

A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development

A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children

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Introduction

For more than 60 years, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has worked to promote high-quality early childhood programs for all young children and their families. Two major strands of activity support this goal: (1) facilitating the professional development of individuals working for and with young children birth through age eight, and (2) improving public understanding and support for high-quality early childhood programs.

NAEYC's efforts have helped to create growing recognition of the importance of high-quality early childhood programs to our society and an increasing demand for services. Nonetheless, serious barriers remain that undermine access to high-quality services for all young children. There is increasing recognition that systemic approaches are required to address these barriers. A growing number of states and communities are employing comprehensive planning efforts to improve their early childhood care and education systems. Although these efforts vary considerably by state and community, there is typically recognition of the following key elements (NASBE, 1991; Melaville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993; Morgan et al., 1993; Galinsky, Shubilla, Willer, Levine, & Daniel, 1994; Kagan & the *Quality 2000* Essentials Task Force, 1994):

1. a holistic approach to the needs of children *and* their families that stresses collaborative planning and service integration across traditional boundaries of child care, education, health, and social services;
2. systems that promote and recognize quality through licensing, regulation, and accreditation;
3. an effective system of early childhood professional development that provides meaningful opportunities for career advancement to ensure a well-qualified and stable workforce;
4. equitable financing that ensures access for all children and families to high-quality services; and

5. active involvement of all players—providers, practitioners, parents, and community leaders from both public and private sectors—in all aspects of program planning and delivery.

NAEYC, working in conjunction with many other groups, is addressing each of these issues. NAEYC's leadership has been especially important in defining quality standards for programs for young children and for early childhood professional preparation programs. NAEYC standards for programs for children include its accreditation system and standards for high quality in early childhood programs, developmentally appropriate practice, and appropriate curriculum and assessment. NAEYC's National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development fosters the development of a comprehensive, articulated system of professional development for *all* individuals working in *all* early childhood settings, recognizing that individuals will pursue different career paths and will bring different experiences, resources, and needs to the preparation process.

NAEYC believes that efforts to promote a high-quality system for early childhood professional development can be a catalyst to successfully address barriers to high quality for all young children and their families. As greater consensus is gained regarding the specialized skills and knowledge needed for effective early childhood practice, there will be greater expectations and demands for such knowledge and practice, requiring a corresponding increase in support for adequate financing of program resources—including staff compensation commensurate with qualifications and responsibilities.

Accordingly, NAEYC has developed the following conceptual framework that identifies key principles of an effective professional development system embedded within the larger system of effective early childhood service delivery. The framework includes several components. It begins with a statement of need that describes the current diversity of early childhood service providers and preparation opportunities and outlines the assumptions upon which this framework is built. The second component uses the analogy of a "lattice" to describe the professional knowledge, performances, and

dispositions connected with the early childhood profession's diverse roles, levels, and settings. The third component describes key elements regarding the provision of professional development opportunities. The fourth and final component describes guidelines for compensation that link increases in professional development and improved performance to increased compensation.

This framework is intended to guide decision making related early childhood professional development. It may be used by individuals making decisions regarding their own professional development, by early childhood programs making personnel decisions and policies and designing in-service training, by institutions of higher education and other community-based programs involved in the provision of early childhood professional development opportunities, and by policymakers and others concerned with the provision of early childhood services. The framework does not attempt to impose a prescriptive model, rather it identifies key principles and premises that apply across the diverse roles and settings of the early childhood profession.

The need for a unifying framework

NAEYC defines *early childhood education* to include any part- or full-day group program in a center, school, or home that serves children from birth through age eight, including children with special developmental and learning needs. This definition includes programs in child care center, both for-profit and nonprofit; private and public prekindergarten programs; Head Start programs; family child care; and kindergartens, primary grades, and before- and after-school programs in elementary schools. These programs are operated under a variety of auspices and rely upon different funding systems, different regulatory structures, and different mechanisms to prepare and certify individuals to work with young children birth through age eight, as briefly described in the following paragraphs.

The diversity of early childhood service providers

The diversity of services within the early childhood field reflects its roots in both social welfare and education. Although there has always been considerable overlap between these two traditions, especially among professionals, public perceptions presume distinct differences. "Child care" has traditionally been assumed to mean providing care for children whose parents are unavailable to provide full-time care because of a job or other circumstances. Child care

centers and family child care homes typically offer a full-day schedule to correspond to parents' work hours and are typically regulated by state departments of human services through facility licensure (or registration in the case of family child care homes). Staff preparation and qualification requirements are sometimes included in these regulations, although they are minimal even when they exist. As a result, many individuals working in centers and family child care homes enter the field without previous professional preparation, but they gain professional knowledge and skills on the job.

Early childhood education is also rooted in the tradition of part-day preschool and nursery programs, traditionally assumed to promote children's social and educational development without consideration of parental needs for full-day programs. Part-day preschool programs operated within the private sector are subject to child care facility licensure in approximately half of the states. In some states programs may follow regulatory procedures for private schools. Professional qualifications for staff may or may not be included in these regulations.

The federally funded Head Start program has historically operated primarily as a part-day preschool program with comprehensive services, including health, nutrition, social services, and parent involvement. Head Start programs are required to meet federal performance standards and may also be required to meet state child care licensing regulations. Federal law requires that at least one teacher in a Head Start classroom possess a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, its equivalent, or other early childhood degree as of 1994.

Prompted in part by the success of Head Start, more and more public education funds have been invested in preschool programs in recent years. These public school prekindergarten programs, now offered in the majority of states, are usually a part-day program. Like Head Start, these programs are typically targeted at children deemed at risk of later school failure, but unlike Head Start most are not designed as comprehensive child and family services. Personnel requirements in public prekindergarten programs typically exceed child care licensing requirements for specialized early childhood preparation but may or may not meet teacher licensure requirements for elementary and secondary education of at least a baccalaureate degree and may not require a specialized early childhood degree.

Early childhood education services also encompass services for young school-age children attending kindergarten through Grade 3, and before- and after-school programs. Kindergarten may be a part-day or full school-day program with teachers certified by the state, following teacher licensure requirements. Elementary grades, also operated on

a typical school day that does not conform to most parents' workday, are taught by licensed teachers. Often, state teacher licensure (certification) requirements do not fully address the specialized skills, knowledge, and supervised practicum experience of work with younger children. Before- and after-school programs are increasingly needed because of the growing number of dual-earner or single-parent families. School-age child care programs are offered by schools and a variety of private agencies, as well as in family child care homes. Regardless of public or private sources of funding, qualifications for school-age child care personnel are more similar to those included in child care facility licensure than public school teacher licensure.

Increasing attention to serving children with disabilities has had considerable impact on the provision of early childhood services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides grants for states to provide interdisciplinary, family-based services for infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays, as well as programs for similarly diagnosed preschool children. One of the basic principles of the IDEA is to provide services in the "least restrictive environment" or the most normalized setting appropriate for an individual child. This principle, along with the legal mandate established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for public facilities—including child care centers and family child care homes—to make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities, means that all early childhood personnel must be prepared to meet the needs of all children, including those with special developmental and learning needs.

Diversity in early childhood professional preparation

Preparation programs are driven by the personnel requirements of the various service providers; personnel requirements are determined by their funding and regulatory structures. As a result, preparation programs for those working with young children are as disparate as the services themselves. Four- and five-year teacher education programs are driven by state teacher licensure (certification) requirements and often do not provide direct experience or preparation working with preschool children, especially infants and toddlers. When they do, they may focus more on theory and research than on practice and application. Programs in two-year institutions or community colleges typically stress working with younger children. Traditionally, two-year programs have taken one of two forms: technical programs in which transfer of credits is not the primary objective or programs designed to articulate with a baccalaureate program in which it is presumed that more professional course

work will be taken at the upper levels. Some individuals begin their preparation in high school vocational programs, sometimes articulated with community college programs and potentially baccalaureate degrees. This conceptual framework focuses primarily on postsecondary programs, presuming that individuals have obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent. There is increasing recognition of the need to strengthen the school-to-work transition through vocational programs that more effectively prepare students entering the work world. Already some vocational programs are designed around the core early childhood competencies to provide supervised work experience in a variety of early childhood settings with children of various ages. As this trend continues, it will be important for the early childhood profession to recognize and incorporate this type of professional preparation as part of an overall system of professional development.

The challenges to be met

Despite the fact that *child care* and *early education* services are often funded and regulated by different agencies, the essential nature of the service varies little when done in an appropriate manner for an individual child. Although historical traditions have focused on *either* the child's needs for a program that promotes her or his development *or* meeting parents' need to provide child care when they are unavailable, there is increasing recognition that this represents a false dichotomy. Good programs must meet children's needs as well as families' needs. Moreover, it is increasingly clear that the teachers and caregivers who bring specialized knowledge and skills to their work are the best prepared to provide high-quality services to young children and their families.

There are significant barriers to improving early childhood professional development within each system. There is little incentive for individuals working in child care centers or family child care homes to seek specialized preparation for jobs that pay little more than minimum wage. In 1990 half of all teachers in child care centers nationally earned less than \$11,000 annually, while the annual earnings of family child care providers *before expenses* average less than \$10,000 per year (Willer, Hofferth, Kisker, Divine-Hawkins, Farquhar, & Glantz, 1991). It is unrealistic to expect those earning such wages to seek further professional preparation without additional reward. Those preparing to work in public schools may find that they are more attractive job candidates when they possess a more generalized teaching certificate (K-8) than specialized early childhood certification.

The increasing focus on full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstreamed educational settings presents challenges both for early childhood special education professional preparation programs as well as those in general early childhood education. Traditional models that presumed separate classrooms with separate teaching staff are no longer acceptable and require the development of new models that build upon the strengths of the more specialized knowledge of early childhood special educators and the more generalist perspective of early childhood educators.

Assumptions

This conceptual framework bridges the historical divisions between child care and early education with a unifying and inclusive vision of high-quality services for all children and families and is based on the following assumptions:

- All young children, birth through age eight, should have access to high-quality early childhood education services.
- Early childhood education is one part of a broad array of comprehensive services designed to foster individual children's optimal learning and development in all areas and to support families' childrearing efforts, often necessitating early childhood professionals to work on interdisciplinary teams and to collaborate with a variety of service providers and agencies.
- Early childhood education programs occur in a variety of settings: centers, homes, and schools.
- The adults who work with young children and their families are key to providing high-quality programs.
- Parents and public have every right to expect that adults employed in early childhood programs have the knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to provide high-quality services.
- The early childhood profession is responsible for ensuring that its members meet and uphold high standards of professional practice.
- There are a variety of early childhood professional roles that require different types and levels of knowledge and skills but share a common core centered in early childhood education.
- Early childhood professionals include those working directly with young children and families as well as those working to support the provision of early childhood services to young children and their families.
- To attract and retain qualified adults to work in early childhood programs, there must be viable career options that provide opportunities for continued professional development and increased compensation.
- Early childhood professionals enter the field through various paths. Some individuals have completed professional preparation programs prior to assuming a professional role; for many others, formal professional preparation follows their decision to work with young children.
- Providing for a variety of early childhood professional roles with varying professional qualifications and responsibility (e.g., differentiated staffing patterns) allows individuals who have not yet acquired a recognized credential to work in early childhood program settings under the supervision of qualified professionals and provides increased recognition and remuneration to professionals who have achieved higher levels of expertise.
- Ongoing training and preparation opportunities should be structured to encourage and support all individuals working with young children to improve their knowledge and skills.
- Articulation mechanisms between various levels of preparation programs need to be strengthened.
- Mechanisms that transform diverse training and learning experiences into academic credit, such as assessment of experiential learning, must be readily accessible to early childhood practitioners.
- The early childhood profession must ensure that its members—in all roles and at all levels—reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of our nation and its families.
- Barriers such as a lack of financial resources, as well as institutional racism and classism, that impede individuals from gaining and demonstrating the requisite knowledge for professional credentials must be challenged and removed.
- There must be greater public understanding of and support for the critical importance of the early years and also for the specialized skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with young children and their families.
- A greater investment of financial resources—both public and private—is needed to support the provision of high-quality early childhood services for all young children and their families.

The lattice of early childhood professional development

A conceptual framework of early childhood professional development must achieve a balance between inclusivity and exclusivity. It must fully embrace the diversity of roles and levels of preparation required for professionals working with young children to provide high-quality services. It must also recognize that individuals enter the profession with diverse educational qualifications and experience and promote a system that encourages ongoing professional development

for individuals at all levels and in all roles. The framework must also set high standards for professional performance and distinguish the specialized skills and knowledge of the early childhood profession from those of other professions.

This framework uses the symbol of a *lattice* to communicate the necessary combination of diversity and uniqueness (Bredenkamp & Willer, 1992). A career lattice provides for the multiple roles and settings within the early childhood profession (vertical strands), each allowing for steps of greater preparation tied to increased responsibility and compensation within that role/setting (horizontal levels), and allows for movement across roles (diagonals). Each strand of the lattice is interconnected; all strands are a part of the larger entity (the early childhood profession).

The lattice distinguishes the *early childhood field* from the *early childhood profession*. The *field* includes anyone engaged in the provision of early childhood services; the *profession* denotes those who have acquired some professional knowledge and are on a professional path. A professional path requires (1) completion of or enrollment in a credit-bearing early childhood professional preparation program that meets recognized guidelines **or** (2) ongoing participation in formal training that may not be credit bearing but is designed to lead to the acquisition of competency that could be assessed through mechanisms such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and/or transformed into credit toward another professional credential or degree.

Individuals may be employed in early childhood settings prior to acquiring a recognized professional credential or degree but should work under supervision or with support. Direct, daily supervision may not be feasible for family child care providers who are self-employed and often work alone or with an assistant. Ongoing support and mentoring of family child care providers can be provided through alternative means, such as linkages with a provider association, network, or Child Care Food Program sponsor to identify qualified, experienced providers to serve as mentors.

The common knowledge and abilities shared by all early childhood professionals

It is the responsibility of the early childhood profession to define how it uniquely differs from all other professions. A defining characteristic of any profession is a specialized body of knowledge and competencies shared by all of its members that are not shared by others. Although a complete description of the early childhood knowledge and competency base is beyond the scope of this document, it is possible to identify two key questions that can be used to determine its

parameters. First, *Is this knowledge or skill required of every early childhood professional, regardless of level or setting or professional role?* Does every childhood professional need to know and be able to do this in order to effectively practice?

The second question that must be answered is, *Does the sum of this body of knowledge and competencies uniquely distinguish the early childhood professional from all other professionals?* For example, if the core stressed human development through the life span rather than child development, it would define a “human service” professional rather than an “early childhood” professional. This is not to say that no other professionals will share certain areas of knowledge (e.g., child development) but that the sum of the body of knowledge effectively distinguishes early childhood professionals from other professionals. Greater breadth and depth in specific topics beyond the core would be needed in certain specializations (administration and parent education) and at higher levels of professional development. Further discussion of these two questions will lead to greater consensus regarding what knowledge and skills are included in the core versus what are needed for specific roles or levels.

The distinct early childhood core is also revealed by a comparison of common elements in the guidelines for early childhood professional preparation programs, including the Child Development Associate Professional Preparation Program (Phillips, 1991a; 1991b) and NAEYC’s guidelines for basic and advanced early childhood professional preparation (1985; 1991).

The common elements define what all early childhood professionals must know and be able to do, including:

- demonstrate an understanding of **child development** and apply this knowledge in practice;
- **observe and assess children’s behavior** in planning and individualizing teaching practices and curriculum;
- establish and maintain a **safe and healthy environment** for children;
- **plan and implement developmentally appropriate curriculum** that advances all areas of children’s learning and development, including social, emotional, intellectual, and physical competence;
- establish supportive relationships with children and implement developmentally appropriate techniques of **guidance and group management**;
- establish and maintain positive and productive **relationships with families**;

- support the development and learning of individual children, recognizing that children are best understood in the context of **family, culture, and society**; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the early childhood profession and make a commitment to **professionalism**.

To effectively implement these common themes, all early childhood professionals need some general knowledge and competencies associated with the full early childhood age span (infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and primary schoolagers), including children with special developmental and learning needs, and usually have greater depth of knowledge and experience in two of the three early childhood age groups (infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and primary schoolagers). Practicum or work experience under qualified supervision is essential to gaining requisite professional knowledge and skills; NAEYC preparation and teacher certification guidelines recommend supervised experience working with a minimum of two of the three early childhood age groups (NAEYC, 1985, 1991; ATE & NAEYC, 1991).

In addition to working with young children, early childhood professionals must be able to establish and maintain productive relationships with colleagues, work effectively as a member of an instructional team, communicate effectively with parents or other family members, and communicate effectively with other professionals and agencies concerned with children and families in the larger community to support children's development, learning, and well-being.

The early childhood common core deepens and expands with specializations at higher levels of preparation. An individual successfully completing the CDA credential has demonstrated competency to meet the specific needs of children and to work with parents and other adults to nurture children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth in a child development framework (Phillips, 1991a; 1991b). At the associate level, the graduate demonstrates technical knowledge and skills necessary to perform competently with a group of children on a daily basis; at the baccalaureate level, the graduate demonstrates the ability to apply and analyze the core knowledge and to systematically plan and develop curriculum for individual children and groups; at the master's level, the graduate demonstrates greater capacity to analyze and refine the core knowledge and evaluate and apply research to improve practices; at the doctoral level, the graduate conducts research and studies practices to expand the knowledge base and influence systems' change. At each of these levels, the professional is expected to engage in reflective practice that contributes to continuing professional development. In addition, at each of these levels, the professional is expected to advocate for policies designed to improve conditions for children, families, and the profession.

In addition to the expanding core of professional knowledge, higher levels of professional development are linked to higher levels of general education. Linking general education and professional development is important for at least three reasons. First, research suggests that the breadth of knowledge associated with college education is related to quality for children (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Second, general knowledge constitutes the "content" of the curriculum for children. Children want and need to learn about everything—science, social studies, literature, math, music, and everything else in their world of experience. To provide experiences that reflect this broad content requires knowledgeable teachers. Third, a crucial interaction occurs between professional knowledge and general knowledge; at higher levels, professional knowledge is embedded within an increasingly broader context. This broader context means that early childhood concepts are informed by the application of knowledge from other disciplines, and it helps to generate new knowledge.

General education and specialized professional education are automatically linked for individuals who complete formal preparation programs, especially those that meet NAEYC's guidelines. Some, but far from all, practitioners complete a professional preparation program before formally working in the field. Many others enter the early childhood professional path later in their careers. Sometimes they have already acquired a college degree in another field before deciding to work with young children; sometimes their experiences working in the early childhood field or as parents convince them to seek professional training. Barriers—lack of money, scheduling problems, limited availability or accessibility of programs, institutional racism, a mismatch between language or literacy expectations and skills—have made it difficult for many practitioners to pursue professional preparation. These issues can and must be redressed. Strategies such as scholarships and financial aid, transforming mechanisms to grant credit for knowledge and competencies gained through experiential learning, and meaningful increases in compensation linked to the completion of a preparation program and improved performance will enhance the likelihood that more individuals will complete recognized preparation programs.

The table on page 20 identifies six levels of early professional development, beginning with those just starting on a professional path. This system of levels is based on the expected outcomes of the various levels of preparation programs. It is designed to reflect a continuum of professional development. The defined steps reflect programs of study for which nationally recognized standards have been set. Not identified as separate levels but implicit in the notion of a continuum are training programs based on the early

childhood core that are designed to recognize the acquisition of knowledge or competencies prior to completion of a nationally recognized credential or degree; for example, the military child care system offers training modules designed to lead to acquisition of a CDA credential.

Currently, community-based training is rarely linked to formal credit and therefore cannot be used toward the next degree (Morgan et al., 1993). A number of states and communities are beginning to develop comprehensive career development plans that create transformation mechanisms allowing individuals to demonstrate their knowledge and competencies and receive credit toward a recognized degree. In addition, the trend toward outcome-based teacher education, promoted by the National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) and performance-based licensure systems emerging in states throughout the nation, stresses what knowledge, performances, and dispositions must be demonstrated rather than specifying one invariant route presumed to lead to their acquisition. Alternative approaches to gain and demonstrate competency already exist at the level of the CDA. Individuals may acquire the CDA by completing the CDA Professional Preparation program or through direct assessment.

Expectations of knowledge and competencies in different roles

Many roles exist within the early childhood profession, and these roles exist within a variety of settings. Roles vary in the specific knowledge, competencies, and levels of education that are required; differences may also exist by setting. The process of developing consensus regarding the specific expectations of knowledge and skills needed in different roles and settings is underway. Many of the areas of specialization within the early childhood field (i.e., family child care providers, directors, regulators, resource and referral) are defining the specific competencies and systems needed for their roles.

Principles of effective professional development

Just as there are common themes of knowledge and abilities that transcend the various levels, roles, and settings within the early childhood profession, there are also common themes related to ensuring an effective process of professional development regardless of level, role, or setting. Detailing a full description of effective professional development processes is beyond the scope of this document. The following principles have been extrapolated from research on

effective professional development (Epstein, 1993; Modigliani, 1993).

1. Professional development is an ongoing process.

All early childhood professionals—no matter how qualified—need to continue to incorporate into their professional repertoire new knowledge and skills related to working with young children and their families. NAEYC recommends that all early childhood professionals complete 24 clock hours of ongoing professional development each year.

2. Professional development experiences are most effective when grounded in a sound theoretical and philosophical base and structured as a coherent and systematic program.

Currently, many early childhood practitioners, particularly those who have not completed formal preparation programs, gain training through a scatter-shot approach that often reflects their state's child care licensing requirements or the availability of training opportunities at a given time. A scatter-shot approach makes it difficult to integrate and apply new information and often results in duplication of some topics and gaps in others.

3. Professional development experiences are most successful when they respond to an individual's background, experiences, and the current context of their role.

This principle is particularly important for employed individuals who are often investing scarce resources—both time and money—in training and may feel cheated or frustrated when there are few apparent links to their needs. Such congruence is particularly important in the beginning stages of professional development because it is more difficult to make connections on one's own without a broad foundation of knowledge and skills.

4. Effective professional development opportunities are structured to promote clear linkages between theory and practice.

Without clear linkages between theory and practice, students may reject new knowledge as “book learning” or an “ivory tower” approach and instead rely on experienced practitioners' information and strategies “that work in the real world.”

5. Providers of effective professional development experiences have an appropriate knowledge and experience base.

Definitions of Early Childhood Professional Categories

This table is designed to reflect a continuum of professional development. The levels identify levels of preparation programs for which standards have been established nationally.

Early Childhood Professional Level VI

Successful completion of a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in a program conforming to NAEYC guidelines; **OR**
Successful demonstration of the knowledge, performance, and dispositions expected as outcomes of a doctoral degree program conforming to NAEYC guidelines.

Early Childhood Professional Level V

Successful completion of a master's degree in a program that conforms to NAEYC guidelines; **OR**
Successful demonstration of the knowledge, performance, and dispositions expected as outcomes of a master's degree program conforming to NAEYC guidelines.

Early Childhood Professional Level IV

Successful completion of a baccalaureate degree from a program conforming to NAEYC guidelines; **OR**
State certificate meeting NAEYC/ATE certification guidelines; **OR**
Successful completion of a baccalaureate degree in another field with more than 30 professional units in early childhood development/education including 300 hours of supervised teaching experience, including 150 hours each for two of the following three age groups: infants and toddlers, 3- to 5-year olds, or the primary grades; **OR**
Successful demonstration of the knowledge, performance, and disposition expected as outcomes of a baccalaureate degree program conforming to NAEYC guidelines.

Early Childhood Professional Level III

Successful completion of an associate degree from a program conforming to NAEYC guidelines; **OR**
Successful completion of an association degree in a related field, plus 30 units of professional studies in early childhood development/education including 300 hours of supervised teaching experience in an early childhood program; **OR**
Successful demonstration of the knowledge, performance, and dispositions expected as outcomes of an associate degree program conforming to NAEYC guidelines.

Early Childhood Professional Level II

Successful completion of a one-year early childhood certificate program; **OR**
Successful completion of the CDA Professional Preparation Program OR completion of a systematic, comprehensive training program that prepares an individual to successfully acquire the CDA Credential through direct assessment.

Early Childhood Professional Level I

Individuals who are employed in an early childhood professional role working under supervision or with support (e.g., linkages with provider association or network or enrollment in supervised practicum) and participating in training designed to lead to the assessment of individual competencies or acquisition of a degree.

In addition to helping ensure the accuracy and quality of the material presented, meeting this principle is important for establishing credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the participants.

6. Effective professional development experiences use an active, hands-on approach and stress an interactive approach that encourages students to learn from one another.

In addition to reflecting what is known about effective strategies for teach adults, meeting this principle has the added benefit of modeling the same type of teaching practices that are effective when working with young children.

7. Effective professional development experiences contribute to positive self-esteem by acknowledging the skills and resources brought to the training process as opposed to creating feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy by immediately calling into question an individual's current practices.

The low pay and status of many individuals working with young children already works to undermine practitioners' self-esteem, which in turn can have negative effects on their interactions with young children. Additionally, building upon existing strengths makes it more likely that the new information will be incorporated into the individual's repertoire, and the opposite approach is likely to result in the rejection of new information ("You don't know my kids; that would never work with them").

8. Effective professional development experiences provide opportunities for application and reflection and allow for individuals to be observed and receive feedback upon what has been learned.

Learning is most clearly integrated into an individual's professional repertoire when there are frequent opportunities to utilize the new information, to reflect upon its meaning and applications, and to receive feedback on how the new knowledge or skill is incorporated into one's practice. Isolated, one-shot training experiences do not provide for such integration and reflection, nor do formal preparation programs that teach theoretical foundations early on without any practicum experiences until much later.

9. Students and professionals should be involved in the planning and design of their professional development program.

Meeting this principle helps to ensure that the professional development experiences are tailored to meet individual needs. It also encourages individuals to develop a stronger sense of ownership for their learning and reinforces

the notion that professional development is an ongoing professional responsibility.

Linking professional development and compensation

There is little incentive for pursuing a system of differentiated professional qualifications unless increased qualifications are rewarded with improved compensation. The following guidelines are designed to link increased professional development with improved compensation. It is recognized that some early childhood programs will require additional resources before these guidelines can be fully implemented. Families alone cannot be expected to bear the additional costs. NAEYC is committed to working for strategies that acknowledge the full cost of quality early childhood program provision and that distribute these costs more equitably among all sectors of society. NAEYC believes that parents and early childhood professionals have borne a disproportionate burden in the provision of early childhood programs. All of society—children, families, employers, communities, and the nation as a whole—benefits from the provision of high-quality early childhood programs. It is time that the full cost of this essential public service be shared more equitably by all sectors of society.

• Early childhood professionals with comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities should receive comparable compensation regardless of the setting of their job. This means that a teacher working in a community child care center, a family child care provider, and an elementary school teacher who each hold comparable professional qualifications and carry out comparable functions or responsibilities should also receive comparable compensation for their work.

Early childhood professionals who work directly with young children typically are employed in a variety of settings, including public schools; part-day and full-day centers, whether for-profit or nonprofit; public and private prekindergarten programs, including Head Start; before- and after-school programs; and family child care. Despite the differences in setting, the nature of the job responsibilities is generally similar.

Although the work of all early childhood professionals has been undervalued, those professionals working with children in situations other than serving school-age children during the traditional school day have been the most under-compensated. For example, a recent national study (U.S. GAO, 1989) found that teachers in early childhood programs accredited by NAEYC earned roughly half that of their counterparts in public schools, holding education and experience constant. Even within the public school, salaries have been found to be depressed for equally qualified teachers of preschool children, especially when program funding is based on parent fees or special program subsidies (Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). As a matter of equity, early childhood professionals who have comparable qualifications and job responsibilities should also receive comparable compensation.

• Compensation for early childhood professionals should be equivalent to that of other professionals with comparable preparation requirements, experience, and job responsibilities.

Although removing disparity within the early childhood profession is an important step forward, given the undervaluing of all work with young children, it is an insufficient goal. Early childhood salary schedules and benefits should be determined following a review of salary schedules for members of other professional groups. Reviews should be conducted within the community and, when feasible, within the early childhood program's larger organizational structure.

Although an institutional review may not be feasible for small independent programs, it has proven to be an effective tool for improving compensation in many programs associated with a larger institution. The institutional review is an internal review, considering salaries and benefits provided to individuals with similar preparation and responsibilities. For example, a community service organization may compare the salaries and benefits of its early childhood teaching staff to its social workers with equivalent preparation and responsibility. A public school would examine the comparability of responsibilities and preparation and corresponding compensation for teachers in its prekindergarten and kindergarten programs to secondary teachers. The compensation of a program administrator in an organization such as a hospital, industry, or educational institution would be compared to the compensation package of heads of other programs or departments of similar size within that institution.

The community review, possible for all programs, should begin by considering professionals with similar responsibili-

ties. The job responsibilities of early childhood professionals are most comparable to those of other educational professionals in elementary and secondary schools. The community review should also take into account other professionals in the community. These may include nurses, social workers, and counselors as well as others. Many of the social services share with the early childhood profession in the undervaluing of their work; broader comparability to more equitably paid professions should be the long-term goal.

It should be noted that family child care providers are typically not salaried employees but are self-employed, with income based on fees for service. Community reviews may provide useful information for family child care providers when determining fees. Fees should be based on the full cost of providing a high-quality service and include sufficient compensation for the level of professional preparation.

• Compensation should not be differentiated on the basis of the ages of children served.

Assuming equivalent professional preparation and equivalent job responsibilities, early childhood professionals working with young children should receive compensation comparable to professionals working with older children. Typically, the younger the child, the lesser the value placed on the service provided. Yet, children are most vulnerable in their early years, and the impact of their early experiences on later development and learning is the most profound. Compensation provided to individuals working with young children should reflect the importance of their work.

• Early childhood professionals should be encouraged to seek additional professional preparation and should be rewarded accordingly.

Currently there is little incentive for early childhood personnel to seek additional training. Despite the lack of public understanding as to its importance, specialized knowledge of how young children develop and learn is the key predictor of how well early childhood personnel are able to implement a developmentally appropriate program (Bredenkamp, 1989). Even when individuals understand the importance of professional development for improving the quality of early childhood services, access to continuing education is often denied due to a lack of resources.

The current crisis in recruiting and retaining qualified staff has resulted in many programs employing individuals who are underqualified for their roles and responsibilities. The provision of in-service training is especially critical in these

situations so that children receive the quality of care they need. When the acquisition of additional preparation is not rewarded, there is little incentive for these individuals to remain on the job, and the investment made in their in-service training is lost.

• The provision of an adequate benefits package is a crucial component of compensation for early childhood staff.

Early childhood personnel who are satisfied with their jobs and whose individual and family members' health is protected are more likely to convey positive feelings toward children, are more able to give utmost attention to teaching and caring for children, and are more likely to remain in their positions for longer periods of time. Benefits packages for full-time staff may be negotiated to meet individual staff members' needs but should include paid leave (annual, sick, and/or personal), medical insurance, and retirement and may provide educational benefits, subsidized child care, or other options unique to the situation. Benefits for part-time staff should be provided on a prorated basis. (Students or others who are placed on the job on a temporary basis for job-training purposes are excluded from this provision).

• Career ladders should be established, providing additional increments in salary based on performance and participation in professional development opportunities.

Individuals who work directly with young children should be able to envision a future in this work. Too often, the only opportunity for advancement in early childhood programs requires leaving direct work with children. Career ladders linked to a salary scale offer opportunities for advancement through merit increases and recognition of higher levels of preparation and mastery of practice. By offering opportunities for advancement while continuing to work with children, career ladders promote higher quality services for children.

Salary scales typically include professional qualifications as one of many factors (Bloom, 1993a, 1993b). Other factors—such as job responsibility and performance, and local economic factors including compensation in comparable occupations—also need to be considered when making specific salary determinations.

Conclusion

This conceptual framework reflects the current state of professional knowledge and experience as well as input from

hundreds of early childhood educators reflecting the diverse roles, backgrounds, and settings of the early childhood profession. It is intended as a working tool designed to promote a coordinated, articulated system of high-quality early childhood professional preparation and development. This document is viewed as a dynamic statement that will be revised based on need and as new knowledge is acquired concerning the education of young children and the preparation of the adults who work with them.

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