Professionalizing Early Childhood Education –
Your Role in the Next Era

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What to Expect

- Introduction & Overview
- Interactive Presentation
- Q&A

POLL QUESTION #1
Early Childhood Education is a fragmented field of practice—reform efforts have attended primarily to 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 it in terms of shared knowledge, preparation, qualifications, commitments, & aspirations.

Rarely are individual/ECE roles thought of as part of something larger than ourselves, programs, or separate sectors.

PLUS ….

ECE Is In The Midst Of Significant Change.

What’s Changed?

- The Context For Early Educators’ Practice.
- External Expectations For Its Work And What It Should Accomplish.
- Widening Gap Between Public Expectations And Field’s Capacity to Deliver.

What’s Changed for ECE?

Field’s Work And Its Trajectory Are Being Redefined

In terms of:
- Purpose.
- Who establishes outcomes expected of ECE.
- What the public expects from the field.
- What teaching and learning looks like in ECE.
- What it means to be a child in an early learning setting.
The Result?

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

Why It Matters

- ECE’s Future Will Vary Depending
  - On Whether:
    - It becomes unified as a field of practice (or remains a mix of disconnected programs and services).
    - It assumes responsibility for practitioner competence (or retains this as an individual option).
    - It structures itself so the field’s knowledge base can be uniformly applied (or relies on a handful of strong programs to demonstrate quality).
    - The field seizes opportunity to reorganize itself and define its future (or remains passive as field of practice).
ECE Should

- **Assume Responsibility** For The Competent Practice Of Practitioners And Positive Results For 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.

Why It Matters

- **By Not Answering Its Field-Defining Questions, ECE:**
  - Allowing children to spend their days in programs of uneven quality and effectiveness.
  - Making it harder to create a coordinated system.
  - Denying itself the chance to become recognized for specialized expertise.
  - Creating a leadership void for others to fill.

The Time Has Come –

We Should Reform – And Re-form – ECE To Become A Recognized Professional Field Of Practice.
This Declaration Is a Leadership Manifesto.

- It moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion OR Incrementally Improve What Isn’t Working.
- It argues For Deep System Change To Unify ECE As A Field Of Practice.
- It Redirects ECE’s Developmental Trajectory.

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

- We Need To Exercise Leadership Individually And Collectively.
  - Leadership Is An Action Verb.
  - This Will Be A Developmental Journey.

POLL QUESTION #2
“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).

BTW: What’s A Profession?
Typical Meaning of “Professional”
- Paid vs. amateur
- Respectful
- Dresses Nicely
- Completes a job with skill and competence
- Provides reliable, competent service
- “Just plain good”

Getting to Shared Understanding of Terms
- We often confuse the adjective “professional” with “profession” as a noun.
- Professions are differently structured than non-professional occupations.
- Professions are systems of preparation, practice, and accountability.
### 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

### Profession
- Field-unifying systemic structures
- Defined boundaries & scope of practice
- Occupational control of preparation, certification, and practice expectations
- Those being served can rely on professional exercise of clinical judgment
- Unique knowledge & skills serve a “noble” purpose
- Licensure required to ensure specialized knowledge and practice skills present
- Credentials required for entry & career mobility
- Field-wide leadership exists

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**THE TIME HAS COME TIME**
For ECE To Be A Coherent System Of Preparation, Practice, And Responsibility

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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 We can Deliver On the Field’s Promise.
ECE’s Missing System

- Becoming A Recognized Professional Field Of Practice Requires Us To Answer Questions About ECE’s:
  - Unifying Purpose.
  - Responsibility – For what will ECE hold itself accountable?
  - Scopes of Practice.
  - Uniform preparation standards.

- A Professional Structure Addresses ECE’s Fractured Status and Uneven Competence.
  - This Is Because They:
    - Are A Field- Unifying Strategy – They define a profession’s purpose, its expertise, and who is served.
    - Create A System – Are accountable for practitioner preparation, practice, and predictable contributions to children’s learning and development.
    - Are Self-Governing As A Field Of Practice.
      - Assume responsibility for competent practice and its outcomes.
      - Are recognized by private and public entities as professional fields of practice.
    - Have Institutional Capacity to Exercise Field-Wide Leadership
      - Lead for profession’s continuous learning and development.
      - Advocate for conditions that make competent practice possible and access to it available.

POLL QUESTION #3
Three Pillars of Professions
It Begins With A Shared and Unifying Purpose

- Roles, Scopes of Practice, & Competencies
- Higher Education
- Self-Governance

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POLL QUESTION #4

The Time Has Come To Reclaim ECE As A Field Of Practice
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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WHETHER TO CHANGE IS NOT AN OPTION.

ECE WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE.

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Big Questions To Consider

• What major choices will be 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]

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What Will Be Required

- **Imagination and Resolve**
  - Shifting Our Focus From Problem Solving To Co-Creating An Alternative Future
  - Dealing With Uncertainty

- **Courage**
  - Risking The Present – As We Know It – For An Uncertain Future. [Heifetz, 1994; Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2013]

- **Tenacity and Perseverance**
  - Taking The Long View ....Keeping Our Eye On The Prize – Our Passion For Giving Every Child The Chance To Reach Their Potential.

The First Next Step

**Conversations with Intent**

- Conversations With Intent Needed To Prepare Us For Decision Making And Action.
  - Create a conversational canvas for planning our alternative future,
  - Develop options for realizing ECE as a professional field of practice, and
  - Lay groundwork for what lies ahead. [Goffin, 2015]

Conversations with Intent

- Conversations With Intent Allow Us To
  - Become more self- and collectively aware.
  - Develop readiness to engage and change.
  - Open ourselves to new possibilities.
  - Develop skills for engaging in decision-making and action. [Goffin, 2015]
Unless Someone Like You Cares A Whole, Awful Lot.
Nothing Is Going To Be Better,
It’s Not.
The Lorax. Dr. Seuss™ © Dr. Seuss Enterprises, 1971

By Coming Together,
We Can Transform ECE As A Field Of Practice!

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