

Redirecting Early Childhood Education's Developmental Trajectory:

Becoming A Recognized Profession

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Why Now?

Reason #1

- **The Field's Knowledge Base Is Expanding Exponentially – But We're Unevenly Informed About What Currently Is Known.**
- **Consequently, A Widening Gap Exists Between The Field's Knowledge Base And Its **Collective** Practices.**

Why Now?

Reason #2

- **Increased Expectations Exist For What We Do BUT We're Not Meeting Them.**
- **Consequently, While ECE Is Gaining Credibility It's Practitioners Are Not.**

Why Now?

Reason #3

- **Decision-Making Authority For Early Childhood Educators' Practice Has Shifted.**
 - **External Expectations For ECE As A Field of Practice Are Being Re-Conceptualized, Including Child Outcomes Expected From Our Practices.**
- **Consequently, We're Not Driving These Changes — Instead, We're On The Receiving End.**

Why Now?

Reason #4

- **Local And State Governments And Philanthropy Are Becoming Ever More Involved in ECE.**
- **Consequently, While An Investment Up-Side Exists, A Down-Side Also Exists — A Decrease In Self-Determination As A Field Of Practice.**

Why Now?

Reason #5

- ECE's "Clientele" Are Becoming Increasingly Developmentally, Geographically, Racially, And Ethnically, Family, Language, And Community Diverse.
- Consequently, The Complexities Of ECE Pedagogy/Practice Are Increasing.

Why Now?

- **Reason # 6**

- **Too Many Children Are Losing Ground.**
- **Consequently, Too Many Children Are Not Accessing Their Potential.**

The Result?

ECE Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- What's Expected From ECE.
- How Its Outcomes Get Determined.
- What Teaching And Learning Looks Like In ECE.
- Children's Experiences In Early Learning Settings.

The Consequences?

- **Confusion re ECE's Purpose.**
- **Increased Programmatic And Systemic Fragmentation.**
- **Uneven Performance And Results.**
- **Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.**
- **An Ineffectual Infrastructure.**
- **Increased External Intervention.**

Hopes For This Presentation

Increased Understanding Of:

1. Professions As A Cohesive, Unifying System That Can Redirect ECE's Developmental Trajectory & Transform It As A Field Of Practice.
2. Distinction Between **Fixing** Present Challenges And **Creating** A Different Future For ECE As A Field Of Practice — One Capable of Fulfilling ECE's Promises To Children And Families.
3. Why Change Should Start From The Inside Out.

Hopes For This Presentation

- 4. How Systemic Change Differs From Current Approaches To Change.**
- 5. Recognition That We Aren't Doing Our Best For Children.**

Ultimately, I Hope Your Thinking About ECE As A Field Of Practice And Its Future Possibilities Are Stretched — That You Are Energized About Our Opportunity.

A quick explanation of terminology —

A ***field of practice*** refers to a loosely connected cluster of occupations and professions — separately and collectively — whose work revolves around related interests, activities, and purposes.

A quick explanation of terminology —

A **system** is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time.

[Donella Meadows, 2008]

Forthcoming: Professional/Professionalism “As An Adjective”; Professions “As A Noun”

Ground Rules

— Why They're Needed

To Begin:

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

[John Goodlad, 1990]

Hold On Tight.

- **This Means ECE Is Not Yet A Profession Even Though We Routinely Call It Such.**
- **Recognized Professions Are Systems With Required Criteria, And ECE Hasn't Yet Chosen To Meet Them.**

Thus The Question Emerges —

**To Reform Or *Re-Form* ECE As A Field
Of Practice?**

What's The Difference?

“We Have Been Trained To Think Of Situations That Are Inadequate To Our Aspirations As Problems.

When We Think Of Them As Problems, You Are Taking Action To Have Something Go Away: *The Problem.*

When You Are Creating, You Are Taking Action To Have Something Come Into Being: *The Creation.*”

[Robert Fritz, 1989, p.11, italics in original]

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

Think About It

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

These Myriad Efforts Lack A Clear And Shared Destination And Further Contribute To ECE’s Fragmentation.

To Reform Or **Re-Form ECE?**

**ECE Needs An Agreed Upon
Destination**

**My Answer To Where We Should Be
Heading?**

**ECE
As A Competent And Respected
Profession**

Typical Meanings For “Professional”

- **Paid vs. Amateur**
- **Nicely Dressed**
- **Reliable, Dependable, Respectful**
- **Good At What One Does**
- **Prepared For What One Does**
- **Presence Of Deep Knowledge Or Expertise**

- **Market Or Employer Driven**
- **Service For Hire – Employers & Consumers Can Hire Whomever They Want**
- **... And “Other Duties As Assigned”**
- **Individually Focused vs. Collectively Oriented**
- **Sometimes Externally Regulated Or Monitored**
- **Certificates, Degrees, Apprenticeships Increase Occupational Skill And Marketability**

Occupations

**ECE Presently
Structured As An
Occupation**

Four Pillars Of Professions

A Unified, Cohesive System of Public Accountability

**A Shared “Noble”
Purpose**

**Roles, Scopes
of Practice, &
Practice
Competencies**

**Formal Preparation
Prior To Entry Into
The Profession**

**Self-Governance
Tied to Profession’s
“Noble Purpose” &
Standards of
Practice**

Remember The Definition Of A System?

A **system** is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time.

[Donella Meadows, 2008]

**Interconnections Among Professions'
Four Pillars Form A System Whose
Behaviors Results In Prepared,
Competent, Accountable Professionals.**

**— Regardless Of Program Setting,
Financing, Or State.**

- The Adjective **Professional** Often Gets Confused With **Profession** as a Noun — And With Non-Professionalized Occupations.
- Professions Are Differently Structured Than Non-Professionalized Occupations **Because They Shoulder A Different Obligation To The Public And Those Who Are Recipients Of Their Practices.**
- Professions Are Purpose-Driven, Professionally Governed, Coherent Systems Of Preparation, Practice, And Accountability.

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- **The Question Of Who Will Be In And Who Will Be Out Often Is Asked Of Me.**
- **This Question Usually References Who Will Be In The Profession And Who Will Not Be Included.**

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- **Here's How I Approach This Question —**
- **How Will It Be Determined Whose Children “Are In” And Whose “Will Be Left Out”?**

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- **Each And Every Child Should Have Access To Competent Teachers And Effective Early Learning Experiences.**
- **Each And Every Family Should Have Confidence In The Caliber Of Their Child's Teachers.**
- **Each And Every Taxpayer Should Feel Assured Their Financial Support For ECE Supports Good Results For Children.**

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- If We Share This Aspiration, It's Time For Us To Take A Stance And Move Beyond Attempts to **Reform/Fix** ECE — To Move Beyond Actions That Foster Uneven Improvements.
- It's Time To **Re-Form** ECE As A Field Of Practice — To Form It As A Professional Field Of Practice Capable Of Fulfilling Its Potential For Each And Every Child.

It's Time To Redirect ECE's Developmental Trajectory

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

- **The ECE System Is Behaving In Accordance With Its Structure.**
- **But These Behaviors Aren't Benefitting Children, Families, And The ECE Workforce — Or ECE's Prestige As A Field Of Practice.**

Rerouting ECE's Developmental Trajectory Requires Change — Starting From The Inside Out

- **Voluntary Strategies Foster Uneven Practitioner Competence.**
- **ECE Is Becoming Increasingly And Unnecessarily Complex And Burdensome To Navigate And Reform [And **Re-Form**].**
- **Layered Interventions Are Creating Further Fragmentation — Intensifying Capacity Issues, And Deflecting Focus And Resources From Practitioner And Program Effectiveness.**

But Here's The Wrinkle

“There Is No ‘System.’ We All Talk About It As If It’s Something That Exists, Almost Like It’s An Independent Entity, But We Are The System.”

[Peter Senge, 2015. Italics added.]

To Reform Or **Re-Form** ECE?

- The Only 'Way Out' Of ECE's Systemic Inadequacies Is To **Re-Form** The Current ECE System.
- To **Re-Form** ECE's Structure So It Behaves As A System Tailored To ECE's Aspirations And Responsibilities.

Rerouting ECE's Trajectory Requires Us To Start From The Inside-Out:

- **To Recognize ECE's Obligation** To Children And Their Families And Raise Its Bar As A Field Of Practice.
- **To Assume Responsibility** For The Competent Practice Of Early Childhood Educators And Resulting Consequences For Children's Learning And Development.
- **To Structure ECE As A Professional System** To Realize Consistency In Practice and Results Across Sites And Program Types.
- **To Become Accountable** As A Field Of Practice.
- **To Provide Stewardship Of ECE** As A Field Of Practice — i.e., Become Self-Governing.

- **Re-Directing** ECE's Future Requires Us To:
- Prioritize The Field's Obligations to Children and Families.
- Shun *Reliance* On Public Policy For *Defining* Our Purpose And Structure.
- Change Our Goals For The ECE System and Change Ourselves And Our Institutions So ECE Can Behave Like A Profession.

- ***Rerouting ECE's Developmental Trajectory To Become A Profession Is A Leadership Manifesto.***
- **It Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, Or Incrementally Improve What Isn't Working.**
- **It Argues For Deep System Change That **Re-Forms** ECE As A Field Of Practice.**

Why It Matters?

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

Why It Matters

If We Don't Change Course, We're Going To End Up Where We're Heading.

Is That Okay?

We Can Do Better As A Field of Practice.

Not Only Because Others Are Calling For It —

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



**CAUTION
DEFINING MOMENT
AHEAD**

By Answering What Defines and Bounds ECE As A Field of Practice,

- **ECE Will Become A Unified Field Of Practice.**
- **Teachers And Other Roles In The ECE Profession Will Be Consistently Prepared And Competent In Practice Regardless Of Program Setting.**
- **ECE Will Become Recognized And Respected For Its Specialized Knowledge And Practice.**
- **ECE Will Be More Capable of Recruiting, Better Compensating, and Retaining Well-Prepared Practitioners.**

By Answering What Defines and Bounds ECE As A Field of Practice,

- **Families Will Have Increased Program Choices For Their Children.**
- **The ECE System Will Have Greater Clarity And Coherence.**
- **Children Will Have Increased Prospects For Realizing Their Potential.**

- We Have The Energizing Prospect Of Changing The Future For Children And For ECE By **Re-Forming** ECE As A Field Of Practice – Starting From The Inside Out.
- Systems Change When We Change Individually And Collectively.

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

- **Re-Imagining** ECE As A Profession
Requires Focusing Attention On Not
Only The Caliber Of Our Work, But Also
On The Lives Affected By Our Work.
- A Profession Is Premised On Its Vital
Contribution To The Public And
Requires Dedication To Fulfilling That
Obligation Through Its Preparation And
Ethical Commitments.

Needed:
Willingness to Step Forward
For ECE's Future

**Will We Define ECE As A Field Of Practice
Or Allow Others To Do It For Us?**

Moving ECE Toward Becoming A Recognized Profession

- **Engaging In Systemic And Adaptive Processes Of Change Is Not Straight Forward Work.**
 - **Because It Starts From The Inside Out, Kicking Off A Campaign To Convince And Induce Others To Drive The Change Is Not The Answer.**

Moving ECE Toward Becoming A Recognized Profession

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

**“There’s nothing in a caterpillar that tells
you its going to be a butterfly.” [R.
Buckminster Fuller]**

Becoming A Recognized Profession

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

Becoming A Recognized Profession

- The Systemic Task Is Ensuring The “Mending Process” Also Advances The Work Of **Re-Forming** ECE As A Recognized Profession.
- No Single Right Answer Exists For How Best To Fulfill Our Aspirations.
- Answers To Every Question About Our Future Can’t Be Known At The Start Of The Journey.
- We’ll Have To Learn To Live With Uncertainties And Conflict – And To Benefit From Them.

- **We Can Become A Recognized Profession By**
 - **Deepening Understanding Of Professions “As A Noun.”**
 - **Engaging In Intentional Conversations About The Future We Want For ECE [Conversations With Intent.]**
 - **Specifying Our Purpose and Obligations(s) to Children’s Learning and Development .**
 - **Distinguishing ECE And Its Specialized Practices From Other Professions.**
 - **Changing The Goals Of ECE’s Present System.**
 - **Addressing ECE’s Leadership Development Gap.**

From Studying Profession's I've Learned

- **A Pre-Existing Road Map To Becoming A Profession Doesn't Exist.**
- **Getting To Our Destination Will Be An Unpredictable Journey.**
- **The Pathway Will Be Figured Out Along The Way.**

From Studying Professions, I've Learned:

- **Confronting Competing Values Involves Choices And Compromises.**
- **Professions Evolve As Their Science Progresses And Their Contexts Change.**
- **Following Preparation, Continuing Professional Development Is Integral to Professional Competence.**

- Remember —
- *Redirecting ECE's Developmental Trajectory To Become A Recognized Profession Is Presented As A Leadership Manifesto.*
 - It Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, Or Incrementally Improve What Isn't Working.
 - It Argues For Deep System Change That **Re-Forms** ECE As A Field Of Practice.

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

**Children And Families
Are Counting On Us**

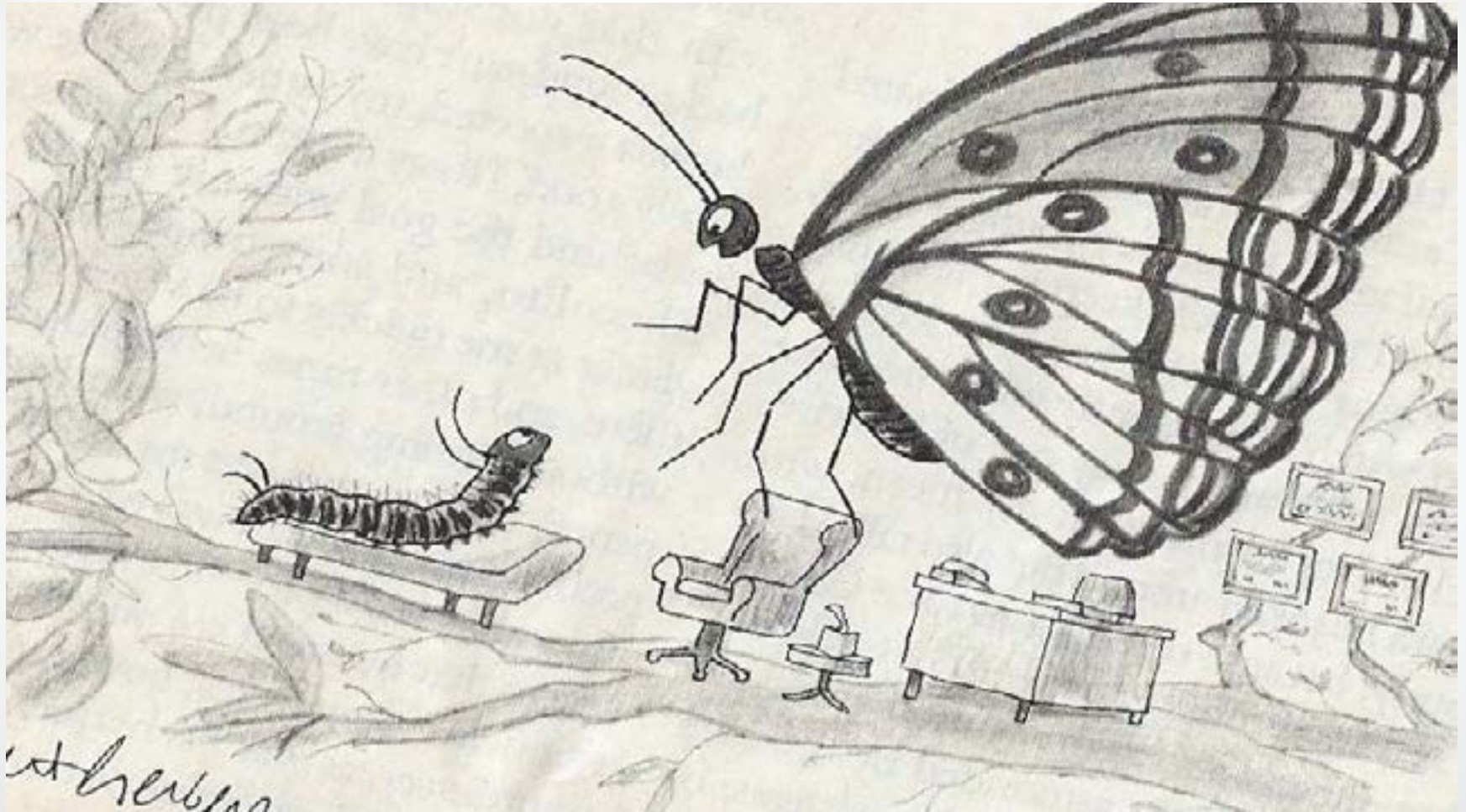
**Change Your Thoughts
And You Change Your World.**

[Norman Vincent Peale]

- **The Developmental Journey Will Be Challenging — But It's Achievable**
- **BUT Only If We Start Engaging From The Inside Out To Reset ECE's Developmental Trajectory To Become A Professional Field Of Practice.**

“The Thing Is, You Have To Really Want To Change.”

The New Yorker, May 26, 2014



**We Have To Believe In Ourselves And The
Significance Of ECE's Specialized Knowledge
And Practice.**

Things Don't Have To Stay The Way They Are.

**"The Most Difficult Thing Is The Decision To Act.
The Rest Is Mere Tenacity." [Amelia Earhart]**

“Rain Begins With A Single Drop.”

**[response of a Saudi Arabian women on the pronouncement
that women would be allowed to drive]**



DON'T BE
AFRAID OF CHANGE.

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**It's About The Children
&
ECE's Credibility As A Field Of
Practice**

There's So Much Possibility.

The Ball's In Our Court.

Slide Intentionally Blank

Questions?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0>

[8 minutes]

Starting The Journey: Conversations With Intent

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

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

They Are Intentionally Designed Conversations That Activate Action To Advance ECE As A Recognized Profession.

Conversations With Intent

- 1. They Pave The Way For Collective Action Aimed At Restructuring ECE As A Field Of Practice.**
- 2. Help Us Become More Self- And Collectively Aware.**
- 3. Discover Options Not Yet Apparent For Creating ECE As A Professional Field Of Practice.**

Three Possible Questions To Explore

Select One

- 1. What Of ECE's Past And Present Is Most Important to Preserve?**
- 2. What Is Not Receiving Sufficient Attention As A Field Of Practice? Why Might That Be?**
- 3. What Are Current Occupational Strengths That We Can Build On To Move ECE Forward As A Professional Field Of Practice?**

Next ---

What Are The Unique Knowledge And Skills That Should Define ECE As A Professional Field Of Practice?

What Makes This Expertise Distinctive From Other Child-Serving Professions?