

# *A Third Way Forward: Advancing ECE As A Professional Field Of Practice*

*NAEYC Professional Development Institute*

*June 6, 2016*

*Stacie G. Goffin*

*Kyra Ostendorf*



# What's In Store

- Opening Introductions
- Starting the Conversation
- Dare to Disagree – a Ted Talk
- A Third Way Forward for ECE
- Advancing As a Professional Field of Practice: What System Changes Do You Think We'll Find Most Challenging?
- Power to the Profession

# Starting the Conversation

- What are attributes of a profession?
- What practices make ECE a specialized field of practice?

# Dare to Disagree

## A Ted Talk

[https://www.ted.com/talks/  
margaret\\_heffernan\\_dare\\_to\\_disagree?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree?language=en)

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# A Third Way Forward -- To Begin

- Early Childhood Education is a fragmented field of **practice** – reform efforts attend primarily to the field’s fragmented financing, delivery system and policies vs. fragmentation of its **core function**.
- The Consequence is
  - Confusion re: Field’s Purpose.
  - Increasing Assortment of Policies & Standards Governing ECE.
  - Uneven Performance.
  - Increasing Variety and Range of Funding Streams with Varying Sustainability & Requirements.
  - Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.

# To Begin

- Result: Field's Work and Its Trajectory Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- Who establishes the outcomes expected of ECE.
- What the public expects of us.
- What teaching and learning looks like in ECE settings.
- What it means to be a child in an early learning program.

# To Begin

- Despite Our Protestations, It's Not True that ECE Isn't a System.
- ECE Is A System – It's Just Not One Functioning The Way We Want.
- ECE's Systemic Behaviors Reflect the Purposes and Elements Generated by the System's Current Structure .



# The Missing System In ECE Systems Development

- ECE's Fractures as a Field of Practice Need to be Eliminated.
- Current Approaches Further Fracturing the Field.
  - Voluntary strategies not leading to practitioners *collectively* capable of competent practice.
  - ECE becoming increasingly and unnecessarily complex and burdensome to navigate and reform.
  - Layered interventions creating still further fragmentation – intensifying capacity issues, and deflecting focus and resources from practitioner and program effectiveness.

# A Third Way Forward for ECE

*We are Advocating for  
ECE as a Field Of Practice to:*

- Assume **responsibility** for the competent practice of practitioners and its results for children's learning and development.
- Formally **organize itself as a profession** to realize consistency in practice across sites and program types.
- Become **self-governing** as a field of practice and shun **reliance** on public policy for **defining** the field's purpose and structure.

# A Third Way Forward

## This Call

- Moves beyond efforts to repair, cushion, or incrementally improve what isn't working.
- Argues for deep system change to unify ECE as a field of practice and elevate its practice.

# A Third Way Forward

It's Time to Rethink Continued Expansion of the Field's  
Compensatory Infrastructure

It's Time to:

- Become a recognized profession organized by a unified system of preparation, practice, and responsibility tailored to ECE's aspirations and responsibilities.
- Become a self-governing field of practice.
- Galvanize equitable compensation based on professional parity.

# A Third Way Forward For ECE

Will Redirect ECE's Trajectory By:

- Holding us accountable as **A Field Of Practice** for competent practice of practitioners and agreed upon contributions to children's learning and development.
- Restructuring ECE **As A Field of Practice**.

# It's Time For Change From The Inside Out

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## It's Time For Us To

- Acknowledge our complicity in ECE's present situation.
- Acknowledge practice as ECE's core function.
- Become collectively responsible for quality of field's practice.
- Develop and exercise field-wide leadership to maximize field's competence and contribution to children's learning and development.

“A vocation (occupation) is not a profession just because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such” (John Goodlad, 1990).



# The Missing System in ECE Systems Development

Organizing as a Professional Field of Practice

Answers Questions Of:

- Purpose.
- Responsibility – For what will ECE hold itself accountable?
- Uniform Preparation Standards.
- Scopes of Practice.
- Governance

# BTW: What's A Profession?

## Typical Meanings of “Professional”

- Paid vs. amateur
- Respectful
- Completes a job with skill and competence
- Provides reliable, competent service
- Knowledgeable
- “Just plain good”

# Occupation

- Market- or employer-driven
- Service for hire – consumers/ employers can hire anyone they want
- “And other duties as assigned”
- Individually (vs. collectively) oriented
- Sometimes externally regulated or monitored
- Certificates, degrees, apprenticeship associated with increased occupational skill and market viability

# Profession

- A field-unifying systemic structure organizes the field of practice
- Occupationally controlled preparation, certification, and practice expectations
- Credentials required for entry & career mobility
- Defined boundaries & scope of practice
- Licensure required for practice – recognizes specialized knowledge and skills
- Unique knowledge & skills serve a “noble” purpose/further a significant social purpose
- Those being served rely on professional exercise of clinical judgment
- Field-wide leadership

# Why It Matters

## ECE's Future Will Vary Depending

On Whether:

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

# It's Our Turn To Be Change Agents For ECE

## Professionalizing ECE As Field Of Practice

- Injects decisive break with field's usual ways of "doing."
- Elevates teaching young children as a distinctive professional practice and defines our work as a profession.
- Creates the chance to focus on compensation issue as one of professional parity.

It's Essential to ECE's Integrity As A Field Of Practice.

This Should Be **Our** Work.

It Shouldn't Be Left To Others.

Our Future Shouldn't Depend Upon Federal, State-By-State & Community-by-Community Decision-Making.

We Can Step Forward Together  
&  
Shape What Change Looks Like  
**OR**

PREPARE OURSELVES TO BE FURTHER CHANGED.

# This Is A Defining Moment

One That Will Define The Identity and Competence  
of ECE As A Field of Practice



# It's Up To Us

## –Individually and Collectively–

To Step Forward and Assume  
Responsibility As A Field Of Practice

To Become Accountable for Preparing Competent Practitioners to  
Deliver On the Field's Promise.

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# What Will We Find Most Challenging?

- *What makes this issue so challenging to address?*
- *What's holding us back as a field of practice from addressing this issue?*
- *What has to change in our thinking if we're going to successfully resolve this issue as a field of practice?*