

Keeping Teachers and Equity at the Center of Early Childhood Systems Reform: Promises, Perils and Collective Responsibilities in Striving to Improve Quality

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Slide #1

Opening Gratitude

First I want to say what an honor it is to be with you here today. I have attended this forum for many years with my graduate students and I am always impressed by the breadth and depth of knowledge, passion and dedication of the diverse stakeholders in this room.

Slide #2

Picture of a High Quality TK Classroom

To begin my talk today, I would like you imagine with me that you are entering a Transitional Kindergarten classroom in one of our Bay Area School districts. The teacher in this classroom completed a BA in Child development, received her Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential and completed a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education. Additionally, she has expertise in creating environments that support young children's executive functioning (e.g., impulse control, emotional control, flexible thinking, self-monitoring, working memory, planning and organizing, task initiation etc). She teaches at school where all of her children quality of free and reduced lunch, in a neighborhood with high rates of violence and inter-generational poverty. She is recognized at her school and among many in her district as an experienced and knowledgeable early childhood educator. One morning last year this teacher shared a story with me that left an impression on me. She described a scene that played out in her classroom earlier that day:

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We'll Come Back when You're Teaching*

Her classroom was humming with the sounds of engaged young children. Some were building with blocks...a bridge that required them...to think through mathematical and scientific concepts and to use trial and error to problem solve together; another small group was collaborating on an imaginary scene in the dramatic play area--organizing and making sense of the death of a child's beloved pet...in the manner in which children embed their experiences symbolically through play to find a sense of control, understanding and order in a world that can too often feel otherwise...and while they are exploring big concepts like life and death, fairness, friendship, family and community, they were also building vocabulary and narrative structure, foundations for literacy, and still another small group was working with the teacher on a

measurement activity on the rug. She explained to me, the children were focused and self-regulated, a healthy buzz sounded throughout the room, the sound of young children's engagement in their learning; the type of engagement that supports them to develop a love of learning in a caring community. She was proud when her principal walked in with a group of administrators as part of her district's 'instructional rounds.' She was happy to see her district administrators taking interest in her classroom. She was eager to talk with them about the intentionality in her curriculum, instruction and the careful manner in which she had set up her TK environment to reflect a high quality developmentally appropriate TK classroom. At this point in the story, her head dropped and her eyes grew watery, my principal, she confessed, took one look around my classroom, observing the children learning through play and loudly announced to the entire group, "We'll come back when she's teaching" and to my utter shock, humiliation and disbelief, she quickly marched everyone out of my classroom.

I share this story with all of you to open up my talk today because it beautifully reflects the promises, perils, complexities and tensions of early childhood systems reform. Here we have an childhood educator who despite her professional knowledge and skills was left with feelings of invisibility, defeat and distrust because the introduction of TK--intended to be a bridge between early childhood and public schooling--has not yet addressed all of the elements of the system that will be required to support the successful integration of early childhood curriculum, instruction, and assessment into public school classrooms. In her story, we see an individual whose professional skills, knowledge and expertise are inequitably cast aside and dismissed by individuals who "don't know what they don't know" but who have the power to evaluate her teaching and its quality and effectiveness. Can we expect this teacher to have trust in a system that has so little understanding of the best practices and developmental science at the foundation of her pedagogy? If she feels invisible and unsupported for her strengths, capacities and expertise, is she likely to take risks to continue to inquire into and improve her teaching practice? Will she embrace her district's professional development and educational change initiatives or leave the profession all together?

It is not surprising that her principal did not have the knowledge base or skills needed to effectively provide instructional leadership and supervision in her early childhood classroom. Although research suggests that principal leadership is second only to teaching in terms of impact on child outcomes, yet we also know that no states, except Illinois—have included early childhood content specifically in their licensure, accreditation, mentoring or evaluation processes for principals (Connors-Tadros & Horowitz, 2014, p. 4). A recent survey from the National Association for Elementary School Principals, suggested that over 60 percent of elementary school principals state that they are responsible for supervising prekindergarten classrooms on their school site or they have responsibilities for leading early childhood programs in their community (NAESP, 2014). And more than half of the surveyed principals reported that they

were in need of professional development and resources that would increase their skills, knowledge and capacity to supervise early childhood teachers (K-3) and to understand the hallmarks of developmentally appropriate classroom environments. This story reminds us of the importance of considering entire systems in working for educational change.

I am a supporter of early childhood systems reform. As a former preschool and elementary school teacher, a researcher and scholar who studies teaching, leadership, early childhood policy and organizational and systems change, I am very inspired by this point in history where we hear our President speaking about the importance of early childhood in his State of the Union address, we have Governors, chief state school officers, school boards, principals, County offices of Education, Community Based organizations, Business leaders and many others are calling for increased investment in early childhood and the inclusion of early childhood into a wide array of reform initiatives that aim to improve public schooling and child and youth outcomes.

I am, however, deeply committed to raising questions of equity and social justice in everything I do. I like to call courageous questions to the table, bring stories from the margins into our gaze, and to create spaces to ‘pause’, to slow down, to listen deeply, and critique and expand our perspectives. This is an approach in working for equity that begins with a belief that by ‘providing the time, structure and a value for paying careful attention and description of the complexity of individuals and the stories they tell about their professional experiences, we can open up new possibilities of thought, reflection and action to emerge.

Teachers are the foundation, the fulcrum, of all educational systems change. Asking teachers to engage in continuous improvement--being willing to open up their teaching and caring practices for examination, change, and professional growth--means we are asking them to be courageous and to have trust. Yet, if we want to realize the aspirations we have in our state and across the nation for improving young children’s learning experiences and outcomes, early childhood educators need to feel supported, respected, valued, visible and trusted themselves...by all of us.

Slide #4

Intro to Systems Change: Goals and Aspirations

National Systems Reform in ECE

What is early childhood systems change? Various named birth-8, 0-8, P-3 and Prek-3, is motivated by the growing body of empirical research reinforcing that children’s earliest years are so critical.

As 0-8 systems work spans infant, toddler, preschool and early elementary years, states and public school districts are doing complicated work coordinating and aligning governance

structures, funding streams, service delivery and professional development efforts across contexts that are regulated by vastly different local, state and federal policy mandates.

So, why do this work? Among the benefits anticipated to result from building more coordinated and aligned systems from birth through early elementary school include:

- Promises of increased quality in early childhood programs and services, tying it more closely to state learning standards and teacher certification and also strengthening the quality of early elementary education by integrating it with child development knowledge and associated practices
- Progress in professionalizing the early childhood workforce,
- Gaining access to new funding sources
- Responding to the needs of families with young children
- Supporting more seamless and positive transitions to public schooling
- Attenuating opportunity and achievement gaps evidenced for child outcomes emerging in elementary school and beyond.

Slide #5

QRIS

There are many examples of systems reform that I could talk about--Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships, Place-Based Initiatives as seen with the Hayward Promise Neighborhood work, Expanded Access to Developmental Screening and many many other examples of the important work that is happening in our field right now. Perhaps one of the most salient examples that most if not all of you are very aware of and engaged with are QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.

Based on a report released on March 3rd by the BUILD Initiative, in 2015, 49 states, the District of Columbia, and many U.S. territories were either planning, piloting or implementing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) in order to assess, improve, and communicate about the quality of early care and education.

Early QRIS

QRIS have existed for about two decades and in this short timeframe the systems have evolved. The initial focus was on improving the generally low quality of care in the late 1990s. providing parents (child care consumers) and the public with a transparent and easily understood rating of child care quality would increase their capacity to make more informed choices, would increase demand for quality, and would give child care providers an incentive for improving quality

Second Generation

In 2009-10, the federal stimulus funds and the announcement of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grant competition spurred on an already emerging second generation of QRIS development.

1. Increasingly, QRIS were designed, first, with a cross-sector focus, i.e. to include Early Head Start, Head Start, Part B, Part C and pre-k, not just child care and
2. Second, with quality levels that required independent observation to determine the quality. validation requirement amplified relationship between quality levels and improved program and child outcomes.

At this point in time, QRIS refers to a variety of different types of systems that fund a range of activities designed to achieve differing desired outcomes.

Increasingly, there is a Focus in QRIS to Improve Child Outcomes Across Sectors

Another focus built into many QRIS is expanding the number of children and families who receive comprehensive services and supports

Raising the Floor for Child Care. Motivated by aims to strengthen existing child care licensing systems and improve public and private program investments.

Where are we now?

- Building infrastructure. Child outcomes are assumed to be achieved in the future
- Key components missing: Compensation for the ECE Workforce

Slide #6

Creating a Pause to Critically Examine Equity in Early Childhood Systems Reform

As I shared, QRIS is only one example of the complex work going on right now regarding ECE systems reform. However, we can use the QRIS as an important example of systems change happening in CA and across the country that we can critically examine through an equity lens:

Make visible what I suggest are some critical considerations for our current systems reform efforts if we want them to result in changes that are equitable for our profession and equitable for early childhood educators (care teachers, preschool teachers, family child care providers and others).

I also want to briefly discuss the important issue of “distrust” as it can interrupt equity and successful educational change efforts.

Finally, I will end with some reflections and calls for action for all of us to consider.

Slide #7

Equity for our Profession: How Early Childhood can Expand, Professionalize and Align with Public Education without Losing its Unique Identity

Robert Halpern (2013) from the Erikson Institute published a very thought provoking article in Teachers College Record exploring the potential and the problems of tying early childhood closely with the policies, procedures and practices of public education. I have pulled out some highlights of his arguments to share with you today:

From a systemic perspective, connecting early childhood more closely to public schooling holds many promises. Yet, it is important to acknowledge and make visible that it also leaves our field vulnerable and in need of maintaining its identity as core practices in early childhood education contrast sharply with conventional approaches in elementary education (Bowdon & Desimore, 2014). For the last century, early childhood and public schooling as social institutions, have not had shared purposes.

- The image of the child and how children learn and acquire knowledge have been significantly different
- How to document and assess what children know and can do
- Relationships with families

These differences have resulted in distinct approaches to curriculum and instruction, the teacher's role, and methods of assessment in ECE all based in developmental science, constructivism and integrated child-centered pedagogy that recognize the holistic, dynamic and individualized manner of children's development.

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Early Childhood Education (Halpern, 2013)

First, early childhood education takes a more holistic active view of children who "construct" their knowledge through hands on experiential learning where domains of knowledge and development are more integrated and where children's development is understood to take place ecologically, in the context of family and community (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp, 1995).

Principles of child development, rather than curricular content, are the primary motivation for the early childhood curriculum. Further, there is a strong desire to nurture agency in children by supporting them to actively construct meanings about the world through inquiry, exploration, and discovery taking place in the context of nurturing and responsive relationships with others.

Early childhood classrooms are characterized by long periods of time devoted to self-initiated play where play is viewed as a central activity for learning and children have easy access to appropriate hands on materials and adult interaction that builds on children's ideas (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009).

ECE has historically emphasized the neurobiological foundations of children's learning and behavior and psychosocial development which leads to a prioritizing of the role of health, social-emotional and physical development in learning and work with children in order to support their development of strong attachments and feelings of safety and belonging, self-regulation, self-understanding, empathy, and social skills (Bodovski & Youn, 2011).

Early childhood educators work to create partnerships with families and in many cases are child and family advocates searching for and securing a range of corollary services for them.

Early childhood educators assess children's learning in naturalistic settings by observing their growth over time, on multiple occasions and with input from families and often multi-disciplinary professionals: speech/language pathologists, Occupational specialists, early interventionists, mental health practitioners to name a few.

Tensions about the relationship between ECE and public schooling have long brought questions about how early childhood would fare. In fact, the introduction of NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practices text was an action taken by early childhood educators' concerns that public schools would inappropriately push academics down into early childhood programs.

Such tensions continue today as, Head Start, preK and many early childhood programs are feeling pressure to narrow the broad purposes of early childhood education to focus solely on one goal, that of school readiness. All too often this is a concept of readiness that is defined as a set of discrete and decontextualized skills, an extension down of our increasingly academic environments in kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade.

Slide #9

Research on Kindergarten as more Academic

Many of you are likely to have seen the recent report from researchers at the University of Virginia who compared the views and experiences of kindergarten teachers in 1998 with those of their counterparts in 2010, and found dramatic differences in what teachers now expect of pupils and how they have structured their classrooms. Generally, teachers now expect children to come in knowing much more, spend more of the day in literacy and math instruction, and devote less time to play, music and art. Some excerpts from the findings:

- 80% believe children should learn to read in kindergarten compared to 31% previously

- 40% spend one hour or more on child selected activities (54%)
- 45% use reading workbook or worksheets

“This research documents how kindergarten has become steadily more school-like in dynamic, with greater teacher (versus child) initiative, more time spent in passive (rather than active) learning, greater emphasis on product (rather than process), more summative and less formative evaluation of children, more competition, and less room for each child’s individuality (Goldstein, 2007).” There is also a growing focus on breaking down the day into short learning time periods, typically 15–20 minutes. Children are just beginning to dig into a learning experience and they are required to transition; with unanticipated consequences that children are not learning how to sustain their attention and efforts. The self-regulatory requirements are great for children to manage when they are constantly in motion and changing what they do as they shift their attention and focus so often.

Standardized, prescriptive curricula have become the norm, and direct instruction, typically focused on basic skills, has become more common (Nicolopoulou, 2010). Many kindergarten teachers are reporting stress resulting from “ignoring their own philosophies” about how children learn and develop, an experience that is decreasing their feelings of professionalism.

Slide #10

Preschool Suspensions and Expulsions

“This is extending down into preschool, especially for low-income children, who are having fewer opportunities for play, conversation, and self-initiated activity than in the past. Children at ever younger ages report feeling pressure to have to “try to get everything right” (Peters, 2000, p. 12). In some early childhood settings, teachers are actually beginning to include test preparation as a feature of classroom life (Brown, 2007).

Recent Report in Ed Week reports on 2011-2012 data collected from the U.S. Department of Education's office for civil rights [reported preschool suspensions](#) for the first time. The analysis found, among other concerns, that more than 8,000 preschoolers under age 5 were suspended from public preschools at least once—and more than 2,500 of those children were suspended more than once. Although AA children make up only 18 percent of the preschool population, they represented 48 percent of preschoolers with more than one suspension. In addition, 54 percent of all preschoolers are boys, but boys made up 79 percent of suspensions.

The authors suggest that increased federal and state mandates to teach developmentally inappropriate academic skills is putting stress on our youngest children.

More recently, the U.S. Department of Education (2014) released Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data compiled in 2011-2012, for the first time since 2000. Data came from 97,000 public schools and 16,500 districts representing 49 million students nationwide.

African-American students represented 18% of preschool enrollment but 42% of preschool students suspended once and 48% of preschool students suspended more than once.

“The increased emphasis on academic skills, often to the exclusion of promoting intellectual and social-emotional learning through play, means young children have fewer opportunities to learn how to regulate their behavior, become deeply engaged in the learning process, and develop critical cognitive skills.”

Expulsions

Results are reported from a national study of 3,898 prekindergarten classrooms (81.0% response rate), representing all of the nation’s 52 state-funded prekindergarten systems currently operating across 40 states. Weighted results indicated that 10.4% of prekindergarten teachers reported expelling at least one preschooler in the past 12 months, of which 19.9% expelled more than one. Nationally, 6.67 preschoolers were expelled per 1,000 enrolled. Although this rate for state-subsidized prekindergarten is lower than what has been previously reported for child care programs, the prekindergarten expulsion rate is 3.2 times the rate for K-12 students. Rates are reported for each of the states and state prekindergarten systems represented. Significant cross state variability in expulsion rates was found, possibly due in part to differences in how state prekindergarten systems are structured. Rates were highest for older preschoolers and African-Americans, and boys were over 4½ times more likely to be expelled than were girls. (Gilliam, W. (2005). *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

Slide #11

Lingering in Childhood

Emily Kaplan’s (Boston area elementary school teacher) recent blog post featured on ECE PolicyWorks titled, “All I Really Need to Know I Should’ve Learned in Kindergarten, critiques the ““sooner, faster, further” thinking--that is, pushing our children to attain academic skills while depriving them of developmentally appropriate experiences” is likely to have significant consequences. She wonders, “*what if a necessary component of improving the long-term prospects of small children from disadvantaged backgrounds is not accelerating through childhood, but purposefully lingering in it?* Maybe, though, letting small children linger in childhood will support them to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions they need as foundations to *stay focused on achieving excellence.*”

Emily's Question is worth our consideration...two other recent articles provide more evidence that ought to give us pause:

Slide #12

Creativity in Childhood

Adam Grant (Professor of Management and Psychology at the Wharton School of The University of Pennsylvania. NY Times, Sunday January 31, 2016
Creativity and young children

He discussed how Creativity may be hard to nurture but it's easy to thwart. In a study of families of children who were rated among the most creative 5% in their school systems, the researchers found that parents encouraged their children to pursue excellence and success--but they also encouraged them to find 'joy in work.' Their children had freedom discover their own interests.

"When the psychologist Benjamin Bloom led a study of the early roots of world class musicians, artists, athletes and scientists and learned that their parents didn't dream of raising superstar kids. They responded to the intrinsic motivation of their children. When their children showed interest and enthusiasm in a skill, the parents supported them...a majority of tennis stars remembered one thing about their first coaches: they made tennis enjoyable."

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And in a recent (January 2, 2016, Vicki Abeles) NYT Sunday Review article titled, Is the drive for success making our children sick?" we learned about

STUART SLAVIN, a pediatrician and professor at the Saint Louis University School of Medicine, who studies the impact of stress on individuals. He anonymously surveyed two-thirds of Irvington High School (here in Fremont) 2,100 students last spring, using two standard measures, Depression Scale and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The results, he stated, were "unprecedented": 54 percent of students showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression. More alarming, 80 percent suffered moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety. Worse, those alarming figures were probably an underestimation; some students had missed the survey while taking Advanced Placement exams.

What Dr. Slavin saw at Irvington he described as a microcosm of a nationwide epidemic of school-related stress...a natural byproduct of the constant measurement in schools under pressure to push through mountains of rote, impersonal material as early as preschool. The article concludes with the warning, "*Yet instead of empowering them to thrive, this drive for success is eroding children's health and undermining their potential. Modern education is actually making them sick.*"

Slides #14, 15, 16

AnjiPlay

Some of you may have been at Mills College just two weeks ago, we had an audience of diverse stakeholders from all over California, the midwest, east coast and international guests...who flew in to hear about Anji Play, a comprehensive play-driven curriculum developed over the past 14 years in 128 public preschools serving 14,000 children 3-6 years old in the primarily rural county of Anji in eastern China.

Under the guidance of visionary regional director Cheng (Angela) Xueqin and a core group of school leaders, the schools began a process of reform based in the belief that it is the fundamental right of children to play. Ms.Cheng's work has dramatically changed the practices of early education in Anji and radically challenged the educational practices of the whole country. In 2014, Ms, Cheng's work was honored with the highest recognition in education in China, the Presidential Teaching Award, and the Ministry of Education is moving to adopt critical elements of her curriculum for the entire nation's young children. The hallmarks of AnjiPlay are children's self-determination through open-ended play, allowance of risk-taking, and the importance of joy, relationships, and love as central elements of children's and teachers' experiences at school.

It is inspiring to see what can unfold if we have the courage to step out of our system as it exists to ask critical questions about how our children and teachers are experiencing the reforms we are implementing...

Slide #17: Don't want to make ECE less early childhood like (Halpern, 2013)

So...as we work to support early childhood systems reform, we need to be committed to doing so in a manner that sustains equity for our profession and maintains what is valued and unique about relationships, learning and development in children's earliest years.

“We don't want to narrow and flatten young children's learning experiences or see ECE pulled into the high-stakes- testing, teacher-and-school-blaming accountability patterns that unfortunately became so prevalent across our nation for more than a decade under NCLB.” We have to be very careful as Halpern suggests that tying ECE more closely to schools will not end in ECE simply being less early-childhood-like.

“We want and need to hold onto early childhood's more generous view of children and education, by including consideration of not only the 'whole' child but also children's moral,

civic, creative, imaginative, artistic, culturally and linguistically diverse and individual, personal selves.”

“Early childhood should be understood to be “a life phase with its own value and purpose rather than only a period of school preparation”. that is, the purpose of high quality infant, toddler, preschool, family child care and other early learning environments is to support children to be one, two, three, four and five years old in enriching, responsive, supportive, engaging and challenging settings” (p. 210).

We don’t want to lose the present to the future. “As John Dewey insightfully stated over a century ago, to meet children’s needs, schooling has to be understood not as *preparation* for life but as life itself, broadly envisioned.”

Slide 18

Equity for Early Childhood Educators: Creating the Conditions that Truly Support Adults’ Professional Learning and Growth

Now I want to turn to Equity for Early Childhood Educators in Systems Reform: That is, several conditions we need to be mindful of and intentionally plan for if we are to realize the goals with QRIS and strengthening and improving teaching and caring practices by guiding their professional learning and growth.

Slide 19

The Importance of Language: Positioning our ECE Educators through Strengths-based Capacity Language

Language “does not passively reflect or merely describe the world...different uses of language constitute the world differently” ((Mehan, 1993, p. 262). The way we choose to represent individuals (e.g., teachers, family child care providers, children)—through our talk and written language—influences the way we think about them, which, in turn, influences the way we act toward them . In this way, language both reflects reality but it also constructs reality. And the way we represent individuals in language can significantly influence their identities because this language can fundamentally change the way they are perceived by their colleagues, peers, families and communities as well as the way they come to think about themselves.

Just as we have strong values in our profession about the importance of positioning all children through language that amplifies their strengths and capacities, we need to remember in our policies, research reports, professional development and QRIS ratings, to do the same with our early childhood educators.

If we want infant, toddler, preschool and early elementary educators to participate in ongoing cycles of improvement to strengthen their practice, they must feel respected as individuals who are seen with valuable assets and strengths to build on. If they feel that they are continuously represented as “lacking,” it is unlikely that they will feel safe enough to take the risks required for opening up their teaching and caring practices for reflection, feedback and change.

We want to position early childhood educators as individuals with strengths and weaknesses and most importantly, human beings “in progress” with growth potential and promise. Further, we need to communicate to them that they are valued and appreciated *because* of their diversity. We want individuals to understand that “the complex story of who they are matters” and is a more important representation than a numerical rating or assessment score.

Most importantly, we need to make sure that our focus is on creating the conditions to support ongoing learning and that the responsibility for improvement is not a light that shines solely on teachers. Instead, we all need to assume an inquiry, humble and learning stance in our work. To do otherwise is to not take equity seriously...Every decision we make that requires teachers to change, improve and grow, we must hold up the mirror to ourselves. how are we holding ourselves accountable for this same rigorous self-improvement?

Slide #20

Conditions that Support Professional Learning

Learning Communities that Support Collaborative Teacher Development (Whitford and Wood, 2010)

Cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and educators have studied how learning occurs for decades and we have a comprehensive understanding of the range of factors and contexts that both support and create barriers for adults’ learning. Although there are many variations in format, there are some common features that support positive transformative change in knowledge, skills, dispositions, and teaching practice.

Learning as a social process...teachers need to work in collegial communities that encourage sharing expertise and problem solving (p. 1). Educators must be able to take an active role in their own learning process...this positions them as professionals instead of technicians. And this requires a fundamental *trusting of teachers but we have a fundamental distrust of teachers (I will return to this next)*...

“Teachers have to be able to talk together to construct contextualized answers to contextualized problems” (Whitford & Wood, 2010, p. 18); rejecting recipe like technical answers to complex adaptive problems.

The best of the learning communities guide teachers to accept the responsibility to talk honestly about children they are failing to reach and about problems in their practice. Together they can ask for advice, pose questions, and seek answers. They tried out ideas in their classrooms and programs and bring those experiences back to the group for continued discussion... This is what Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (2009), call building a much needed “knowledge *of* practice.”...which brings together outside knowledge or knowledge for practice” (e.g., child development) and practitioner knowledge or “knowledge *in* practice”.

“The dispositions we must engender in students--a lifelong thirst for learning, mental agility and flexibility, informed judgment, collaborative work, and community mindedness--ought to be embedded in teaching/educator cultures” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009)

We must provide time for teachers to inquire into, and deepen their understanding and learning about their teaching craft if we want to see the changes we envision in early childhood.

Education systems around our world have schedules that provide time for teacher collaboration and planning to increase student learning. If we value this for our teachers, we can work to do the same.

Slide #21

Trust and Distrust in the Process of Educational Change

One final topic I want to talk about for just a few minutes is related to some important work on Trust and Distrust and their relationship to Educational change that Kathy Schultz, Dean of the School of Education at Mills College, and soon to be the new Dean at University of Colorado Boulder’s School of Education, is writing about in a book she is writing titled, *Distrust and Educational Change*.

Dr. Schultz reminds us that Learning—on the part of students, teachers and administrators—only transpires in an atmosphere of trust. Yet, if trust is necessary for people to learn and change, the presence of distrust, or actions that lead to greater distrust, prevents change from occurring.

She describes a typology of distrust that can be very helpful for understanding how it influences the outcomes of educational change efforts:

- **Relational distrust** she explains, is derived from interpersonal relationships and arises when an individual or group does not believe that the decisions or actions of other individuals and groups of people are reliable or based on a shared set of values or principles.

- **Structural distrust** she states, arises from hierarchies and bureaucratic structures or policies and an imbalance of power that undermine participation by local communities. So, for example, Making decisions *for* rather than *with* the community is an example of a condition that leads to Structural distrust reflecting hierarchical decision-making in which those in power make decisions for those in less powerful positions, often ignoring their dreams or demands. An example might be defining readiness universally and through tools and tests that are not permeable to local families' and communities' beliefs, values, histories and goals for their children's learning and development. Or, definitions of 'quality' that deny cultural and linguistic variability among educators and communities.
- Finally, she describes **contextual distrust** is tied directly to historical events that shape the distrust.

Trust is as Kathy Schultz describes, the “glue” in human relationships. In order for teachers to learn and to change, and to enact the reforms that will lead to higher quality practices, it is essential for there to be trust and a willingness to be vulnerable in order to truly learn.

“When educators, children, families, programs and schools are tightly monitored, it is impossible to imagine a successful process of change and likely that educational reform will fail.”

“In order for there to be positive and lasting change grounded in trusting relationships, it is essential to uncover, acknowledge, and directly address the genesis and sources of the distrust because without doing so, the solutions will not be sustainable.”

For structural and contextual distrust to be addressed, we must begin by naming what Carolyn Shields describes as our pathologies of silence. And for early childhood educators, there is no more significant silenced dialogue than the inequitable pressures educators face to increase quality and to professionalize without earning, in exchange, equitable teacher wages and compensation to indicate an institutional trust we place in their value and the significant contribution we know they are making to our entire society.

Slide #22

Equity for our Collective work for Change: An Inclusive Call to Action

Everyone in this room is to be honored and respected for the work they are doing on behalf of children and families. Only working together can we realize equitable systems change. As Clyde Kluckhohn wisely remarked in 1949, “*It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water.*” We each come to the work with our own histories, values, perspectives and goals. We need one another to learn and stretch our perspectives. We also need to support and respect one another.

ECE Educators in the room. You are rock stars in my eyes. You have the power to change the world in what you do and you do this everyday in your work with young children. In my call to action, I ask you to commit to continuously improving your practice, being vulnerable to open it up, to be open hearted for change and growth by committing to maintaining a learning stance. Ask questions about your teaching, observe closely and document and reflect on what you do, participate in learning conversations and learning communities, read and be curious about research and learning from your colleagues.

Principals, School/program and district administrators, Policymakers, Researchers infrastructure and community agency staff: Work towards building trust with teachers by carefully considering the language you use to represent them, including their professional knowledge and physical selves in the process that informs your decision-making and research and evaluation designs. There is no question that scientifically based research and evidence-based education positions practitioners as the recipients of others people's knowledge. Privileging outside/expert knowledge (your own) without considering the values, beliefs and goals of local and diverse communities, families and practitioners will always be perceived as problematic and lead to distrust. As Peter Senge warns, "Reality is made up of circles but we (too often) see straight lines."

Slide #23

Closing

In closing, I remind all of us that teaching is complex and political work. As Whitford and Wood remind us, "Teaching is not like building bridges between stable points, but like building webs among constantly moving parts."

I am ever hopeful and passionate about the important work ahead in working towards systems reform that bridges early childhood with public schooling, increases access and opportunities for young children and their families to high quality early learning environments, and continues to build the strengths and capacities of our early childhood workforce. I look forward to early childhood teachers, like the TK teacher I highlighted in the beginning of my talk, receiving the professional recognition, respect, and trust they deserve.

If we all commit to professional practice informed by inquiry, dialogue, listening, pausing, and thinking together, we will build the foundations needed for equitable systems change for children, families, and the early childhood professionals working so tirelessly on their behalf.

Slide #24

Thank you

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