

Early Childhood Exchange



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And Now a Word from the Real Experts!

That's you. You may be under the mistaken impression that scientists invent knowledge about adult-child interaction and early education. Not true. Scientists go out and observe people like yourself--the real experimenters--to find out what works and what doesn't.

So let's hear from you on what works. As the new editor of the Early Childhood Exchange, I'd like to use your expertise to make this newsletter into a useful exchange among Wisconsin child care providers about what has worked for them. Each issue we'll pose a question or topic, and the following issue we'll print your responses. If this works, you may learn 50 different ways to get the kids to put the blocks away! But remember: if this is to work, you have to tell us your way.

Here's the question for the next issue: WHAT HAVE YOU DONE RECENTLY THAT WORKED TO HELP MAKE NAP TIME EASY AND ENJOYABLE? Help your child care colleagues by mailing me your response.

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A RESPONSE

To get our "exchange" rolling, I took a question to two of your colleagues, Jacquelyn Leckwee and Elizabeth Caul (Head and Assistant Teacher) of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Preschool. I asked them HOW DO YOU HELP A NEW CHILD FIT INTO AN EXISTING PLAYGROUP? Although tired from a day with the children, Jacquelyn and Elizabeth warmed to the question. Here are 10 thoughts they shared with us:

1. First, we tailor our response to the particular child and parent. Some need more help than others. But in general we:
2. Encourage the parent and child to visit when the other children aren't there, before the first day.
3. On the first and following days, we ask the parent to prepare the child for the parent's leaving, to warn the child when leaving, to say when returning, and not to linger very long at the preschool.
4. We try to be sensitive to the parent as well as the child. Sometimes the mother has more separation anxiety than the child (and sometimes guilt if she's a working mother). We explain to her why it's better for the child that she leave, and let her know that her child is in good hands.

5. We encourage the new child to bring something from home, a special toy or blanket. They feel more secure with it, and it can be a topic to discuss at sharing time.
6. We give the child his/her own personal space. This can be a cubby or bin or shoebox, whatever. But it's their place to put their things.
7. One teacher accompanies the child at first, if the child doesn't have good "entering skills." The teacher supports the child, and makes it easier for the child to get

involved. Very low key. Sometimes the child just wants to watch for awhile. That's OK.

8. With new ones, be particularly aware of the need for simple directions.
9. Help the child learn that there is a consistent routine. List the day's activities in order, often. The last item on the list is, "Mom (or Dad, etc.) comes to pick you up."
10. Use name songs, or stories with the child's name, to recognize and incorporate the new child.

GUEST AUTHOR

What does it mean to be a professional child care worker? Mary Babula, guest author for this issue of EARLY CHILDHOOD EXCHANGE, discusses the issues in identifying a professional field, and describes the differing levels of qualifications necessary for different positions in the field of Early Childhood Education. Mary is Executive Director of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, and is a former child care center teacher and director.

PROFESSIONALISM IN CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Introduction

What is it that you do? How do you describe what you do to others who ask? What does it mean to be a professional early childhood educator? Is a family day care provider a professional? A day care teacher? A day care administrator? Do we want to be professionals?

What is a professional?

Many definitions have been put forth, sometimes conflicting definitions. One purpose of professionalism, according to William Ade (1982), is to recognize that a service or field has certain unique characteristics about it. Professional status connotes specialized knowledge, a desirable service, and an assurance of quality, dependability and effectiveness. One of the problems with defining the field of child care and early childhood education as a professional field is that many people see the knowledge required to perform jobs in this field as basically no different from the knowledge required to be a parent. Therefore, following such

thinking, since parenting is not a profession, working in day care or any other early childhood program is probably not a profession either.

Lilian Katz, Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois, defines a professional "as someone who uses advanced knowledge and has adopted standards of performance in that field." Katz asserts there is an advanced body of knowledge required to work in day care and early childhood programs. This body of knowledge comes from developmental psychology, early education and other fields. Understanding children's development and how to care for children in your own family is significantly different from providing care and education for a group of young children.

The other aspect which defines a profession, according to Dr. Katz, is the adoption of standards of performance. Professional associations generally accept the role of setting professional standards. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC),

the largest professional early childhood education association with 40,000 members, has developed a national accreditation program which will be able to certify that both part day and full day group programs meet high standards of quality, including standards of performance for staff. Although this program is not presently designed to include family day care providers, hopefully they will be included in the future. This NAEYC program is based on the best available knowledge, including information on the best practices to use in group early childhood education programs.

Katz also adds that a professional is committed to performing consistently at the same high standards, and not allowing personal matters or one's moods to affect one's work. Ade suggests that another aspect of a profession is having an agreed-upon terminology to use to describe and define itself. In addition, society must recognize and support the field's authority, specialized knowledge, and prestige.

Is early childhood education a profession by these standards? According to Ade (1982), this field has the potential for becoming a true profession. According to Hostetler and Klugman (1982), one of the first requirements to become a professional field is self-definition. For the field of early childhood education, there is a need to identify the commonalities among all of those who work with young children, while at the same time allowing for diversity, in training, experience and jobs currently performed.

What is a career?

A career implies a long-term commitment to a particular occupational choice. It requires that the person acquire the skills and education necessary to enter the field. A career may or may not involve moving from one type of job to another within a particular field. For example, one person may have a lengthy career as a teacher of young children working in a classroom. For her, career growth could occur as she participated in continuing education, and learned new skills and ideas which she then implemented

in the classroom. It might also involve supervising student teachers or classroom volunteers and being a role model to beginners in the field. Another way to advance in her chosen career might be to present workshops to other teachers on topics in which she has developed a special expertise.

For another person selecting the field of early childhood, the career path may include being a classroom teacher, a family day care provider, a center administrator, and an instructor in the vocational school's early childhood classes, with career growth occurring as she becomes trained and experienced in these new jobs.

What is early childhood?

Early childhood is a term generally used to refer to children from birth through age eight or nine. This is a time in every child's development when growth occurs quickly, and children change dramatically. Children are developing language, problem solving skills, social skills, increasing independence, self-concept, and many new physical skills which require the use of all of their muscles. The growth, learning and development which occurs in these early years will set the stage or form the foundation for this person's life. The work done by people who select a career with young children is thus very important. It will have a major impact on who developing children become and what they are capable of doing with their lives.

Selecting a Career

Do you remember as a child, thinking about what you wanted to "be" when you "grew up?" What were some of those things you anticipated doing? Now think about what you are currently doing with your life. Most of you, as readers of the Early Childhood Exchange, have no doubt chosen to spend at least this part of your professional life employed in the field of child care, child development, or early childhood education.

As adults, we make choices about what to do to earn the money we need to support ourselves and our families or to contribute

to our family's support. We can choose any job which provides us with that income, or we can make a deliberate choice of a career which is consistent with our personal interests as well as available job opportunities.

To enter a career you must acquire the training and experience necessary to translate your interests into mature, practical skills and job competencies for a professional career. The decision to work with young children must involve a realistic appraisal of your personal values and skills, combined with accurate information regarding available career options and the levels of skill and experience you will need to enter that particular career path.

Early Childhood Education as a Career

Teaching young children all day is creative, exciting and fulfilling. It can also be exhausting and frustrating for both the beginner and experienced teacher.

In response to the tremendous need for care which supplements and complements that which each family provides for its children, early childhood programs are expanding and multiplying. As such programs increase in number it is important. They reflect the knowledge that exists about how to provide the best care and education for young children.

Research done in the past twenty years has given us a great deal of evidence to support the belief that the first six years of a child's life are critically important. They are a time when a great deal of growth occurs in social, physical, cognitive and emotional spheres of development. A large base of child development knowledge now exists and should be drawn from in planning appropriate environments and programs for young children.

Recent research (for example Ruopp et.al, 1979) also shows that a major factor in the quality and effectiveness of programs for young children is the specialized education of the staff. Parents have the right to expect that the people who are paid to care for and educate their young children have

the attitudes, skills and knowledge which will insure not only that all children will receive safe, healthy care, but will also be helped to achieve their fullest potential.

The role of early childhood staff members in a group program (nursery school, day care center, Head Start program, after school day care program, for example) is more complex than the role of the traditional teacher. In addition to instructing and facilitating learning, early childhood personnel are expected to provide child care, emotional support and guidance, and to work with adults to a far greater extent than teachers of older children. Such a complex and all-encompassing role also describes the role of family day care provider.

There is no one single role performed by early childhood personnel, but several different roles, each requiring different knowledge and skill levels. For example, the skills and knowledge required of an individual who assists the leader of a group are different from those required of the group leader. Similarly, those skills required of a group leader are different from those required of a program director. The skills and knowledge required of a family day care provider encompass those of teacher or group leader, program director, independent business person, cook, custodian, accountant, and more!

Recognizing the existence of these differing levels of ability helps assure that professional roles will be filled by appropriately qualified individuals. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognizes such levels, while suggesting that the required skills and knowledge can be acquired through different paths. For example, the pre-professional would not have a formal credential but would develop further skills through supervised experience with children and participation in staff development. The competency-based National Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing program identifies and recognizes individual competencies which may have been acquired through diverse patterns of training and experiences. Other early

childhood staff will have completed a formal education program with a supervised student teaching experience, in a one- or two-year vocational school program or a four-year college or university undergraduate program.

Professional Levels in Early Childhood Education

The professional levels recommended by NAEYC are:

Level 1: Early Childhood Assistant Teacher

This is an entry-level position, with the people at this level working under the direct supervision of staff with more training and experience. This level doesn't require specialized education to enter, but requires continuing professional education once employed.

Level 2: Early Childhood Associate Teacher

Staff employed at this level are professionals who independently implement program activities and who may be responsible for the care and education of a group of young children. The required qualifications can be achieved by earning the CDA Credential or an associate degree in early childhood education or child development (a two-year vocational school program.)

Level 3: Early Childhood Teacher -

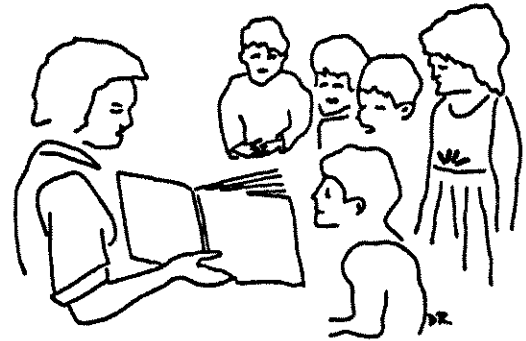
Professionals at this level are responsible for the care and education of a group of young children. Individuals employed at Levels 2 and 3 may perform similar roles and functions, but the different titles reflect the different formal education received and the extent of background knowledge of child development. The required qualifications can be earned by receiving a baccalaureate degree in child development or early childhood education.

Level 4: Early Childhood Specialist - This

level consists of professionals who supervise and train staff, design curriculum and/or administer programs. To be at this level, an individual must demonstrate competencies at the first three levels as well as demonstrate competency in designing and implementing a developmentally appropriate program, and in supervising

staff. This level requires a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or child development plus at least three years of full-time teaching experience with young children, and/or any advanced degree.

In combination with these recommended qualifications, NAEYC believes that salaries and benefits in the early childhood field should be on a par with other professional groups with comparable training and responsibilities.



The Distinctive Roles of Parents and Child Care Providers

It is important for parents and teachers or child care providers to remember they each play different, yet complimentary roles in children's lives. Dr. Lilian Katz defines these distinctive complimentary roles on the basis of several dimensions of human interactions. The first dimension deals with the scope of responsibility. Parents have ultimate and complete responsibility for their children - everything about their children is their responsibility 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Early childhood educators, and child care providers, on the other hand, are responsible for the entire group of children in their care, but their responsibility for each child has limits--where the role of the parent enters in, as discussed below.

Another dimension is attachment. Parents should maintain an "optimum emotional attachment" to their children, because everything about their children really matters to them. This means such feelings as joy, love, anger, and panic (when a child is in danger). Teachers and providers of child care should maintain "detached concern" or an "optimum emotional detachment" to the children in their care. Maintaining an appropriate emotional

distance from the children can help prevent burnout and can allow the professional child care providers to retain their ability to evaluate the children's development realistically. Children can still love their providers and will feel that their love is returned even while the professional is maintaining this optimum detachment.

Rationality is a third dimension. Parents need to be "optimally irrational" where their children are concerned. According to Lilian Katz, "It's only when you are irrational that you won't give your child away on certain days!" It is important for parents to be consistently themselves, and to rely on their instincts at times--sometimes this is more important than trying to be consistent in the application of rules. Children will be able to learn when and where there can be differences or exceptions in the application of rules. Child care providers and teachers, on the other hand, should be "optimally rational," bringing their knowledge and best understanding to bear on child care situations. This points out the importance of training for child care providers, giving them the knowledge base for making decisions regarding the children in their care. Early childhood educators should not be relying primarily on their instincts.

Spontaneity is a fourth dimension. Parents should be "optimally spontaneous" according to Dr. Katz. If they try to be too intellectual about what they do with their children, they are likely to run into trouble when solutions arrived at intellectually, break down under the weight of emotionally charged situations (which are bound to occur between parents and children). On the other hand, child care providers need to be "optimally intentional" in their interactions with children in their care. What providers are doing for the most part should be deliberately planned, based on their child development philosophy and knowledge--it should not be accidental. This is not to suggest that child care providers or early childhood educators should not ever be spontaneous and change planned activities in response to the "teachable moment." In fact it will often look like a good

provider is being spontaneous in response to the children and the situation. However, the activity is likely to be a part of that provider's plan.

The final dimension is partiality. Children need their parents to be biased on their behalf. Parents should be champions or advocates for their own children. In contrast, early childhood educators need to be impartial. Whatever skills, techniques and insight the teacher and provider has, should be equally available to all the children in the group. Child care providers and teachers don't need to like or love all of the children equally--that is probably not humanly possible. They do need to have all of their resources as professionals available to all the children in their care. This also does not mean that all children must be treated exactly alike--they are not identical and can't be treated as such--but they must be treated equally.

Implications for Child Care Providers/ Early Childhood Educators

Dr. Katz emphasizes the following implications for early childhood teachers and family day care providers based on the distinctions in roles of parent and child care provider. Child care providers as professionals need to remember that these distinct roles do exist. Good parents will have different perspectives than good teachers or providers who are being professional. Therefore, don't blame or attack parents when differences arise, and don't respond defensively. Acknowledge the restraints on both providers and parents, acknowledge the differences in perspectives, and discuss the concern with these in mind. It is important for educators and providers to know their own minds, to know what their bottom line is for children--which should be developed by a process of self-scrutiny. With this in mind, a teacher or provider should be much more able to respond professionally and gracefully, to reduce tension, so both she and the parent can more readily work on solving the problem. It may help to negotiate a plan with parents about what the parent wants for the child. Once an agreement is reached, both the parent and

teacher or provider should try in good faith to carry out that agreement. Remember, teachers and providers can't always satisfy all of the parents. The requests of one parent will sometimes be in conflict with the requests of another, or parents may want teachers and providers to go beyond their "bottom line"--changing their program's philosophy, for example. Such negotiations can be carried out by a program's board of directors if it has one, until a decision can be reached which is mutually acceptable. For family day care providers, or programs with sole owner, the parent and early childhood educator may not be able to negotiate a solution but may need to consider ending the relationship as an alternative.

As providers of child care and early childhood education, it is important to keep in mind that family or personal relationships are different from professional relationships. Take time out to ask yourself if you have achieved and are maintaining an optimum distance between yourself and the children in your care. Ask yourself: "Am I in danger of burning out? Do I have a full personal life? Do I have ways of being resilient?" Co-workers and support groups of family day care providers can be valuable in helping each other work out ways to respond to these questions and maintain appropriate professional roles.

Resources used to prepare this article,
recommended for your use:

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NAEYC, 1834 Connecticut Ave, N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20009

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Available from: Child Care Employee Project, P.O. Box 5603, Berkeley, CA 94705, for \$3.50.

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Roberts, G.T., (1983), Status and Salaries of Our Profession. Young Children, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 18-19.

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

**31st Annual Conference of
The Wisconsin Early Childhood Association**

October 11-12
in Stevens Point

Topics include:

Music	School Age Care
C.D.A.	Men in Preschool
Head Start	Story Telling
Make and Take	Preschool Environment
Family Day Care	Computers
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NAEYC Center	Puppets
Accreditation Project	

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