

Professionalizing Early Childhood Education – Distinguishing and Engaging the Field in Its Next Era

Early Childhood Investigations

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Continuing The Conversation

- We first interacted with one another on this topic on February 26th.
- Here Are The Two Objectives For Today’s Interaction –
 1. Deepen understanding of professions as a unifying, systemic structure for providing consistently competent practices regardless of program setting
 2. Persuade you to continue this conversation with your colleagues. **Each of us** should be part of shaping ECE’s future – beginning with focused conversations about what it means to be a profession and thoughtfully considering the choices and decisions we will have to make.

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POLLING QUESTION #1

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POLLING QUESTION #2

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Why Are We Having This Conversation Now?

Reason #1

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

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Why Are We Having This Conversation Now?

Reason #2

- The Field's Knowledge Base Is Expanding Exponentially.
- A Widening Gap Exists Between The Field's Knowledge Base And Its Practice.

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A Troubling Question

- Why As A Field Have We Been Okay With This Practice Gap For Such A Long Time?
- Maybe This Doesn't Apply To Those Of You On This Call
- But Note: This Question Is About Us As A Field of Practice
- And the Pronoun **Us** Includes Each Of Us.

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A Troubling Question

So None Of Us Is Is Off The Hook!

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The Result?

- Confusion re ECE's Purpose.
- Increased Programmatic And Systemic Fragmentation.
- Uneven Performance And Results.
- Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.

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6 Questions I'm Often Asked

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Question #1

1. Why Isn't ECE Already Recognized As A Professional Field Of Practice?

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"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)

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Think About It

When We Talk About “Professionalizing ECE,” It’s Usually Shorthand For Ongoing And Fragmented Improvement Efforts – And Typically Their Impact Is Transitory.

Our Myriad Efforts Also Lack A Shared Destination.

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Question #1

ECE Needs A Destination

That Destination Should Be ECE As A Recognized, Competent Profession

THEN A Shared Baseline Can Exist For Continuous Improvement – i.e. Professional Development That Lifts Us Up Together As A Field Of Practice.

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Still Question #1

We Need Shared Understanding of Terms

- The Adjective “Professional” Often Is Confused With “Profession” as a Noun.
- Professions Are Differently Structured Than Non-Professional Occupations Because Their Organizing Structures Have Different Intentions.
- Professions Are A Purpose-Driven Coherent System Of Preparation, Practice, And Accountability.

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BTW: What's A Profession?

Typical Meanings of "Professional"

- Paid vs. Amateur
- Respectful/Diplomatic
- Nicely Dressed
- Skilled
- Reliable
- Well Trained
- Having Deep Expertise

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Occupations

- 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

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Professions

- Have a purpose-driven, unifying systemic structure
- Embrace a "noble," service-driven purpose embedded in a Code of Ethics
- Have defined roles & scopes of practice
- Have professionally controlled preparation and practice expectations
- Have singular designations e.g., MD, RN, Au.D, DDS, OD
- Require **professional** (vs. academic) degrees, typically from professional schools
- Require licensure to ensure specialized knowledge and practice skills present
- Have field-wide leadership coordinating decisions affecting profession's future

POLLING QUESTION #3

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Three Pillars of Professions

It Begins With A Shared and Unifying Purpose

Roles, Scopes of Practice, & Competencies

Formal Preparation/Professional Degrees

Self- Governance Tied to Professional Standards of Practice

Question #2

2. Why Should ECE Become A Recognized Profession?

Question #2

- By **Not** Answering What Defines And Bounds ECE As A Field of Practice, We Are:
 - Allowing children to spend their days in programs of uneven quality and effectiveness.
 - Denying itself the chance to become recognized for specialized expertise.
 - Creating a leadership void for others to fill.
 - Making it harder to create coordinated system of supportive policies and financing.

Question #2

- By **Answering** What Defines and Bounds ECE As A Field of Practice,
 - ECE Can Become Unified As A Field Of Practice.
 - Teachers And Other Roles In The Profession Will Be Consistently Prepared And Competent In Their Practice Regardless Of Program Setting.
 - ECE Will Be Recognized And Respected For Its Specialized Knowledge And Practice.
 - Families Will Have Authentic Choices When Selecting A Program.
 - Children Will Have Greater Prospects For Reaching Their Potential.

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Question #3

Question #3: Haven't We Already Been Improving Children's Early Learning Experiences – And Our Status – With QRIS, PD Systems, Registries, and The Like?

Where Do They Fit Into This Conversation?

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Question #3

This Response May Make Some Feel Squeamish

One, Because So Many Of Us Have Put Our Hearts And Souls Into These Initiatives.

Two, Because We Need To Distinguish Professional **Preparation** From ECE **"Professional Development"** And Champion The Difference.

Additionally, The Answer Requires Us To Understand The Difference Between Interventions To Fix the Present and Actions Taken To Birth A Different Future For ECE As A Field Of Practice.

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Question #3

- QRIS, PD Systems, And Registries Are Innovative Approaches Developed To Address ECE's Uneven Program Quality – In The Present.
- They Came About Because **ECE Teachers Lack Consistent Preparation** For Their Roles.
- Neither Children Nor Their Teachers Are Having Effective Learning Experiences.
- And Data Is Needed To Inform And Document Progress.

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Question #3

- These Efforts Are Important Compensatory Interventions – They're About Compensating For "What Is."
- Once Organized As A Profession, Teachers And Other Roles Identified As Part Of The Profession Will Be Prepared Prior To Entering Their Roles.
- The Work Of QRIS, PD Systems, and Registries Will Consequently Shift.

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Question #3

- It's Possible QRIS, PD Systems, And Registries As Presently Constructed May Not Be Part Of The Future We Create For ECE.
- But They **CAN** Be An Integral Part Of ECE's Transition To Becoming A Recognized Profession.

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Question #3

- This Requires Us To Live In Two “Spaces” Simultaneously.
 1. Mending The Present
 2. Creating ECE's Future As A Recognized Profession.
- The Strategic And Systemic Challenge Is Ensuring These Parallel Efforts “Join Up” At The Right Moments During Our Journey To Become A Recognized Profession.

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Question #3

Where Do QRIS, PD, & Registries Fit?

- Answers To All Of Our Questions About The Future Can't Be Known At The Start Of The Journey.
- We'll Have To Learn To Live With Uncertainties – And To Benefit From Them.

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Question #3

- The Role and Function Of QRIS and PD Systems Will Evolve As ECE Evolves Into A Profession.
 - I Suspect They'll Have Important Roles To Play In ECE's Evolution Toward Becoming A Recognized Profession.
 - And I Can Imagine Registries Evolving Into A National Repository Of Workforce Data.

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Question #4

4. Will Becoming A Recognized Profession Address ECE's Compensation Issues?

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Question #4

- Compensation Matters
 - To Attract Individuals Prepared & Committed to ECE
 - To Retain Talent
- The Question To Answer Is: Parity With Whom?
 - Distinctions Among "Worthy Wages," Pay Parity With K-12 Teachers, And Professional Parity
- It's Reasonable To Assume Compensation Will Increase But Professional Parity Also Driven By Factors Beyond ECE's Domain.
 - Gender
 - Society's Value Of The Profession's Specialized Knowledge

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Question #5

#5: How Long Will It Take Us To Become A Recognized Profession? Where Do We Start?

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Question #5

- How Long Will It Take? Another Question Absent A Definitive Answer.
- From Studying Professions, I've Learned:
 - It Will Be An Unpredictable Journey Despite The Destination Being Known.
 - Some Things Will Be Figured Out Along The Way.
 - Challenging Issues Will Have To Be Confronted.
 - Hard Choices And Compromises Will Have To Be Made.
 - The First Version Of The ECE Profession Won't Be Its Last.
 - And Then It Will Still Be "A Work In Progress."

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Question #5

Because Professions Serve A "Noble Purpose," They're Aspirational –

Reaching For The Stars Takes Perseverance And Continually Stretching Toward What Seems At First Beyond Our Reach.

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Remember

"There's nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly." [R. Buckminster Fuller]

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Question #5

- BUT For Sure Becoming A Profession Won't Happen Unless We Make It Happen!
- Don't Forget – Professions Are **Self-Governing**. **We're Responsible – Not Others** - For ECE's Development As A Professional Field Of Practice.

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So It's Up To Us.

The Time Has Come To Re-Imagine ECE.

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- This Declaration Is a **Leadership Manifesto**.
- It
 - 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*.
 - Redirects ECE's Developmental Trajectory.

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ECE Should

- **Assume Responsibility** For The Competent Practice Of Its Practitioners.
- **Hold Itself Accountable** for Contributing to Children's Learning And Development.
- **Formally Organize As A Profession** To Realize Consistency In Practice Across Sites And Program Types.
- **Develop Field-Wide Leadership** & Shun **Reliance** On Public Policy For **Defining** The Field's Purpose And Structure.

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- **Becoming A Recognized Professional Field Of Practice** Requires Answers To Questions About ECE's:
 - **Unifying Purpose** – What Defines And Bounds Us A Field Of Practice?
 - **Specialized Knowledge** – What Distinguishes ECE As A Field Of Practice?
 - **Individual And Collective Responsibility** – For What Will ECE Hold Itself Individually and Collectively Accountable?
 - **Scopes of Practice.**
 - **Uniform Preparation And Practice Standards.**

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Question #6

How Do We Go About This Work?

What Should Be Our Starting Place For Structuring ECE As A Profession?

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Question #6

Where To Start

1. Be Part of **Conversations With Intent** To Prepare For Collective Decision Making And Action.
2. Develop Conversational Skills For Engaging In Decision-Making And Action.

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Question #6

“Conversations With Intent” Are NOT Just Talk!

They Are Intentionally Designed Conversations Used As A Means To Get To Action In Support Of Advancing ECE Toward Becoming A Profession.

They Launch Collective Action Toward Restructuring ECE As A Field Of Practice.

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“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]

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Question #6

Where To Start

- **Thinking Alone: Questions To Ask Of Yourself**
[See Professionalizing Early Childhood Education As A Field Of Practice: A Guide To The Next Era, Chapter 2.]
 - Are You Ready To Be Part Of The Solution?
 - What Is Your Commitment To Personal Change?
 - What Is Your Openness To Changing ECE As A Field Of Practice?

BE HONEST!
If You're Feeling Uncomfortable, You're On to Something!

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Question #6

Where To Start

- **Thinking Together: A Beginning** [See Professionalizing Early Childhood Education As A Field Of Practice: A Guide To The Next Era, Chapter 3]
- **Starting Questions To Explore With Colleagues**
 - What Is The Cost Of Maintaining The Same Path, Tinkering Around The Edges As We Go?
 - What Is Emerging As ECE's Future If We Don't Step Forward To Create A Different Trajectory?
 - What Are ECE's New Realities Calling It To Become?

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Question #6

- **We can't get from here to there without**
 - Deepening understanding of professions "as a noun."
 - Identifying our foundational values.
 - Clarifying our aspirations.
 - Distinguishing ECE From Other Professions.
 - Engaging with "First Step Change Strategies."

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Let's Go For It!

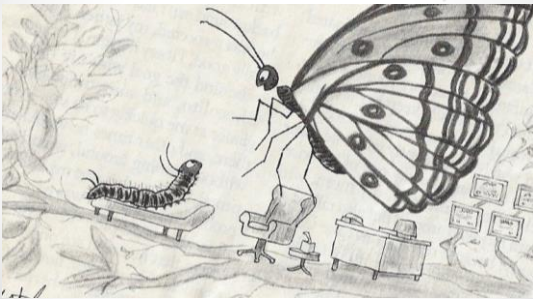
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**Change Is Not An Option
ECE Will Continue To Change**

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"The thing is, you have to really want to change."

The New Yorker, May 26, 2014.



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**It's Up To Us
 -Individually and Collectively-**

**To Step Forward and Be Accountable
 As A Field Of Practice**

**To Take Responsibility for Preparing
 Competent Practitioners So ECE Delivers On Its
 Promise.**

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**The Time Has Come To Reclaim ECE
 As A Field Of Practice - To Reset ECE's
 Developmental Trajectory**

**To Come Together And Decide The Future
 We Want For ECE As A Field Of Practice**

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ECE's Integrity As A Field Of Practice Is At Stake

We Need to Unify Around the Imperative to Change - From the Inside Out.

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Seven horizontal lines for notes.

By Coming Together,

We Can Transform ECE As A Field Of Practice.

We Can Become Accountable To Children and Families, To Society, To Each Other.

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Seven horizontal lines for notes.

Want To Stay In The Conversation?

1) Want More To Think About?

www.goffinstrategygroup.com

2) Policy [M]atters, Episode 8 | Professionalizing ECE: Roles & Compensation

<http://wp.me/p3la1b-2tG>

3) ECE Pioneers For A New Era on Linked In

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Seven horizontal lines for notes.