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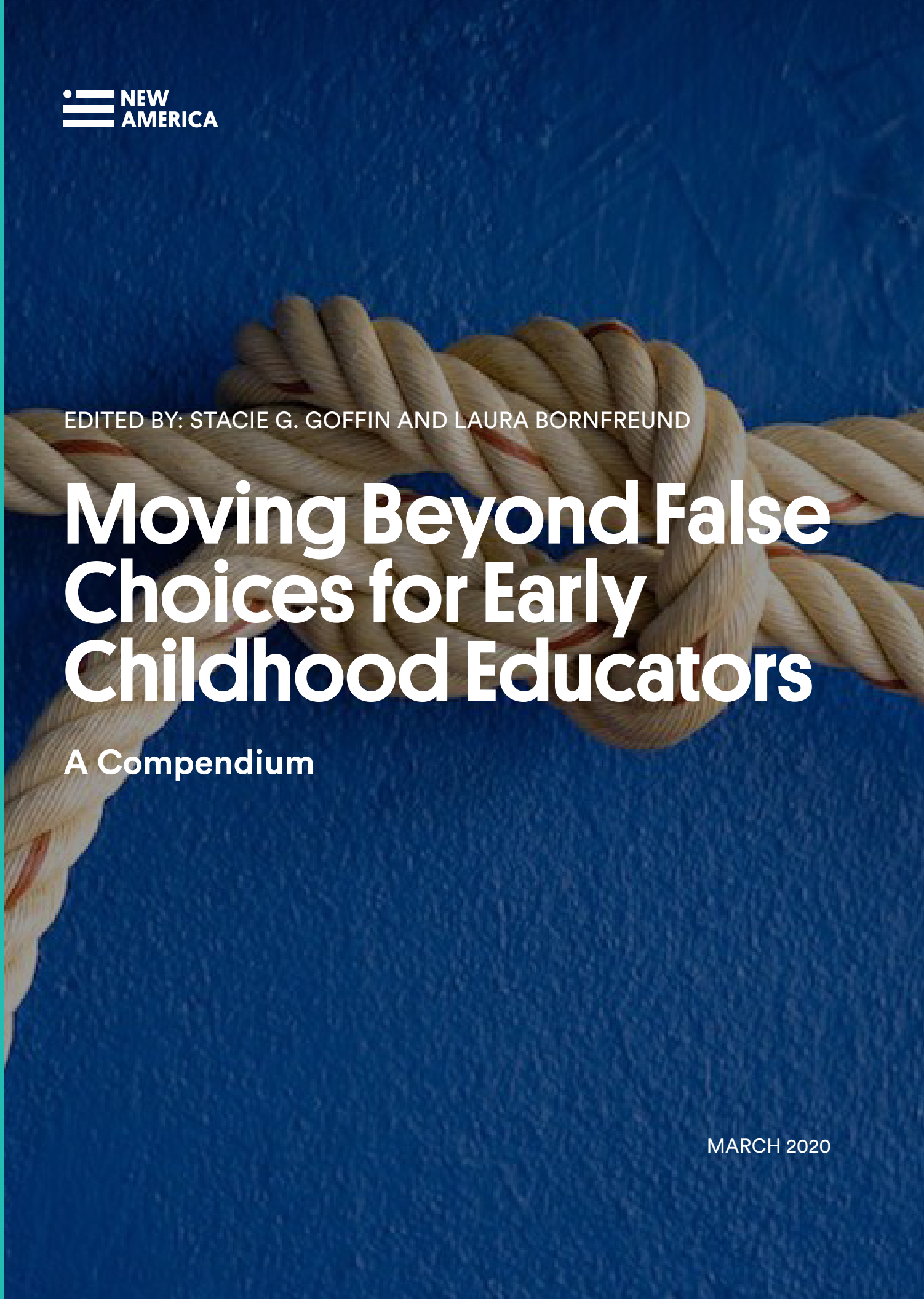

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Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators

A Compendium

MARCH 2020

Acknowledgments

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Please Note: The views expressed throughout the Compendium are those of the authors alone and not necessarily of their organizations or of New America.

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About Education Policy

We use original research and policy analysis to help solve the nation's critical education problems, crafting objective analyses and suggesting new ideas for policymakers, educators, and the public at large.

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Prelude: Moving Beyond False Choices May Be Within Our Reach

Prelude by Stacie G. Goffin, series editor

Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators—A Compendium is the culmination of an 18-month blog series that engaged diverse viewpoints about disentangling early childhood education's (ECE) long-standing thorny knot which is comprised of three of its most challenging issues: preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity.

Launched in January 2018, the 32 pieces in the series spotlighted the ECE field's diverse perspectives regarding the entwined relationships among the knot's three strands. Laura Bornfreund and I strove to incorporate a range of perspectives and voices, including those too often not at the table. We sought to invite new possibilities for unraveling a knot increasingly resistant to being loosened so new options could emerge.

The series was well received, and as it drew to a close, it became evident that the exploration of ECE's thorny knot had yet to run its course. The conversation kindled by the series clearly warranted further encouragement. As a result, the compendium's format and its new content is intended to foster continuing discussion, deepen understanding of the knot's underpinnings, lift up unexamined presumptions, and cultivate the level of consensus necessary for formulating next steps to move the field beyond false choices for early childhood educators.

The Compendium's Organization

The blog series succeeded in presenting co-existing perspectives and accruing new insights, but revelations of new ways to respond to the challenge of untangling the knot were less evident. The new content prepared for this compendium broke through this impasse. First, by identifying five overarching themes from the series, each associated with a set of related pieces, the series' seemingly diverging views coalesced around several common topics. Second, by attaching a field-defining question to each theme, a sharper, higher-level examination of ECE's thorny knot was catalyzed. And third, the request made of new authors to offer questions warranting further exploration and recommend next steps created an action orientation missing from the blog series.

Below are the five themes and their defining questions:

1. Degrees and Education: Do degrees and education matter for early childhood educators? Why or why not?

2. Higher Education: What does higher education need to do to regain its stature as a gateway to the ECE profession?

3. Race, Class, and Gender: What is the role of race, class, and gender in resolving ECE's thorny knot?

4. Family Child Care: Where does family child care fit in the ECE system?

5. Early Childhood Educators: Why Do Educators' Voices Matter in Conversations About the Field's Thorny Knot? What should be done differently to authentically engage them?

The authors invited to prepare introductions for these five theme sections were prodded to push readers' thinking and invited to be provocative in their responses to the field-defining questions. Authors were charged to

- Introduce each theme section by consolidating what can be learned from "their" authors by presenting a synopsis that offered a fresh platform for unpacking ECE's thorny knot.

- Expand the ECE field's exploration of its thorny knot in the context of the theme's overarching, field defining question without falling into the abyss of inaction.

- Steer the conversation toward next-step possibilities.

- Demonstrate awareness of race, class, and gender issues.

This charge is reflected in the common organizational format used for each introduction, with the intent of honing authors' attention to their field-defining questions. Their answers are aimed at sparking fresh approaches to unraveling ECE's thorny knot.

The issue of equity, of course, has no boundaries, so a framing essay is organized around the question of "What do equity and progress look like for children and their early childhood educators?" The compendium's concluding essay examines the fundamental question of "Getting Unstuck: What's Needed for ECE to Take a Big Step Forward?"

Moving Beyond the Status Quo

The compendium's format propelled the conversation evoked by the blog series beyond revelations of the range and diversity of perspectives about the ECE field's thorny knot and insights into its complexity. The five theme introductions, as well as the opening and closing essays, differ from one another, as one would expect since each responds to a unique field-defining question. Yet there is a unifying conclusion: different kinds of intervention are necessary for releasing ECE's thorny knot. Recommendations from the compendium's new authors all urge the ECE field to move beyond current approaches to addressing its thorny knot.

These authors individually, and often collectively, contend that awareness is needed of the field's historical legacies, past choices, and existing presumptions. We are asked to recognize that the presumptions we hold, and the choices we've made, are contributing to the field's present challenges and relative inertia when it comes to its thorny knot. The authors maintain that those of us in the ECE field need to forge a new mindset if we want to drive meaningful change.

The compendium's new content unearths buried assumptions hindering ECE's evolution as a field of practice and offers novel strategies. Not unlike Barbara Bowman's, Bela Mote's, and Patricia Snyder's pieces, they challenge us to open ourselves to different alternatives. And perhaps foretelling an adjustment of increasing importance, they almost unanimously join with series authors who called for repositioning early childhood educators so they are central in shaping the field's developmental trajectory (e.g., Anne Douglass, Sherri Killins Stewart, Lauren Hogan, and Michele Miller-Cox). Collectively, they also corroborate a conclusion I expressed in the series' final piece: "given how long these issues have thwarted ECE's development as a field, it would seem obvious that the 'same ole' is not well serving the field or children and families."

I don't want to be misinterpreted as agreeing with all that's been written. Nonetheless, without trying to over-project a sense of optimism, *Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators—The Compendium* conjures up the possibility that the ECE field is awakening to the realization that transcending boundaries[1] and transforming systems[2] cannot be accomplished if one's

approach to change is driven by technical thinking and a restricted problem-solving mentality. Rather, it is characterized by creative work that calls upon not only commitment and perseverance but also upon a willingness to venture into the unfamiliar with a spirit of learning, experimentation, and discovery.

Acknowledgments

Huge thanks are due to the series' 32 authors whose willingness to express their thoughts with authenticity and courage fueled the success of Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators. Without their willingness to work through multiple drafts to fine-tune their thinking, the compendium's authors would have been unable to take this project to new heights.

The seven authors who graciously accepted the invitation to write the compendium's essays and introductions deserve similar credit. Responding to the seven field-defining questions provided both opportunity and challenge and each of these authors rose to the occasion.

Finally, special appreciation is extended to Laura Bornfreund, director of Early & Elementary Education Policy at New America, who generously agreed to host the blog series and this follow-up compendium. She has been a strong supporter and valued colleague throughout the project's nearly two years, as have members of her team.

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Opening Essay: What Do Equity and Progress Look Like for Children and Their Early Childhood Educators?

By Albert Wat

As a policy professional in early childhood education (ECE), I'm on the record[3] in support of a policy solution to ECE's thorny knot: supporting and requiring lead teachers in early education programs (from birth through age 5) to attain a bachelor's degree in ECE in order to maximize the benefits of ECE programs.[4] This position, while not original, has been the subject of robust debate in recent years, as exemplified by *Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators*. The question of whether such a policy would lead to inequities among these educators has been raised throughout this New America compendium, and further questions have arisen for me as a result: How do we advance ECE as a profession in an equitable way? Can it be accomplished by relying on higher education as a primary pathway? How do we acknowledge the competencies and diversity of the field's incumbent workforce and at the same time, build an even stronger profession for the future?

Equity and Diversity in ECE

Before turning to those questions, though, I'll first share my definition of equity for children and then for their early childhood educators based on the

presumption that efforts to achieve equity for early childhood educators should be undertaken to further equity for children in ECE programs.

At the risk of oversimplifying things, to me, an equitable ECE system for children is one in which all children, but especially those furthest from opportunity (because of their class, race, or gender), have access to a highly competent, well compensated, and diverse corps of early childhood educators. Outside of the family, they make the single most important contribution to building a strong foundation for school and long-term success. In turn, an equitable system for their educators is one in which anyone who aspires to join the ECE profession, but especially those furthest from opportunity, have the supports needed to attain the competencies and commensurate level of compensation necessary for fulfilling this expectation.

In this regard, a diverse workforce should be a non-negotiable. The ECE field has historically celebrated its diversity. The question is how this diversity advances equity. What does it mean to take pride in this diversity when inequities like low wages suppress a profession disproportionately made up of women and women of color?[5] What does it mean to celebrate this diversity when it is a legacy of our society's devaluing of "care" and other "house work"[6] as "women's work" or, for those more privileged, as work for servants and maids (or earlier in our history, slaves) – work considered as free or cheap labor. To say it bluntly, the diversity that we celebrate today is a legacy of racism and sexism that has legitimized the exploitation of those who care for young children. This legacy binds too many early childhood educators to a life of subsistence and limited opportunities for career advancement, which in turn, limits their ability to create a more equitable future for young children.

Consequently, in addition to worrying about how a new policy strategy, like requirements for higher degrees or credentials, may sustain or create new inequities, we also need to focus on what it will take to disrupt inequities that currently exist. If we truly value ECE's diversity, more needs to be done to intentionally cultivate it as an asset in service to achieving more equitable outcomes for children. This means fighting not only for fair compensation policies, but also for effective professional training systems and robust ongoing supports that help early childhood educators attain increased competencies.

Role of Professional Preparation and Higher Education

In the final analysis, the clearest path to me for breaking free of the racist and sexist history plaguing ECE – and to bring more equity into the profession - remains higher education, as flawed as it is. I may be biased as an immigrant whose parents uprooted their family to give their children greater educational opportunities. I may be unduly influenced as an undergraduate by the savage inequalities[7] I read about in our public education system and the research I

studied on stereotype threat.[8] These experiences led me to pursue a career to expand educational opportunities as a matter of social justice.

I believe if we eschew higher education because of its deficiencies, we do so at the peril of the ECE profession. Higher education may not be sufficient, but I believe it's necessary. First, especially when done in partnership with actual ECE programs, higher education is an important setting to learn the science of early childhood development and the content knowledge that undergirds effective ECE practice – even if it sometimes falls short on training educators about pedagogy. Second, unlike other countries with robust unions and apprenticeship systems, in the U. S. a bachelor degree is still a key pathway to higher compensation. A college education still comes with an earning premium[9] for women and people of color, even in a field like ECE. While it's true that people with ECE degrees are among the lowest paid college graduates,[10] I would argue that's more a function of how we finance ECE and our advocacy priorities than a function of attaining a bachelor degree in ECE.

Nonetheless, one of the most concerning critiques of higher education as a pathway to advancing the ECE profession is that low-income people and people of color experience systemic barriers to access and success in postsecondary institutions. To me, this suggests the ECE community should work closer with K-12 and higher education advocates and policy leaders to remove these barriers, rather than shunning these institutions as avenues for professional and personal advancement. Otherwise, wouldn't we just be perpetuating the inequities in ECE that currently exist?

I am open to other pathways that will lead to professional advancement *and* equity, but those who propose a different path also have a responsibility to show how it can lead to more equitable outcomes for the ECE workforce – one that is highly-competent, well-compensated, and diverse. If the field were to abandon higher education as a strategy, I would want to be confident that we aren't doing so just because there are implicit or explicit assumptions that a bachelor's degree would take too long or be too difficult for the ECE workforce to achieve.

Conclusion: Lessons for the Future

For better or worse, the elevation of equity issues in the debate around advancing the ECE profession has had limited impact on my *policy* position. If anything, my resolve on this issue strengthens every time I see or hear from early childhood educators who achieve any credential or degree – whether it's a BA, an AA, or CDA. The pride and confidence they express, and what the achievement means to them as a professional, and more often than not, as women and as mothers, is profound.

That said, I recognize that the policy strategy others and I are proposing will bring disruption and even loss to some in the ECE profession. For one, if we do this right, more men will be in the profession. Also, it's unlikely that the path to

progress will "lift all boats" at once. Some policymakers or advocates may decide to first address inequities *within* the profession by investing in the career advancement and compensation of those who are on the lowest rung of the ladder, like infant and toddler educators and family child care providers. Others may choose to focus more on pre-K or Head Start educators whose professional preparation, growth, and compensation may be easier for the general public and political leaders to understand and support.

If the ECE field were to go down this road, strategies to work through these disruptions, a plan to ensure *all* early childhood educators have pathways to advancement, and a commitment to securing resources to implement that plan has to be present. A way to honor the competencies and expertise of existing educators that promotes equity within the profession *as well as* for children has to be present, too.

How we go about this policy endeavor should not be led by or left to people like me, however, which gets to how my approach to this issue *has* changed. Over the past few years, I've grown to recognize the need to do this work *with* early childhood educators. Earlier on this journey, I don't think I fully appreciated why they would not willingly join the cause of attaining higher status and greater competencies and compensation as a profession through higher degrees and credentials.

I had to be reminded of all the times in our history when "progress" was made at the expense of the poor, people of color, and women. I was too focused on what higher education can mean personally and professionally to the ECE workforce to notice that a call for higher standards could be interpreted as an insult to the experience and expertise of educators who have given decades of their lives to young children. Finally, and maybe most importantly, as a policy professional, I didn't invest much energy in listening to and engaging with educators' ideas, hopes, and fears. (They don't teach you that in policy school. Perhaps they should...)

I still believe in the merit of policy change, but there's a huge difference between a policy directive from "above" – even when it's done with good intentions – and a profession-driven movement for change. Both are necessary, and equity - both in terms of how we make change and the change we're making – should be a core principle. As policy professionals like me continue to work with colleagues in the ECE field to strive for a better, more equitable future for young children and the ECE profession, I believe these are the lessons we need to act on.

Albert Wat is senior policy director of the Alliance for Early Success.

Do Education and Degrees Matter?

By Rebecca Kantor and Kristie Kauerz

Introduction to the Theme of Degrees and Education

Do education and degrees matter for early childhood educators? As a field, we have little agreement about the answer to this, a stalemate that dates back 20 years to the National Research Council (NRC) proposal[11] that the BA be the baseline for early care and education (ECE) teachers. In this theme section's nine pieces, authors' opinions range from a definitive, "a four-year degree should be the standard" (Albert Wat, Phil Acord) to an equally definitive position that, "given the choice between Violette (a less-than high school educated caregiver) and a caregiver with a college diploma, I would choose Violette every time." Fabienne Doucet's position is that Violette's competencies and caring commitment are what count and cannot be guaranteed by a degree. Similarly, Jamal Berry notes that the necessity for ECE teachers to love children and have a growth mindset "up-ends" the notion that degrees are all-important. Other authors put contingencies on the degree, arguing its importance only for lead teachers or teachers of three- and four-year-olds. Yet, evidence is mounting[12] that degrees increase program quality and higher quality leads to better child outcomes.

Consensus does exist, however, on issues of racial and gender equity. The ECE field currently has important and laudatory diversity. As Doucet and Luis Hernandez caution, requiring bachelor degrees risks excluding some, plus

degrees have not necessarily been wealth generators for Black Americans.[13] We agree that the field—indeed, society writ large—must be honest and vigilant about institutional racism, implicit bias, and who benefits from which decisions in building ECE's workforce. Further, we agree that requiring a degree, given current barriers to higher education, could create the same problematic predominantly white teacher workforce that exists in K–12 education.

For this, and other reasons, Alberto Mares cautions that degrees should not be seen as a silver bullet solution. And Carol Brunson Day suggests those in the field should take an incremental, tiered approach to promote formal education for all ECE teachers.

Ultimately, the fundamental question underlying the pieces in this section is: can we design an inclusive system that builds a workforce with degrees *and* preserves the diversity we value?

Expanding the Conversation

To address this question, the conversation must expand. To put our stake in the ground: we believe formal education and degrees are essential. Degrees professionalize the field, drive policymakers' and the public's buy-in for higher compensation, and unequivocally reflect the importance of working with young children.

What about ECE teachers themselves? What do they want? A recent survey of ECE teachers (both center- and home-based) in Colorado makes clear that they want a degree.[14] In the sample surveyed, 66 percent were not currently enrolled in a degree program, but 87 percent said they would pursue a degree if provided support.

Often, we hear the argument that higher ed is ill-prepared to support diversity and to provide specialized preparation programs that include intensive, authentic engagement in quality settings with meaningful support and feedback (i.e., practice-based residency approaches). As higher education stakeholders, we believe an inclusive system that builds a workforce with degrees and that preserves diversity *can* be designed. To date, however, the field's approach has been rigid and scientific, striving to definitively identify the mix of credits, content, competencies, and accountability that will produce a predictably high-quality workforce. What if we, instead, addressed this dilemma not as scientists with the goal of prescriptive policy but as design thinkers with the goal of innovation and adaptability? An iterative creative process, design-thinking[15] originated to solve problems in ways that are human-centered, innovative, and iterative. Design thinkers seek a deep understanding of, and an empathy for, those for whom they design products or services.

The design process challenges long-held assumptions and presumes that revision and going "back to the drawing board" are necessary parts of the process. Are

those in the field willing to challenge these assumptions, revise systems previously intended to be definitive solutions, and let go of those not serving educators, families, and children? The field's fragmentation reflects its tendency to add new solutions and bureaucracies, without ever letting any go.

One long-held assumption in ECE, for example, is the forced choice between requiring degrees *or* valuing teachers' love for children, growth mindset, and competencies. The irony is that the ECE field is grappling with the same issues for its teachers as it is for the children it serves. For both, there exists a vehement commitment to preserve the value of social-emotional skills and well-being, while policymakers clamber for academic skills and return on investment.

The time has come to declare that, for children, academic preparation (i.e., aptitude in reading and math) is just as important as self-esteem, self-regulation, and joyful engagement in learning. And, simultaneously, for adults, academic preparation (and/or progressive attainment of formal education) is just as important as self-worth, growth mindset, and joyful engagement in learning. In other words, we should increase the number of Violettes who *also* have college diplomas.

Another assumption is that our best return on investment is "protection," that is, protecting children and families from poor quality through ratings of settings. Over the past two decades, the ECE field has created vast new Quality Rating & Improvement Systems (QRIS) bureaucracies in most states, on top of an already vast web of licensing rules. Commanding billions of dollars across the country,[16] research[17] suggests that QRIS have not improved children's learning experiences to an extent that significantly correlates to improved child outcomes.

Contemplate instead the possibility of redirecting these billions of dollars to fund degree attainment or ECE teachers' compensation and other incentives to engage in professional learning and formal education. We believe the time has come to invest in "professionalism" and the assumption that more qualified teachers increase quality and that what's needed is a system that supports teachers' attainment of more education.

Are we willing to give up strategies that no longer serve our constituents? While this will take time, we agree with Carol Brunson Day when she says we can't "just get straight from here to there." We must not let perfect be the enemy of good enough. We must get started.

Questions for Further Exploration

- To date, the ECE workforce's career pathways have been lined with professional development, the CDA, competency frameworks, and associate's degrees. How do we redesign the system, supporting teachers' advancement to four-year degrees, without wrecking this good work? Can we increase access to higher education for underpaid ECE teachers and for teachers of color simultaneous with degree attainment?

- Innovative institutions of higher education use "credit by evaluation of prior learning[18]" to link the pathways of non-credit professional development and academic credit. Others are exploring "micro-credentials," used in other industries as smaller pieces of learning that stack to credit, as more manageable and more affordable ways to make progress toward a degree. Can higher ed embrace these approaches that align with the work/family lives of diverse educators, provide more access to starting a degree, and build teachers' confidence in doing so? Does the movement to digital delivery of higher ed coursework open new avenues for flexible, cost-effective degree attainment? Though delivered in online formats, how do we *not* replicate rote approaches to teacher education?

Moving into Action

Pockets of design thinking and innovation exist. For example, in our home state of Colorado, we are designing and iterating a system[19] that supports multiple on-ramps to formal education to support educators while also sustaining the field's diversity. A critical piece of this work is the Colorado ECE Competencies Framework[20] that is at the center of all workforce development initiatives including professional development, CDA-, AA-, or BA-oriented opportunities. No single mandate exists for all teachers; instead, we recognize non-credit professional learning *and* formal education in a single system of workforce development.

The systems design challenge we now face is connecting the lines between professional development and academic credit. Otherwise, ECE educators will have hundreds of professional learning hours that do not advance their careers, and we risk creating a two-tier professional culture. Consistent with design thinking, Colorado is shifting, albeit slowly, to prototype, implement, revise, iterate, and implement again. Colorado is not alone; other states, like Virginia,[21] are similarly innovating.

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Degrees and Credentials for Early Childhood Educators: Inching Towards A Consensus?

By Albert Wat

Could it be that a consensus is brewing within the infamously fractured early care and education field?

It's dangerous to extrapolate from a few data points, but almost all authors in this series so far agreed that attaining higher degrees and credentials is an important part of an early childhood educator's preparation. Notably, these voices include practitioners and leaders in family child care programs, center-based programs, and public school systems. The apparent agreement among them belies headlines from major news outlets[22] questioning the wisdom of requiring early childhood educators to have a college degree.

For example, Tracy Ehlert and Jamal Berry both described the impact that pursuing higher education has on early childhood educators' growth and self-respect as professionals and individuals. In addition to noting the impact on personal growth, Sue Russell made the case that attaining higher degrees opened doors for women, framing investment in the early childhood education (ECE) workforce as a feminist and social justice issue. Sherri Killins Stewart's support for degrees and credentials rested on their leading to more proficient practice and putting in place policies that respect existing educators' experiences and address the barriers faced in making educational and professional advancements.

So if a consensus is emerging that having early childhood educators with college degrees and formal preparation is more desirable than the status quo, how can the field get from here to there? On that question, there's less agreement. In fact, Jason Sachs and Berry lay out two very different paths. Sachs provocatively proposes that all pre-k for three- and four-year-olds, and consequently their teachers, become part of the public education system—thereby achieving parity with other K–12 educators in terms of education, compensation, and benefits. This resembles the strategy implemented by the Abbott pre-k program in New Jersey. Like other public-school teachers, Abbott pre-k teachers are required to have a bachelor degree and certification in ECE. Whether teaching in public schools or ECE centers, all are paid the same as public school teachers.[23] (Center-based teachers do not get the same benefits, however.)

The Abbott program continues to be recognized as a model for professionalizing the ECE workforce. Because New Jersey made intensive investments[24] to assist existing educators in attaining higher education degrees, the proportion of early childhood educators with BAs and teacher certification increased from about one-third to almost 100 percent in six years. Yet, as Killins Stewart reminds us, these investments and supports operate in a society in which women, people of color, and low-income individuals face systemic barriers to personal and professional advancement. Consequently, by themselves, well-intentioned policies may not be enough if educators have no role in crafting them and if a strategy for removing or mitigating barriers isn't also present. Otherwise, ECE runs the risk of losing the current workforce's diversity and perpetuating

inequities in the system. Indeed, as Sachs acknowledges, the public education system in which he would integrate early childhood educators struggles with an increasing lack of diversity.[25]

Berry presents a different pathway than Sachs' path. He doesn't minimize the importance of higher education, but he advocates hiring early childhood educators who have a passion for the field plus a "growth mindset" and then providing them with scaffolds that build on their strengths so they can become more proficient and attain higher degrees.

Each path has its tradeoffs and costs financial and otherwise.

Berry's path attends to the issues of diversity and equity that Stewart highlights, although it's unclear how compensation will follow. His approach relies on a package of supports for the early childhood educator—scholarships, articulation agreements, peer support, mentoring, accessible coursework, credit for previous experience, etc.—that is challenging to scale up. In contrast, Sachs puts more trust in formal professional preparation in higher education institutions to give novices a basic level of competency before they become "educators."

Sachs' path addresses compensation more directly; but without more targeted interventions and perhaps broader reforms in the K–12 and higher education systems, it could lead to a whiter workforce. Finally, while Sachs' strategy may create systemic change more quickly, it will support mostly pre-k educators, not those who work with younger children.

As the *Moving Beyond False Choices for Early Childhood Educators* series proceeds, here are questions to consider:

- Which pathway(s) to higher education and credential attainment can best advance the goals of preparation and education, diversity and inclusion, and compensation and status? And can the same pathways be equally effective for different sectors of the ECE workforce (e.g., teachers in pre-k vs. infant and toddler programs; center-based vs. family child care settings) or do we need differentiated pathways?

- As Russell's piece asserts, the field has had some success with supporting existing early childhood educators, including educators of color, in attaining higher degrees that transform their career trajectories. But how do we scale these strategies up so they transform early childhood education as a field of practice, not just individuals? Where will the funding and political will come from?

- How important is formal education and professional preparation *before* an individual is entrusted in the ECE classroom, or can these experiences come later as long as beginning early childhood educators have experiences or qualities that are valued as just as important? What is better for children?

As I was drafting this piece, it occurred to me that we are talking about nothing less than professionalizing a workforce (in terms of competencies, compensation, and education) while cultivating one that is diverse and can serve similarly diverse children well. That is a tall order, and early childhood education may be one of the first fields to make this attempt. But it's one that our children deserve.

Albert Wat is senior policy director of the Alliance for Early Success.

Formal Credentials and Degrees: Not Always the Best Starting Point for Early Childhood Teachers

By Jamal Berry

The early learning field has for too long been considered mere "babysitting." As it grows and matures as a field of practice, challenging questions and issues are inevitable. Regarding the interplay among preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity, the challenge is being made more complex because higher expectations for early childhood educators are being pitted against demands for equitable compensation and finding effective drivers to transcend the divide.

I began my career driving a van for an after-school program; later I became a pre-K teacher in a child care center. I progressed by obtaining a masters in human development and education and an educational specialist degree, first becoming a Head Start teacher and then a mentor-coach for infant and toddler teachers. Now, I lead Educare DC, a full-day, full-year Head Start program serving 160 children and families in Washington, DC. Educare DC is part of a national network of 23 research-based schools with financing that enables it to employ what the field considers highly qualified teachers and coaches, i.e., teachers with bachelor of art and master of education degrees in early childhood education (ECE).

I begin by introducing my career pathway because I wanted to offer an example of the multiple entry routes into ECE. While on my path, I met awesome early childhood educators. Some of them had high school diplomas; some had a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and still others had bachelor degrees. Despite variability in their educations, these teachers shared two things: love for children and a growth mindset, two qualities that up-end the notion that degrees or credentials are all-important for entry-level early childhood educators.

Two of these teachers particularly stand out. Both have completed collegiate course work but neither is credentialed or has a degree. They both have been early childhood educators for over 15 years and are mothers of adult children.

The thought of going back to school has simultaneously excited and unnerved them. But because of their willingness to engage in embedded professional development (including reflective supervision, coaching, and communities of practice), they are becoming two of the most effective teachers I know.

As ECE increasingly relies upon education credentials and degrees to indicate competence, I fear that unless these two colleagues complete their bachelor degrees, they will not be afforded the opportunity to advance in their careers. Consequently, I am testing a different hiring approach at Educare DC.

We have begun assessing applicants' strengths and competencies, rather than their formal credentials and degrees. We assign teachers without formal preparation who are nonetheless considered sufficiently competent based on their strengths and competencies as interim lead teachers in our Early Head Start classrooms, which is possible because they are subject to nominal practitioner requirements. An instructional coach and I provide supervision. Concurrently, these teachers are exposed to professional development circles, such as a weekly community of practice, that I run for lead teachers. Additionally, each teacher develops an individual professional development plan that includes a timeline for applying for school and earning a degree.

In conjunction with salary increases, individuals participating in this pilot become inspired to develop in ways I would not have imagined. According to the prominent developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, "in order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid. That's number one. First, last, and always." I challenge us to feel this way about adults as well. I think participants in our pilot are blossoming because someone believes in them and expresses elevated expectations for their work. As a community and as a nation, recognizing the incredibly valuable work of ECE teachers is past due.

The ECE field must do more to offer higher compensation, better on-the-job training, and fully resourced programs. Early childhood teachers should never be compelled to seek public assistance to support their own families. Babies' futures should not be built on the backs of a workforce that earns poverty wages. Rather than think of education and compensation as an either-or choice, we should be thinking in terms of "both-and." We should both develop the competencies and credentials of our current and future teachers in all their diversity (including those I describe above) and at the same time increase their compensation.

In the process, we should remember that from a business standpoint, even if successful in raising credentials and teacher compensation, most early childhood education programs struggle to keep afloat. Rather than force trade-offs between credentials, compensation, and diversity, we should invest in quality early learning by establishing sustainable structures and funding sources for teachers

and programs that can yield the greatest impact for children. I truly believe that by strategically appropriating funding and by working with others to increase program quality through grant-funded trainings and partnerships extending beyond our programs' walls, all children will be the beneficiaries.

Jamal Berry, EdS, is the deputy director of Educare DC.

Higher Education Degrees—The Latest ECE Panacea?

By Alberto Mares

As series authors, we've been challenged to investigate options for moving beyond early childhood education's (ECE) false choices so those in the field can fulfill its potential and promises to young children. Yet, as a field, we're continually focusing on the same false choice: degrees or no degrees for early childhood educators. Choose the former, it's argued, and a predominantly white workforce, similar to public schools,[26] will be created since, as Maurice Sykes and Sherri Killins Stewart have reminded us, systemic barriers undermine minorities' educational access. But then Albert Wat warns us that if we avoid degrees, we risk reinforcing the status quo: childcare providers in the private market who are "cash poor, less educated, but rich in diversity."

Can we please move beyond this false choice?

Reducing ECE's thorny knot to the polarizing question of whether early childhood educators should be required to earn degrees steers us toward either-or answers. If we want authentic options for developing early childhood educators' competence, different questions need to be examined, including this one: why does ECE privilege higher education and resist the possibility that multiple pathways may exist for preparing competent early childhood educators?

Results from landmark studies[27] of preschool intervention programs have led to pre-K becoming an intervention strategy that dominates education's public discourse. They also have fortified the call for quality ECE for all children, which, in turn, have led to increasing demands for early childhood educators with degrees. I think the time has come to interrogate how this research is shaping our field's obsession with degrees and reinforcing singular intervention thinking.

Single intervention strategies can't resolve complex, systemic problems. Yet the call for early childhood educators with degrees is morphing into the latest of ECE's silver bullet solutions and becoming mythicized as yet another ECE panacea. In today's digitized and globalized world, most, if not all, of the skills needed for competent performance can be acquired through practical experience in conjunction with other supports. Consequently, obtaining degrees need not be viewed as early childhood educators' only pathway to competence. Further, while credentialing systems can formalize a field's disciplinary practices and establish

common values, gaining this knowledge solely through institutions of higher education—without attending to the systemic inequalities faced by women and other minorities—will only aggravate access issues and continue privileging those for whom eligibility is not an issue.

Developmental psychology (and now neuropsychology) strongly influences the ECE field and informs many of its polarized debates around the content of degree programs. These sciences have inspired curriculum frameworks[28] overly influenced by beliefs and ideals of affluent white and Western families, so that value systems pertaining to children and their development from other cultures too often are ignored and/or undermined. Consequently, before endorsing degrees, it must be remembered that a wide range of ways exists for early childhood educators to effectively interact with children and that this knowledge can be incorporated into preparation programs, regardless of their delivery system. We should ensure that the field remains guided by the experiences of children within the context of their families, communities, and history.

Taking advantage of ECE's diverse workforce also needs to become a priority. Why are we not capitalizing on this strength by asking educators what they feel is most needed to enhance their effectiveness and promote their career advancement? These individuals have made a commitment to children, and that is what most matters. Rather than mandating formal qualifications, the ECE field should instead be supporting them at each stage of their careers.

ECE and its public needs to move beyond panaceas. In the process, we need to examine how ECE panaceas have affected the use of other available strategies for developing children's, families', and communities' capacities. By moving beyond panaceas, we can relieve the expectations placed on us to serve as society's saviors. Responsibility for children's well-being needs to be shared across institutions. Then perhaps, at last, we can direct more of our attention to the systemic barriers blocking too many children and early childhood educators from fulfilling their potential.

Alberto Mares is a doctoral student in early childhood education at New Mexico State University and an ECE consultant and coach with the Early Childhood Services Center at the University of New Mexico.

Is the Cart Being Put Before the Horse?

By Fabienne Doucet

For seven years, my family hosted a group day care in our New York City apartment. The primary caregiver was our son's favorite at the group day care that ours replaced. In the 13 years we have known her, Violette (a pseudonym) has been the favorite of countless children in our neighborhood. She is kind, warm, and effusive, to be sure, but my observations suggest that what makes her a baby

whisperer is her ability to really see each child. Without their needing to say a word, Violette intuitively connects to children's emotional temperature and responds to their needs, whether it's a comforting hug, reassuring smile, playful banter, or curiosity about a block structure. Yet Violette did not finish high school, and her emails to parents are grammatically incorrect. But given the choice between Violette and a caregiver with a college diploma, I would choose Violette every time.

This is not because I don't understand the benefits early childhood educators gain from research-based knowledge about child development and learning, pedagogical skills honed through mentoring by experienced practitioners, and the sense of pride and accomplishment that follows degree completion. Sue Russell, Tracy Ehlert, and Jamal Berry have all elaborated on these benefits. Empirically, though, the evidence is lacking when it comes to scaling these benefits up.

Russell referenced a meta-analysis[29] that makes a strong case for higher levels of education as significantly correlated with higher quality care and education in early childhood education (ECE). To my knowledge, though, a randomized, controlled trial has not been conducted of early childhood educators without bachelor degrees and an experimental group that has been put through a BA program who are tested pre- and post-program to determine whether their knowledge or skills in educating or caring for young children improved as a result of the degree. In contrast, a robust body of evidence from Bob Pianta's lab at the University of Virginia has shown that emotional support forms the foundation[30] for effective teacher-child relationships during the preschool years that, in turn, influence lifelong learning and achievement. So I believe that equivocating these evidence-based traits with a degree is based on faulty reasoning.

I also concur with Marica Cox Mitchell's argument that "advancing ECE as a profession requires creating a stable 1.0 version, inclusive of compensation, before building towards more visionary versions." The political will to pay early childhood educators a living wage must be a top priority—not having frontline care providers, typically women of color and working poor folks, pursue degrees in hope of validating their worth. To do otherwise, I'd argue, is putting the cart before the horse.

You see, the thorns I can't get out of my side when considering ECE's thorny knot are the seeming taken-for-granted assumptions about what a B.A. actually means when we are talking about what early childhood educators need to know and be able to do to serve children well. These concerns are not mine alone. Sherri Killins Stewart shared that the frontline child care providers with whom she worked "were proud of achieving a higher education certificate or degree; yet they saw little connection between this education and their daily work." Further, Amy Rothschild, Sally Holloway, and Laura Bornfreund point to problems of consistency, relevance, and access in teacher preparation programs; Rothschild

goes so far as to ask us to consider what the letters BA and MEd really mean. These authors, in addition to Berry, also point to the question of competencies and aptitudes as telling us a lot more about how an educator will perform in a classroom than the letters behind their name. Luis Hernandez put it this way: "It is a matter of respect and decency for ECE as a field of practice and as part of human-focused organizations to support and include workers with a range of heart capacity, academic foundations, and joyful commitment to young children." I agree.

It also is important to consider questions about the economic returns provided by bachelor degrees. According to a 2014 article in *The Economist*,[31] "not all degrees are equally useful. And given how much they cost—a residential four-year degree can set you back as much as $60,000 a year—many students end up worse off than if they had started working at 18." Although small-scale or state-level programs have worked to provide scholarships and other support for early childhood educators seeking bachelor degrees, the issue of scale has been an obstacle to igniting change.

More common are the experiences shared by the educators with whom Killins Stewart worked: "Most…said their modest pay increases did little to compensate for long hours away from family and friends." Plus, as Maurice Sykes asks, "Why should we encourage women of color to enhance their educational portfolio only to be consigned to a low-wage, low-status job where they will be paid 84 cents for every dollar their white, female counterparts earn?" Underlining Sykes' point is a piece out of the Brookings Social Media Memo series, "Black Women Are Earning More College Degrees, but That Alone Won't Close Race Gaps,[32] which points out that "an undergraduate degree is not a wealth generator for Black Americans."

In their pieces for this series, both Josephine Queen and Jessica Sager get real about the obstacles and roadblocks family child care providers face with respect to furthering their education within the sanctioned walls of institutions of higher education. Our beloved caregiver Violette would have to overcome these hurdles and more given her age, prior education, lack of experience in U.S. schools as a first-generation immigrant, and her identity as a Black woman. And the children of my neighborhood would potentially miss out on one of the most gifted caregivers I have ever met.

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Keeping it Real and Optimistic: Will Attaining Bachelor Degrees Bring Rainbows Across the Sky?

By Luis A. Hernandez

Hooray for fantastic and lofty goals focused on early childhood educators attaining four-year degrees that enhance and challenge their joyful work with children and their families!...But then, BANG! Rainbows don't appear across the sky because we hit the wall and the reality of our nation. While the horizon recedes, though, the dream remains...albeit only a dream.

My esteemed colleagues and friends eloquently—and with incredible conviction and determination—make the case for higher academic preparation for the thousands of women who daily work with children. Yes, early childhood education's (ECE) progress and advancement demonstrate ways to move forward. Yes, mandates and initiatives have spurred successful models that support early childhood educators' academic advancement. Yes, if we could only be Norway!

As a steadfast optimist, I have profound appreciation for the leaders and pioneers who have challenged and pushed our thinking toward making ECE a professionally prepared workforce. Although each step along the way has been a struggle, new possibilities emerge and higher levels of educator competence are achieved. In turn, awareness of the inherent benefits of our work with young children and their families has increased. I extend my gratitude to those who've made the case for early childhood educators' further academic advancement. As fellow optimists, they recognize we don't live in a perfect world, but our efforts can still improve the status quo.

Yet, doubt and cynicism unavoidably intrude into our positive thinking because our aspirations are starkly restrained by economics. Even superficial discussions of economic class differences can feel unpleasant; yet, to a great degree, economics define the reality and circumstances of our nation's communities. Families must, for the most part make child development choices based on economics; their employment is based on economics; their return to school to earn a degree is based on economics. And alas, program quality is defined by economics, too.

I, too, long for Scandinavian-like models where political, economic, and public will create conditions that promote equity and access for all families—from prenatal care, parental leave, to enviable ECE program options. For a much more limited American model, we've begun estimating a price tag of about $140 billion a year[33]—a figure unlikely to be embraced by our politicians.

No longer can the pretension exist that our country is an idyllic colorful mosaic, melting pot, or mixed salad. Even so, my optimism is elevated by the fact that the dynamics of community life are nourished by family interactions and encounters

with the women who work with, take care of, and teach our nation's young children.

A core belief that education makes a significant difference to individuals and families has become the beacon of the American experience. As Jamal Berry's piece notes, many in our early childhood education workforce begin their careers by volunteering in a classroom. For others, obtaining a degree represents a symbolic victory earned by becoming the first in their family to attend college. For immigrant women, obtaining a degree can fulfill the American dream of getting a college education.

It is blood, sweat, and tears to return to school as an adult—especially if it involves taking a math class seven times. As Sue Russell points out, the overwhelming message from the women I'm describing centers on "actualization, transformation, and profound appreciation," affirming their commitment to children and their families.

But those for whom earning a degree is not realistic must still be considered part of ECE. They cannot—should not—be left behind. It is a matter of respect and decency for ECE as a field of practice and as part of human-focused organizations to support and include workers with a range of heart capacity, academic foundations, and joyful commitment to young children. ECE's on-going professional development efforts must continue to integrate a diversity of talents, skills, and abilities.

It often is said that if you want to see the face of America in 20 years, look at children in a kindergarten classroom. These children represent the new and next America, and their families and teachers are part of this picture. Preserving a sense of hope in our nation will take collective intelligence, compassion, energy, and a belief in dreams and rainbows. Let's not give oxygen to a culture of have and have-nots. Let's respect those doing great work wherever they are on their ladder of learning. Let's collaborate, support, and be vigilant with institutions of higher learning regarding how ECE degree and non-degree programs address the aspirations and needs of adult learners.

Unrealistic expectations of academic uniformity can only turn to dark clouds and unwelcome storms. Our faith needs to be placed in human potential. Optimism for the future is best based on the progress and respect of individuals doing work that is meaningful and important. Although we must move forward cautiously, we should never give up on the belief that genuine optimism can carry our profession forward.

Luis A. Hernandez is an ECE specialist at Training & Technical Assistance Services at Western Kentucky University.

Let's Get on With This Business!

By Carol Brunson Day

I'm inclined to repeat a story I told in 2000 when asked to respond to the National Research Council's Eager to Learn[34] report that first recommended, "each group of children in an early childhood education [ECE] and care program should be assigned a teacher who has a bachelor's degree." I was head of the Child Development Associate (CDA) national office at the time, and I opened my remarks with a story about my brother, a big-city Northerner who, having recently moved to a small Southern city, was completely miffed by what Southerners said whenever he asked for directions to a specific location. "Oh, you can't get there from here." Inevitably they would then proceed to explain, "well, first you have to go where the Sears used to be. Then turn right onto the main street and then left just past the clock tower, and you'll get there."

Although we have since made progress towards early childhood educators having bachelor degrees, what I felt back then I feel even more strongly about today—*we can get there, but we can't just jump from here straight to there*. A carefully calculated journey is required, and this is what the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is working to achieve through the Power to the Profession[35] dialogue—creating a route so no one misses the turn where Sears used to be.

Defining the profession[36] is something widely acknowledged as exactly what ECE needs to do at this moment. It is audacious and exciting, albeit hazardous and risky, but once done, will strengthen our identity as a field of practice and provide momentum for a continuously evolving process.

Although this process can be painful, I don't see the fractious strains we're experiencing as tightening ECE's thorny knot and leading us nowhere. I see them from a different perspective because they have helped accomplish consensus on some critical points. By way of examples, we all seemingly want children to have the most competent and well-trained teachers possible; we recognize more can be done to increase our options for generating a well-prepared, well-compensated, and inclusive/diverse workforce; and we're increasingly committed to making plans throughout every sector to remove or mitigate institutional bias barriers to achieving a diverse workforce.

Further, the thorny knot's three stands have the potential to generate new thinking. So I propose we not see them as either/or debates where one side or the other presents the stronger argument. Instead, we should regard them as dialectic discourse, where, as tensions become more clearly codified, possible resolutions can emerge and be embraced as part of a continuing agenda for our evolving profession to address both intentionally and strategically.

For the sake of argument, let's take the aspiration that, as a profession, ECE teachers should have bachelor degrees (the "perfect ECE BA" has yet to be defined by our higher education colleagues.) Rather than seeing that as out of the question (because we will lose workforce diversity) or as the only way (because it gains us status and compensation), we would regard the tiered approach proposed in the Power to the Profession's decision cycles 3, 4, and 5[37] as a near-term resolution while simultaneously supporting systems that assist early educators in achieving BA degrees. Sue Russell's piece provides a recipe for accomplishing better educated, better compensated early childhood educators *and* workforce diversity. On behalf of the family child care sector, Tracy Ehlert, Josephine Queen, and Jessica Sager reiterate that sustained, multidimensional efforts that build access to formal preparation and degree attainment can work (e.g., tuition dollars, mentoring, embedded professional development). These ideas are not dissimilar from those Albert Wat offered in the piece responsible for catalyzing this series.[38]

Moreover, it is within the higher education community's reach to promote formal education of personnel from their first entry point into work with children and to actualize seamless articulation between levels of preparation from CDA to AA to BA and beyond. And as Sally Holloway suggests in her guidelines for transforming the caliber and consistency of preparation programs, weak programs can be strengthened.

Finally, I firmly believe that institutional class, race, and cultural bias can be eliminated. Precisely because these biases permeate our society, the ECE field will always have to promote activism within its ranks by insisting on results that we value. "Naming inequities and using an equity lens for driving decisions," as Marica Cox Mitchell states, should always be among our non-negotiables.

Here's my point: We can have it all if we stop thinking choices have to be made among (1) preparation and education, (2) compensation and status, and (3) diversity and inclusivity. We need only to launch models capable of addressing the contradictions inherent to participation in this struggle.

To this end, Albert Wat's "Ah-haa!" speaks very deeply to me: "We are talking about nothing less than professionalizing a workforce (in terms of compensation and education) while intentionally cultivating one that is diverse and can serve similarly diverse children well. That is a tall order, and ECE may be one of the first fields to make the attempt."

So let's get on with this business, and *be* the first field to make this happen.

Carol Brunson Day, PhD, is president of Brunson, Phillips & Day consultants, Inc.

Options Exist for Addressing ECE's Education-Compensation Dilemma

By Phil Acord

Currently, child care administrators' most pressing issue is the ability to hire and retain qualified teaching staff. The issue is even more pronounced for those of us operating programs serving low-income families. Maintaining a high-quality program and compensating educators at a livable wage while also keeping fees affordable for the families we serve often feels like an impossible task. While an issue that has plagued directors for decades, it's become even harder to navigate in today's economy. Yet steps for remediating this seemingly intractable problem are available. We just need to recognize them and become more focused in maximizing their potential.

Because of efforts being put forth to legitimize early childhood education (ECE) by structuring it as a profession with credential (CDA) and degree (AA, BA/BS, or higher) requirements, however, this issue is undergoing a shift in terms of its complexity. No longer is it primarily a matter of competing with low-wage service jobs. Now the challenge revolves around recruiting and hiring qualified staff to meet credential/degree requirements. Despite the added challenge this shift creates, though, I support it because it is the only path to becoming a recognized profession. But if we are going to professionalize the early education industry, two steps need to be prioritized: (1) require all teaching staff to have credentials/degrees and (2) pay them a wage commensurate with their education and experience.

Child care center programs such as mine, though, have to compete with public education and the business world when seeking to hire the most capable and qualified people possible. I recently attended a workshop where it was reported[39] that the early education industry is comprised of about two million workers. To compensate all of these individuals at a livable wage, much less a professional wage, would cost about $60 billion annually, and obviously the burden of financing the ECE system can't be placed on the backs of families or classroom teachers.

So, where can the needed funding sources be found?

Despite our tendency to wring its hands and question the probability of ever effectively responding to this longstanding challenge, options are available to help us break new ground. I'm confident that the first step exists in the $5.8 billion that Congress recently approved[40] and is distributing to states through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). These funds have the potential to help ECE become professionalized if states allocate a majority of their CCDBG funding to their certificate/voucher programs. These funds would give programs needed revenue for increasing teacher wages and benefits. For this tactic to succeed, though, the state's reimbursement rate has to be based on a current

market rate survey that reflects the true cost of care. Additionally, eligibility guidelines have to be high enough to include the families that populate the majority of ECE programs.

A second funding source for increasing teacher salaries is through collaborations and partnerships. The Early Head Start Child Care Partnership program,[41] for example, has injected a new source of funds into the early education community. It requires program partners to have staff with credentials/degrees and increases compensation accordingly.

Still another option is the TEACH and WAGE$[42] programs. These two programs provide great examples of what can be done nationwide to encourage teachers to obtain credentials/degrees, while providing increased wages for those who continue teaching in early education programs following degree attainment. Presently, about 22 states have a TEACH program, although fewer also have the WAGE$ program.[43] A major, national advocacy effort on the part of early education advocates could generate great results in this regard. In my town of Chattanooga, for example, Mayor Andy Berke has put in place a WAGE$ program.[44]

Even with these opportunities, though, states are going to have to step up to the plate too and invest in ECE. Still, we need not wait until then to tackle the challenge of acquiring better-qualified and fairly compensated teaching staff.

The ECE industry is at a milestone in its evolution. Three forces are at work, each of which is moving us in the right direction: NAEYC's Power to the Profession initiative,[45] Head Start's credential requirements,[46] and the CCDBG monies. They all focus on quality and increased credential/degree requirements.[47] Even though the booming economy is making it more difficult to hire qualified staff, rather than being discouraged, this reality should be used to motivate us towards increased credential requirements for teaching staff and advocacy for the funding needed to compensate our workforce in a way commensurate with their education and job responsibilities.

The touchstone of quality early education programs is a high-quality teacher in every classroom, starting with our infants. The best way to ensure teacher quality is through credentials and degrees. Consequently, this needs to be where our time, energy, and money are focused. Since ultimately this will lead to better outcomes for children, we really have no other choice.

Phil Acord is the president/CEO of Chambliss Center for Children in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The Solution for the Workforce Dilemma is the Public Schools

By Jason Sachs

Albert Einstein is often given credit for exclaiming, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results." I think most of us who pay attention to the early care and education field (ECE) would agree that neither wages nor education have changed substantially in 25 years. According to the Early Childhood Workforce Index[48] from 2016, only 35 percent of center-based teachers have a bachelor degree or higher and 65 percent of lead teachers in these same programs earn less than $15 an hour.

The tragedy continues when we know:

- Americans agree,[49] according to polls by Atlantic Media and other groups that we should have a well-trained and -compensated workforce to compete internationally.

- Data[50] from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that having a higher education degree is associated with improved prosperity.

- A recent paper from the Brookings Institution showed consensus among early childhood education researchers that a strong connection exists between the quality of instruction and student outcomes.

- Especially as more evidence emerges about the demands of effective pedagogy, most would agree that teaching is hard. National studies show teacher instruction, based on measurements of teacher-child interactions, [51] is not at the level necessary for facilitating desired student outcomes,[52] according to researchers at the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.

Given that most Americans seem to agree that we ought to have an educated and compensated workforce, why are so few preschool teachers well educated or compensated?

ECE's challenge comes from its ambivalence regarding who defines and sets policy and who defines what preschool[53] is as a field of practice. Whether preschool should be designed for educational purposes (i.e., for closing the achievement and opportunity gap), to promote children's social skills, or to help parents participate in the workforce is debatable. Yet, if preschool were part of the public schools, this debate—both in terms of policy and child outcomes—would be largely resolved because the public education system has a defined set of educational requirements and expected student outcomes. In contrast, when society primarily views preschool in terms of children's social development or as a support for working families, what the market can afford defines teachers' educational requirements and compensation, which in turn affects our workforce's diversity.

The U.S. has a hybrid model comprised of public systems and fee-paying parents, both of which are currently defining preschool's purpose. Given their differences, these co-existing systems often are confronted with the nasty, unintended consequence of having to pit program quality against access.

To resolve this challenge, I propose that policymakers and advocates agree to make preschool for three- and four-year-olds a public educational right or "good," shifting it entirely to the public education system. This would establish a policy mandate to educate all Americans, preschool through twelfth grade. This decision alone would raise preschool teachers' pay to $27 an hour, matching what kindergarten teachers earn, according to 2016 data from the Early Childhood Workforce Index.[54]

This doesn't mean public schools would have to become the sole delivery system for preschools. What would be obligatory, though, is for public school funding sources and quality assurance policies to be applied to all early childhood providers, especially in terms of degrees, certification, special education, compensation, and access. In Boston, for example, we are developing a mixed delivery system involving public schools and community-based programs. As a result, all preschool teachers are earning the same starting salary as public school teachers. They are required, though, to use the same curricular materials and receive coaching. This program also increases assistant teachers' and center directors' salaries.

I realize our public schools have many critics, and I acknowledge that as currently constructed, they are not optimally designed for educating students from preschool to third grade. Knowing this, my proposal requires public schools to develop stronger out-of-school time options, strengthen the PreK–third grade curriculum, and support families to a much greater degree than they currently do. In the case of a mixed delivery system, public schools would also have to develop improved partnerships with community-based providers and create meaningful linkages between curricula and professional development supports.

Yet the benefits have the potential to be transformative for all ECE stakeholders as additional resources become available for birth-to-three programs, and vertical alignment would be greatly strengthened between preschool and early elementary school. While partnerships with public schools may be unsettling for providers who currently lack a relationship with school districts, I would point out that the current system has done little to meaningfully elevate compensation and educational attainment over the last 25 years.

Dramatic change is needed. Every year we wait, we are sentencing students and teachers to an academic and economic trajectory that threatens our country's ability to compete successfully in a global market. If we make this bold change, I believe our focus can at last shift to where it belongs—to student instruction, public school reform, and pathway degree programs for preschool teachers in

community-based programs. While this may create a hardship for teachers lacking degrees (and unintentionally threaten the diversity of the ECE workforce), over time, as more and more students succeed in school, ECE will at last find itself celebrating, rather than defending, wise investments in its work.

Jason Sachs, PhD, is executive director of early childhood education at Boston Public Schools.

What Does Higher Education Need to Do to Regain Its Stature as a Gateway to the ECE Profession?

By Marjorie Kostelnik

Introduction to the Theme of Higher Education

Suggestive of its prominence in early childhood education's (ECE) thorny knot, the role of higher education in preparing the workforce has been discussed in the pieces extending beyond those identified in this theme section. They have covered topics such as potential impacts of uniform credentialing (Jason Sachs, Albert Wat, Sherri Killins Stewart) and leaps in self-growth and personal esteem gained by early educators furthering their studies and skills (Tracy Ehlert, Jamal Berry). Others focused on variability in quality among teacher preparation programs as well as the skewed relationship between theory and practice that students often experience (Amy Rothschild, Tammy Mann). While some pieces scrutinized access and status barriers of two-year and four-year degrees (Luis Hernandez, Alberto Mares, Fabienne Doucet), others explored issues of content relevance in regard to ECE and child populations with which graduates may work (Maurice Sykes, Laura Bornfreund). Finally, students' need for higher education funding and other supports, as well as a lack of diversity in higher education among faculty and students are posed as significant challenges for academic institutions and the field as a whole (Tammy Mann). Those in higher education clearly have a lot to think about regarding ECE.

Indeed, Sally Holloway maintains that the education of early childhood teachers needs to be transformed. Similarly, Tammy Mann noted that all our efforts to transform the field in other ways will be for naught unless "ECE's higher education programs can be counted on to well prepare all of the field's early childhood educators." She challenged us to "aggressively examine the barriers that keep higher education at all levels from changing its content and approach to teacher preparation."

Expanding the Conversation

Responding to these issues, this theme section's overarching question drives us to probe two dilemmas more deeply. First, what obstacles stand in the way of post-secondary education playing a more central role in developing ECE as a recognizable field of practice? Second, what does higher education need to change and what can it build on to more effectively prepare early childhood educators?

Much good ECE work occurs in two-year and four-year institutions. Too often, though, this work is characterized by fragmentation as well as rigid boundaries among programs, disciplines, and the populations being addressed. Students seeking to learn about working with young children quickly discover that classes dealing with "early childhood" are scattered among various academic homes. Courses are offered at different levels and by faculty whose backgrounds vary considerably, even when the course descriptions sound very much the same. Further, preparation is distributed among CDA, AA, bachelor's, and master's credentials. The result is a confusing alphabet soup for aspiring practitioners.

In addition, in many institutions, early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood education (ECE) refer to different fields altogether. Treated as distinct entities, they are located in their own departments and colleges. Higher education institutions also often segregate academic programs, faculty, practicum placements, accreditation standards, and research emphases into disparate age-focused categories: birth to age two, three to four years, and five years on up.

These practices lead to differentiated cadres of practitioners who seldom see themselves as members of the same profession. Infant-toddler and kindergarten educators, for instance, may see no relationship to one another in terms of their education or future work. Instead, they develop unique professional identities, adopt different professional heroes and heroines, acquire idiosyncratic vocabularies, and demonstrate distinct and sometimes conflicting practices. From the very start, ECE preparation programs promote division rather than cohesion.

This division creates a significant barrier to a coherent and recognizable field of ECE practice. With the goal of coherence in mind, those in higher education needs to move beyond tweaking the system (such as adding or subtracting a

course here and there) to pursuing genuine reinvention of ECE programs—a reinvention that results in ECE preparation systems that are more comprehensive, more interconnected, and more collaborative. Importantly, institutions can immediately begin active pilot work in this regard. I know this from my experiences as a former dean at the University of Nebraska.

Colleges of education and human development or education and human sciences are already in existence nationwide. Typically, ECD, ECE, and elementary education operate side by side, sometimes acknowledging each other by sharing a few courses, but rarely offering coherent programs that include the entire age-range encompassed by ECE. Instead, colleges could experiment with creating more unified programs within and across their majors. Creating a seamless interdisciplinary core that progresses from beginning to more advanced work across these programs would be in keeping with the Institute of Medicine/ National Research Council's *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8* recommendations.[55] As the people in the field, though, ECE has yet to come to grips with what these recommendations really mean for higher education programs and curricula—and for the improved preparation of early childhood educators.

Obviously higher education is not the sole answer to the many dilemmas the field will face if it chooses to support the comprehensive and integrative field of practice proposed by Power to the Profession.[56] But it *is* a significant player, and those of us committed to higher education's unique contributions to effective practice need to challenge higher education to go beyond tweaking to reinventing its ECE programs.

As in any big issue, many questions remain unanswered. Yet, higher education is trending in ways that suit the ECE field's needs. For instance, an emphasis on interdisciplinary work is on the rise in many fields[57] and strategies for achieving these aims are being actively investigated.[58] It is especially encouraging that there are calls to reexamine academic guidelines for reappointment, tenure, and promotion to be sure they take into account the work of faculty who address educational challenges by working in teams or across traditional academic boundaries.[59]

It is within our grasp to create a more cohesive, diverse, and supportive field of practice for children and their early educators. The time is ripe for higher education to make changes that support our field's quest for coherence, and we have the means to keep moving forward, the intellect to bridge conceptual chasms, and the need to do so.

This task is not for the faint of heart. I believe, however, that it is both possible and absolutely necessary.

Questions for Further Exploration

As the "False Choices" discussions continue, here are additional questions to probe:

1. How can higher education address ECE more coherently across professional divides within the academy?

2. How might higher education enhance the use of laboratory schools as dynamic sites of training and research that contribute to the coherence conversation around professional practice?

3. How might diverse accrediting bodies work more closely together to support coherence and consistency across certain areas of ECE practice programs?

Moving into Action

The work envisioned here must be carried out with genuine willingness to reinvent and co-create new approaches. Here are three possibilities for moving into action to achieve greater academic coherence in ECE:

1. Look toward collaborations between early childhood education and special education for examples of models and practical means for creating greater pedagogical coherence across disciplines and ages of children. Create new programs that bridge ECD and ECE with these models in mind.

2. Examine the hard boundaries that separate ECE and ECD and then develop semi-permeable ones that enable a flow of ideas, instruction, and credits that represent more coherent approaches to learning about and teaching young children.

3. Encourage existing colleges of education and human development/ human sciences to take on the challenge of creating more comprehensive credentialed programs for early childhood educators that cross multi-unit boundaries in substantive ways.

Marjorie Kostelnik, PhD, is a professor at University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

ECE Degrees as Mirrors

By Sally Holloway

In her piece, pre-K teacher Amy Rothschild shared her contrasting preparation and education experiences and alerted us to the need to unpack what the letters

BA and MA mean in practice. Then Laura Bornfreund, in her piece, suggested that more effort needs to be directed toward "strengthening and aligning early childhood educators' preparation and education with the field's expanding knowledge base, growing understanding of essential practitioner competencies, and increasing need for viable clinical experiences" but that this "outcome depends on finding unified agreement on the knowledge and competencies required of early childhood educators."

Rothschild's and Bornfreund's conclusions represent more than just personal viewpoints. According to a discussion paper published by the National Academy of Medicine, "disparities in access to high-quality early care and education exist across socioeconomic status, ethnicity, immigrant status, and geography. These disparities are in part driven by misalignment or inadequate program standards across all care and education settings, differing professional standards for the early childhood workforce, and inequitable resources allocated to implement high-quality care and education in all settings."[60]

I don't think I stand alone in thinking that the preparation and education of early childhood educators needs to be transformed so Bornfreund's aspiration can be achieved. Early childhood education (ECE) higher education faculty need to step forward and begin aggressively addressing disparities in content, pedagogy, and access.

As teacher educators, we are charged with preparing the ECE workforce, ensuring that our graduates meet and exceed the field's practice standards. Yet at present, degree programs are like shattered mirrors, reflecting broken, scattered images of ECE as a field of practice without clarity or stability. Some programs focus on pre-K, offering little birth-to-age three content. Others focus on child development with little student teaching or curriculum coursework. Still others focus on family policy and child advocacy. Higher education faculty, especially at the bachelor's degree level, need to figure out how to design their ECE programs so they can be assembled as intact mirrors that reflect ECE's needs as a field of practice.

Recognized professions[61] achieve this consistency through accreditation of their higher education programs. The Power to the Profession task force,[62] a collaborative effort focused on ECE's advancement as a profession, is developing updated preparation competencies for ECE's higher education programs. Once approved, teacher educators should vigorously advocate for AA and BA teacher preparation programs to become accredited. Shifting this expectation into a requirement has the potential to create a pipeline of well-prepared early childhood educators regardless of the higher education program setting.

Creating consistent content throughout ECE preparation programs will not, however, address all dimensions of our field's "thorny knot" of preparation and education, compensation and status, diversity and inclusion. In Washington

State, members of the Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council are working on four strategies for responding to our students' needs as learners:

1. **Removing barriers to accessing higher education**. Clear pathways that make the process of degree attainment more meaningful, transparent, and possible are needed. This involves offering an increasing variety of entry and exit points. We have found recruitment and retention improves when transition supports like these are available: initial courses in students' first languages; tutoring for basic education courses; proactive advising to help students stay on track; and help obtaining scholarship funding.

2. **Tailoring delivery of ECE programs to reflect students' and employers' needs**. Courses are increasingly being offered in a variety of modes: online, hybrids, and traditional face-to-face. Employers and stakeholders are asked to serve on ECE program advisory committees, thereby offering college personnel with feedback on current demands and providing guidance regarding delivery logistics. Additionally, since higher education relies on community child care and early learning centers to provide its students with welcoming practicum sites staffed with reflective supervisors, it is in everyone's best interest to support on-site supervisors' development and to reward programs that mentor students.

3. **Bridging the gap between research and practice**. Simply imparting information is not sufficient. Students need to see theories in action, see best practice modeled. Ultimately, they need to be able to apply what's being learned in real situations. College faculty work to hear their students say, "now I know why that works so well with children."

4. **Moving beyond cultural responsiveness and cultural competencies to equipping students with culturally sustaining practices.** Implicit biases and restrictive approaches have to be deliberately addressed. Faculty are continually exploring new ways of sustaining First Nations' cultures, for example, through the use of playground designs that highlight natural materials, demonstrate native art, and encourage native language.

I dream of the day I say, "Yes, enter the early childhood education profession. You will find it a challenging, rewarding, and meaningful way to be respected in our community and fairly compensated." For that day to come, we need a preparation system that ensures the ECE workforce is well educated and accountable for consistently demonstrating the field's standards, regardless of the program setting. Those in higher education needs to step up to the challenge of making consistent quality programs of study accessible while also offering responsive student supports. Then, ECE's mirror image will match its

responsibilities, and higher education faculty can confidently recruit and prepare the competent, diverse workforce our children and families deserve.

Sally Holloway is the ECE Project director at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, Washington, and co-chair of Washington State's Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council.

Oft-Overlooked Threads Woven into ECE's Thorny Knot

By Laura Bornfreund

Moving Beyond False Choices' second author cohort appears largely to agree that early childhood educators play an important role in young children's learning and development. Yet these authors also raise issues needing increased attention if early childhood education (ECE) is to unify around more rigorous expectations for higher education degrees and credentials.

Three issues in particular are worth further exploration:

- the role of family child care providers in the ECE ecosystem,
- how well higher education programs equip early educators with what they need, and
- systemic barriers related to race, gender, and class.

Family child care providers: The need for a sector-specific solution

In 2018, Child Trends reported that 97 percent of child care settings are homes, not centers.[63] Of those homes, 27.5 percent are family child care providers who receive payment for their services. Based on 2016 data from HHS, this represents approximately 1,037,000 family child care providers as compared to 129,000 child care centers.[64] Yet paradoxically, much of the field's current discussions and efforts to advance ECE's workforce are focused on child care centers and public schools.

Jessica Sanger stated in her piece that "limited recognition and compensation [is] accorded FCC educators given their critical contribution to the delivery system of early childhood education (ECE)," an assessment confirmed by the above findings. Since family child care providers have responsibility for deepening—and sometimes even providing—the foundation for future learning for many children, just like their colleagues in center- and school-based settings, they are receiving too little recognition for their important role.

It's no easy task to assist center-based child care educators acquire the knowledge and competencies necessary for meeting young children's needs. Doing so for family child care providers presents an entirely different scenario given their unique challenges. As Josephine Queen notes for us,

The family child care providers I know tend to be working or lower class, living paycheck to paycheck. This makes attaining a formal education degree financially out of reach for most of us. Some also are single parents and lack resources to pay for child care while attending classes. Plus, running a home-based business means few of us can carve out time to gain the required practical experience and requisite hours needed for degrees since, typically, working in one's own home child care under one's own supervision and tutelage is not credit-bearing.

Naming these issues, as Maurice Sykes cautions us, mustn't be used to cast blame. Instead, they should alert us to the fact that real challenges exist and underscore that acknowledging them is essential to forging viable solutions for increasing this sector's level of education and credentials.

Once we set the right standards for educational and credential requirements and find effective strategies to assist current and future educators meet them, we're done, right?

Not so fast.

It's no secret that too many ECE degree programs leave early childhood educators without the knowledge and competencies for effectively interacting with young children. Amy Rothschild explains that she sought out a non-traditional teacher preparation program because it provided extensive practical experiences linked to observations and insights from experienced early childhood educators. To earn her master's degree, she also took courses at a university, and recounts that, "the university courses were too often rote. I felt like I was paying the piper, rather than learning the art of teaching or even the nuts and bolts of practice. Everyone seemingly passed with flying colors just by showing up."

Setting preparation and education requirements and extending supports for those seeking to meet expanding expectations clearly is insufficient by itself. In fact, these investments may even be detrimental if not linked with educator preparation programs capable of ensuring that early childhood educators

- know the latest science of child development and early learning, including their connections to practice;

- are immersed in content areas such as early math and science;

- have ample opportunities to develop practice skills in a range of settings; and

- engage in meaningful discussions about challenges children confront as learners.

Finally, Maurice Sykes calls on us to shift our conversational focus from adults to children when it comes to teacher degrees and compensation. He contends that "every child needs and deserves a highly qualified, highly effective, and highly competent early childhood educator." He also reminds us that throughout U.S. history low-income men and women and people of color have successfully attained degrees, leading him to ask, "what's all the hullabaloo?"

ECE and society at large do have obligations to address systemic barriers related to race, gender, and class that promulgate negative assumptions about what early childhood educators and the children whose learning and development they foster can and cannot accomplish. The challenges too many people face when attempting to advance their education need to be alleviated.

And then there's the ever-present policy question of who's going to pay for it.

Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education proposes a price tag of $140 billion,[65] which as Luis Hernandez noted in his post, is a number politicians are unlikely to embrace. Still, this figure at least gives us an estimation of what is needed to develop a competent workforce, inclusive of costs for transforming higher education, supporting degree attainment by ECE's current workforce, and providing an appropriate level of compensation.

However, while an important part of the equation, increased financing alone won't ensure every child has well-prepared and highly effective early childhood educators. First, ECE as a field of practice, policymakers, and other stakeholders must learn to value the abilities of early childhood educators to create innovative, sustainable solutions for attaining more rigorous education and credentials—a viewpoint also articulated by Sherri Killins Stewart in an earlier post.

Second, still more effort needs to be directed toward strengthening and aligning early childhood educators' preparation and education with the field's expanding knowledge base, growing understanding of essential practitioner competencies, and increasing need for viable clinical experiences. This outcome, though, depends on finding agreement for the knowledge and competencies required of early childhood educators, as well as state incentives—including funding—to incentivize preparation programs to change. Third, strategies must be developed for overcoming barriers of race, gender, and class that have limited past progress and will inhibit future possibilities.

Only if these three oft-overlooked threads are addressed will ECE be able to unify around more rigorous expectations for higher education degrees and credentials and give every child access to the educators they need and deserve.

Laura Bornfreund is the director of early & elementary education policy with the Education Policy program at New America.

Preparing Competent Early Childhood Educators: Is Higher Education Up to the Task?

By Tammy Mann

Like Maurice Sykes, I readily acknowledge my endorsement of high standards for educational preparation as an essential ingredient for delivering high-quality early care and education (ECE) to young children from birth forward. I note birth here because when not explicitly stated, the mental model that most often comes to mind is a preschool child. Our solutions focus on what happens in the year or two before formal school entry instead of truly reflecting a birth forward perspective. The preschool mental model also shapes how we think about what it means to support early learning and development and the approaches necessary for preparing those engaged in this work. How this work benefits young children, after all, is the north star of why this conversation matters.

I have been fortunate to experience ECE from many vantage points, and this has shaped my perspective on the challenges we face related to questions of preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusion. Almost 10 years ago, I transitioned from talking about the intersection of research, practice, and policy at the national level to living this intersection's impact in leading a large community-based organization. This work spans the "cradle to career continuum" and has been a real source of joy, to channel Luis Hernandez, and at times a challenge, too, as we strive to operate within the numerous quality and accountability systems (i.e., NAEYC accreditation, QRIS, CLASS, Head Start Performance Standards, state and local regulations) that surround our work. I could write a book on the exhaustion that stems from keeping up with countless rule changes and the unintended consequences too often generated for those on the frontlines of this work.

But rather than focus on all three components of the thorny issue that prompted this series, I want to focus on one that has only recently surfaced in other posts, namely those authored by Amy Rothschild and Sally Holloway. I believe an urgent and sharper focus on higher education is imperative if we are to transform the ECE workforce. To focus on whether or not those engaged in ECE actually want to improve or do better, as Sherri Killins Stewart aptly notes, diverts attention from critical issues associated with how well higher education

programs prepare students for the hard work of teaching that Jason Sachs underscored for us.

Teaching is a practice-based profession, yet most higher education programs overwhelmingly focus on its theoretical underpinnings without also providing sufficient, direct learning opportunities in ECE settings so aspiring early educators can unpack how these theories shape the process of teaching across diverse populations of young learners. Additionally, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through 8* highlights recent developments in instructional science that seem especially relevant when it comes to connecting research to practice within a developmentally appropriate framework.

Preparation programs also need to sharpen their focus on helping educators develop self-awareness about explicit and implicit bias and its impact on children's identity development. Personal commitment to self-awareness in this regard should bear the same significance as medicine's Hippocratic Oath. Our failure to address these practice issues does little to move the needle on better outcomes for all children, especially for those living in communities beset by economic and social challenges.

An unspoken, but nonetheless real barrier in our thinking about reforming higher education centers on long-held, implicit values held about what makes for "real education" and where this kind of education most likely takes place. To a certain extent, the debate over associate and bachelor's degrees underscores this tension. Too many readily dismiss the idea that it's possible to get an effective education at two-year institutions. Most see associate degrees as stepping-stones to earning a four-year degree. While it would seem unnatural to expect someone from either of these institutions to argue against the merits of their contributions to preparing early educators, this is where a great deal of energy is currently being spent. I'd argue that we should instead be analyzing the content and structure of programs at each level, and asking in what ways they're contributing, or not, to helping students develop the competencies needed to excel at teaching young children. I suspect that if more time were spent focused on these kinds of questions, the improvements necessary for preparing and supporting infant and toddler educators, as just one example ripe for action, would readily be uncovered.

The time has come to aggressively examine the barriers that keep higher education at all levels from changing its content and approach to teacher preparation. For too long, our focus has centered on change targets such as increasing seats; intensifying the rigor of how programs and teachers are evaluated; and increasing requirements. But our more challenging change target —altering our implicit values and the preparation and support systems that result —also needs to be confronted.

My fear is that ratcheting up expectations for educators absent transformative improvements in preparation programs will only increase the difficulty of attracting motivated and talented individuals to educate and care for children during one of the most important developmental periods of their lives. Even if we fix financing, get compensation right, and ensure a diverse workforce, if the content and approach of teacher preparation hasn't been altered, we still run the risk of too few children realizing their full potential. For me, this outcome is unacceptable.

Tammy Mann, PhD, is president & CEO of The Campagna Center.

Walking a Tightrope and Making the Case for Professionalizing Early Educators

By Anna Mercer-McLean

As a child care director, I often feel as if early childhood administrators walk a tightrope, starting at one end and staying continually alert to losing their footing before reaching the goals located at the rope's other end. Early childhood education's (ECE's) aspirations regarding the relationship among preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusion represent the brass bound ties holding the tightrope in place. Because the competition between and among these three strands is increasing, though, the field's tightrope is becoming even more difficult to cross.

I believe my ability to navigate ECE's tightrope as a child care administrator is possible because of my commitment to having a well-prepared teaching staff. While I have appreciated the views of the series' authors who have preferred options other than four-year degrees for early educators, I am an advocate of the Institute of Medicine's recommendation[66] promoting four-year degrees for lead teachers, and along with Sue Russell and Albert Wat, think this should be the standard set for early educators.

My program is always staffed by at least 75% Bachelors' degreed teachers who have both preparation and experience in ECE. Contrary to Amy Rothchild's and Fabienne Doucet's views regarding our taken-for-granted assumptions about the meaning of BA degrees or Sherri Killins Stewart's observation that early childhood educators in Massachusetts reported little connection between their newly minted degrees and their daily work, my lead teachers with BA degrees report notable differences in their practice.

These amazing early educators understand the importance of quality care and education. They rely on developmentally appropriate practices so children's individual needs are continuously being met. They've become more observant of children's developmental progression, teach with greater intentionality, and

better support children's social emotional learning. Their own cultural and educational values inspire them to want more for our children.

Yet as noted by Amy Rothschild, Sally Holloway, and Laura Bornfreund, problems of inconsistency, relevance, and access exist in teacher preparation programs. Sally Holloway's contention that higher education faculty should assume more responsibility for early educators' preparation by helping remove access barriers, if implemented, could help make ECE's tightrope more navigable. Doing so would make it easier for early childhood educators and administrators to walk the tightrope because enrollment, ongoing student support, and consultation would be available to those choosing to earn two- and/or four-year degrees.

My program also benefits from having degreed early educators in a way too often overlooked. Because I no longer have to constantly work in orientation mode with my staff, I have a more secure tightrope and can redirect my attention to ensuring classrooms are well-resourced and offer professional development opportunities to increase and/or fine-tune educators' competencies, skills, and knowledge.

Nonetheless, as a Master's degree child care administrator with a well-respected program, similar to Tracy Ehlert's experience, my pedigree hasn't made me immune to comments, such as one from my own brother, that stereotypes my work as babysitting. Those of us who are part of ECE routinely find ourselves having to defend our status. Consequently, I found Sara Mead's insight in this regard thought provoking, especially when the question of "What would it mean for ECE to be viewed as a professional field?" was posed, because she underscored the importance of values, beliefs, and assumptions in addition to credentials. I was particularly taken by her view that a fundamental expectation of professions is that those who work in the same profession see themselves as professionals and share a similar identity, including shared values and thinking.

Marica Cox Mitchell's five non-negotiables for moving ECE beyond its rhetoric, therefore, will be essential for next step decision-making regarding ECE's professionalism and will encourage early educators to risk moving further out on the field's tightrope. I believe ECE's professionalism will only be recognized when early educators gain mastery of the field's practice competencies by developing the necessary skills and knowledge acquired through formal education accompanied by direct classroom experience and by advocating for competitive compensation commensurate with their education.

ECE needs a unified framework if it wishes to be recognized as a profession. Without formal education and, yes, competitive compensation for early educators, child care administrators will be stuck with navigating ECE's tightrope with uncertainty and having to negotiate the consequences that accompany a tightrope whose brass bound ties are under increasing stress.

Too often, though, the voices of early educators and administrators are omitted from these field-defining conversations. Our experiences and insights bring perspectives too often overlooked or possibly not even known. Further, our views are essential for understanding potential accomplishments, as well as adversities, inherent to ECE's movement toward degreed early childhood educators. The movement is accelerating because of the field's need for better-educated practitioners who are regarded as professionals as indicated by their competence and societal status, including level of compensation. Following years of complacency, do we allow ECE's tightrope to become increasingly challenging to cross or do we strive to achieve the full potential of our ECE profession by setting higher educational standards and demanding competitive compensation?

Anna Mercer-McLean is the director of Community School for People Under Six in Carrboro, North Carolina.

What Exactly Do the Letters BA and MEd Signify?

By Amy Rothschild

My experience as an early childhood educator both in public and private schools has taught me that formal teacher preparation offers many benefits, but that the quality of that preparation is vastly uneven. In the course of earning my master's degree in early childhood education (ECE), I received detailed feedback on my teaching from mentors and corresponded with them in a shared journal. I also made paper plate masks of the Three Little Pigs. Nearly a decade into my career, I still have the observations from my mentors, but I discarded the paper plate masks before the Elmer's glue had dried.

If, as suggested by Albert Wat, we may be inching towards consensus regarding the importance of four-year degrees and beyond, the question of what a degree represents looms large. If individuals, employers, or governments aim to invest in degrees, what will they be purchasing? Yet to be explored by this series is the question of what is needed to ensure degrees effectively educate adult learners, and through us, children.

When I graduated from college as an English major, I considered my options for becoming an early childhood educator. Accidents of birth and, more importantly, deliberate workings of politics and economics, helped me, a white woman with means, become a teacher very easily. Although preschool teaching was not the path my attorney parents had imagined for me, they nonetheless financially supported me. Consequently, I didn't have to make the sacrifices so many frontline early childhood educators have to make, sacrifices that Sherri Killins Stewart pointedly details. I didn't have to navigate the tricky path from support staff to lead teacher that Jamal Berry describes.

I decided to bypass traditional teacher preparation; I didn't want to spend two years and tens of thousands of dollars in graduate programs friends had characterized as weak. But I also craved more than the six weeks of preparation that most alternative certification programs would provide.

So, I sought out a small apprenticeship program with the guiding philosophy "learn to teach by teaching." I worked alongside and learned from experienced educators, gradually assuming teaching responsibility. My cohort formed a vibrant community of adult learners pursuing questions vital to our practice. I also decided to pursue the option of earning a master's degree in tandem, thus securing the legitimacy and mobility that degrees provide.

That step involved taking a few courses at a university highly regarded for its teacher preparation—and unfortunately that's where the paper plate masks came in. Where the apprenticeship model was supportive, in-depth, and rigorous, the university courses were too often rote. I felt like I was paying the piper, rather than learning the art of teaching or even the nuts and bolts of practice. Everyone seemingly passed with flying colors just by showing up. Instructors enacted bias, with one proclaiming the work of Ezra Jack Keats "too dark" for kindergarteners, and no matter the course title, lectures often devolved into scattershot discussions of the dangers of posting about students on social media.

It might be easy to dismiss my experience with this traditional coursework as anecdotal and isolated, but I fear it is not. At the same time that policy makers[67] and many ECE thought leaders place great hope in degree programs, many outside the field are concerned about trends in higher education generally: the rise of poorly regulated for-profit institutions,[68] the increasingly corporate structure of public institutions,[69] growing reliance on graduate students and adjunct faculty,[70] rising student debt,[71] and lack of accountability for student outcomes.[72]

To these challenges, add those associated with training teachers. Our field's core knowledge and competencies remain hotly debated, and schools of education have a history of distancing themselves from classroom practice. In *The Allure of Order,*[73] Harvard researcher Jal Mehta paints a picture of how university schools of education originally "sought to distance themselves from applied questions in order to increase their status," noting that, "in particular, questions about pedagogy were shunned as potential contaminants because of teaching's association with low-level, women's work." I observed this tension directly. Few of the traditional courses I took merged theory and practice in intentional ways, mostly leaning on one at the expense of the other.

I didn't have to take on any debt or make great personal sacrifice to complete my graduate degree program. Most educators, though, must do both. Educators should receive the requisite financial and other supports outlined by Sue Russell

to take on advanced training. And teacher education programs should meaningfully advance early childhood educators' preparation.

We teach children that letters have meaning, and it depends on all of us to figure out what exactly the letters BA and MEd signify.

Amy Rothschild teaches a mixed-age Pre-K and kindergarten class at Capitol Hill Day School, a Pre-K through eighth grade private school in Washington, D.C.

What Is the Role of Race, Class, and Gender in Resolving ECE's Thorny Knot?

By Linda Hassan Anderson

Introduction to the Theme of Race, Class, and Gender

Race, class, and gender bias were woven into the fabric of American society at its inception and unraveling early childhood education's (ECE) thorny knot necessitates acknowledging these enduring influences. Solutions to untangling the knot in this context range from Barbara Bowman's quick strike that frames the conversation as one that should revolve around family diversity and differential staffing to Aisha Ray's challenge to critically examine "ECE workforce preparation programs' entrenched whiteness and racialization as unique factors in child development, practice, pedagogy, instruction."

Alternatively, Nilsa Ramirez speaks to process and advocates for bringing the voices of practitioners and families to the table. For her, excluding these voices perpetuates inequities as well as undermines those in the ECE field's ability to meet children's and families' actual needs. In turn, Maurice Sykes, Valora Washington, and Edna Ranck assert that issues of power, control, and lack of respect for working mothers and the ECE workforce impede equity and progress for children and their early childhood educators.

Unifying all of these positions is the authors' shared contention that ECE's problems cannot be effectively resolved without involving those who are most

impacted by them. Anything else is "I know best-ism" and white saviorism at play. I agree that this "call" cannot be ignored if ECE is to experience a meaningful transformation. For social justice to be achieved, connections must exist among content, pedagogy, *and* communities' social-cultural context. Those in power, who in the ECE field are largely individuals representing the dominant culture, must own their part in excluding and minimizing the full participation of those closest to children's lives.

Expanding the Conversation

A dominant theme of this series overall has been the merit of early educators having four-year degrees. I am a Black woman with a degree, and my experiences have tempered the optimism fostered by my parents about doors opening for people of color with higher education. My academic degrees have not shielded me from encountering the trifecta of racism, classism, and sexism. As a result, I'm concerned about the limits of disjointed strategies when it comes to these issues.

The ECE field extensively lobbies for money and legislation, failing to recognize that they neither by themselves nor together effectively address racism, classism, or sexism. We widely expound disjoined strategies in books, articles, position papers, and more. Conversely, too often we pretend no problem exists and blame the victim, in this case, educators who won't invest in their own development. In addition, we continue proposing countless interventions without simultaneously doing our own diversity, equity, and inclusion work to address root causes. Instead of looking outward, ECE should be looking inward at the biases we are bringing to the decision-making table and how to go about shifting them. Given our core value of reflective practice, how does ECE shift from a culture of pointing fingers and blaming to internal reflection and taking responsibility? Too often we naïvely assume that isolated strategies will "untangle the thorny knot." In other words, we're good at "talking the talk" but not "walking the walk."

The "thorny knot" metaphor central to this compendium reminds me of the consequences incurred when one shifts from dissecting a problem to taking an action. In the legend of "the Gordian Knot"[74] an impossibly tangled knot was presented to test the wisdom of the man who would be chosen ruler. According to legend, Alexander the Great, who became king upon solving the problem, either quickly cut the knot with one slice of his sword or simply pulled the linchpin from the post. It is said he reasoned it made no difference **how** the knot was unraveled.

When, however, it comes to ECE's thorny knot, I question the king's approach and sometimes feel as if we have chosen to follow his example. Do we want to commit to the notion that ANY solution is acceptable? Solutions have consequences, both intended and unintended. In this instance, they more often than not perpetuate structures and institutions that honor the status quo when it

comes to issues of race, class, and gender. Remember: This conversation is about REAL children and REAL lives. Meaningful ECE solutions will need to be centered on the experiences of those most impacted by amplifying and by empowering multiple non-dominant perspectives.

Heart-wrenching scenarios throughout 2018–19 from immigrant refugee camps have given us a look at the choices made untangling a "thorny knot" when simplistically framed as "a strain on existing resources" or cast as "these are other people's children." We have seen insensitivity to images of starving and dying children of color. What makes us think that similar scenarios won't play out when it comes to closing the achievement gap for children of color or to promoting the economic value of early childhood educators?

Yet, those in the ECE field acknowledge these problems by lobbying others for money and legislation; attempting to mobilize others by preparing position statements and writing treatises; blaming the victim; and supporting discrete, disconnected interventions. In the absence of our doing the work of addressing the impact of racism, classism, and sexism, a void has been created, and others with varied intentions, who are weakly equipped to address the field's thorny knot, are setting policy and funding priorities.[75]

Many of this series' authors challenge us to confront the question of "What is the ECE field's true commitment to closing the achievement gap and elevating the ECE workforce?" Lisa Delpit[76] reminds us "there is no achievement gap at birth."

Questions for Further Exploration

To have meaningful impact on this dilemma, ECE will best be served by greater self-awareness, recognizing that **we** are part of the conundrum. The questions that follow should be joined by the intent to own our role in creating the thorny knot and our opportunity to be accountable for its resolution.

Race, class, and gender issues can limit the field's ability to "untangle its thorny knot" if we don't acknowledge that their residence exists within a labyrinth of additional variables such as the impact of societal factors, research, and life experiences.

- What do we need to know from other viewpoints/perspectives (families, early childhood educators, community members)? What does ECE need to do to bring these perspectives to the attention of those with decision-making power?

- Is an equity lens being used to surface critical issues and develop plans to mitigate harm and to be proactive about unintended consequences? How do we hold ourselves accountable for advancing equity?

- Of the funding currently allocated or being pursued, do we assess who serves to benefit financially? Are intermediaries studying the problem and considering whether their recommendations directly and favorably impact the quality of children's experiences or practitioners' educational advancement?

Moving into Action

- **Follow the Money**: Document how much money has already been spent on "solutions" that don't directly impact what we say is most important (i.e., funding for educational advancement of the current workforce).

- **Follow the Influencers**: Identify the decision-makers. Does their representation reflect the workforce and children we want to impact? Provide ongoing real world experience for leaders, administrators, and professionals with limited or no current field experience.

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ECE's Quintessential Equity Challenge

By Aisha Ray

The calculus typically applied when linking workforce diversity, increased wages, and early childhood education (ECE) program quality assumes that addressing these factors will reap significant improvements in children's educational achievement, especially for those furthest from opportunity. From my perspective, the persistence of the achievement gap is the single greatest educational challenge for early childhood educators and those who prepare them. It is the quintessential equity issue of our field.

The achievement gap persists because of multifactorial institutional and structural factors (e.g., poor quality programs, inadequate workforce preparation, deficit perspectives). If we're to deliver on the promise that untying ECE's thorny knot will result in children's improved educational outcomes and an ebbing achievement gap, its fragmented, uneven, and problematic professional development landscape must be addressed.

A Thorny Challenge Awaits Us

The majority of my career has focused on preparing the ECE workforce in institutions of higher education (IHEs), including researching professional development systems and racial equity and diversity, and consulting with states'

ECE leadership to improve professional preparation systems. I'd argue that states presently lack ECE professional development systems that are sufficiently rigorous, robust, flexible, creative, accountable, available, and affordable to all sectors of the workforce. As Albert Wat noted in "Degrees and Credentials for Early Childhood Educators: Inching Towards A Consensus?", the field lacks scalable exemplary programs and widely available coherent career pathways that link to portable credentials (e.g., CDA, AA, BA, professional certificates) that, in turn, facilitate our workforce's progression toward career goals. We have a long way to go to prepare the over one million individuals working in center-based and licensed home settings, or the over 900,000 who work in unlicensed settings. To channel Maurice Sykes, this presents a knotty and wicked problem within a still larger knotty and wicked problem.

Tammy Mann, Sally Holloway, Amy Rothschild, and Josephine Queen raise legitimate concerns regarding higher education's ability to effectively prepare those educating young children, including those of color and those in poverty. Can the daunting realities of ECE higher education be addressed and overcome, including lack of big, ambitious reform efforts; entrenched faculty; insufficient student and faculty diversity; uninspiring curricula; unexamined "whiteness" and explicit/implicit bias; course content heavy on theory versus implications for practice; and issues of affordability and access? For me, the critical questions that link workforce preparation, compensation, quality, diversity, and child outcomes are these: Are ECE preparation programs able to address the demands of a pre-service and in-service workforce responsible for the developmental and educational needs of culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse children, those in poverty, and those furthest from opportunity whose educational success may be most threatened by what we do and do not do in the preparation of the ECE workforce? If not, why not, and how do we create the preparation programs our nation, workforce, children, and families deserve?

Here are seven critical questions our field needs to address in relation to workforce preparation, complex diversity, equity, and IHEs if we are to address and overcome these daunting realities:

1. Is there a research-based understanding of the relevance, depth of treatment, and coherence of course content, of faculty expertise, and of practice experiences provided in IHEs preparing the ECE workforce?

2. Have the competencies related to knowledge, skills, and personal capacities the ECE workforce, at all levels and in all settings, must have to support the development of young children furthest from opportunity and to close the achievement gap been sufficiently defined?

3. Are IHEs able to provide adult learners with high-quality practice experiences in settings with culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse

children and families, and the reflective supervision opportunities necessary to improve practice?

4. To what extent are IHEs preparing early childhood educators to understand theory, research, and best practice strategies for bilingual, multilingual, and bi-dialectic English speakers?

5. How deeply do ECE workforce preparation programs address culture, equity, entrenched "whiteness" and racialization as unique factors in child development, practice, pedagogy, instruction, and the achievement gap? Are we, in our treatment of culture, racialization, and equity, reinforcing stereotypes and biases about specific groups? Are early childhood educators supported to address explicit and implicit bias in their work? Are educators helped to develop strong anti-racist/anti-bias practice?

6. Is there sufficient support for both faculty and innovative program development related to reforming or creating new ECE preparation approaches or programs (including credentials, pathways, curricula, practice experiences, increasing faculty diversity) that are grounded in equity and can effectively educate an increasingly diverse workforce?

7. What are the institutional and systemic factors within IHEs and their ECE departments and programs that must be addressed to bring about substantial change, reform, and revolution in workforce preparation so that children and families furthest from opportunity will benefit from highly competent early learning programs and educators equipped to close the achievement gap?

These questions make evident that unwinding the intertwining knotty problems of compensation, quality, diversity, and preparation will demand sustained effort from all of us. Yet given the stakes, we have no choice but to try and do so.

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Education is a Game Changer for Women as Well as Children

By Sue Russell

Education is a game changer for women[77] and children. We know a mother's education predicts a child's future success[78] in school and beyond. We know women with more education, in general, make more money[79] and have better career options. A recent meta-analysis[80] found better quality classrooms had better educated teachers, and we know higher quality classrooms predict better

child outcomes. And, finally, we know women in underdeveloped countries across the world are literally dying in pursuit of the opportunity to go to school and college.[81] So I'm unclear as to why we are debating degrees for early childhood educators.[82]

I am not insensitive to the challenges, fears, and costs associated with transforming the nation's ECE workforce. I know them well because it has been my life's work. North Carolina was my laboratory. In 1988, less than 10 percent of early childhood educators working in licensed child care settings in North Carolina had a two- or four-year-degree. They earned poverty-level wages and had employers who did not support their professional development. Yet when asked, these women overwhelmingly said they wanted to go to college. We began with 21 early childhood educators taking courses to earn ECE associate's degrees, providing them with (1) comprehensive scholarships to support tuition, books, and paid release time, (2) a scholarship counselor, (3) a wage increase, (4) a retention requirement, and (5) mandated employer buy-in.

Now, 30 years later, North Carolina's experiment has included over 33,000 early childhood educators, including directors and family child care educators. Scholarships have expanded to support bachelor degrees, teacher licensure, and even master degrees. The complexion of the ECE teaching workforce remains unchanged, but the education of our state's workforce has been transformed.

What makes North Carolina an interesting laboratory for exploring the interplay among preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity? First, North Carolina is the ninth largest state. Second, it is a purple state in terms of its political climate. Third, the state began at the bottom in terms of its ECE standards and its workforce education when the experiment began. And finally, about half of North Carolina's children from birth to kindergarten are children of color and/or Hispanic origin, as is the ECE teaching workforce.

Despite concerns to the contrary, North Carolina has not lost diversity in its ECE teaching workforce, even though our rated facility licensure weights staff education as 50 percent of a program's license score, and even though our pre-K standards require a BA in ECE with a birth to kindergarten license. In fact, the racial and/or ethnic distribution of pre-K teachers who meet these higher standards does not differ from the distribution before the standards.

All early childhood educators, regardless of program setting, have been supported to achieve this higher standard. Over the last 12 years,[84] there has been a 16 percent increase in African Americans in director and/or owner positions. By 2015, 63 percent of all teaching staff, 81 percent of center directors, and 49 percent of family child care educators had degrees.

I have learned from women who have made this educational journey. Their overwhelming messages revolve around actualization, transformation, and profound appreciation. For many, their perception of themselves as smart,

strong, capable women was affirmed. Their understanding of early childhood education and the import of their life's work was transformed. And for many, there had been this unachievable dream of earning a college degree. With the help of this comprehensive scholarship and a counselor who believed in them, they achieved their dream, graduating debt-free and often exceeding what they thought was possible.

These women are now working across North Carolina in the wide array of jobs our field offers. Many continue in centers, classrooms, or homes as lead educators or administrators; some are working as technical assistants or professional development specialists or have gone on to teach in our colleges and universities. And the complexion of women in these roles is changing the number of women of color in leadership positions.

Making this possible requires a significant investment of time and money in our workforce. North Carolina, a conservative and relatively poor state, made that investment over the last 25 years, and continues to invest so all those in the ECE workforce attain degrees. It has also taken courage to require the workforce to get more education and provide time to do it. We have not solved the issue of compensation, but individuals with degrees earn or have the potential to earn a lot more money. They can move to different teaching settings; they can advance in their roles within their programs; or they can move to other positions within our field. But wherever they go, they now have new assets—a degree in early childhood education; increased lifelong earning potential; new knowledge and competencies; the pride that comes from their achievement; the confidence that they can advance in our field if desired; and the vision that their children and grandchildren will go to college.

ECE is at a crossroads. Our children need better-educated teachers, and our teachers need real opportunities. We cannot fail either. We do not have to choose. Our children can have diverse, well-educated, effective educators, and our workforce can have real opportunities for educational, wage, and career advancement as early childhood educators.

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Elephants in the Room: Workforce Respect and Equity

By Valora Washington

Talk about "professionalizing" the early childhood education (ECE) field is today's hot topic, and for good reason. More than ever, the field's expanding knowledge base in child development and the science of early learning has expanded our views of what children can do and increased our focus on the capacity of staff who work with them.

For me, a critical question becomes: What principles will guide us as we envision a future and shared purpose for ECE as a field of practice? While there are no easy answers, and solutions seem costly,[85] I see two core concepts as essential elements of change: respect for the workforce and focus on equity issues.[86]

Let me explain.

As CEO of the Council for Professional Recognition, I have the privilege of conferring nearly 50,000 Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials on educators every year. With many occasions to represent and support these educators, I am sad to say that I encounter too many instances where the field's "thought leaders" critique the infant, toddler, preschool, family-child-care and home-visitor communities that I serve with statements such as: "They" are holding "us" back in "our" efforts to raise the quality and value of "our" profession; "they" are poorly educated and have insufficient vocabularies; "they" are unacquainted with the field's knowledge base and don't help children achieve the results that "we" know are possible from research.

Yet the collective "we" often have virtually no teaching experience with young children and are comprised almost exclusively of monolingual, English-speaking white women with graduate degrees. "We" certainly earn more than the minimum hourly wages that "they" do. Yet "they"—without question—exhibit enormous courage and commitment to change through the higher education and reflective practices that are being demanded by the "professionalization" movement.

I offer this experience because it's real, not to offend anyone. I'm pointing out the "elephant in the room" because, if we want, we can choose to respond differently. But we can't change what we don't face.

Expressing support for both professionalization and diversity is de rigueur in our field's culture. Rationally, we all know that the field's diversity is a strength[87] and that workforce challenges are structural and systemic in nature,[88] not endemic to the inherent characteristics of the staff. Nevertheless, in this era of leadership choices,[89] it is still too easy to "blame" the victims of social inequities, perhaps to protect our own vulnerability. To preserve the belief that the world is a just place, we devalue the victims of injustice.[90]

I hold deep esteem for the hard work and good intentions of colleagues who have created ECE's current, dynamic environment. Nevertheless, the gap between our collective intentions and the realities of the current workforce is too big to ignore, despite our own well of goodwill and the impact of innovative efforts such as T.E.A.C.H.[91]

A deficient approach to the people who do the incredible work of educating young children, it's worth noting, is ironic given the field's strident call for promoting a strengths-based paradigm about children and families. How can so

little respect be rendered to individuals deeply immersed in demonstrating respect for the children and families they serve?

Often disrespect is an unintended or unreflective expression of asymmetrical power of one group over another. This happens to us as well as among us. Case in point: We celebrate the amazing power of early brain development yet tolerate widespread poverty and poor working conditions among those responsible for interacting with children in ways to stimulate young brains.

And, speaking of elephants in the room, silence about race—and how professionalizing our field could impact the diversity of our workforce—is not productive to untangling ECE's thorny knot. A focus on equity matters, and we must be dogged about achieving it. For decades, practitioners of color at all educational levels have reported concerns about inclusion and isolation. Within our field, there are demonstrated racial differences in wages[92] and hiring preferences.[93] Consequently, along with the field's growth in recent years, concern is escalating that our expanding numbers adequately reflect the demographics of the children and families served, especially among "new" roles such as coaches, mentors, state specialists, and assessors.

The call for "representative leadership"[94] is not whining; it is a deeply felt requirement for the field's advancement. Our task forces, work groups, and committees cannot react with dismissal, annoyance, or gossip when people of color offer feedback that differs from the mainstream opinion. "Whitening the field"—as has happened in other education sectors[95]—should never be an option for us, especially because ECE can take pride in having a more diverse group of educators than many other education sectors, including public schools.

Bringing forth our vision for an esteemed and equitable profession will require us to engage in democratic processes that respect and build on the strengths of the field's early childhood educator

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It's All About Social Justice

By Nilsa Ramirez

As we consider how to untangle early childhood education's thorny knot, I can't help but notice that missing from the ECE conversation are the authentic voices of those who are most impacted—early childhood educators and the families they serve. If we want to cultivate quality practice and professional identities, social justice—the balance between equity and equality and the actions we take to get there—needs to be put at the center.

Series authors Luis Hernandez, Jamal Berry, and Fabienne Doucet raise the risk of diluting the field's diversity if ECE were to require early childhood educators with degrees or credentials. Frankly, I think the ongoing debate between these two options misses the point. Neither will be successful if ECE caregivers aren't asked what they want and need and if ECE continues viewing social justice as a secondary concept in debates about the workforce because social justice is central to these debates. Without its inclusion in debate on this issue and others, I believe the choices made too often will fail to achieve the balance essential to children's early learning and development.

As Sara Mead notes in "Values, Beliefs, and Institutions: What's Needed for Early Educators to Unwind ECE's Thorny Knot?", "conversations about elevating the ECE workforce...rarely address the organization of ECE delivery or the culture and capacity of organizations that provide ECE programs." While she isn't specifically referencing diversity, inclusion, and issues of implicit bias and systems of oppression, the message is still clear to me: to untangle ECE's thorny knot, the interaction of its entangled threads with larger societal issues has to be understood.

The ECE field should be investing in its diverse workforce as its strongest asset and embracing social justice as the engine to better advance the ECE system. Towards this end, we should be elevating the voices of educators and families so a partnership can be formed in service of articulating a shared agenda for children's learning and development. As Michele Cox-Miller notes for us in her piece, "while parents are young children's first and best teachers, they rely on early educators as partners in preparing their children for success."

I'm learning firsthand how becoming authentic "partners" with families helps early childhood educators uncloak socio-cultural inequity in their classrooms and incorporate social justice into their identities. As site director for the Rauner Family YMCA child care center on the west side of Chicago, I'm getting a close look at how unearthing implicit biases can be tackled in daily practice. At the Rauner Y, this has meant amplifying voices inside our classrooms with children and outside of classrooms with our families.

If social justice is to be achieved, better connections need to be made among content, pedagogy, and the socio-cultural contexts of the communities being served. As Sherri Killins-Stewart argued in "Are Policymakers and Advocates Reducing or Increasing Early Childhood Education's Inequalities?" policies need to recognize the value educators can bring when it comes to informing culturally and linguistically relevant practice and policies. I'd contend, though, that cultural and linguistically relevant practices and policies are not enough. Social justice also needs to be represented—in partnership with families—in classrooms, and most especially as part of early childhood educators' identity development.

In the last few years, the Rauner Family YMCA teachers, assistant teachers, and I have participated in peer-based professional learning communities focused on altering instructional practice through anti-bias education and social equity. We've dug deeply into issues of race, culture, socioeconomic class, gender identity, family structure, and religion. We've challenged our beliefs, discussed our personal biases, and importantly, connected these ideas to how our teaching and learning in ECE settings can be improved.

It has been incredibly difficult work. But it has empowered the center's teaching staff, and me in my role as the site director, to take risks in our practice and test strategies for working with children and families that feel meaningful and relevant in the broader societal context. This combination—partnership with families, focus on quality practice, and core values linking social justice and equity—has cultivated a sense of pride in our work that is translating to our practitioners' identities as early childhood educators.

The social justice lens we've applied to our practice extends to policy as well. We, as Y staff, are now better equipped to come to policy tables with insights relevant to ECE preparation and professional development that can improve educator practices and better serve children and families.

Professionalizing early childhood educators goes hand-in-hand with how we as a field represent, understand, and internalize our individual voices and the voices of the children and families being served. Most likely, for reasons mentioned throughout this blog series, decades will be needed to untangle ECE's thorny knot. Nonetheless, I agree with Carol Brunson Day that the time has come to move beyond the "best" educational pathway debate. In its place, let's pull up a chair, make room at the table, and hand over the microphone to the educators we too often act as if we can speak for, and to the families they serve. Only then can we authentically advance ECE's workforce for the demands of the 21st century.

Nilsa Ramirez is site program director for the Rauner Family YMCA in Chicago.

Let's Be Honest: It's About Sexism, Classism, and Racism

By Maurice Sykes

To avoid being misinterpreted or perceived as resisting efforts to raise the academic bar for early childhood educators, let me state from the onset that I support efforts to elevate their competencies prior to entry into the early childhood education (ECE) workforce. And yes, equal pay should be in place for equal work. But if we want to reach this end point, we have to be willing to confront the real barriers blocking attempts to create a well-educated, well compensated, and diversified workforce.

I designed and operated a program known as "Project Headway" for 15 years. It assisted early childhood educators to advance in their careers by moving from the CDA credential to the AA degree and beyond. Its enrollees were similar to those typically referenced in conversations as the "diverse workforce" when discussing early childhood education workforce development.

Yet, contrary to routinely cited statistics,[97] we boasted 80 percent workforce retention and graduation rates. Our success can be credited to our not viewing or profiling participants as first generation, minority, low income females dependent on a monthly wage close to or below the poverty line supporting families—or by extension, as too tired and too poor to go to night college, which to this day remains the predominant higher education approach for women in the ECE workforce.

Rather than using a lens of pathology, we viewed enrollees as capable, competent, resourceful learners, some of whom, by dint of the birth lottery, had lived in poor neighborhoods, attended inferior schools and, consequently, needed a good practitioner-based ECE higher education program.

Like others whose writing has preceded mine, we recognized that advancing these women's formal education required attention not only to their academic lives but also to their work and personal lives. But here's how we differed: we engaged with their plight as an issue of social justice. While we saw increasing their academic preparation as a way of improving their work and personal life circumstances, we, more importantly, saw it as improving their ability to change the life trajectory of the children they taught.

The time has come to alter the narrative we hold regarding teacher credentialing and teacher compensation that presumes adult career advancement is our end goal. To the contrary: our focus should be on improving young children's schooling and life outcomes.

Every child needs and deserves a highly qualified, highly effective, and highly competent early childhood educator. This is the reason why we should care about early childhood educators' competencies and compensation.

So, now a cautionary note is needed as we continue exploring issues of teacher preparation, teacher compensation, and a diverse and inclusive workforce: views that verge, at best, on paternalistic, and, at worst, on racist overtones must be shunned. And if we want to avoid this unsavory impulse, two essential questions have to be probed:

1) Why should we encourage women of color to enhance their educational portfolio only to be consigned to a low-wage, low-status job where they will be paid 84 cents[98] for every dollar their white, female counterparts earn?

2) Remember my reference to night colleges? This venerable American institution historically has catapulted low-income men and women out of poverty and their working class standing and into middle class professional status. People of color have successfully moved from sharecropper to PhD. So what is all of the hullabaloo surrounding recommendations to move people of color from CDA to AA to BA and beyond?

The change literature is replete with references to three types of "messes"[99] that motivate an organization to change. There is the hot mess and the holy mess—both of which can be addressed through a solid, strategic planning process. The third is the Wicked Mess. It requires a systems thinking approach.

ECE has a wicked mess on its hands. Demanding immediate attention are answers to two more questions: "Who's going to fix this conundrum?" and "Who's going to pay for it?"

Initiating a systems change approach requires dives below ECE's façade to detect trends, patterns, and behaviors that can help explain ECE's present performance. We also should be probing what prevents the ECE system from changing. After all, it's not as if the issues we're exploring are newly identified.

By diving beneath the surface of ECE's issues regarding teacher preparation and education, and status and compensation, I suspect we would find the lurking menace of sexism, classism, and racism. If honest with ourselves and with each other, we'd acknowledge that these three realities are integral to mapping and addressing barriers blocking the development of a diverse and professionalized ECE workforce. Frankly, it's our only hope for addressing this wicked mess.

Maurice Sykes is author of "Doing the Right Thing for Children: Eight Qualities of Leadership" and executive director of the Early Childhood Leadership Institute.

Restructuring Early Care and Education To Address Its Thorny Knot

By Barbara Bowman

Stacie G. Goffin describes the tangle of issues facing the early care and education (ECE) field as a knot consisting of threads related to staff preparation and education, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity. Thirty experienced ECE professionals have already addressed these issues by presenting their perspectives in this series. I would like to add mine.

Ideas suggested in previous pieces, for the most part, contend that ECE teachers need more education, more diversity, and more pay, with which I agree. Yet I think the knot's prickliest component is matching ECE's staff structure, wages, and roles to children's and families' needs.

A large difference in wages, education, and training exists among ECE teachers, with child care teachers' compensation often hovering just above minimum wage, which leads to high turnover and poorly trained teachers. In response, some advocates suggest that all ECE teachers need to have the same education and receive the same pay as public-school teachers, which has huge financial implications—the cost of highly educated teachers for small groups of children over a full workday is overwhelming to many families, as well as to taxpayers.

To move forward, those in the ECE field need to stop trying to force all teachers into the same mold, no matter what their responsibilities, education, or training. The 'field' of early care and education needs to forge a policy that coordinates teacher knowledge and skill with wages and family needs. The starting point is child and family diversity. While all children and families need many of the same things, they do not all need them in the same way or at the same time. For example, some working families need infant care, and a grandmother or a relative may nicely fill the bill. Other families prefer the reliability and/or quality of a center and want a teacher who provides an effective learning environment for small groups of children. Infants living in challenging environments (e.g., poverty or drug addiction) or with difficult conditions (e.g., severe disabilities) may need sophisticated services with highly trained teachers and therapists. In other words, every infant needs the care of committed adults, but not every infant needs daily care from a highly educated BA- or MA-level teacher for their healthy development.

Consequently, I suggest a differentiated workforce based on certifiable credentials. I recognize that many adults have years of experience, enjoy working with young children, and have a talent for this work. In building a system, however, the case for formal education and training is strong, and the argument for using individualized assessments based on personal experience is too arbitrary and expensive.

At the same time, we know that not all children need the most highly trained and compensated caregiver all day from infancy through preschool.[100] Families differ in their resources and preferences and although all children need a full range of opportunities to develop well, they may not need the same ones or at the same time.

Central to this differentiated model is that levels of education, professional training, and wages are tied to certified professional competencies. The model recognizes teacher preparation for preschool (three-to-five year olds) as entailing more education and therefore, higher personnel costs than basic child care. The rationale is that a solid research base exists[101] for the importance of teacher education and skills in preparing children for school while less rigorous research documents the educational benefits of childcare alone.

Four Educator Roles for a Differentiated Model

I suggest the following job descriptions as the basis of such a system.

Assistant Teachers support teachers across ECE settings. They might not have formal education or training, but would be required to pass an organized training program established and paid for by the state before their positions became permanent. They would start at minimum wage and be required to work under the direct supervision of a teacher.

Child Care Teachers are prepared to work in a standard child care program in a center or licensed home. Competent to supervise a group of typically developing children, birth to five, they provide constructive and developmentally appropriate activities, including eating, toileting, napping, and constructive and creative activities (including play). They also are trained in using benchmark child assessments and cooperating with families. While not responsible for teaching academic skills, the Child care teacher facilitates children's interests and efforts in this domain. Children attending half-day preschool could access child care for the remainder of their day if needed. The child care teacher would have at a minimum a CDA credential or an AA degree; salaries would begin at (at least) double minimum wage.

Preschool Teachers have knowledge and skills that extend beyond those held by the child care teacher. They would have a four-year college degree and advanced training that includes expertise in facilitating academic achievement for children two to five, especially those at risk of school failure. They would be responsible for providing a challenging curriculum that includes literacy, math, science, and technology. They also would be responsible for program alignment with public school standards either as school employees or through regular consultation.[102] Additionally, they would be expected to know the criteria for referrals and, when necessary, refer children for a longer school day (full day preschool) and/or therapeutic interventions. This baseline preschool component would be a half-day program for up to 20 children; children from families with low incomes and children with special needs would attend for free. Salaries would be the same as public-school teachers.

Master Teachers (Educational Coordinators) would be responsible for supervising the three roles just outlined as defined by state licensing requirements. They would be responsible for coordinating and supervising services for children with special needs as well. Master teachers would have advanced degrees and training, and their salary scales would mirror those of public school administrators.

Being Realistic Matters

I am proposing a staff structure with different roles and responsibilities for preschool and child care teachers, ones that align with both child and family needs. The model assumes some children will only need developmental child care, while others need only preschool, and still others need both. The model

doubles down on the preparation of preschool teachers because children's formal education is increasingly important in society today given connections between the quality of early instruction and later school achievement. Finally, compensation is based on the complexity of teacher tasks and the depth of their education and training.

I acknowledge this model invites questions tied to preparation and training, financing, and program delivery. It also demands recognizing that the model's dependency on an adequate supply of child care and preschool teachers. Since teachers of color are currently disproportionately represented in the lowest group for education and training, special efforts must be made to enlist and prepare a diversified pool of Child Care, Preschool, and Master Teachers. Nonetheless unraveling ECE's "tangle" depends upon first creating a model that aligns the needs of children, families, and communities with teacher roles, responsibilities, and wages.

Barbara Bowman is the Irving B. Harris professor of Child Development at Erikson Institute.

Unraveling ECE's Thorny Knot Is Constrained by Its History

By Edna Ranck

Maurice Sykes was right: Early childhood education's (ECE) thorny knot—education and preparation, compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity—is affected by racism, classism, and sexism. The field's history proves it. For over two centuries, ECE's child care sector has been trapped in controversy over issues revolving around beliefs and attitudes toward working mothers, resulting in the knot we are trying to unravel because of its entanglement with:

- the role of the federal government in relation to families, especially poor families;
- the roles women in society, particularly working mothers, with bifurcated views tied to race; and
- the purpose of out-of-home care and education of young children, whether for all children or for children deemed "disadvantaged."

I have been in ECE for over 50 years but only recently have I become aware of just how pervasive maternalism ideology is. As defined by historian Sonya Michel,[103] maternalism is a politics that accepts the notion that mothers properly belong at home with their children. Historically, mothers were, and too often still are, denied social rights and civic responsibilities. Fueled by race, gender, and class prejudice, they've been kept from earning wages in the workforce, and their

domestic work continues to go unrecognized as having public economic value. The results have not only negatively affected mothers and children; they have compromised ECE as a field.

ECE's Thorny Knot is Inseparable from its National History

With this ideology as our backdrop, we can begin seeing how the strands of ECE's thorny knot emerged, became entangled with one another, and continue to be tangled[104] by maternalism:[105]

- Rather than provide child care support for working mothers, the federal government has chosen to rely on a class-driven child care system, contributing significantly to ongoing fractures between child care and early education.

- Mothers in more affluent circumstances, especially if white, have been expected to be altruistic care providers, which ECE has historically supported via co-op nursery schools, leading not only to insufficient compensation but to the public's disinterest in compensation as a significant issue.

- Since mothers, white mothers in particular, "belong at home," their children are not seen as needing out-of-home care, leading to ECE's "education" component being viewed as a compensatory intervention.

Our Nation's Maternalism Is Alive and Well

Between December 2018 and early March 2019, seven articles in prominent newspapers and magazines appeared with titles like these: "The Special Misogyny Reserved for Mothers,"[106] "Why Fewer U.S. Workers Are Parents,"[107] and "The Real Mommy War Is Against the State."[108] Additionally, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren and others have introduced S.1878 – Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act.[109] Though well named, it perpetuates the stigma of tying ECE to poverty: Only low-income children will attend free; others will pay on a sliding fee scale.

As a field, ECE needs to take advantage of what this mini-history lesson teaches us and figure out how to transcend it. I see public policy as the way forward: We need to work with others to overturn maternalism, and we need to advance policies that value working mothers by supporting their child care needs in ways that maximize their families' lives and the well-being of their children.

Edna Ranck, EdD, is an ECE researcher and historian.

Where Does Family Child Care Fit in the Early Childhood Education System?

Safiyah Jackson

Introduction to the Theme of Family Child Care

Working across center-, school-, and home-based learning environments, I've witnessed each sector distinctively contribute to the early childhood education (ECE) system. The presence of two conditions promote positive developmental outcomes for children, regardless of location. First, each program setting operates with a standard of licensed quality while consistently working through cycles of quality improvement. Second, practitioners demonstrate specialized qualifications, backed by credentials, degrees, and ongoing professional growth strategies.

While the authors in this section consistently support the idea of earning degrees, the issues of degree type and level, plus the process for acquiring them, dominate their four pieces. One author emphasizes that acquiring degrees is a matter of urgency if the ECE field is to be professionalized. The other three support the idea with caveats. They underscore the importance of professional supports; developing a career ladder as an incentive for earning degrees; and honoring the nuance of family child care (FCC). I stand with these authors in believing that when FCC providers earn degrees, it authenticates home-based learning environments.

As former director of Taking the Lead Leadership Academy,[110] I observed FCC providers demonstrating what is possible when considering these authors' ideas. Like Tracy Elbert writes in "In-Home Childcare Providers Need to Step Up to the Importance of Formal Education," providers believed it was critical for them and other providers to work toward earning formal degrees. Within each academy cohort, approximately 80 percent registered to earn college credit. Affirming Josephine Queen's position in "For Family Child Care Providers, Attaining a Degree Presents Unique Difficulties," successful completion was linked to supports responsive to FCC providers' individual circumstances. Monthly courses were held on Saturdays, course fees were largely subsidized, and curricula aligned with their concurrent roles as business owner, educator, and advocate. When trained in the intersection of administrative and pedagogical leadership,[111] FCC businesses, like their center-based counterparts, can become stable environments that offer continuity of care for children and families. And for this reason, I often suggest we expand the idea of education entrepreneur[112] to include FCC.

Similar to the authors in this section, many of the providers I've worked with acknowledge the contrast between their view of themselves as professionals and parents' reported views of them as babysitters. As Jessica Sager noted in "It's Tough to Step Up Without Steps: Building a Ladder for Family Child Care Providers," when FCC providers earn college degrees, higher wages and greater professional recognition typically doesn't follow. Yet despite the absence of external rewards, these providers have been committed to professional growth, often telling me, "I'm doing this for me, for children, their parents, and for my neighborhood." It is a consistent perspective that providers often express and speaks to Mary Tuominen's concept of community care work.[113] Similarly, Sonja Crum Knight, in an unpublished qualitative study, found that many providers are keenly aware of the connections between their professional growth and its impact on those they serve.[114]

Expanding the Conversation

With this said, though, I question whether the ECE field has become so focused on degree attainment that it's ignoring child care's changing context, particularly the steep decline in the FCC sector.[115] As a result, the field seems to be overlooking an opportunity to position FCC as a vital sector benefiting infants, toddlers, and the ECE system. The ECE field can continue debating the inherent value of degrees and whether they should be required, but all the while, the FCC workforce is shrinking. For many reasons,[116] those entering this sector aren't keeping pace with those exiting.

For one, expansion of pre-K programs[117] has increased the number of families who qualify for subsidized learning environments for their prekindergarten-aged children, resulting in many center-based programs competing with and losing families to school-based programs.[118] Centers are then left with the challenge of

either expanding their number of infant and toddler classrooms or closing their doors because, as cost models[119] reveal, this type of expansion is financially questionable. The decline of FCC settings and center-based options—and the absence of school-based choices—means the scarcity of infant and toddler child care is getting worse.

The ECE field's policy and advocacy agendas tend to omit FCC, despite the fact that, when last surveyed in 2015, approximately 75 percent of child care subsidy providers were home-based.[120] Based on this statistic, I'd argue the field has an obligation to revisit its stance on FCC and open itself to the possibility that FCC offers a solution for addressing infant and toddler childcare.

FCC providers and their networks[121] have what it takes to meet the demand. To realize this potential, though, the ECE field needs to temporarily shift its energies from questions of FCC degrees to those of FCC availability. Some may say I'm prioritizing quantity over quality. I'd say we have studied program quality for years and know what it looks like. After the field positions and reinforces the FCC sector as a long-sought solution to the shortage of infant and toddler care, it can circle back to discussions of provider qualifications and program quality. Debates on preparation, education, and status become more relevant when a pipeline exists for FCC providers to enter and thrive as part of ECE's workforce. Then answering the question of how the FCC sector fits into the ECE system becomes evident: the FCC sector is a "market niche" of qualified education entrepreneurs who meet the demand for infant and toddler care.

Questions for Further Exploration

The viability of this proposal requires additional study of the structure, impact, and value of FCC. The questions below invite examination of the FCC sector's pros and cons as a solution to infant and toddler care deserts[122]:

- Home-based learning environments challenge public narratives regarding educational settings most conducive to children's development. How does family child care differ from its center- and school-based counterparts in terms of (a) offering responsive caregiving that promotes infants' and toddlers' optimal development and (b) the ability to expand and sustain infant and toddler programs?

- Given the shortage of infant and toddler child care, in what ways do family child care business models differ from center-based programs when it comes to business development pilots in child care deserts?

- Women of color are disproportionally represented in the child care workforce.[123] They also are helping drive entrepreneurial trends.[124] How could repositioning the FCC sector address issues of racial equity and

change the narrative[125] associated with a history of women of color lifting up their own and other families and communities?[126]

- Some FCC providers are educators who want to own intimate learning environments. Others may be career changers seeking entrepreneurial options. How can the ECE field respond to this variety of professional training while heeding Bela Moté's warning in "Apples and Oranges: Family Child Care Homes Shift the Thorny Knot's Paradigm," to avoid reliance on solutions oriented to center- and school-based providers?

Moving into Action

- Convene conversations to examine how licensed FCC providers contribute to advancing child and family outcomes; include FCC providers.
- Apply brand-positioning strategies to shift public perception of licensed FCC.
- Encourage development of policy agendas that elevate the FCC sector.
- Organize networks to examine licensed FCC as a possible solution to the infant and toddler care shortage.
- Encourage higher education systems to recognize FCC providers as education entrepreneurs and reduce the barriers to their growth and development.

Safiyah Jackson, EdD, is the early childhood systems director at North Carolina Partnership for Children.

Apples and Oranges: Family Child Care Homes Shift the Thorny Knot's Paradigm

By Bela Moté

Many conversations around the professionalization of early childhood education (ECE) as a field of practice revolve around the triad of workforce directives to credential, better compensate, and diversify. However, I find these conversations tend to ignore the circumstances that family child care providers confront in this regard. If ECE continues to approach these expectations solely through the lens of center-based care, though, or by trying to force a center-based peg into the family child care hole, family child care (FCC) providers will continue to be slighted, along with the children and families they serve.

As CEO of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning on Chicago's West Side, I have gained an appreciation for how the underlying logic of ECE's thorny knot shifts in the context of family child care. As a field, we need to realize that a host of assumptions are embedded in the knot analogy that derive from the status of the center-based model. For example, when discussing compensation, we typically are referring to salaries and benefits. When talking about bachelor degrees, we usually are referring to ECE degrees. And when advocating for a diverse workforce, we mostly are thinking of individuals who wear the familiar hat of "educator." While largely the case for center-based sites, these assumptions overlook the fact that FCC homes are businesses.

The ECE field needs to expand beyond its center-based stance if it wants to ensure that solutions to its thorny knot increase access to high-quality ECE for children in family child care settings as well as in center-based programs. As Jessica Sager writes, family child care is an essential resource, in particular for economically vulnerable families that, for cultural or geographical reasons, prefer the intimate environment of home care for their child.

Several of the compendium authors, however, have conflated this sensitivity with an assumption that the field's thorny knot exists in similar, if not more acute, form in FCC settings. Sager, for instance, contends that FCC providers are unlikely to reap compensation commensurate to their degree, while Fabienne Doucet argues in "Is the Cart Being Put Before the Horse?" that a degree requirement will hurt diversity among FCC providers, especially for women of color.

I disagree with these assessments, though, because they rely on a narrow understanding of home providers. I have learned from leading an organization that has operated a family child care network for over two decades that, in fact, this delivery model has more flexibility than center-based programs to accommodate the field's growing decree for credentials and degrees, increased compensation, and sustainable diversity. But for this potential to be realized, home providers have to be understood as more than educators; their settings have to be acknowledged as small, independent businesses, and they have to be recognized as small business owners.

Recognition of the additional responsibility, however, requires a fuller accounting of what compensation means for home providers. Obviously, more than salaries and benefits are involved because the home setting involves revenues and expenses. This is where the network concept increasingly in vogue becomes key: a network model, also commonly known as a shared services model,[127] can leverage economies of scale, providing budget relief for items that would be analogous to capital expenses in a center-based setting. This model can also reduce or eliminate costs for marketing and recruitment; back-office equipment and support; supplies; trainings; and professional development, line item expenses easily forgotten if we ignore that FCC homes are businesses. A

network model can not only increase the revenue available to providers, it can also allow their businesses to expand and boast new offerings. It also allows the network's "home office" to solicit funding opportunities oriented towards economic and workforce development.

The implications of this broadened perspective apply to the thorny knot's credentialing and diversity threads, too. Many FCC providers, with Tracy Elbert being just one example, tout the importance of ECE degrees. Others enter the field with bachelor degrees in other fields, such as business or psychology, adding to the field's diversity. While the content of an ECE degree is important, I believe FCC providers offer proof that a requirement for bachelor degrees in ECE may represent another example of one-size-fits-all thinking that warrants revisiting. I would advocate instead for ECE bachelor degree programs with a business administration component for family child care providers and, as Josephine Queen suggests, course credit for experiential learning. This would allow providers to find their voices and identities as small business owners as well as educators.

When it comes to the field's thorny knot, I think ECE has two choices. It can recognize the distinctive context and potential of FCC providers or it can continue to ignore the sector's distinctions from its center-based colleagues. If the first option is chosen, we can expand opportunities to provide families who prefer home providers with quality options. And if the ECE field truly wishes to serve families no matter their program choice, including family child care voices as both educators and business owners will move this conversation forward.

Bela Moté is chief executive officer of the Carole Robertson Center for Learning in Chicago.

For Family Child Care Providers, Attaining a Degree Presents Unique Difficulties

By Josephine Queen

According to Nelson Mandela, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."[128] I agree. It's not only a powerful tool; it opens doors to endless opportunities. So it stands to reason that someone who spends her days educating young children should also have an education. But what does this entail? Is a four-year degree as presently designed the best indicator of being educated? Is its present structure conducive to further educating those of us educating and caring for children in family child care settings? I think not.

Tracy Elhert contends that "in-home child care providers need basic child development knowledge and training on developmentally appropriate practices." I run a family child care, and I have an associate's degree in child development, which I earned prior to starting my business. So I agree with her premise, but too

often the challenges this presents for practicing family child care providers are overlooked.

Consequently, Elhert and I disagree when it comes to believing that becoming educated is dependent on family child care providers investing in "more formal education." My resistance comes from knowing Elhert's aspiration is not easily attainable because of the costs associated with earning a degree and our sector's insufficient access to supports such as those described by Sue Russell. In my estimation, Elhert underestimates the impact of these variables in her advocacy for family child care providers with degrees.

The family child care providers I know tend to be working or lower income, living paycheck to paycheck. A formal education degree is financially out of reach for most of us. Some also are single parents who lack resources to pay for child care while attending classes. Plus, running a home-based business means few of us can carve out time to gain the required practical experience and requisite hours needed for degrees since, typically, working in one's own home child care under one's own supervision and tutelage is not credit-bearing.

Finally, as family child care providers, we are responsible for every aspect of our business, including purchasing equipment such as books, toys, furniture, food, and arts and craft and first aid supplies. Our evenings and weekends are spent preparing and organizing the learning environment for the next day. In terms of time and money, we are stretched thin.

Sue Russell writes about North Carolina's success in providing scholarships and support to early childhood educators, including family child care providers, and how this support transformed the education level of the state's workforce. Too often, though, family child care providers are not included in these kinds of initiatives. This is why organizations such as, All Our Kin[129] are needed. All Our Kin provides us customized training and workshops, mentors and support, and resources. But similar organizations are not nationally available.

One way for higher education to become more feasible for family child care providers, however, is by having our daily experiences recognized when exploring how to boost the education level of the early childhood education (ECE) workforce. Our experiences with children should count towards education degrees we either voluntarily seek out or are required to obtain. Physicist Richard Feynman perhaps best expressed the merit of experiences such as those in abundance in family child care settings when he stated, "you can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird....So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing—that's what counts."

We, as family child care educators, are immersed in the lives of the children we care for and teach. We know what they love to play with, which toys or activities they prefer, which projects they delve into, and which they steer clear of. We

know who loves to get muddy and dirty and covered in paint; we know which ones prefer to stay clean, which ones love bugs, which ones love water, and which ones cringe at the feel of grass between their toes. We adjust the learning environment and plan activities to reflect their needs and preferences. We know their parents' fears, concerns, and hopes, too.

Too often higher education institutions ignore these hard-earned insights. These experiences with children and what we learn each day from them deserve recognition in the form of credit hours towards attaining a higher education degree.

Albert Wat noted that "states and communities have helped teachers with diverse backgrounds obtain higher education by investing in strategies like peer support programs,[130] scholarships and grants,[131] articulation between two-year and four-year colleges, and ways to give current teachers credit for their experience and competencies."[132] Yet, too often, family child care providers don't have access to these opportunities. A standard expectation for the education level required of all early childhood educators, including family child care providers, would be ideal. But we need to have access to the same resources and funding provided to the rest of the ECE workforce. Course credit for the experiential learning that comes from directly interacting with children also needs to accompany formal classroom preparation.

A degree recognizing our formal education level is all well and good, but becoming part of children's lives needs to be recognized, too. I support the idea of family child care providers attaining higher education degrees, as long as the obstacles are acknowledged and appropriate supports are provided.

Josephine Queen is a family child care provider living in Connecticut.

In-Home Childcare Providers Need to Step Up to the Importance of Formal Education

By Tracy Ehlert

When in June of 2017, Albert Wat[133] wrote that a "four-year degree should be the standard for ECE teachers," I began digging deeper into my feelings about the early care and education (ECE) profession. I've concluded his assertion is correct and want to be sure it includes in-home early childhood educators.

I run an early learning program for preschool-age children in my home and hold a master of science in early childhood studies with a focus on teaching and diversity. Especially in light of Wat's assertion, my accomplishment should be a source of pride. Yet when sharing what I do for a living, I instead often feel belittled. After revealing my education level, I typically get a bewildered look and a response along the lines of, "Why do you need a master's degree to sit at home

and watch cartoons with kids?" because people assume that loving and playing with children defines my work.

Unfortunately, this presumption is not unique to those outside of ECE. In-home child care providers often express similar views. Too few of my colleagues understand it's not enough to just love children, change their diapers and clothing, feed them, and play with them. At the very least, in-home child care providers need basic child development knowledge and training on developmentally appropriate practices so, for example, three-year-olds are not seated in front of a worksheet and expected to sit still and complete it and taught so many academics during the day that they have little time to play. Further, we need to be knowledgeable about community resources, proper nutrition, first aid, program administration, communication with families, and more. Because we work alone, we assume every role involved in an ECE program.

Yet too many of us in the in-home based sector do not know these basics because we have not sought the formal education that would expand our knowledge base and alter our practices. While Head Start and pre-K programs increasingly are requiring their lead teachers to have bachelor degrees, based on conversations across Iowa where I live, including a recent survey conducted to inform new QRIS expectations for this sector, in-home child care providers are not following suit. Given what research[134] tells us about education's positive consequences, I'm stumped as to why in-home child care providers aren't interested in pursuing degrees.

As an in-home early childhood educator, I understand the logistical barriers. I run a full-time business during the day, work as a continuing education Instructor in the evenings and on weekends, serve on multiple committees, and volunteer weekly. I also have a husband and children with whom I want to spend time. Finding time to further one's education is a balancing act, and too few supports are available for in-home providers' formal preparation as early educators.

Further, as a middle-class mother with limited income to spend on school (and financial aid already maxed out from a previous degree), I understand the financial barriers as well. I also hear from colleagues that they are intimidated by the age gap between themselves and students who have just graduated from high school. Others contend they will soon be retiring and do not see value in furthering their education. And still others consider themselves experts because of their accumulated experiences and view urgings to take college courses insulting.

Finally, there's another barrier I understand only too well—the public's denigration of in-home child care providers. I routinely overhear myself being called "the sitter" or "the daycare lady." I'm often considered a glorified babysitter, despite the prominently displayed diploma parents see each morning while hanging up their children's coats.

For in-home child care providers to be recognized as the professionals so many of us claim to be, we must step up to what this designation requires and acquire more formal education. We must put in the time and possibly spend personal funds to prepare ourselves for the important work we do. Even if they are not as widely available as we might wish, Sue Russell's essay, "Education is a Game Changer for Women as Well as Children," makes evident that resources and supports are available to those of us ready to take this next step.

Children, families, and the ECE profession deserve better than the status quo. Stronger education guidelines should be in place for in-home child care providers. Although other options are available, I support a bachelor degree as the preferable choice because it provides a thorough understanding of the topics that are core to working with children.

When in-home child care providers become better educated, we will be better prepared not only to educate children but also their families, and to attract others to a field they would be proud to work in because we are respected as professionals. And maybe, just maybe, we would finally get the higher wages we deserve as well.

Tracy Ehlert is an in-home early childhood educator and the state representative for Iowa House District 70.

It's Tough to Step Up Without Steps: Building a Ladder for Family Child Care Educators

By Jessica Sager

Family child care educators play a critical role in our child care system. They often nurture our youngest, poorest children and children with the greatest barriers to accessing quality care.[135] And as Tracy Ehlert and Josephine Queen described in their pieces, they are eager to achieve high levels of education and credentials—to "step up," as Ehlert puts it, as early childhood educators.

However, family child care (FCC) is at a moment of crisis. Across the country, FCCs are closing at alarming rates.[136] And, as Queen highlights, family child care educators face particular challenges in obtaining formal education and credentials. They often work alone, caring for children 10 to 12 hours a day, making it difficult, if not impossible, to attend daytime classes. Limited financial resources too often make the cost of formal education out of reach. And available professional development opportunities tend to be offered only in English, a significant barrier to the large proportion of family child care educators for whom English is a second language. In short, most current offerings are not designed to work for family child care educators' real lives, effectively excluding them from participation--even as the field moves towards increasing education requirements--and exacerbating inequities in the early childhood workforce.

Perhaps the most challenging disincentive, though, is the limited recognition and compensation accorded FCC educators given their critical contribution to the delivery system of early childhood education (ECE). Few or no incentives exist to pursue the limited professional development and continuing education opportunities available to family child care educators. Additionally, what they can charge is driven by the economics of children and families in their neighborhoods, rather than their credentials. Consequently, FCC educators are unlikely to reap financial benefit from investing in their education. In the absence of career ladders that acknowledge and recognize continued growth—in contrast to what is available to their center-based colleagues—encouragement for advancing their education is further diminished.

In this landscape, staffed family child care networks, such as All Our Kin,[137] play a critical role[138] in offering ongoing learning opportunities to FCC educators. These networks offer professional development and training, coaching and mentorship, peer support, and leadership opportunities that make a difference in the quality of care[139] that FCC educators offer, their earning power, and their businesses' sustainability.[140]

On their own, however, staffed FCC networks are insufficient to meet two critical, and twinned challenges. First, many FCC educators seek to obtain formal credentials—specifically, college degrees—and while many staffed family child care networks offer training leading to the Child Development Associate credential, these networks are not degree-granting institutions. Second, FCC educators want and need pathways for continued growth and advancement on a scale beyond what small, staffed FCC networks can offer.

In All Our Kin's 2019 publication, "Creating the Conditions for Family Child Care to Thrive,"[141] we outline strategies for partnering with and supporting family child care educators across several key areas, including funding streams, licensing, business supports, and multisector engagement. We also share a number of workforce training and education strategies. We discuss how to design professional development systems that actually work for FCC educators' real lives; share recommendations on how to create pathways for competency-based credentialing and continuing education, leveraging partners like community colleges, that are accessible to FCC educators; and discuss the role that quality rating & improvement systems (QRIS) can play in incentivizing and supporting FCC educators in reaching the highest levels of quality.

Community colleges, for example, have long served as sources of innovation and creativity in designing educational approaches that work for adult learners, particularly learners who face barriers to access. Some community colleges offer training specifically tailored for early childhood educators.[142] These efforts are highly localized, however, and, in many cases, don't go far enough to alleviate FCC educators' burdens. Courses need to be offered at night and on weekends; located in communities where FCC educators live and work; delivered in

English, Spanish, and potentially other languages; and tailored, in terms of content, to FCC settings. Partnerships with staffed FCC networks can be one effective way to respond to these needs.

State QRIS can help create career ladders for FCC educators tied to increased responsibility and compensation. QRIS can draw on FCC educators' knowledge and expertise by engaging them as paid coaches who dedicate a portion of their time to mentoring others, either by visiting on evenings and weekends or by hiring staff to provide part-time coverage. This addition to QRIS would enable FCC educators who complete formal education and demonstrate high levels of program quality to be recognized publicly and recompensed for contributions to their colleagues' learning and development.

If we truly value equity in ECE, it's critically important to create opportunities that include family child care educators and the children and families that they serve. It's time to start designing systems—it's time to start building ladders—with family child care in mind.

Jessica Sager, JD, is the co-founder and CEO of All Our Kin and a lecturer at Yale University. She is a Pahara Aspen fellow and an Ashoka Fellow

Why Do Educators' Voices Matter in Conversations About the Field's Thorny Knot?

By Ariel Ford

An Introduction to the Theme of Early Childhood Educators

Three refrains dominate the seven pieces in this section. The first revolves around the absence of early educators' voices in the early childhood education (ECE) field. It's a cry for inclusion that is seemingly being ignored. Instead, the martyr-like, undercompensated early childhood educator working in underfunded programs mired in misaligned standards has become a field-wide trope used to cajole elected officials and foundation leaders to advance priorities. In the process, early childhood educators are positioned as beneficiaries versus actors in determining their fate and that of ECE.

Second, these pieces reveal tensions revolving around the push to create a more formally educated workforce, an endeavor too often hampered by teacher preparation programs grappling with integrating theory and practice, including for special populations such as children with disabilities and English language learners. And then there's frustration with policymakers who hold the authority and ECE advocates who hold the microphone and who together are complicating ECE as a field of practice.

The third refrain speaks to the disconnect between these writers' use of political rhetoric about ECE's value and the absence of alignment among the field's

science, policies, and practices. They question those in field's capacity to develop actionable solutions to tackle issues ranging from scaling programs that work, developing practitioners with skills needed for advocacy, and aligning resources with field-identified priorities. Yet to be examined, however, is why we have failed to promote early childhood educators' voices.

Expanding the Conversation

I think the answer to this question resides in the fact that ECE has developed,[143] and continues to develop, an infrastructure reliant on intermediary leadership, inclusive of roles such as state administrators, QRIS administrators, and heads of ECE preparation programs. Residing in local, state, and federal systems, this infrastructure is enabling a growing gap between early childhood educators and those with the authority to shape ECE's present and future. Few opportunities exist for early childhood educators to use their voices within ECE's multiple systems.

This reality brings us to the overarching question of whether the voices of early childhood educators matter in conversations addressing ECE's challenges. The answer seems obvious to me: those engaged in teaching and caring for children every day are the most knowledgeable about ECE as a field of practice and have the most at stake when it comes to its credibility. They, more than any of the rest of us, know what is and isn't working when it comes to program quality and effective practices.

I acknowledge that I am among those who will have to wrestle with diminished authority if early childhood educators are given more. Doing so, however, acknowledges our roles' differing contributions. Further, it's worth noting that unlike those of us whose work resides outside of classrooms, early educators typically are not beholden to existing systems, structures, or current political administrations when fulfilling their obligation to make early learning settings places for children's growth and development. In contrast, my role, and roles like mine operating in local, state, and federal systems, are subject to these pressures. We are expected to avoid disruption and instead sustain and enhance existing systems with slow and methodical quality improvements.

Those of us who are part of ECE's intermediary leadership structure are authorized to develop and execute programs and systems, determine priorities, and oversee field-wide change efforts without widespread or consistent input or feedback. Typically, early childhood educators in this context are called upon to share opinions and perspectives for the purpose of developing generalizations about the state of the system in question or for gathering high-level feedback.

As a result, early childhood educators are dependent on those with positional authority whose decisions impact not only ECE's meaning as a field but also their work and careers. In the process, their voices are being marginalized. The reliance on intermediary leadership is unintentionally reinforcing a paternalistic

system of authority in which those farthest away from the work hold the majority of power.

Many in the field, albeit slowly, have begun the work of countering its racial inequity.[144] Appropriately, we are beginning to position racial diversity and inclusion as non-negotiable. I propose that diversity of power in ECE decision making become a non-negotiable element, as well—that all levels within ECE adopt and work within a racial *and* power equity framework. The inclusion of power equity as a non-negotiable should help propel two results: a dramatic increase in the presence of early childhood educators' voices and assurances that systems are inclusive of diverse leadership and distributed authority.

I acknowledge that we will need to develop early childhood educators' leadership abilities as well as the field's overall capacity to effect the change being proposed.[145] Those of us in positions of authority, on the other hand, must confront the anxiety that may accompany the recalibration of power. Mobilizing early childhood educators' voices, though, will enable the development of systems receptive to their realities and responsive to emerging opportunities.

Questions for Further Exploration

Before we realize a future in which early childhood educators actively help lead and develop ECE as a field of practice, three fundamental questions about the intermediary leadership structure should be investigated: Who benefits from early childhood educators being omitted from conversations such as those initiated by the *Thorny Knot* blog series? Why haven't we developed early childhood educators' capacity to participate in, convene, and lead these conversations? And what mental models will those of us with positional authority have to change to realize this future?

Moving into Action

A sensible first step might be responding to this follow-up question: What should be done differently to authentically engage them? Those of us in positions of authority can begin immediately to examine the choices we're making and start re-positioning early childhood educators so they can influence conversations relating to ECE's purpose, the challenges of working in an increasingly diverse and complex social landscape, and the foundations of program quality and educator competence.

Secondly, higher education's existing structure can be reconfigured to offer fellowships in service to developing content and pedagogical expertise as well as field-wide leadership. Similarly, training and coaching structures can be re-designed to include mentorships that incorporate navigating social, economic, political and policy influences on the field and its practice. These efforts can help early childhood educators better understand the relationship of their role with

policymakers and advocates who, in the absence of educators' authoritative voice, occupy this void with assumed authority.

Resolving ECE's thorny knot demands more from all of us. I was an early educator in local and state systems and programs, and now I lead a mayor's office of early learning; I'm continually reminded that my aspirations for ECE, including those entwined within ECE's thorny knot, cannot be accomplished without the driving participation of early educators.

Ariel Ford is the director of Early Learning at City of Chattanooga.

Are Policymakers Reducing or Increasing Early Childhood Education's Inequalities?

By Sherri Killins Stewart

Frontline child care providers are a critical, perhaps the most critical, ingredient in ensuring a high-quality, high-performing early childhood education (ECE) service delivery system. Inequities impact not only children but also their communities and the choices available to families for supporting children's growth and development. Policymakers, advocates, and other decision makers have an obligation to acknowledge historical and current inequities that are influencing the effectiveness of policy decisions regarding the three topics covered in this series—providers' preparation and education, their compensation and status, and diversity and inclusivity in ECE. Otherwise, we are inadvertently undermining equitable opportunities for children and the adults who work with them.

Policymakers at all levels of government share a near-universal belief that the educational level of frontline childcare providers significantly improves the quality of children's care and education. Based on this belief, many policymakers have set ambitious goals and established programs to support providers' completion of higher education degrees. Many state legislatures have also passed laws or created policies requiring frontline providers to complete a bachelor's degree in order to be licensed, receive increased compensation, or advance in their positions.

However, when I was Massachusetts' commissioner of early childhood education, frontline childcare providers shared countless stories of their struggles to meet the challenges of work, family, and school. Almost to a person, they were proud of achieving a higher education certificate or degree; yet they saw little connection between this education and their daily work. Most also said their modest pay increases did little to compensate for long hours away from family and friends.

As policymakers, advocates, and other decision makers striving to advance frontline childcare providers' formal education, we had assumed that given the supports offered, providers would be able to seamlessly and effortlessly integrate what they were learning into their interactions with children and families. In hindsight, though, this thinking was shortsighted. We lacked understanding of frontline providers' programmatic, personal, and professional challenges. We needed a better understanding of the dynamic interactions among providers' preparation, education, and compensation, and the ECE field's diversity and inclusivity.

These three issues cannot be addressed in isolation. To move forward on these issues, though, we have to move beyond false perceptions. Listed below are four questions policymakers, advocates, and other decision makers have to confront when deliberating policies for addressing these interlocking issues in order to help avoid further workforce inequities and reduction of the field's diversity. Decision makers' privilege often contributes to erroneous answers to the following questions.

- Do you think frontline child care providers are choosing not to provide children the best learning environment for stimulating their growth and learning?

To combat this perception, those in the ECE field, and especially frontline childcare providers, have to be engaged in developing and implementing policies, regulations, and practices that impact them. The current workforce must be recognized for the value it brings, and messaging about the poor quality it is providing needs to be curbed.

These educators are often from the communities they serve. As policymakers, we not only do a disservice to our providers by minimizing their voices, but we miss out on insights that can lead to culturally and linguistically relevant policies and practices. Our usual approach has to change; we need to highlight the skills, knowledge, and abilities the ECE workforce needs and allow child care providers to participate in designing the strategies to achieve them.

- Do you think all frontline childcare providers have the same opportunity for employment, compensation, and education and are making choices not to advance their careers?

To combat this perception, it's necessary to understand historical and systemic barriers that prevent many in our frontline workforce from obtaining a quality basic education, higher education degree, and living wage employment. The voices of ECE's providers have to be included in policy conversation so they can share their struggles and concerns and identified barriers can be reduced.

- Do you think children and their families and communities all have the same opportunities?

To combat this perception, policymakers must understand and address the multiple inequities that lead to poor outcomes for children and families. Frontline childcare providers' educational attainment will not, by itself, significantly impact program quality or children's growth and development. Issues such as unsafe or unaffordable housing, limited access to quality health care, food insecurity, poor transportation, and educational systems' long-term failures create disparities and inequities in children's growth and development and for families and communities.

- Do you believe individuals have personal responsibility to meet requirements regardless of social context, position, or history?

To combat this perception, policies need to address systemic and systematic interventions so barriers experienced by African American and other diverse frontline providers can be addressed. These interventions need to benefit the ECE workforce as a whole. They also need to include targeted strategies based on the needs of specific populations such as African Americans and other groups.

Recognizing the false clash among the three issues being targeted by this series offers an important first step in creating a fairer and more equitable ECE service delivery system. Let's turn the elephant around and see the side frontline early childhood workers see to reduce not only inequities children experience but also their families and communities.

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Five Non-Negotiables Needed to Move Early Childhood Education Beyond Its Rhetoric

By Marica Cox Mitchell

What a time to be alive! As a NAEYC staff member conceptualizing and informing the direction of Power to the Profession,[146] a 15-member national collaboration defining and advancing early childhood education (ECE) as a profession, it's exciting to experience the synergy across the country as we advance toward becoming a unified, effective, and accountable profession. I do not, however, speak on behalf of NAEYC or the Power to the Profession task force. My perspective, as expressed below, draws from personal reflections about the complexities, frictions, and mistrust embedded in this discourse.

Two "keep it real" advocate groups routinely energize me—ECE workforce policy veterans and practicing educators. The veterans have experienced more than four decades of what they see as minimal progress and can quickly point to self-inflicted barriers impeding our progress. The practicing educators (including faculty and administrators) are living the field's identity and compensation crisis. They've lost patience with the field's seemingly never-ending rhetoric.

From ongoing conversations with these individuals, I've concluded that addressing ECE's thorny knot depends on grappling with what I've come to think of as five non-negotiables essential to the field's advancement as a profession.

1. **Advancing ECE as a profession requires creating a stable 1.0 version, inclusive of compensation, before building more visionary versions**.

As we embark upon building a unifying framework for an ECE profession, I believe its first iteration must be capable of lifting up the field across all sectors, while also paving the way for future, enhanced versions. For educators and administrators living daily with ECE's crisis, moving forward with a version 1.0 is imperative. They have neither the financial nor the social privilege to wait decades for a bold, future vision to materialize. They want a "right now" movement that guarantees compensation parity.

In contrast, my workforce policy veterans are driven by a more daring and visionary future. They've experienced too many incremental and isolated wins and want assurances that version 1.0 will be neither static nor regressive. They want the visionary seeds they've been planting for decades to be harvested. I think of them as the optimists Luis Hernandez describes in his piece, when he shares his cautions about unrealistic expectations for academic uniformity. Still, since their leadership has contributed to the field's considerable progress over the past decades, there's reason to believe their vision, however lofty, is attainable.

2. **Advancing the profession means naming inequities and using an equity lens for driving decisions about ECE's future as a profession.**

Organizing as a profession can lead to becoming insular and exclusive. In my review of organized professions, I've seen that reliance on social structures like higher education and state licensure can unintentionally and intentionally produce cultural, linguistic, and racial inequities. Consequently, advancing as a profession can be treacherous territory. The risks of decreasing ECE's diversity are real. As advocates, we must be prepared to name and disrupt structural inequities and ensure that targeted supports are in place to recruit and retain a diversity of people in the profession.

3. **Advancing ECE as a profession means we have to confront biases**.

We are products of the same racist, sexist, and elitist systems we are seeking to disrupt. This means we need to interrupt structural inequities external to ECE, as well as confront our own implicit and explicit biases. When, for example, I visit rural communities and observe that universities or practicum teaching sites aren't a few train stops away, I have to confront my city bias. Disparaging comments about Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential holders and associate degree graduates and their faculty expose a more global example of our field's elitist sentiments.

4. **Advancing ECE as a profession means being more intentional about policy and financing decisions within our control.**

"Can somebody just teach me how to work the system?" is what a frustrated practicing educator asked towards the end of a three-hour conversation about ECE's movement toward becoming a profession. Because we have some agency over systems that influence our work, we can—and should—be more strategic and intentional about ECE policies and funding decisions. For example, are we funding "industry recognized" degrees and credentials that are high-quality, portable, and stackable, or are we funding state credentials that may be more accessible but have minimal value in the wider market? Do the QRIS and pre-K systems we design and finance support the coaching and quality assessment industry while only minimally supporting educator compensation and working conditions?

5. **Advancing ECE as a profession means we respect and leverage the profession and profession-led standards and systems.**

In the research, policy, and practice triad, we must ensure that ECE's expertise is not marginalized. As Sherri Killins Stewart pointed out in her piece, policymakers need to challenge their assumptions about "frontline providers." While research and policy should inform practice, they, in turn, should be informed by our practices.

State and federal agencies intentionally leverage the standards and systems developed by professions. They don't spend limited public dollars duplicating (or worse, disregarding) profession-led accreditation systems or ignoring industry credentials. We can't denigrate profession-led systems or organizations and then expect ECE to be an influential player.

If ECE is to realize its aspirations to become a recognized profession, these five non-negotiables must undergird our decision-making. They highlight the complexities involved with moving forward as a profession and also identify the mental shifts we collectively need to make. To move beyond false choices, we must be willing to practice what we preach. If we want the public to adopt new

mental models about financing ECE, we too must be willing to shift our mental models.

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In the Rush to Improve Early Childhood Education, Don't Forget the Educators

By Michele Miller-Cox
Originally published in ***Education Week***

Parents know that children's early experiences greatly influence their success later in school and in life. While parents are young children's first and best teachers, they rely on early educators as partners in preparing their children for success. And when that partnership is strong, we have the building blocks for prosperous communities, states, and nations. As a result, states and communities across our country have started to raise the qualifications and credentials for early educators. That is a great thing—as long as the resources are in place to assist early educators with the real costs of preparation and professional development while the bar is being raised.

It takes more than love of teaching for a person to be an effective early educator. I started my career in child care after entering a secretarial degree program and landing a summer internship at a nonprofit that supported early childhood and Head Start programs. I became interested in going into early education but I didn't know the extent of the knowledge, skills, and expertise it took to be a top-notch teacher until I accepted a job at one of the highest-quality child-care facilities in North Carolina. There, teachers were expected to maintain high levels of skills and continuous professional development.

Working at such a high-quality facility required that I spend evenings and weekends attending trainings and sometimes taking college courses necessary to complete my company's required 66 in-service training hours per year. It wasn't easy. However, it became very rewarding when I became more intentional in the teaching strategies I used and saw the difference it made in the development of my pupils. Those experiences also made me realize that I needed to learn more, and that meant going back to school to earn degrees.

Developing foundational skills in young children is a complex job that requires competency and skill. That's why it is critically important to have standards for the lead early educators who are primarily responsible for fostering social-emotional and academic growth while overseeing the work of assistant teachers and paraprofessionals. Those who work with the youngest children must know how to build trust with children and families.

Teachers—whether they run a family child-care home or work in a child-care center—need to understand and abide by local rules and state regulations, develop and implement lesson plans, assess children's development, design curricula that's appropriate, and have a true understanding of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Code of Ethical Conduct, which provides a common basis for resolving the primary ethical dilemmas that early educators face. These skills and knowledge are not innate, any more than the skills and knowledge to design and build buildings are innate. Strong instructional programs must exist to help student-teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and expertise to become effective.

Many fear that raising qualifications for early educators will make the profession less diverse and no longer reflective of the children it serves. That is simply not true. In North Carolina, 44 percent of center directors and 47 percent of center early educators are people of color, according to a 2015 survey from the Child Care Services Association.[147] Nationally, a significant percentage of our profession consists of low-income women of color who are hungry for professional advancement and will seek out opportunities if we provide the pipeline and assistance to make higher education possible. If the resources are there, we can have diversity, a well-qualified workforce, and better outcomes for children and communities.

My experience running a child-care business in North Carolina shows that this is not impossible, as some suggest. I worked 12 hours a day and went to school at night. My family sacrificed, and my advancement was made possible by a system that made higher education possible. For example, the Child Care Services Association's T.E.A.C.H. early-childhood scholarship program—which offers a three-way partnership between the nonprofit, the scholarship recipient, and a sponsoring child-care center—paid for 80 percent of what it cost to earn my associate's and bachelor degrees while still running my business. It also reimbursed me for books, provided a travel stipend, supported release time for me to study and go to class, and provided a counselor to support my journey.

I also received support from a statewide initiative (WAGE$), which provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors, and family child-care educators working with children from birth to age five. The program is designed to increase retention, education, and compensation.

We need to expand these kinds of supports to provide the same resources and opportunities to all early-childhood professionals.

But it is not just funding support that early-childhood educators need to complete their education. Many also need people who can help them navigate the path to obtaining higher education, especially those for whom college and technology can be intimidating. Early educators will meet the call as long as there's a path

and a system in place that helps them achieve their aspirations to be the best possible teacher for the children placed in their trust.

By raising the qualifications and increasing professional development and compensation opportunities for early educators, our communities, states, and nation have much to gain. Children who come to elementary school with foundational skills that foster reading at grade level are on the pathway to be high school and college graduates and productive citizens.

Investing in early educators has a real return. And parents need early educators who know their children, see their potential, and know how to employ all the ways to bring it out. Children and families deserve nothing less—and we need to work together to make that happen.

Michele Miller-Cox is the executive director at First Presbyterian Day School in North Carolina.

The Field's Leadership Potential is Being Ignored

by Anne Douglass

Can you imagine trying to improve quality in healthcare settings without the input of doctors and nurses? Or strengthening cybersecurity without the participation of internet technologists? Yet this is what we typically do when discussing how to advance early care and education (ECE). We move forward without input or guidance from those most experienced in ECE: educators, center directors, and family child care owners who care for and educate children from birth to age five. What if, instead, we looked to early educators at all career levels for leadership and innovation?

It's no mystery why early educators are overlooked so often. Women comprise 93.4 percent of the ECE workforce, nearly half of whom are women of color. According to a report released last May[148] by the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin, 44 percent earn less than $10.09 per hour. Generally speaking, it does not matter whether women at this end of the socio-economic spectrum lean in, out, or sideways, they too often are not taken seriously.

I direct ECE degree programs at an urban public university. I also run a research institute that trains early educators and ECE business owners in entrepreneurial leadership. This work is exciting and challenging. But it is no less meaningful or engaging than my prior 20 years caring for and educating very young children as the owner of a home-based child care center, an early childhood educator, center director, and quality improvement coach. Nevertheless, my opinions on ECE are sought out much more frequently today than they ever were in my former roles.

I'm not the first author to highlight how early educators' competence and leadership is being disregarded. Other authors have described the dynamic by which caregivers of our future—early educators responsible for children from birth to age five—are casually and routinely underestimated. Anna Mercer-McLean, who directs a child care center, writes about hearing a family member describe her work as "babysitting." Home-based child care owner Tracy Ehlert, who hung her diploma for a master of science in early childhood studies next to her students' coat rack to ensure parents would see it, writes, "I routinely overhear myself being called 'the sitter' or 'the daycare lady.'" When respect is given, as Stacie Goffin has noted, it is often extended to the profession rather than the practitioner.

Valora Washington convincingly writes that solutions to the challenges now facing ECE must be guided by "respect for the workforce and intentional focus on equity issues." Nilsa Ramirez correctly observes that you can't have a conversation about reform without "the authentic voices of those who most are impacted—early childhood educators and the families they serve." And Washington further notes the irony that ECE's "approach to promoting a strengths-based paradigm about children and families often is not extended to educators."

In his aptly titled piece, "Let's Be Honest: It's About Sexism, Classism, and Racism," Maurice Sykes laments our near-universal failure to see the ECE workforce for what it is: creative, experienced, and resilient. Sykes attributes his success running a program for early educators seeking associate's degrees to seeing "enrollees as capable, competent, resourceful learners, some of whom, by dint of the birth lottery, had lived in poor neighborhoods, attended inferior schools, and, consequently, needed a good practitioner-based ECE higher education program."

Like many of the other authors, I work daily with early educators and child care business owners who reflect the rich diversity of the children and communities they serve and are eager to advance their knowledge, become more effective educators and administrators, and implement new practices to better support children and families. The Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation[149] (Leadership Institute) at UMass Boston, where I do this work, trains frontline workers in entrepreneurial leadership. ECE educators and business owners who are at the beginning, middle, and advanced levels of their careers learn the skills to develop solutions to challenges ranging from poverty-level wages and workforce turnover to the best ways to bring pedagogical research and innovation into the classroom. These are issues about which they have deep insight, and they are best positioned to offer ideas that should be tested. Importantly, family child care owners and providers, who are among the most marginalized of early educators, are full participants in this work. Indeed, a federally commissioned research project I conducted with three family child care

provider leadership Institute graduates found that they want to use their expertise and voices to strengthen practice within the field.[150]

As evidence of my thesis, instead of leaving the field[151] as so many early educators do, our graduates stay and mobilize leadership to drive change in the profession. They're opening new preschools,[152] influencing education policy,[153] testing innovations[154] to improve children's classroom learning, and achieving efficiencies in business operations[155] that enable them to invest in quality enhancements. The ripple effects have been immense. Graduates have influenced the teaching methods and mindsets of their colleagues and strengthened the care and learning of an estimated 5,000 young children in Massachusetts so far.

On the road to early education reform, one size does not fit all. But recognizing and cultivating practitioners' leadership capacity to build programs, design innovations, and advocate for change—and in general advance ECE as a field of practice— is essential to successful reform.

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The Work Beneath the Work: What We're Fighting About When We're Fighting About Our Profession

By Lauren Hogan

As most any couple will tell you, you're never actually fighting about the dishes. You're fighting about what doing the dishes says about how you're valued and respected. In Congress, likewise, and in our early childhood education (ECE) community, we're often not fighting about the thing we appear to be fighting about. Instead we are grappling with questions about motives and compromises. We're wrestling with questions about whose voices get to lead, get sidelined, and get dismissed. And we're confronting questions of control, fear, privilege, power, and trust. Let's call this the "work beneath the work."

As Congress struggles to find a way forward, and ECE attempts to detangle its "thorny knot," policymakers, advocates, and influencers are engaging with (or avoiding) that deeper work. But as early childhood advocates who must engage, it is imperative that we assume responsibility for the systems and sequences we design, especially those of us (and I count myself among them) who have, in some way and because of some unearned attributes, benefitted from one or many of these systems. We cannot allow our privilege to get in the way, as Killins Stewart posits that we do, nor blind ourselves, as Valora Washington references, to the ways in which our lack of respect for educators is made visible.

We must connect the dots between things such as Maurice Sykes' (accurate) assessment of a system rife with racism, elitism, sexism, and classism and Washington's concern that our "numbers adequately reflect the demographics of the children and families served among 'new' roles such as coaches, [etc.]" We must then take that connection to the next step by adding new details to questions such as one posed by Cox Mitchell so that we ask, "do the QRIS and pre-K systems being designed and financed support the coaching and quality assessment industry (which tends to be more highly-paid, more highly-educated, and less diverse) while simultaneously only minimally supporting educator compensation and working conditions (among a profession that is less well-paid, less well-educated, and made up of a greater percentage of women of color)?"

The answer to that question, added parentheses and all, is yes; and the point is that those of us who create and influence policy could do it differently. We could, for example, create quality rating and improvement systems that reverse the focus—that is, they create incentives that lean more towards increasing the compensation and working conditions of the frontline professional, and less towards the growth of the coaching industry. But typically we don't. Instead we call consequences of policies we create "unintended," even when they are predictable, or we bemoan results of the problems we've created for ourselves.

Why do we do this? What do we believe about educators doing this work that causes us, as advocates, funders, and policymakers, to design and promote systems that invest in systems and structures around the profession rather than in the profession itself? What is behind the "countless rule changes" that Tammy Mann references in "Preparing Competent Early Childhood Educators: Is Higher Education Up to the Task?" with their "unintended consequences too often generated for those on the frontlines of this work?" As early childhood advocates, our "work beneath the work" should be to ask questions such as:

Are these consequences actually unintended? Why don't we create QRIS systems that invest first and foremost in frontline educators? Why is it so hard to achieve articulation between associate's and bachelor degrees? And further: Who is benefiting from the way things work? Who is helped by a kind of controlled chaos?

The truth is that somebody always benefits. Most things don't just happen, no harm intended.

Michelle Alexander, in her seminal book, *The New Jim Crow*,[156] writes of efforts by "white elites to decimate a multiracial alliance of poor people"—in other words, to make sure that the people who should be banding together to fight a shared challenge instead are fighting each other. Sowing division is one of numerous strategies to halting change, and, as for our country at large, these strategies represent a threat faced by the ECE field.

If there's to be any hope of addressing them, these threats have to be understood. Here's just one example of how sowing division plays out: those who are demanding increased affordability of early learning programs get pitted against those demanding their increased quality. Those in the ECE field get sucked into making it seem this is the field's defining division and engage in internecine fights with each other instead of turning towards policymakers and holding them accountable for developing financing solutions that transcend the false schism.

It doesn't have to be this way. False choices can be avoided. But to stop fighting the wrong fights, we must seek out and welcome new voices, questions, experiences, ideas, and perspectives, especially from early childhood educators on the frontlines. Significant and sustained public investments can't be won without them. As Representative Ilhan Omar tweeted a few months ago, "We get what we organize for." So let's get clear on who we are fighting, what we're fighting about, and who we are fighting for. In other words, let's get to the work beneath the work.

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Values, Beliefs, and Institutions: What's Needed for Early Childhood Educators to Unwind ECE's Thorny Knot?

By Sara Mead

What does it mean to be a profession? That question runs as a through line for this blog series. Contributors have engaged one another in thoughtful dialogue about long-standing inequities along the lines of race, class, and gender that shape the current demographics, compensation, and working conditions of early educators; the importance of considering family and home-based child care providers in efforts to elevate the field; the need to increase compensation; and the need to seriously reassess current practices and quality in postsecondary and pre-service preparation programs for early educators. Embedded within these important issues, however, is another set of questions: What would it mean for early childhood education (ECE) to be viewed as a professional field? Should we want that (and at what cost)? And who in the ECE field should be viewed as a professional?

Public and policy dialogues about the ECE "profession" often focus on the "professionals"—the people who work in ECE settings, and the credentials, knowledge, and skills they hold. That makes sense: Research shows[157] that the individuals in ECE classrooms and the relationships they form with children and families are the most crucial component of program quality. And several posts in this series highlight the grave folly of making prescriptions for the ECE workforce

without engaging the experiences and perspectives of early educators themselves.

But it's also a mistake to focus exclusively on the professionals. Indeed, as this series powerfully demonstrates, values, beliefs, assumptions, and institutions are at least as central to defining a profession as the credentials of those within it. Thus, professionalizing the ECE workforce also requires articulating and grappling with the beliefs and values that should characterize professional ECE practice, and questioning whether existing institutions and delivery structures are consistent with the profession we would like to see.

A fundamental requirement for any profession is that the people working within it view themselves as professionals and share a professional identity that includes commonly held values and ways of thinking about their work and the world. As Tracy Ehlert notes in her piece "In-Home Childcare Providers Need to Step Up to the Importance of Formal Education," ECE cannot be viewed as a profession if early educators do not view themselves as professionals. Yet to date, the field has lacked a clear articulation of the values and mindsets that differentiate early educators from others who view themselves as professionals (and non-professionals). One crucial test for NAEYC's Power to the Profession[158] (P2P) efforts, therefore, will be whether it generates meaningful stakeholder buy-in around a common understanding of the skills, values, and mindsets that will define ECE's future as a recognized profession.

Professions, which I'm defining more broadly than P2P, must also have institutions that cultivate, sustain, and reflect their beliefs. For example, as several contributors to this series, including Marica Cox Mitchell, Tammy Mann, and Sally Holloway, have noted (and as Lisa Guernsey, Emily Workman, and I wrote[159] earlier this year) viewing early childhood educators as credible professionals will require significant changes to the institutions that prepare them. But postsecondary institutions aren't the only ones that need to change.

Elevating ECE's professional status also will require major changes in the organizations where early educators work. Organizational cultures affect how early educators view their roles, and working conditions[160] influence their ability to teach children effectively. Yet conversations about elevating the ECE workforce—including this compendium—rarely address the organization of ECE delivery or the culture and capacity of organizations that provide ECE programs. Many "mom and pop" small businesses and nonprofits that operate ECE programs unfortunately lack the capacity, resources, and internal infrastructure to support, develop, and retain a professional workforce. It's unreasonable to expect early childhood educators to practice as professionals if the organizations where they work are not organized as professional working environments.

Finally, Jason Sachs argued in "The Solution for the Workforce Dilemma is the Public Schools," that professionalizing the ECE workforce would be best

accomplished by bringing ECE under the umbrella of the public education system. As someone who believes in the value of diverse delivery and recognizes the shortcomings of our public-school system, I can't agree. But if the ECE field values a diverse ecosystem that encompasses a variety of private, non-profit, home-, faith-, and community-based programs as well as public schools, it must be willing to confront the weaknesses of existing delivery structures and rethink how to organize and support ECE's delivery. Strategies such as shared services alliances[161] and family child care networks, which strengthen the capacity and professionalism of ECE organizations and the individuals who lead them, must be part of any effort to professionalize ECE, but the field likely needs additional strategies that have yet to be developed.

Like many authors in this compendium, I believe that elevating the skills, prestige, and compensation of early educators is essential both as a matter of social justice and to enable our nation's children to realize their full potential. But credential requirements alone cannot accomplish this goal. The "thorny knot" that confronts ECE's workforce efforts is the product of values and beliefs in the field and broader society and is baked into the institutions and delivery structures at all levels. Untangling that knot, then, requires a willingness to interrogate our assumptions and beliefs and rethink existing institutional and systemic arrangements. This is neither easy nor comfortable. But if we value early educators and children, it is surely work worth doing.

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What About Early Intervention and Early Childhood-Special Education? Early Childhood Education's Knot Just Got Thornier

By Patricia Snyder

Early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) refers to two programs of supports and services for young children from birth through age five with or at risk for disabilities or delays and for their families. Since 1986, these two programs have been codified in federal statute under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act[162] (IDEA). They are now known as Part C, the early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, and the Part B preschool grants program for children three through five years of age with or at risk for disabilities. Despite a federal policy statement on the importance of inclusive early learning settings, this compendium has yet to address this group of educators and has overlooked their thorny knot and its intersection with early childhood educators' knot.

What might be surprising to many given EI/ECSE's[163] history is how interconnected its thorny knot is with Early Childhood Education's ECE's thread related to education and preparation. Although EI/ECSE programs existed

before 1986, state-level personnel qualifications or personnel development systems were not specified or mandated until 1991. When these two programs were established in 1986, practitioners from other disciplines serving young children with or at risk for disabilities were already affiliated with professional fields of practice (e.g., speech-language pathology, physical therapy, occupational therapy—even though they might not have had specialized competencies relevant for EI/ECSE). Yet, when it came to educator positions in EI/ECSE, one could work (and in many cases still can work) as a special instructor or preschool special education teacher without being fully credentialed or licensed when entering the workforce.

Consequently, tensions have existed about EI/ECSE practitioner competencies since 1986, whether teachers are serving as special instructors under the Part C program or as preschool teachers under the Part B preschool grants program. Thorny questions abound: Should these individuals be required to have a strong foundation in ECE, special education, or both? Is EI/ECSE a part of the ECE field, an auxiliary field of practice, an ECE subspecialty, or a special education subspecialty? Who should establish and oversee the credentialing of the individuals in each of the two programs? Should credentialing be different for those working in Part C versus Part B? How should preservice programs be designed to prepare individuals to meet the developmental and learning needs of the children being served?

I am a former practitioner who entered the EI/ECSE field in 1978 as a speech language therapist and subsequently obtained master and doctoral degrees in special education with EI/ECSE emphases. In addition to working as a speech therapist, I also worked as a home visitor in early intervention, a preschool special education teacher, and inclusive early childhood program administrator. Given these experiences, as well as my current involvement with personnel preparation, I maintain that the time has come to position EI/ECSE as a specialization within ECE as part of the latter's evolution toward becoming a professional field of practice. My assertion is based on years of experiencing the "separateness" that too often exists between ECE and EI/ECSE—a separation that is detrimental not only to both fields, but also to the formation of ECE as an inclusive field of practice capable of serving all young children and their families.

If we aspire to inclusion and the inclusive practices described in the 2015 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and U.S. Department of Education *Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs*,[164] those of us in these two, now relatively distinct, fields will need to come together to address complicated questions associated with which competencies are important for all early childhood educators to possess and which ones should be associated with an EI/ECSE specialization. In other words, what would distinguish a general ECE professional from an ECE professional with specialization(s) focused on supporting young children with or at risk for

disabilities, young children who are dual language learners, or young children who have experienced chronic adverse early childhood experiences?

I recently reviewed Power to the Profession's (P2P) Discussion Draft 2, Decision Cycles 3 4 5 + 6[165] and the draft EI/ECSE personnel preparation standards[166] developed by the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC/CEC). The significant and sustained efforts devoted to developing a stand-alone set of standards for EI/ECSE need to be acknowledged. These standards, as I understand it, will replace DEC/CEC's existing initial and advanced knowledge and skills specialty sets. What is not clear to me is if these updated performance-based competencies will be situated within a larger ECE professional field of practice (i.e., as if EI/ECSE were a specialization) or remain separate. It is unclear from the draft standards of P2P, as well as those of DEC/CEC, whether an independent pathway is being forged when it comes to EI/ECSE's preparation and education, even though the P2P draft document included promising statements about a unified framework for the ECE profession, including professional preparation, responsibilities, scope of practice, *specialization*, and compensation.

Incremental progress is being made to define ECE as a professional field of practice and to identify the need for specializations such as EI/ECSE. But, unless we move forward now to accelerate and further align ECE's and EI/ECSE's future trajectories, achieving aspirational statements about a unified ECE profession is unlikely to become a reality for this and future generations of early childhood educators.

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Getting Unstuck: What's Needed for ECE to Take a Big Step Forward?

By Laura Bornfreund

Spurred by the seminal 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Research Council,[167] a flurry of efforts are underway to revamp the early childhood education[168] (ECE) workforce. Bringing together the science of learning and knowledge of child development, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* identifies the competencies and supports early childhood educators need to provide high-quality learning experiences for each and every child. These efforts coincide with heightened public and political attention to families' access to high-quality child care and pre-K. This attention to both the supply of and demand for competent practitioners elevates the urgency of making meaningful change that spares countless families, especially those who have the least access to quality, the cost of navigating disjointed systems at a detriment to their own children's growth and development.

This urgency is needed because despite more than five years of ECE workforce research and innumerable national and local initiatives since the IOM report's publication, limited progress is evident. While some good and *different* things are happening, too many children lack access to high-quality ECE programs; too few early childhood educators have the knowledge and competencies for effective practice; and too often preparation programs fail to equip early educators with

sufficient knowledge and skills. At the same time, the field still struggles with recruiting, retaining, and compensating competent educators. And, while the field values and holds up that women of color are a significant part of the teaching force, too often they are working in the field's lowest paying jobs.[169]

Why ECE Remains Stuck

Putting aside the fact that meaningful change is rarely easy, I think three overarching issues keep ECE stuck: (1) a lack of field-wide agreement on ECE's direction; (2) fear of letting go of the status quo; and (3) an imbalance between the push for immediate action and implementation realities.

Lack of Field-wide Agreement Regarding ECE's Direction

Early childhood educators and other ECE stakeholders disagree on both basic and essential questions. What does the field call itself, for example? Throughout this compendium authors have used the terms *early childhood*, *early care and education*, and *early childhood education*. And there's still another complex question: is ECE's scope children birth to five or birth to eight? There's been a push toward defining the scope as birth to eight or P–3 during the last 15 plus years, but consensus on this front remains elusive. Not even the meaning of P–3 is shared: does the *P* refer to pre-K, prenatal, or something else? And, while elementary schools, local educational agencies, state education agencies, and other traditional K–12 stakeholders are recognizing they have a role to play, this recognition has yet to be translated into things being done differently in most school districts.

Still another area where an absence of agreement exists is early childhood educator roles. The Power to the Profession Task Force, led by the National Association for the Education of Young Children,[170] has moved the needle forward and has done important level-setting, but, we as a field have yet to fully come together in support. Resounding agreement is still lacking on not just practitioner roles but also on the knowledge and competencies needed for these roles; on how practitioners should be prepared for their roles; and on requisite qualifications and the extent to which they should—or should not—vary across settings and programs. Simultaneously, in states across the country, educational and qualification requirements for early educators, along with salary and benefits, are becoming increasingly variable depending on program setting and the entity holding them accountable.

Power to the Profession is but one workforce-focused initiative. There are others aimed at transforming credentials, preparation, and compensation for the workforce but may not be in alignment with each other. And, given lack of shared direction among those in the field and other stakeholders, it is timely to ask how national and philanthropic ECE workforce-focused initiatives fit together. Are they working in concert? Are they building on each other? Or, are they discordant?

Alongside the various initiatives focused on professionalizing ECE, states are also playing a dominant role in governing early educators by defining their competencies, roles, and qualification requirements. Given states' diverse socio-political contexts, considerable variation now exists across the U.S. in terms of the caliber of the ECE workforce. This fact underscores the complexity of the ECE landscape as well as the importance of persistence and realistic timelines for change; many moving pieces need to be harmonized over multiple years if a coordinated implementation plan for ECE is to be achieved.

The famous creator of Pogo, Walt Kelly, said, "we have met the enemy and he is us."[171] In the absence of coherent unity the field will likely remain stuck. While some state and community actors will succeed in changing policy and practice, it's questionable whether discrete actions will move us closer toward a well-qualified and well-compensated ECE workforce that is capable of delivering on the promise of early education, especially to children from the most marginalized communities.

Fear of Letting Go of the Status Quo

Those trying to explain ECE's current resistance to change say the problem often stems from insufficient resources. While a significant factor, given ECE's erratic and inadequate progress, the time has come to take stock of what is working well, what is not, for whom, and under what conditions. It's time to ask hard questions to determine what needs to be done differently, including the possibility of what needs to be halted.

This includes assessing long-standing programs and practices and fostering out-of-the-box thinking. Think of it this way: if we were starting from scratch to envision an ECE system that meets the needs of children, families, and educators, what would it look like? My response would be something much different from what is in place today.[172]

Imbalance Between the Push for Immediate Action and Implementation Realities

Change was needed yesterday. While we certainly don't want to let the perfect be the enemy of the good, the "good" is only worthwhile if it moves ECE toward an ultimate shared vision. Tinkering around the edges with well-intentioned initiatives such as tax credits and wage supplements will not resolve systemic problems; nor will they dramatically improve the lives of early child educators. Yet, these kinds of activities presently dominate the field. Widespread transformation takes more than a year, or five, or even ten. This reality has to be acknowledged by all of us who are involved with trying to advance ECE. Meaningful change requires multiple iterations accompanied by predictable and sustainable resources. If the field continues to settle for easy wins and what can be accomplished within short time frames, little change is likely to materialize.

Why Now is the Time for ECE to Get Unstuck

ECE has been gifted with an opportunity for big change. Here's my rationale for this belief: First, leaders at the state and national level are engaged in serious, research-based conversations about how to finance an ECE system that includes a well-qualified and adequately compensated workforce. Second, the quality of ECE programs has become part of the public conversation. Some states are engaging in important work to eliminate child care deserts, decrease the cost of quality care, improve the state of the workforce, and more. Not only are states passing legislation aimed at increasing children's access to ECE (which has been on a relatively upward trend for 20 years), but they are now also focused on improving program quality and developing creative responses for increasing educator qualifications along with higher compensation. For the first time, nearly all of the 2020 presidential candidates have something to say about ECE and most have a plan.[173]

But if all children and families are to have access to high-quality ECE programs that include a well-prepared, well-resourced, and well-compensated ECE workforce, it's essential to change the field's modus operandi. Needed, in my opinion, is a focused, three-pronged, coordinated approach. One prong, as discussed above, is agreeing on a description of early childhood educator roles and the knowledge and competencies required for them in conjunction with the education and qualifications for their attainment. Numerous efforts are underway, but in my opinion, the field has yet to come together. Absent unity, ECE's thorny knot may be further tightened instead of loosened.

Several authors in this compendium assert the need for transformation in higher education. I agree, and so another prong is developing a plan for transforming higher education for early childhood educators. More attention must be paid to improving their preparation and support as they pursue additional educational credentials. Although higher education reform is sometimes seen as impossible, it is absolutely necessary. Certainly many challenges exist, from rethinking requirements for remedial coursework and providing credit for prior learning to establishing pipelines for well-equipped faculty and valuing adjunct faculty. Pockets of promise exist across the country, including national T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarships, which provide dollars, mentors, and other supports for students pursuing two- and four-year degrees; efforts like CUNY ASAP in New York that provides wraparound services and academic support for students seeking associate degrees; and the Early Childhood Mentor Network in New Mexico that helps build the capacity for mentorship in current early childhood educators.

In scaling these ideas up and developing new ones it's important to keep laser focus on how they ensure students pursuing degrees are equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and experiences needed for teaching and caring for young children, especially our growing population of dual language learners.

A third prong then is recognizing ECE, with well-qualified and well-compensated educators, as a public good and in accordance developing a financing plan that includes significantly more public investment. While we are nowhere close to the level of financing needed, current public support and political interest suggest the time is ripe for advancing this aspiration.

In 2017, a group of researchers released *Cradle to Kindergarten,*[174] which offers a blueprint for expanding access to high-quality ECE programs for children who would benefit most. In 2018, as a follow-up to the *Transforming the Workforce* report, the National Academies of Medicine released *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education,* which put a dollar figure on what will be needed to provide high-quality programs with a highly qualified workforce along with recommendations for its achievement. Finally, recent research *The Early Advantage 2—Building Systems That Work for Young Children: International Insights from Innovative Early Childhood Systems* from a team led by Sharon Lynn Kagan[175] of Columbia University offers the chance to broaden our thinking by looking to how other countries successfully fund ECE systems.

Why these three issues need to be simultaneously addressed

As I've participated in national ECE meetings, visited states and communities, and listened to conversations over the past five years, it has become clear to me that progress is hindered when these three issues do not get addressed in concert with one another, when the persistence and long-term commitments necessary for systemic and adaptive change are ignored, and when practitioners are not included in the thinking from planning to implementation. Consider this: a state approves new competencies and licensing standards that require lead and assistant early educators to obtain BAs and AAs, respectively. The state also increases its investment to cover the tuition costs of those degrees. The state does not check in with institutes of higher education about existing capacity to prepare new degree seekers, however, nor does it provide incentives for institutions to help ensure student success. Without also investing in teacher compensation and ECE program quality *and* higher education reform, this state's initiative is inviting failure.

These beliefs are not mine alone. As Goffin notes in the opening piece to our compendium, multiple authors throughout discuss the momentum exists both within the field and beyond to advance ECE. However, more work awaits us.[176] It's essential to move beyond current thinking and to be prepared to tackle multiple change elements simultaneously in a strategic and coordinated way. A knot cannot be undone until you pay attention to all ends of its threads.

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