Redirecting Early Childhood Education’s Developmental Trajectory:

Becoming A Recognized Profession

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Why Now?

Reason #1

- The Field’s Knowledge Base Is Expanding Exponentially – But We’re Unevenly Informed About What Currently Is Known.

Why Now?

Reason #2

- Increased Expectations Exist For What We Do BUT We’re Not Meeting Them.

- ECE Is Gaining Credibility BUT Not Its Practitioners.
Why Now?

Reason #3

- The Context For Early Childhood Educators’ Practice Has Shifted.
  - External Expectations For ECE As A Field of Practice Are Being Re-Conceptualized, Including Results Expected From Our Practice.
  - We’re Not Driving These Changes — Instead, We’re On The Receiving End.
Reason #4

- Too Many Children Are Losing Ground.

&

- Too Many Children Are Not Accessing Their Potential.
The Result?

ECE Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- Who Establishes Its Outcomes.
- What The Public Expects From ECE.
- What Teaching And Learning Looks Like In ECE.
- Children’s Experiences In Early Learning Settings.
The Result?

- Confusion re ECE’s Purpose.
- Increased Programmatic And Systemic Fragmentation.
- Uneven Performance And Results.
- Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.
- An Ineffectual Infrastructure.
- Increased External Intervention.
Hopes For This Presentation

Increased Understanding Of:

1. Professions As A Cohesive, Unifying System That Can Redirect ECE’s Developmental Trajectory & Transform It As A Field Of Practice.

2. Distinction Between Fixing The ECE System’s Present Problems And Creating A Different Future For ECE As A Field Of Practice — One Capable of Fulfilling ECE’s Promise To Children And Families.

Hopes For This Presentation

4. How Systemic And Adaptive Change Differs From Current Approaches To Change.

5. Stretching Your Thinking About ECE As A Field Of Practice And Its Future Possibilities.
Ground Rules

— Why They’re Needed
“A vocation is not a profession just because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such.”

[John Goodlad, 1990]
Hold On Tight.

- This Means ECE Is Not Yet A Profession Even Though We Call It Such.
  - ECE Does Not Meet Required Criteria Of Recognized Professions.
Thus The Question

To Reform Or Re-Form ECE As A Field Of Practice?
What’s The Difference?
“We Have Been Trained To Think Of Situations That Are Inadequate To 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, italics in original]
To Reform Or Re-Form ECE?

Think About It …..

When We Talk About “Professionalizing ECE,” It’s Typically Shorthand For Ongoing (And Fragmented) Improvement Efforts — Usually With Transitory Impact.

These Myriad Efforts Lack A Clear And Shared Destination And Contribute To ECE’s Fragmentation.
To Reform Or Re-Form ECE?

ECE Needs An Agreed Upon Destination

My Answer To Where We Should Be Heading?

ECE
As A Respected Profession
Typical Meanings For “Professional”

- Paid vs. Amateur
- Nicely Dressed
- Reliable, Dependable, Respectful
- Good at What One Does
- Prepared For What One Does
- Presence Of Deep Expertise
- Market Or Employer Driven
- Service For Hire – Employers & Consumers Can Hire Whomever They Want
- ... And “Other Duties As Assigned”
- Individually Focused vs. Collectively Oriented
- Sometimes Externally Regulated Or Monitored
- Certificates, Degrees, Apprenticeships Increase Occupational Skill And Marketability

ECE Presently Structured As An Occupation
Four Pillars Of Professions
*A Unified, Cohesive System of Public Accountability*

- A Shared “Noble” Purpose
- Roles, Scopes of Practice, & Practice Competencies
- Formal Preparation Prior To Entry Into The Profession
- Self-Governance Tied to Profession’s “Noble Purpose” & Standards of Practice
Professions’ Four Pillars Undergird A System Whose Behaviors Lead To Prepared, Competent, Accountable Professionals.

— Regardless Of Program Setting, Financing, Or State.
- The Adjective **Professional** Often Gets Confused With **Profession** as a Noun — And With Non-Professionalized Occupations.

- They Are Differently Structured Than Non-Professionalized Occupations — **Because They Shoulder A Different Obligation To The Public And Those Who Are Recipients Of Their Practice.**

- Professions Are Purpose-Driven, Professionally Governed, Coherent Systems Of Preparation, Practice, And Accountability.
To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- The Question Of Who Will Be In And Who Will Be Out Often Is Asked Of Me.
- Usually This Question References Who Will Be In The Profession And Who Will Not Be Included.
To Reform Or Re-Form ECE?

Here’s How I Approach This Question —

How Will It Be Determined Whose Children “Are In” And Whose “Will Be Left Out”?
To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- Each And Every Child Should Have Access To Competent Teachers And Effective Early Learning Experiences.

- Each And Every Family Should Have Confidence In The Caliber Of Their Child’s Teachers.

- Each And Every Taxpayer Should Feel Assured Their Financial Support For ECE Supports Good Results For Children.
To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- If This Is A Shared Aspiration, It’s Time To Take A Stance And Move Beyond Reforming/Fixing ECE.

- It’s Time To **Re-Form** ECE As A Field Of Practice — To Form It As A Professional Field Of Practice Capable Of Fulfilling Our Aspirations.
It’s Time To Reset ECE’s Developmental Trajectory

To Come Together & Create The Future We Need And Want For ECE As A Field Of Practice.
ECE Is A System.

- It’s Behaving As It’s Been Structured To Behave.
- But Its Current Behaviors Aren’t Benefitting Children, Families, The ECE Workforce — Or ECE’s Prestige As A Field Of Practice.
To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- The Only ‘Way Out’ Of ECE’s Systemic Inadequacies Is To **Re-Form** The Present ECE System.

- To **Re-Form** ECE’s Occupational Configuration So It “Behaves” As A System Tailored To ECE’s Aspirations And Responsibilities.
“There Is No ‘System.’ We All Talk About It As If It’s Something That Exists, Almost Like It’s An Independent Entity, But We Are The System.”

[Peter Senge, 2015. Italics added.]
Re-Forming ECE Requires Us To Prioritize Our Obligations to Children and Families.

Re-Forming ECE So It Becomes A Recognized Professional Field Of Practice Requires Us To Change [Our Goals For The ECE System and To Change Ourselves And Our Institutions So Our Aspirations For ECE Can Be Achieved.}
Redirecting ECE’s Developmental Trajectory To Become A Profession is a Leadership Manifesto.

- It Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, Or Incrementally Improve What Isn’t Working.

- It Argues For Deep System Change That Re-Forms ECE As A Field Of Practice.
Redirecting ECE’s Developmental Trajectory Requires Change Starting From The Inside Out

ECE Will Need To:

- **Define Its Purpose.**
- **Assume Responsibility** For Practitioners’ Knowledge & Skills To Fulfill That Purpose.
- Become Individually and Collectively **Accountable** For Our Practices.
- **Re-Form ECE As A Recognized Profession** So Consistency In Practice and Results Exists Across Sites & Program Types.
- Develop Field-Wide Leadership & Shun **Reliance** On Public Policy For **Defining** Our Purpose And Structure.
Redirecting ECE’s Developmental Trajectory Requires Change Starting From The Inside Out

- ECE’s Fractures Are Undermining Its Competence And Development.

- Too Often Our Fix-It Approaches Are Further Fracturing ECE.
Redirecting ECE’s Developmental Trajectory Requires Change Starting From The Inside Out

- Voluntary Strategies Foster Uneven Practitioner Competence.

- ECE Becoming Increasingly And Unnecessarily Complex And Burdensome To Navigate And Reform [And Re-Form].

- Layered Interventions Creating Further Fragmentation — Intensifying Capacity Issues, And Deflecting Focus And Resources From Practitioner And Program Effectiveness.
Why It Matters?

- By **Not** Answering Its Field-Defining Questions, ECE:
  - Allowing Children To Spend Their Days In Programs Of Uneven Safety, Quality, And Effectiveness.
  - Focusing On ECE Primarily As An Early Intervention Rather Than Helping Children Realize Their Potential.
  - Denying ECE The Chance To Be Recognized As Having Specialized Expertise.
  - Making It Harder To Create Coordinated Systems Of Service Delivery, Policy, And Financing.
  - Creating A Leadership Void For Others To Fill.
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 – Starting From the Inside Out.
By Answering What Defines and Bounds ECE As A Field of Practice,

- ECE Will Become A Unified Field Of Practice.
- Teachers And Other Roles In The ECE Profession Will Be Consistently Prepared And Competent In Their Practice Regardless Of Program Setting.
- ECE Will Become Recognized And Respected For Its Specialized Knowledge And Practice.
- ECE Will Be More Capable of Recruiting, Better Compensating, and Retaining Well-Prepared Practitioners.
- Families Will Have Increased Program Choices For Their Children.
- Children Will Have Increased Prospects For Realizing Their Potential.
WHETHER TO CHANGE IS NOT AN OPTION.

ECE WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE.
We Have The Energizing Prospect Of Changing The Future For Children And ECE By Re-Forming ECE As A Field Of Practice – Starting From The Inside Out.

Systems Change When We Change .... Individually And Collectively.
Leadership Is An Action Verb — 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
CAUTION
DEFINING MOMENT AHEAD
Will We Define ECE As A Field Of Practice Or Allow Others To Do It For Us?
Moving ECE From An Occupation To A Recognized Profession

- We Will Be Engaging In Systemic And Adaptive Processes Of Change — Which Is Not Straight Forward Work.
  - Because It Starts From The Inside Out, Kicking Off A Campaign To Convince And Induce Others To Drive The Change Is Not The Answer.
Moving ECE From An Occupation To A Recognized Profession

“We Must Grow Into Our Future Possibilities.” [Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p.11]

“There’s nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it’s going to be a butterfly.” [R. Buckminster Filler]
Getting ECE From An Occupation To A Recognized Profession

- This Work Requires Us To Engage With Changing Ourselves And How Our Institutions Relate To One Another.
- It Requires Us To Live In Two “Spaces” Simultaneously.
  1. Mending The Present By Relying On Short Term Accomplishments (vs. Quick Fixes) That Move ECE Toward Its Destination As A Profession.
  2. Creating ECE’s Future As A Recognized Profession.

- The Systemic Task Is Ensuring The “Mending Process” Also Advances The Work Of Re-Forming ECE As A Recognized Profession.
Getting ECE From An Occupation To A Recognized Profession

- No Single Right Answer Exists For How Best To Fulfill Our Aspirations.

- Answers To Every Question About Our Future Can’t Be Known At The Start Of The Journey.

- We’ll Have To Learn To Live With Uncertainties And Conflict – And To Benefit From Them.
We Can Get From Occupation To Profession By
- Deepening Understanding Of Professions “As A Noun.”
- Engaging In Intentional Conversations About The Future We Want For ECE [Conversations With Intent.]
- Specifying Our Purpose and Obligations(s) to Children’s Learning and Development.
- Distinguishing ECE And Its Specialized Practices From Other Professions.
- Changing The Goals Of ECE’s Present System.
- Addressing ECE’s Leadership Development Gap.
From Studying Profession’s I’ve Learned

- A Pre-Existing Road Map To Becoming A Profession Doesn’t Exist.

- Getting To Our Destination Will Be An Unpredictable Journey.

- The Pathway Will Be Figured Out Along The Way.
From Studying Professions, I’ve Learned:

- Confronting Competing Truths Involves Choices And Compromises.
- Following Preparation, Continuing Professional Development Is Integral to Professional Competence.
- Professions Evolve As Their Science Progresses And Their Contexts Change.
ECE’s Integrity As A Field Of Practice Is At Stake

Children And Families Are Counting On Us
Change Your Thoughts
And You Change Your World.

[Norman Vincent Peale]
The Journey Will Be Challenging — But It’s Achievable

BUT Only If We Start Engaging From The Inside Out To Reset ECE’s Developmental Trajectory As A Professional Field Of Practice.
“The Thing Is, You Have To Really Want To Change.”

The New Yorker, May 26, 2014
We Have To Believe In Ourselves And The Significance Of ECE’s Specialized Knowledge And Practice.

“The Most Difficult Thing Is The Decision To Act. The Rest Is Mere Tenacity.”

[Amelia Earhart]
Where To Start The Journey
Conversations With Intent

Conversations With Intent Prepare Us For Collective Decision Making And Action.

“Conversations With Intent” – They’re NOT Just Talk!

They Are Intentionally Designed Conversations Used To Activate Deliberative Action That Advance ECE Towards Its Destination As A Profession.

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Conversations With Intent

1. They Pave The Way For Collective Action Aimed At Restructuring ECE As A Field Of Practice.


3. Discover Options Not Yet Apparent For Creating ECE As A Professional Field Of Practice.
Three Possible Questions To Explore

1. What should be ECE’s purpose?

2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of having a variety of unrelated entryways for becoming qualified as early childhood educators?

3. What Should Be Our Expectation In Terms Of The ECE Profession’s Accountability To Children And Families?