

## NAEYC Interest Forums

- Asian
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  - Black Caucus
- CEASE/Violence in the Lives of Children
- Children of Incarcerated Parents (CHIPS)
- Children's Global Issues
- Community Collaboration
  - Diversity and Equity
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- Ethics in Early Childhood Education
- Faculty in Associate Degree Early Childhood Preparation Programs
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- Health and Safety in Child Care
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- Intergenerational Caucus of Early Childhood Professionals
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  - Men in Education Network
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    - Primary Grades
- Research, Practice, and Policy in Early Care and Education
  - Student
    - Technology and Young Children
  - Tribal and Indigenous
- Early Childhood Network (TIECN)
  - Worthy Wage

### Student Interest Forum

facilitator William H. Strader, former department chair of early childhood education at Hesser College in New Hampshire, wrote this column. Look for the NAEYC Student Interest Forum on Facebook.

This column and Part 1 (January 2011) are available in an online archive at [www.naeyc.org/jc/columns](http://www.naeyc.org/jc/columns).

# Turning College Students into Leaders in Early Childhood Education

## Connecting with Today's Students

**EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS** develop skills and acquire knowledge in colleges and universities, but they also benefit greatly from the personal connections they make as students. Faculty members mentor and support students as they grow in their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Student-faculty relationships give both parties opportunities to explore, discuss, and build on their experiences. "Mentoring is not only a way to develop a relationship that helps the mentee grow, it is also a fantastic opportunity for the mentor to grow and learn and to question and modify his or her own teaching and thinking," says Mary K. Jamsek, master teacher at the Priscilla Pond Flawn Child and Family Laboratory at the University of Texas at Austin. Campus early childhood clubs provide an ideal setting for students to build such relationships with faculty members.

When students join their school's early childhood club, they establish themselves as leaders and broaden their campus engagement. "The faculty advisor to an early childhood club plays a key role in supporting, mentoring, and guiding students," notes Kerry Ragno, who is faculty advisor to Tidewater Community College's Early Childhood Development Club and a member of the Virginia AEYC Student Leadership Committee. She knows firsthand the importance of student-faculty mentoring relationships. Kerry says,

I am having a full-circle experience with early childhood clubs. As an undergrad, I was the secretary of our club and built a relationship with the club's advisor, who became my mentor. She and I keep tabs on

each other. Last year, I sought her advice when I selected and was accepted in a doctoral program.

Club advisors are in a unique position to get to know students more intimately and help them find career and network opportunities. Now that I am a faculty club advisor, I plan to be a touchstone and lifelong mentor to my student club members, because that's what my own mentor taught me to do all those years ago.

### Early childhood clubs and the community

Most early childhood clubs and organizations are officially recognized student groups that meet student government association requirements. This means that a club has an official constitution (governance structure), a mission, elected officers, membership information, and designated times to meet. The mission of the club may be to provide students with the environment to discuss ideas pertinent to the field, build social involvement opportunities, and extend classroom knowledge through workshops, seminars, and guest speakers.

Early childhood clubs are often busy on and off campus. They participate in clothing drives, food drives, bake sales, car washes, children's fairs, and education workshops. Butler Community College Association for Early Childhood Education (BCCAEE) and Smart Start of Butler County, Kansas, are one example of a club-community organization partnership. Together the two groups offer resources to local professionals.

For example, at a recent professional development day for early childhood professionals, 12 BCCAECE members supplied resources to help 125 educators comply with regulatory requirements and improve the health, safety, and development of the children they serve. In April, BCCAECE conducted an all-day workshop, Enhancing Inclusive Child Care Programs for Children with Autism.

“Butler’s student group not only supports and promotes collaboration and community involvement, but it also encourages the early childhood educators in our community to continue their education,” states Audra Kenneson, director of Smart Start of Butler County and adjunct professor at Butler Community College. Smart Start has matched BCCAECE’s scholarship fund, enabling students to attend academic conferences—an opportunity they would not otherwise have.

## Student opportunities with NAEYC Affiliates

Mentors play a significant role in introducing students to resources and networks beyond the campus. For Brionne Thompson, it took a few nudges before she got involved in her state AEYC. “Although I was aware of NAEYC as an undergraduate, I didn’t become a member until I was pursuing my master’s degree. I worked at an on-campus center at the time. The director, a longtime NAEYC member, led me by the hand to the Utah AEYC booth at an early childhood conference.” Brionne joined and then accepted the student representative position on the association’s board. As Brionne’s career grew, her role with the affiliate grew, as well. Utah AEYC created a student liaison position to keep her on the affiliate board while she worked with student groups throughout the state.

**Student-faculty relationships give both parties opportunities to explore, discuss, and build on their experiences.**

Early childhood clubs are also great avenues by which early childhood professionals can reach students. Members or board members of the local AEYC can ask to attend an early childhood club meeting. They can tell students about their Affiliate, NAEYC, and opportunities for students. Board members can discuss their role within the Affiliate, student involvement, and leadership opportunities. Theresa J. Thompson,

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## From Student to Professional

I began my career in the early childhood education field as an undergraduate majoring in human development and family studies at the University of Missouri. I worked at the laboratory school with teachers who emphasized the importance of being a part of a professional network of peers and mentors. They were also involved in our local NAEYC Affiliate, Central Missouri AEYC. The lab school teachers often shared NAEYC materials and early childhood research with students and encouraged us to join NAEYC and get involved in the Affiliate. I joined my local affiliate because of my professors' encouragement and the welcoming atmosphere of the Central Missouri AEYC. They are the reason I became involved in NAEYC.

I attended my first NAEYC Annual Conference in 2007 in Chicago. The environment of like-minded professionals, the energy of my peers, and the in-depth sessions provided me with an amazing experience. The conference convinced me that I could grow and succeed as a professional within NAEYC.

When I chose to go to Missouri State University for my master's degree, I knew that the local NAEYC Affiliate would have a built-in network of local professionals. The Ozarks AEYC welcomed me to their board meeting, and I was nominated for a leadership position that night! Because of my involvement in Central Missouri AEYC and interest in getting more involved with NAEYC, I was elected president of the Missouri State University (MSU) Early Childhood Club, which operated in alliance with Ozarks AEYC. I worked with the Ozarks AEYC board and helped organize both community and university events.

With a scholarship from Ozarks AEYC, I attended the NAEYC Annual Conference in 2008. That was the year I went to the NAEYC Student Interest Forum's annual business meeting at the conference and joined the interest forum as a student representative. The Student Interest Forum allows early childhood education students to share their experiences, support each other, and network with other students and professionals. In our meeting, I met students from across the country and we shared our stories as emerging professionals—a very empowering experience!

As I grew more involved with the Student Interest Forum, my local and state Affiliates became more interested in the role of students in their organizations. This has led them to offer more opportunities for younger members. For example, the Ozarks AEYC and MSU Early Childhood Club have cohosted career fairs and professional development seminars for early childhood students.

I have acted as a voice for students at all levels of NAEYC—as an at-large board member for Rivers Bend AEYC, as a panelist at a Missouri AEYC conference, and as an NAEYC Student Interest Forum facilitator. Each level of involvement has provided wonderful leadership opportunities and expanded my professional network. My involvement in NAEYC even helped me secure a new job.

The encouragement and leadership opportunities I have received as an emerging professional have had a tremendous impact. I look forward to becoming more involved in NAEYC and supporting other future leaders.

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**Jami L. Swindell**, MS, is a toddler teacher for Bright Horizons at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She previously acted as a mentor teacher at Missouri State University. As an NAEYC Student Interest Forum facilitator, Jami presents sessions and networks with student leaders at local, state, and national conferences. [jamiswindell@wustl.edu](mailto:jamiswindell@wustl.edu)

lead early childhood faculty for Butler Community College, noted, "Our [BCCAEC] officers were invited to a Kansas AEYC board meeting when it was held locally, so they could see what happens at the state level. Afterward, several students expressed an interest in getting more involved."

As a result of the work of NAEYC's Affiliate and Member Relations office in conjunction with the NAEYC Affiliate Council, 15 state and regional Affiliates are working on a variety of initiatives related to students and future leaders. (The states and regions are Alaska, southern Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York State, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and northern Virginia.) The purpose of the initiatives is to strategically support the Affiliates' intentional outreach to students and faculty and two- and four-year institutions and to nurture emerging leadership at the local and state level. Some Affiliates have, for example, developed student sections on their websites and designated board members as student liaisons.

## Opportunities at the national level

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The number of students attending local, state, regional, and national conferences continues to increase. Students represented more than 100 colleges and universities at the 2010 NAEYC Annual Conference and Expo, and there is a growing international contingent that includes students from Australia, China, France, Japan, and South America. International students attend the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development as well as the Annual Conference.

With the development of the NAEYC Interest Forums, student networking opportunities have grown over the years. The Student Interest Forum hosts the Student Networking Center at NAEYC's Annual Conference. The forum offers student-specific confer-

ence orientation sessions, faculty and student presentations, business meetings, and professional networking events at the conference. Student attendees can also meet the candidates for the NAEYC Governing Board and leaders from other Interest Forums. The Student Interest Forum also organizes a celebratory dinner and holds a T-shirt exchange where students can swap school shirts.

At past NAEYC Annual Conferences, students have presented sessions on various topics, including maximizing the student practicum experience, writing an effective résumé, organizing an NAEYC student chapter, and creating meaningful leadership opportunities in early childhood clubs. As students step up to play a larger role in their school or local community, the Student Interest Forum continues to support these emerging leaders through Facebook, NAEYC's online community, and the Annual Conference.

## Conclusion

Our future leaders emerge from community colleges, four-year college and university programs, and graduate and doctoral programs in which supportive faculty advisors foster student growth and leadership. "Introducing students to professional associations such as NAEYC is part of our responsibility as early childhood education instructors," says Carole Williamson, faculty advisor for the Carroll Community College Early Childhood Education Club in Westminster, Maryland. "Preparing students for careers in early childhood education involves introducing them to all facets of professionalism, including public policy, multiculturalism, and model programs throughout the world."

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## DE NUESTRA PRESIDENTA *(continuación de pág. 7)*

logrado grandes progresos en el ámbito de la primera infancia!

En las últimas dos reuniones del Comité Gobernante de NAEYC, dedicamos un rato a conversar y reflexionar sobre lo que pensábamos personalmente sobre el significado de ser una organización productiva e inclusiva. Hablamos de esto en relación con las políticas y prácticas del Comité, las comunicaciones, el desarrollo de materiales, la recolección de datos y el desarrollo del liderazgo. Tomamos muchas páginas de apuntes, contamos nuestras luchas personales y profesionales, y aprendimos mucho de la gran variedad de perspectivas de los integrantes del Comité. Expandimos las dimensiones de la diversidad para considerar al pensar en los miembros actuales y futuros de NAEYC. Nos preguntábamos sobre las barreras que pudieran desanimar a algunos de unirse a la Asociación. Hablamos de la necesidad de desarrollar políticas que harían nuestra organización más acogedora. Respondimos al desafío que el Comité anterior expuso al escribir en el manual:

Las organizaciones productivas e inclusivas procuran aprovechar las tensiones inherentes entre el contexto histórico, el poder del presente y el cambio intencionado e inevitable para seguir siendo instituciones dinámicas y viables. Esto requiere un plan para manejar el cambio y para identificar y apoyar los resultados deseados de la transformación organizacional (página 93).

Nuestras conversaciones no han terminado, pero el Comité Gobernante ha ideado algunos planteamientos concretos que seguiremos utilizando al pensar juntos en el significado de ser una organización productiva e inclusiva. Dedicaremos un rato durante cada reunión plena del Comité Gobernante para reflexionar sobre lo que esto significa para nosotros. Hemos empezado a crear una herramienta a utilizar para la orientación del Comité Gobernante, la cual se enfocará en el concepto de las organizaciones productivas e inclusivas. Y estamos aumentando nuestros análisis de las decisiones sobre políticas que pueden tener impacto en nuestra capacidad de ser inclusivos.

Tengo mucho orgullo de integrar el presente Comité Gobernante, escuchar las conversaciones bien pensadas y observar a individuos que luchan por alcanzar comprensiones nuevas— y presenciar que creen pasos concretos con que avanzar hacia adelante. Espero que cada uno de ustedes emprenda también esta labor y considere verdaderamente la pregunta: ¿qué significa que NAEYC sea una organización productiva e inclusiva?

Sigamos conversando y aprendiendo juntos sobre maneras de abrazar la diversidad y la inclusión en nuestra profesión y nuestra NAEYC. Los NAEYC Interest Forums (Foros de intereses), abiertos a todos los miembros, ofrecen un modo de mantener dichas conversaciones. Los animo a todos a visitar [www.naeyc.org/community/interest\\_forums](http://www.naeyc.org/community/interest_forums).

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