriented
- Sometimes externally regulated or monitored
- Certificates, degrees, apprenticeship associated with increased occupational skill and market viability

\*\*Goffin, 2013.

# Profession

- Officially recognized specialized body of knowledge and skills; depends on exercise of judgment
- Serves “higher” purpose
- Occupationally controlled preparation, certification, and practice
- Training credentials required for entry & career mobility
- Defined scope of practice
- Must be licensed to practice
- Field-wide leadership

# Why the distinction matters ....

- Professions Address ECE's Status and Uneven Competence By:
  - Unifying Us As A Field Of Practice By Creating Interconnections And Shared Identity Derived From Common Purpose.
    - ✧ Commitment to public interests that establishes compact between professions and society.
  - Developing interdependent Systemic Structures Accountable For Practitioner Preparation, Practice, And Predictable Results For Those Being Served.
  - Becoming Self-Governing As A Field Of Practice.
    - ✧ Assuming responsibility for competent practice and its outcomes.
    - ✧ Becoming formally recognized by private and public entities for specialized knowledge, skill, and public value.
  - Being Proactive In Exercising Field-Wide Leadership
    - ✧ Leading for positive change on behalf of those being served
    - ✧ Advocating for conditions that make competent practice possible and access to it available.

- Professions:
  - Are imperfect – None match the ideal prototype.
  - Continually evolve to reach their aspirations.
    - Can weaken over time if they fail to do so.
  - Vary from one another in terms of structure and extent they incorporate the “ideal.”

WHETHER TO CHANGE IS NOT AN OPTION.

ECE WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE.

- 10 Reasons Structuring As A Profession Should Be Our Way Forward
  1. Allows ECE's specialized "hybrid" knowledge and pedagogy to be formalized and recognized as distinctive discipline.
  2. Drives and sustains unity because of shared commitment/passion tied to a common purpose.
  3. Reduces internal fragmentation by creating cohesive systems for ECE as a field of practice.
  4. Clarifies and defines roles and responsibilities.
  5. Requires field's *practice* – regardless of sector, sponsorship, or funding stream - to be based on professionally developed standards.
  6. Requires field to be accountable to children and families, general public, and to the profession.
  7. Supports ongoing, continuous improvement through field-wide leadership and mutual obligation to competent practice.
  8. Fosters coherent policy support.
  9. Offers buffer against external politics related to practice.
  10. Can change ECE's track record in educating and caring for young children.

# It's Time For Internal Change

**IT'S TIME**

We Step Forward And Assume  
Responsibility As A Field Of Practice

**And**

Become Cohesive System Of Practice,  
Preparation, And Accountability

This Should Be **Our** Work.

It Should Not Be Left To Others –

“We have been trained to think of situations that are inadequate for our aspirations as problems. When we think of them as problems, you are taking action to have something go away: *the problem*. When you are creating, you are taking action to have something come into being: *the creation*.” [Robert Fritz, 1989, p.11]

- Internal Collective Will.
- Shared Passion For Creating An Alternative Future for ECE.
  
- Demands Individual And Collective Shifts In Thinking.
  - Mental Models
  - Adaptive Change
  
- Systems Thinking

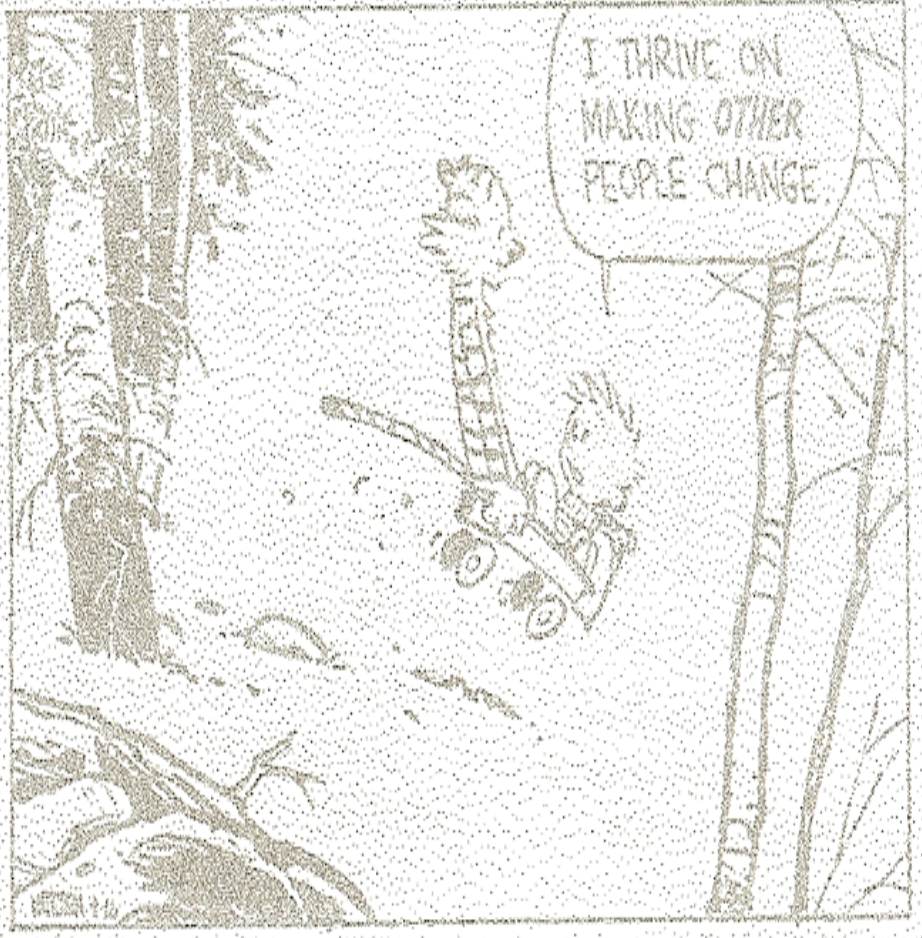
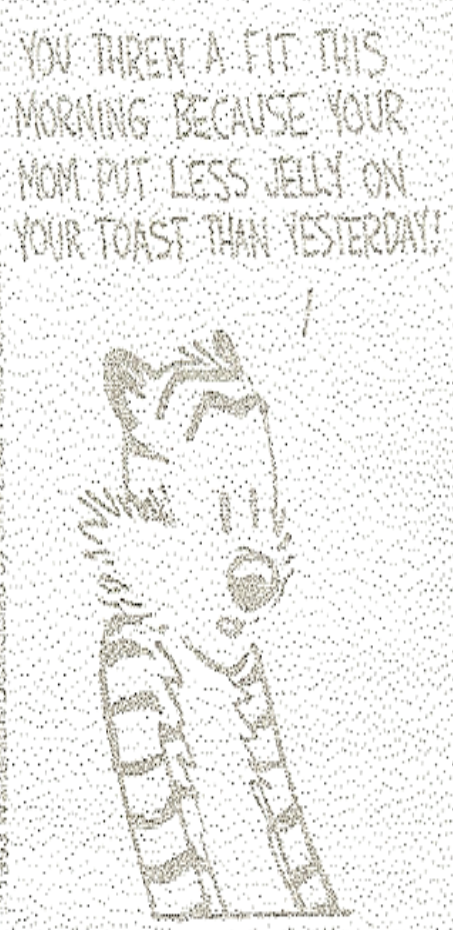
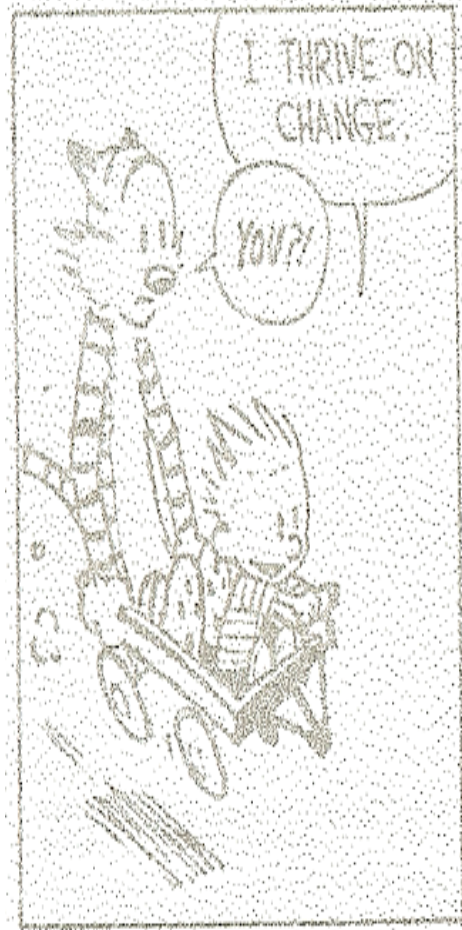
The system changes when we change ....  
Individually and collectively.

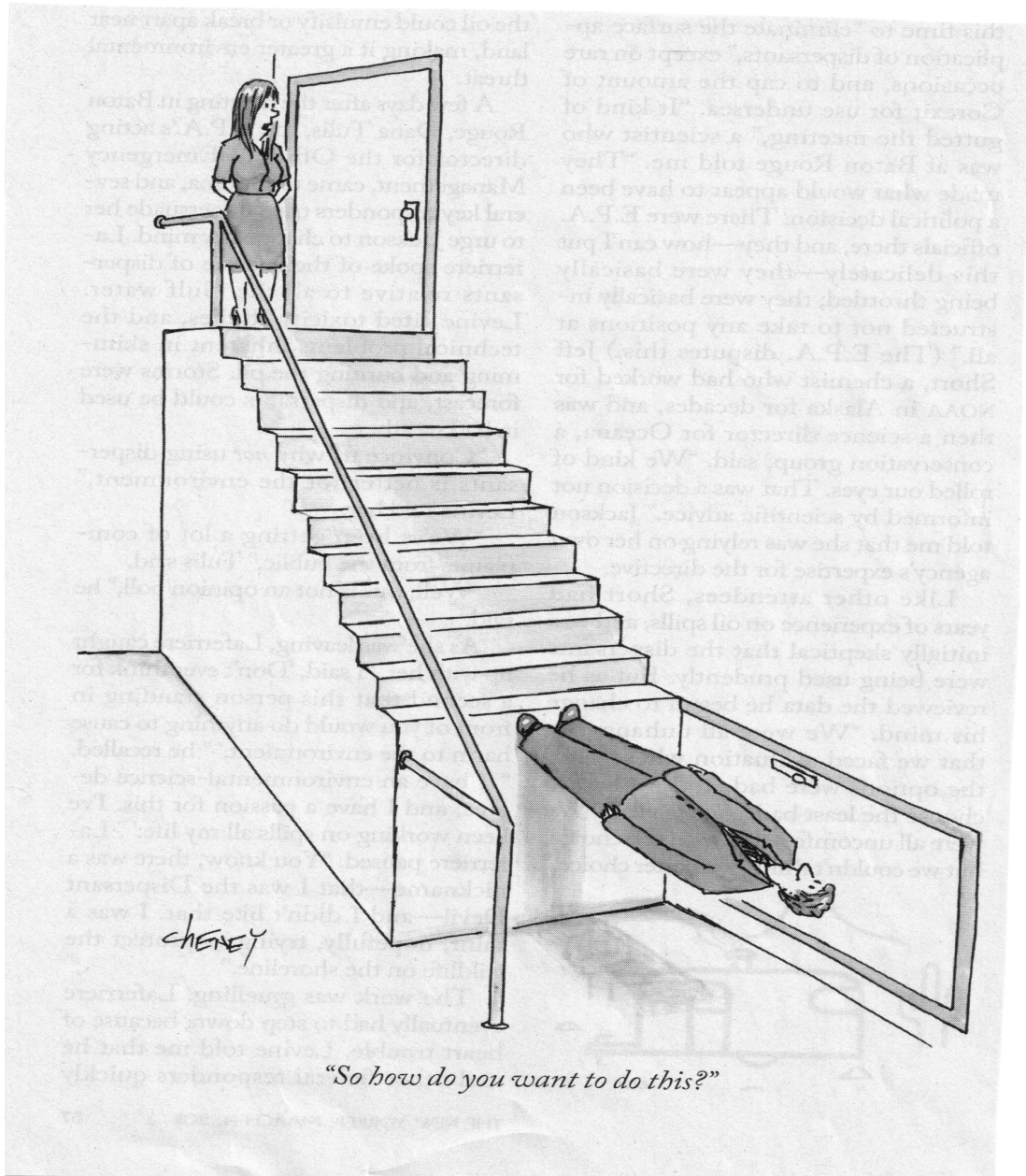
Calvin: I thrive on change. Hobbes: You?!

Hobbes: You threw a fit because your mom put less jelly on your toast than yesterday!

Calvin: I thrive on making other people change. [from Washington Post, 2010]

# CALVIN AND HOBBS





Remember, Professions Are A Coherent Interconnected  
System of Preparation, Practice, and Accountability

Crafting New Systemic Relationships Requires Systems  
Leaders Who Catalyze Collective Leadership.

[Senge, Hamilton, Kania, 2015]

- Leadership Is An Action Verb – It Is Not A Role
  - Is Exercised Individually and Collectively.
  - Shifts Collective Focus From Reactive Problem Solving To Co-Creating An Alternative Future.
  - Involves Risking The Present – As We Know It – For An Uncertain Future. [Heifetz, 1994; Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015]
  - Requires Working In The Space Of An Emerging Future. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Scharmer, 2014)
  - Is messy.

Needed:  
Willingness to Step Forward  
For ECE's Future

# A Next Step

- “We Must Grow Into Our Future Possibilities.” [Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p.11]
- Where To Start: Conversations With Intent.
  - Allow for personal and collective reflection
  - Invite thinking together to create an alternative future for ECE

“Conversation is the core process by which we humans think and coordinate our actions together. . . .

*Conversation is our human way of creating and sustaining—or transforming—the realities in which we live.” [Juanita Brown, 2005, p.19]*

- Conversations with Intent Needed To Prepare Us For Decision Making And Action.
  - Create a different conversational canvas for planning an alternative future for ECE,
  - Fashion options for realizing ECE as a professional field of practice, and
  - Lay needed groundwork for what lies ahead.

[Goffin, 2015]

- Conversations With Intent Will Allow Us To
  - Become more self- and collectively aware.
  - “Ripen” the issue – Develop readiness to engage and change.
  - Open ourselves to new possibilities.
  - Develop skills for engaging in decision-making, and action that’s going to be required. [Goffin, 2015]

## ■ Overarching Questions

- What major choices are required to move ECE forward as a profession? Are we prepared as a field of practice to make them?
- What principles or values should guide formation of ECE as a professional field of practice?
- What options are available for ECE's organization as a professional field of practice?
- What should be the starting place(s) for structuring ECE as a profession?
- What else do we need to know to move forward? Who else should we be learning from? [Goffin, 2015]

# Stepping Forward For ECE's Future

This is not a typical moment in time.

*Truly* Professionalizing ECE Is Essential To Integrity As A Field Of Practice.

- Can
  - Bring increased consistency to children's early learning experiences in out-of-home settings.
    - ✧ Across 50 state change strategy.
    - ✧ Across diversity of program delivery, financing, and auspices.
  - Promote individual and collective accountability as a field of practice.
  - Bring ECE's practitioners the recognition, credibility, and respect they deserve.

# Stepping Forward For ECE's Future

- Requires

- Changing ourselves so we can change together.
- Working on the “edge” of what is acceptable or comfortable.
- Giving the work back to those of us [inadvertently] sustaining disparity between performance and aspirations.
- Learning continuously –personal and collective development.
- Accepting conflict.
- Feeling our way forward - experimenting with next steps.
- Making choices – often difficult ones.
- Living with uncertainty and ambiguity.
- Acting courageously.
- Persevering.

# It's Time To Call The Question

What Defines and Bounds ECE As A Field Of Practice?

# What Is The Future We Want To Create For ECE?

“Our Dreams Contain The Power To Transform Mediocrity  
Into Magnificence” [Dawn Stankowski]

It's Up To Us  
- Individually and Collectively -  
To Make Our Dreams For ECE Become A Reality

Are *You* Ready?

Are *We* Ready?