

Rethinking Early Childhood Education's Developmental Trajectory

Becoming A Recognized Profession

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Ground Rules

Why Have This Conversation Now?

Reason #1

- The field's practice knowledge 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

- Intensified expectations exist for what we do BUT we're not meeting them.
- Consequently, while ECE is gaining credibility, its practitioners are not.

Why Now?

Reason #3

- Decision-making authority re: early childhood education has shifted.
- Expectations for ECE as a field of practice are being externally driven, resulting in ECE's re-conceptualization, including the outcomes expected from its practice.
- Consequently, we're **not guiding ECE's future** — instead, we're on the receiving end.

Why Now?

Reason #4

- Local and state governments and philanthropy are becoming ever more preoccupied with driving ECE's agenda.
- Consequently, while an investment up-side exists, so does a down-side— **diminishing self-determination.**

Why Now?

Reason #5

- ECE's "clientele" are becoming ever more developmentally, geographically, racially, ethnically, family, and linguistically diverse.
- Consequently, early childhood educators must be knowledgeable of increasingly sophisticated pedagogy.

Why Now?

■ Reason #6

- Too many children are losing ground.
- Consequently, too many children aren't realizing their potential.

The Result?

ECE Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- What's expected from ECE as a field of practice.
- How ECE outcomes get determined.
- What teaching and learning look like.
- Children's experiences in early learning settings.

The Consequences?

- **Confusion re ECE's purpose and identity.**
- **Uneven practices and results for children and their families.**
- **Increased programmatic and systemic fragmentation.**
- **Weakened internal leadership capacity.**
- **An ineffectual infrastructure.**
- **Increasing external intervention.**

- **This is important!**
- **I'm not trying to bend your will to my viewpoint, nor to convert you to the righteousness of my point of view.**
- **Becoming a professional field of practice requires a conscious decision because rerouting ECE's developmental trajectory involves deliberate choices.**
- **A sustainable, shared vision won't be forged if this decision is approached as a top-down or rushed consensus building process.**
- **Consequently, I'm hoping to make a case sufficiently compelling about ECE's present and future possibilities that you leave primed and eager to continue our conversation.**

More Hopes For This Presentation

Increased understanding of:

1. Professions as a unifying system that can resolve ECE's fractures and establish an integrative identity.
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.

More Hopes For This Presentation

Increased understanding of:

- 3. How systemic change differs from problem-solving approaches to change.**
- 3. Why the decision-making process needs to start from the inside out.**

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]

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

Niccolo Machiavelli

**I've chosen to take this risk
because of what's at stake
if we don't decide to change.**

- **Downgrading children's possibilities.**
- **Marginalizing ECE's potential as a field of practice.**
- **Side-stepping ECE's integrity as a field of practice.**

“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 that meet required criteria, and ECE hasn't yet decided to meet them.**
- **We have yet to lay proprietary claim to ECE as a professional field of practice.**

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 — too often with transitory impact.

These myriad efforts lack a clear and shared destination and contribute to ECE’s fragmentation.

To Reform Or Re-Form ECE?

ECE needs a destination.

We've three options:

1. Continue accommodating **the status quo**.
2. Reform ECE's occupational status with increased intentionality **[Professionalize]**.
3. Re-form ECE as a field of practice so it becomes a recognized **Profession**.

You Realize, Though, Don't You

That ECE is going to continue to change?

In question is who will lead the change.

And if us, what's the change we want?

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 responsible**
- **Sometimes externally regulated or monitored**
- **Certificates, degrees, apprenticeships increase occupational skill and marketability**

Occupations

**ECE Presently Is
Structured As A
Loose Occupation**

Four Pillars Of Professions

A Unified System of Public Accountability

**A Shared “Noble”
Purpose**

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

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

**Self-Determination
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 systemic infrastructure whose behaviors result in competent, responsible professionals prior to being recognized as early childhood educators.

— Regardless of program setting, financing, or state.

- The adjective **professional** and verb **professionalizing** often get confused with **profession** as a noun — and with non-professionalized occupations.
- Recognized professions are purpose-driven, self-determining, coherent systems of preparation, practice, and public accountability.
- Professions are differently structured than non-professionalized occupations **because their professionals shoulder a different obligation to each other, the public, and those who are recipients of their practices.**
- And once licensed to practice, they become accountable to the public for their practices.

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 included in the profession and who won't.**

Want To Know How I Approach That Question?

- **How will it be determined whose children “are in” and whose “will be left out” when it comes to learning with competent early childhood educators?**

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

- Each and every child should have access to competent early childhood educators and effective early learning experiences.
- Each and every early educator should feel prepared and eager to fulfill her/his responsibilities.
- Each and every family should have confidence in the caliber of their child's educators.
- Each and every taxpayer should feel assured their financial support for ECE supports good results for children.

- **The ECE system is behaving in accord 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 Changing From The Inside Out

- Voluntary strategies are fostering 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

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

- The only 'way out' of ECE's systemic inadequacies is to **re-form** the current ECE system.

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

- It's time to move beyond reforming ECE — To move beyond actions that foster uneven improvements.
- It's time to **re-form** ECE's organizational structure so it behaves as a system tailored to ECE's aspirations and responsibilities.

Rerouting ECE's Trajectory Requires

- **Recognizing our responsibility** to children and their families and raising the bar as a field of practice.
- **Structuring ECE as a system** capable of realizing consistency in practice across sites and program types.
- **Providing stewardship of ECE** as a field of practice.
- **Accepting public accountability** for the competent practice of early childhood educators and our practices' consequences for children's learning and development.

Re-Directing ECE's Future Will Require Us To

- Have a destination.
- Identify and prioritize the field's responsibilities to children and families.
- Change the goals shaping ECE's system so early childhood educators can become publicly accountable for their competence.
- Shun *reliance* on public policy for *defining* ECE's purpose and structure.

- ***Redirecting ECE's developmental trajectory needs to become a shared Leadership Manifesto.***
- **To move us beyond repairing, cushioning, or incrementally improving what isn't working.**
- **To push us to confront the need for deep system changes that re-form ECE as a field of practice.**

Why It Matters?

- By not answering its field-defining questions, ECE is:
 - Allowing children to spend their days in programs of uneven safety, quality, and effectiveness.
 - Allowing ECE to be narrowed to an early intervention rather than a practice capable of extending each child's possibilities.
 - Denying ECE recognition for having specialized expertise.
 - Making it harder to create coordinated systems of service delivery, policy, and financing.
 - Creating leadership voids 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.

- **Systems change when we change
individually and collectively.**

- **Re-Imagining** ECE as a profession requires focusing attention not only on the caliber of our work, but also on the lives affected by our work.
- Professions are premised on their unique and vital contribution to the public's well-being.
- They require collective dedication to fulfilling that responsibility through preparation, ethical commitment, and accountability.



**CAUTION
DEFINING MOMENT
AHEAD**

- **Engaging in systemic and adaptive change is not straight forward work.**
 - **Kicking off a campaign to convince and induce others to drive the change is not the answer.**
 - **Neither is a typical consensus building process.**

**Needed:
Willingness to step forward
for ECE's future.**

“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

- **No single right answer exists for how best to fulfill our aspirations.**
- **Answers to every question about the future can't be known at the start of our journey.**
- **We'll have to learn to live with uncertainties and conflict—and to benefit from them.**

**Can I
Truly
Make A Difference?**

Do I invest in the world I'm in?

Or the one I want?

UBS

Here's The Answer

It's both.

Advancing Toward Becoming A Recognized Profession Will Require:

- **Ongoing reflection re what we need to change about ourselves in order for ECE to move forward.**
- **Deciding what we aren't willing to loose as a field of practice and what we can let go.**

- **Living simultaneously in two “spaces.”**
 1. **Reforming ECE:** Mending the present by relying on short term accomplishments (vs. quick fixes) that move ECE toward its destination.
 2. **Re-Forming ECE:** Co-creating ECE's future as a recognized profession.

Becoming A Recognized Profession Will Require:

- Deepening understanding of professions “as a noun.”
- Taking collective ownership of the problem and seizing our opportunities.
- **Re-forming** the ECE system’s present goals and elements.

From Studying Professions, I've Learned

- A pre-existing road map to becoming a recognized profession doesn't exist.
- Getting to our destination will involve an unpredictable journey.
- Confronting competing values involves choices, compromises, and for some of us, losses.
- Consequently, the pathway will be figured out along the way.

From Studying Professions, I've Learned:

- **Professions evolve as their science progresses and their contexts change.**
- **Consequently, following initial preparation, continuing individual and collective development, plus field-wide leadership are integral to professional competence.**

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

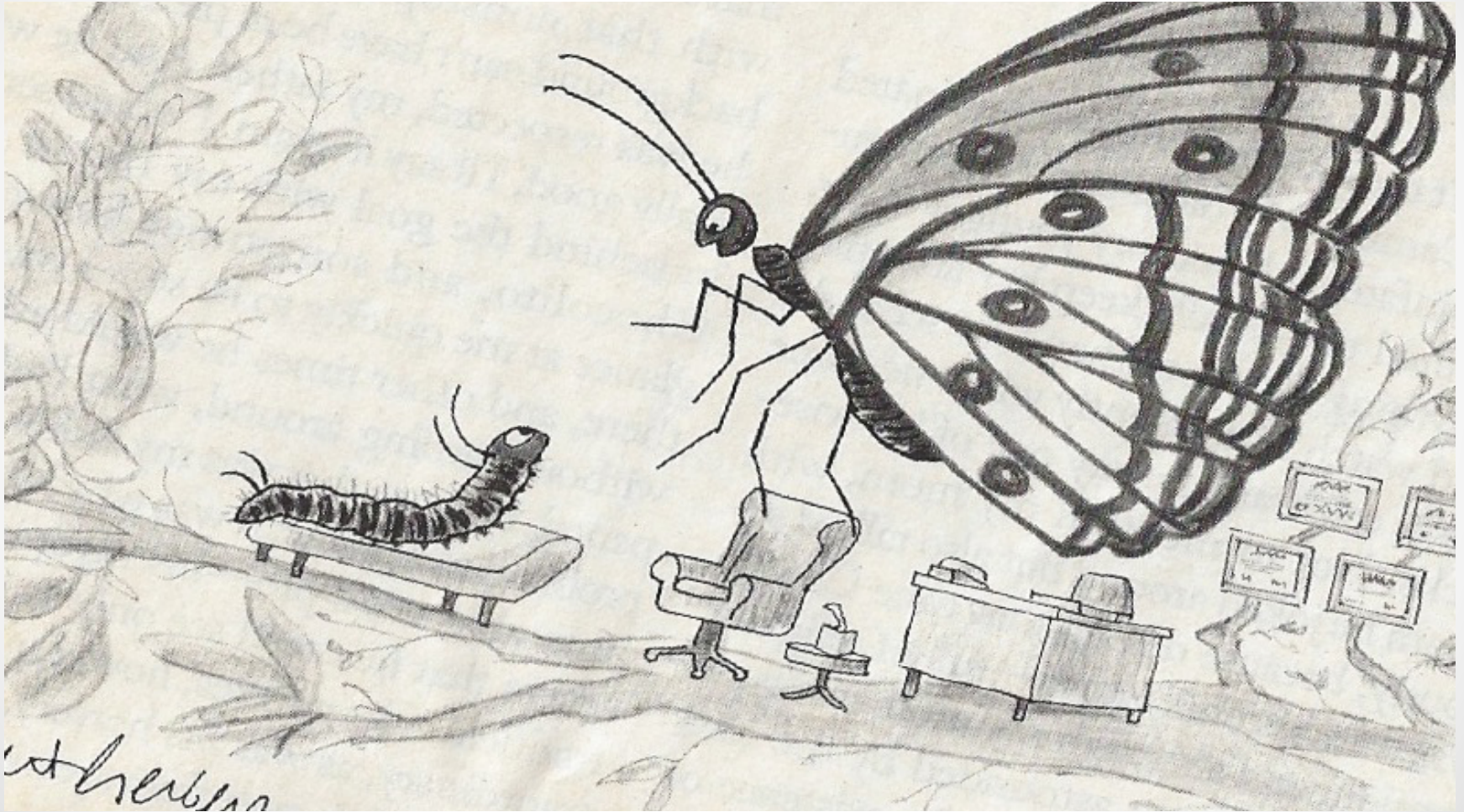
**Children And Families
Are Counting On Us**

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

[Norman Vincent Peale]

“The 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



DON'T BE
AFRAID OF CHANGE.

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Remember

**It's about the children.
It's about ECE's credibility.**

We've So Much Possibility.

The Ball's In Our Court.

Thank you!!

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Slide Left Intentionally Blank

<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 for field-wide engagement that activates action to advance ECE as a field of practice.

Conversations With Intent

- 1. Pave the way for collective action going forward.**
- 2. Develop self- and collectively awareness.**
- 3. Create shared meaning.**
- 4. Reveal options not yet apparent for advancing ECE as a field of practice.**
- 5. Provide a field-wide leadership develop opportunity.**

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said. “One can’t believe impossible things.

I daresay you haven’t had much experience,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why sometimes I’ve believed in as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Through the Looking Glass, Ch. 5

Conversations with Intent

As you engage, keep in mind:

- **“A shift in thinking is the essence of transformation.” [Peter Block, 2016]**
- **There are no right answers.**
- **Our opinion are.... Opinions — Valid opinions but not fact.**

Conversations with Intent

- **Be willing, though, to suspend your opinion so you can “hear” what others are saying.**
- **Be curious about others’ thinking.**
- **You’re not being asked today to give up your opinion or position. You’re being asked**
 - **To consider whether your opinion might be worth revisiting.**
 - **If you decide that ECE should re-envision its developmental trajectory, you do so with the understanding that your opinion matters to ECE’s ability to move forward.**