

Power to the Profession

Decision Cycle 1: Professional Identity and Boundary Consensus Draft

Introduction

Skilled, supported and knowledgeable early childhood educators provide high-quality early childhood programs. Low compensation undermines that quality and diminishes the benefits to children, families and our economy. In order to advance early childhood education as a profession and effectively receive significant and sustained investments, early childhood educators and stakeholders must come to agreement on some foundational elements of the profession, held regardless of state or setting.

All established professions are built upon a shared purpose, common identity, and agreement on the unique responsibilities, characteristics and ethics of their members. From this foundation, a profession can build pathways for preparation, requirements for inclusion (entry or sustained membership), a clear scope of practice, differentiated roles within the profession, standards, and individual accountability. Equally important, a defined profession can build a stronger case for public investments and support. This consensus paper defines the purpose, responsibilities, and unique identity of the early childhood education profession.

Power to the Profession is structured in a series of eight [decision cycles](#). The profession identified in this decision cycle, Decision Cycle 1, will be taken through the following seven cycles of the Power to the Profession process, inclusive of the competencies, specializations, competency attainment, qualifications and pathways, recommended compensation structure, accountability and quality assurance, and required support and infrastructure. Essentially, we commit, in this initial time period, to advancing, promoting, influencing, and governing the profession we identify in Decision Cycle 1.

Guiding Principles to Drive Task Force Decisions:

The following guiding principles have been agreed upon by the National Task Force for managing *their* discussions and decision making process.¹

1. We commit to conducting our work to the benefit of each and every child and their family.
2. We will intentionally and equitably advance a profession that reflects the diversity of the children and families the profession supports.
3. We will define the profession based on roles and responsibilities and the mastery of specialized knowledge, skills and competencies, and accountability to its standards regardless of settings.

¹ Note that these guiding principles drive the Task Force decision-making process; these are not guiding principles for the early childhood education profession.

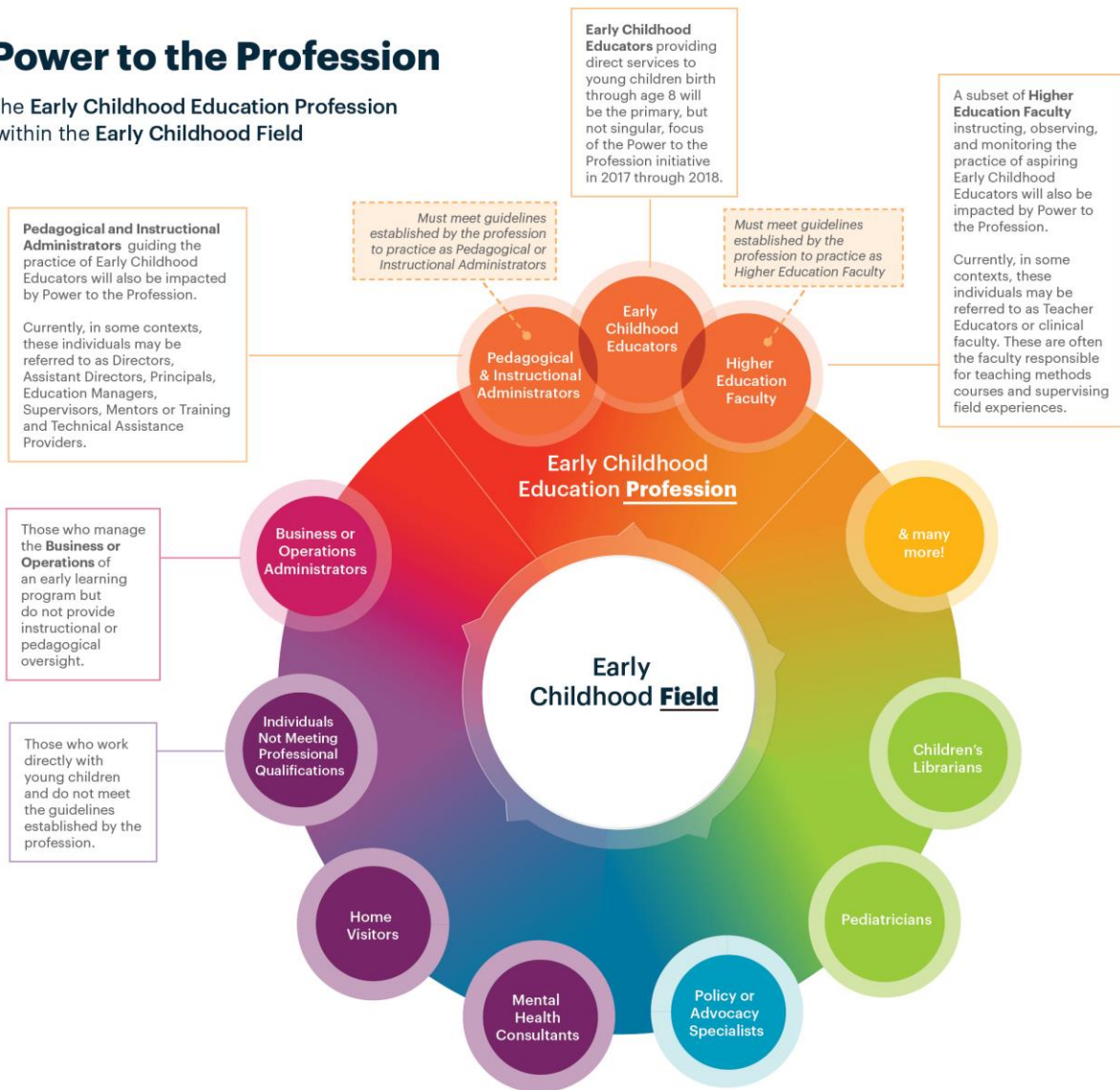
4. The voices of the profession will lead our deliberation.
5. We will take into account what exists and imagine what could be.
6. We will ask questions and strive to understand.
7. We will rely on science and research and use evidence.
8. In building a unified profession, we will acknowledge the commonalities among professions.

The Construct: Detangling the Profession and the Field

Supporting the learning and development of young children requires complex, demanding, and valuable work that is performed by many individuals in many occupations. It is important to recognize and value the complementary, yet distinct role of each profession and occupation. Early childhood educators care

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The Early Childhood Education Profession within the Early Childhood Field



for *and* promote the learning, development and well-being of children birth through age eight in all early childhood settings. They meet the qualifications of the profession and have mastery of its specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies.

The Early Childhood Education Profession:

Members of the Early Childhood Education profession include individuals who meet the guidelines established for the profession and who are prepared to be accountable for all the responsibilities outlined in the draft recommendation below². These individuals are called Early Childhood Educators. They are defined by their mastery of specialized knowledge, skills and competencies and accountability to the standards of the profession. (ex. Code of Ethics).

Power to the Profession will develop systems and policies that advance, promote, influence, and govern Early Childhood Educators, regardless of setting. It is anticipated that multiple levels of Early Childhood Educators will be defined in 2017-2018 to reflect varying levels of responsibility and autonomy to practice independently.

Additionally, Power to the Profession will focus on: (1) those who teach, monitor and guide aspiring Early Childhood Educators in professional preparation settings, such as higher education programs, and (2) those who provide supervision and instructional or pedagogical leadership to Early Childhood Educators in early childhood program settings. It is anticipated that individuals in these roles must be prepared as Early Childhood Educators before assuming leadership responsibilities. Therefore, decisions made to define Early Childhood Educators will influence how individuals in these roles are positioned in the context of the early childhood education profession.

The Early Childhood Field:

The early childhood field includes a number of different roles and individuals who are not accountable for *all* of the responsibilities outlined under section titled Roles and Responsibilities of the Early Childhood Education Profession and/or individuals who choose not to or cannot adhere to the guidelines established by the profession.³ Individuals in the field that do not assume the responsibilities and accountability defined for the Early Childhood Education profession or who choose not to meet the professional guidelines established can be valuable partners, but they are not considered members of the profession. We will seek opportunities to collaborate with and support these individuals.

Examples of related occupations and professions in the early childhood field include mental health consultants, social workers, child psychologists, home visitors and others who are not accountable for *all* of the responsibilities outlined under Roles and Responsibilities of the Early Childhood Education Profession and who may be prepared within an allied profession. In addition, individuals may be employed in roles that are not required to meet the profession's guidelines and who choose to not

² Established through Power to the Profession

³ Established through Power to the Profession

adhere to them.⁴ These individuals are part of the field but not the profession. Employers or funders may require that individuals serving in roles in the field outside the profession are Early Childhood Educators (as defined above), but that is at the discretion of the employer or funder and doesn't make the role part of the profession. For example, a home visiting program may require home visitors to be Early Childhood Educators, but that doesn't make all home visitors part of the early childhood education profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed Name of the Professional: Early Childhood Educator

Proposed Name of the Profession: Early Childhood Education Profession

Proposed Role and Responsibility of the Early Childhood Education Profession:

The Early Childhood Education Profession cares for *and* promotes the learning, development and well-being of children birth through age eight to establish a foundation for lifelong learning and development⁵. This foundation for learning is built through reciprocal relationships between Early Childhood Educators and the children they serve. Reciprocal relationships require attention to family and child diversity – including race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, immigrant status, family structure, special needs, and learner characteristics – which is one of the multiple influences on children's development and learning.

Members of the Early Childhood Education Profession are prepared to be accountable for the following responsibilities⁶:

1. Planning and implementing intentional, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promote the Social-Emotional Development, Physical Development and Health, Cognitive Development, and General Learning Competencies of each child served⁷
2. Establishing and maintaining a safe, caring, inclusive, and healthy learning environment

⁴ Established through Power to the Profession

⁵ Influenced by UNESCO definition: <http://en.unesco.org/themes/early-childhood-care-and-education>

⁶ Influenced by Head Start definition of classroom teacher: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/pd/fsd/All%20Staff/Sec648AStaff.htm>

⁷ *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Age 8* organized the domains of child development with the recognition that the domains are interrelated; See Figure 4-1 of the report.

3. Observing, documenting, and assessing children's learning and development using guidelines established by the profession
4. Developing reciprocal, culturally responsive relationships with families and communities
5. Advocating for the needs of children and their families
6. Advancing and advocating for an equitable, diverse and effective early childhood education profession
7. Engaging in reflective practice and continuous learning

The responsibilities, as well as accountability to those responsibilities, are consistent across all early childhood education settings that support young children birth through age eight.