Preparing Early Childhood Professionals

NAEYC's Standards for Programs

Marilou Hyson, Editor

NAEYC's Standards for Initial Licensure, Advanced, and Associate Degree Programs

Also includes standards material from:

Council for Exceptional Children/
Division for Early Childhood (CEC/DEC)

National Board for Professional
Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

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Introduction

by Marilou Hyson
NAEYC's associate executive director for professional development

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child,
that must the community want for all its children.

—John Dewey, *School and Society*

Looking into young children's eyes, we wish them limitless joy, limitless opportunities, and limitless achievements. In our complex world, it takes a system—not just a village—to develop every child's full potential. Many institutions, policies, resources, and family and community services must work together to create conditions that support early learning and development.

Teachers and other early childhood professionals have a unique place in this system. As researchers describe how early childhood education can best effect positive outcomes for children from birth through age 8 (Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2000; National Research Council 2001), one finding stands out: *Teachers are the key.* Curriculum, teaching strategies, assessment, comprehensive services, public policies—all are important. But it is through caring, committed, and competent early childhood professionals that young children and their families experience the excellent curriculum, the appropriate teaching strategies, the thoughtful assessment practices, the supportive services, and the effective public policies.

Early childhood professionals at work

Not all early childhood professionals start at the same place or arrive at the same destination in their careers. Early childhood professionals work in many settings and many professional roles—family child care provider, public school kindergarten or primary grade teacher, home visitor, program director, media specialist, trainer, education coordinator, and many others. In visiting just one early childhood program (let's say a full-day child care center for infants through 4-year-olds), you might meet . . .

• A lead teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education from a program accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). She holds initial licensure in birth–kindergarten education and has been employed by the program for four years. This teacher is currently working toward certification

National Recognition and Accreditation—NAEYC and NCATE

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is an organization that accredits colleges, schools, or departments of education in higher education programs at the baccalaureate and advanced degree levels in the United States. Today 550 institutions are NCATE accredited, and another 100 are getting ready for accreditation. The number of institutional candidates for accreditation has almost tripled in the past five years.

As of fall 2003, NCATE is a coalition of 35 specialty professional associations (SPAs), of which 19—including NAEYC—have NCATE-approved standards. In 2001 and 2002, respectively, NCATE reviewed and approved NAEYC's standards for initial licensure and advanced (master's and doctoral) preparation in early childhood education. NCATE's standards for all professional education "units" (colleges, schools, departments of education) require that "candidates" (future education professionals) demonstrate competence in their identified content areas. NCATE uses its SPAs to provide feedback and quality control in each of those areas.

How does NAEYC play a part? Higher education institutions that aim for NCATE accreditation voluntarily undergo a rigorous review process. One part of the process is for the institution to prepare reports on each of its specialty programs and submit the "Program Reports" to NCATE for review by the pertinent specialty professional associations. As one of these associations, NAEYC receives from NCATE the Program Reports from institutions that have early childhood education programs. Each report includes a description of the mission and context of the program, its conceptual framework, the desired outcomes for candidates, the program's unique characteristics and challenges, the system that the program uses to assess its students' progress in relation to the standards, and summarized evidence of student performance in relation to the standards. It also includes samples of students' work. (A detailed outline of what NAEYC requires in an early childhood Program Report may be found at www.naeyc.org/profdev.)

Once NAEYC has received these reports, members of NAEYC's Professional Development Panel (selected through an application process and appointed by NAEYC's Governing Board) meet as teams to review them and assess the programs' compliance with NAEYC standards. After reaching consensus on the basis of the evidence, each team sends its findings to NCATE, which forwards them to each institution. Following this phase and the submission of an overall institutional report to NCATE, a team from the NCATE Board of Examiners visits the institution and submits its own findings to NCATE's Unit Accreditation Board. At each phase of the process, programs and institutions have opportunities to rejoin (write responses to) the findings of NAEYC, other specialty professional associations, and NCATE.

Quality assurance

Program standards that define the core components for teachers are critical to quality assurance in the teaching profession. The NAEYC standards support the preparation of early childhood teachers who can provide the educational base for learning throughout a child's schooling.

In addition, program standards provide the benchmarks for teaching that are necessary for building quality systems of teacher education in our colleges and universities.

—*Donna M. Gollnick*, NCATE

from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), with an emphasis on bilingual and multicultural programs and family involvement.

• A teacher with an associate degree in early childhood education who is taking courses toward a bachelor's degree to receive initial licensure from her state. She would like eventually to mentor and supervise new teachers.

• An assistant teacher with a CDA (Child Development Associate credential). Having grown up in the community, she started working in the program as a teacher aide. She is now taking courses for an associate degree at a local community college.

• A director who combines an early childhood education background with a recent master's degree in program administration and leadership. Her master's project included an assessment of child care staffs' professional development needs.

• A new teacher aide who is still unsure of her long-term goals. She is talking with other staff, searching the Internet, and evaluating her own interests, strengths, and needs as she considers applying for a scholarship that would allow her to take an early childhood education course at a local college.

• A faculty member from the local university who has a doctorate in child development and early education. She supervises student teachers placed in several of the program's classrooms. Using information from a summer institute she attended, she teams up with several experienced teachers to teach a weekly on-site course on children's challenging behaviors for staff from this and other programs.

• An early childhood special educator who serves this and several other local programs. He meets with staff, observes, coordinates assessments of children about whom staff have concerns, and works with staff and families to develop IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) for children with disabilities. He is just beginning work toward a master's degree focusing on infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities.

These early childhood professionals differ in their responsibilities, but all have set themselves on a continuous path of formal education, specialized training, and ongoing professional development.

New research finds strong relationships between teachers' educational qualifications and young children's development and learning. Of course there are individual exceptions; but in general, if early childhood practitioners have higher levels of formal education and specialized training, they are much more likely in their work with young children and families to use the evidence-based practices and possess the ongoing professional commitment we know are necessary to make a positive difference in children's lives (National Research Council 2001; Barnett 2003).

Professionals make connections

The value added by high-quality education and training goes far beyond specific skills or techniques. As early childhood professionals move forward in their own learning, they become better able to make connections—

- between research and daily practice
- between challenging content standards and children's positive outcomes
- between a curriculum and an individual child
- between homes and schools
- between prior knowledge/experience and new information
- between national and state policies and their effects on children's lives
- between the program and diverse cultures and communities
- between program staff and other professionals who can serve as sources of expertise and resources.

Professional preparation and ongoing professional development are really about *making meaning,* connecting diverse areas of knowledge and experience in ways that make sense. These connections—built on a sound base of general education and professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills—give greater power and coherence to professionals' work, multiplying the benefits for children and their families.

Standards for high-quality professional preparation

The kind of professional development that provides that sound base is not accomplished cheaply or quickly. Brief training in a narrow set of technical skills does little to create the connections teachers need in order to see their work in a wider context and to develop the deep commitment that keeps talented educators in the profession. Nor is the key just getting a degree. Degrees matter, but a degree alone—whether associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral—is not a guarantee of professional competence. Courses in specified subjects, credit hours, and grade point averages mean little in the absence of an overall concept of the desired outcomes of early childhood professional preparation.

What does matter is what early childhood professionals know, what they are able to do, and the dispositions or "habits of mind" they possess to nurture and promote children's development and learning as a result of their preparation and continuing development. How can we encourage and recognize those competencies?

An answer is in the five sets of standards found in this book: NAEYC's standards for (1) associate degree, (2) initial licensure, and (3) advanced master's and doctoral programs; (4) the early childhood special education standards of the Council for Exceptional Children and its Division for Early Childhood (CEC/DEC); and (5) the Early Childhood/Generalist standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The very word *standards* makes some people nervous, and with good reason. If poorly developed and inappropriately implemented, standards can be rigid and incompatible with innovative practices. But at their best, standards—whether for children, for programs, or for practitioners—reflect a shared vision based on evidence and professional consensus.

The standards movement has been described as a very recent development, with early childhood education trailing behind other parts of the education field. However, the 75-year history of NAEYC is that of a major professional association building evidence- and values-based consensus around expectations for high-quality programs. The 1929 publication *Minimum Essentials for Nursery School Education* (National Association for Nursery Education 1929) began that history. A series of later publications and position statements outline early childhood program accreditation criteria (NAEYC 1998) and provide guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple 1997) and expectations for early childhood curriculum and assessment (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003). This volume presents new standards for professional preparation.

Many standards, unifying themes

The professional preparation standards of NAEYC and related organizations represent a comprehensive vision for what early childhood professionals should know and be able to do at various points along the continuing path of professional development—including associate degree, baccalaureate or initial master's degree, and advanced master's and doctoral degrees—as well as in the specialized preparation for becoming an early childhood special educator or an accomplished teacher certified by NBPTS. As the standards in this book emphasize, each of these has distinctive features, missions, and roles, and so the specific learning opportunities needed and the ways in which professional growth should be assessed vary considerably in each.

At the same time, these standards, which address diverse programs, levels of preparation, and professional roles, are unified by common themes:

• **Shared professional values.** Woven through each set of standards are a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion; responsibility for ethical behavior on behalf of children; respect for family, community, and cultural contexts; respect for evidence as a guide to professional decisions; and reliance on guiding principles of child development and learning.

• **A shared emphasis on the broad range of ages and settings included in early childhood professional preparation.** NAEYC defines early childhood as the years from birth through age 8. Linked by common developmental issues and learning needs, children in this age group require teachers and other professionals with specialized preparation and professional development. All standards for early childhood professional preparation give attention to kindergarten/primary-age children as well as younger children; this is especially important as

NAEYC's Standards

What should tomorrow's teachers know and be able to do?

1. Promoting child development and learning

Well-prepared early childhood professionals

- understand what young children are like;
- understand what influences their development; and
- use this understanding to create great environments where all children can thrive.

2. Building family and community relationships

Well-prepared early childhood professionals

- understand and value children's families and communities;
- create respectful, reciprocal relationships; and
- involve all families in their children's development and learning.

3. Observing, documenting, and assessing

Well-prepared early childhood professionals

- understand the purposes of assessment;
- use effective assessment strategies; and
- use assessment responsibly, to positively influence children's development and learning.

4. Teaching and learning

Well-prepared early childhood professionals

- build close relationships with children and families;
- use developmentally effective teaching and learning strategies;
- have sound knowledge of academic disciplines or content areas; and
- combine all of these to give children experiences that promote development and learning.

5. Becoming a professional

Well-prepared early childhood professionals

- identify themselves with the early childhood profession;
- are guided by ethical and other professional standards;
- are continuous, collaborative learners;
- think reflectively and critically; and
- advocate for children, families, and the profession.

Meaningful, participatory program reviews

With the change in focus from input to outcomes, program reviews now serve a more meaningful function and require ongoing participation of all faculty. How can such a shift in responsibility occur? I think it begins with the consideration of faculty dispositions. What faculty attitudes and actions lead to program quality and improvement? What are faculty's responsibilities to the overall program as opposed to their own courses and scholarship? What relationships with university colleagues, school staff, community members, candidates, and students need to be fostered to improve candidate competence and children's lives? I welcome the challenge to create opportunities for faculty to dialogue about such issues and to develop trust in the program review as a meaningful process that enhances program integrity.

—*Debra Thatcher,*
Northern Michigan University

trends toward narrower curriculum and assessment in K–3 programs become accelerated. NAEYC and CEC/DEC address infant/toddler programs in their standards; although the standards of NBPTS apply only to teachers of children ages 3–8, they too consider the wider scope of early development and learning.

Similarly, descriptions of standards for early childhood professional preparation are based on the knowledge that practitioners work in diverse settings, including group programs for children ranging from infants and toddlers through the primary grades, family child care, specialized early intervention programs, and programs focused on children with disabilities; government and private agencies; higher education institutions; and organizations that advocate on behalf of young children and their families. The roles that professionals assume

in these and other settings are equally varied, including classroom teacher, faculty member, trainer, home visitor, administrator, and resource specialist.

• **A shared set of desired outcomes for early childhood professional preparation at every level.** The three NAEYC standards documents (Associate, Initial Licensure, and Advanced) share a core of five standards:

1. Promoting Child Development and Learning
2. Building Family and Community Relationships
3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families
4. Teaching and Learning
5. Becoming a Professional

These core standards outline a set of common expectations for professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are critical at every level and in every setting (see "NAEYC's Standards—What Should Tomorrow's Teachers Know and Be Able to Do?").

• **A multidisciplinary emphasis.** All five standards documents reflect a common recognition that early childhood education, more than other areas of education, is truly a multidisciplinary field. Each organization's standards, at each level, echo expectations that early professional preparation must draw from and connect multiple disciplines.

• **Emphasis on outcomes.** In every case early childhood professional preparation standards focus on outcomes or results: What should future professionals in associate degree programs, initial licensure programs, advanced programs, and early childhood special education programs know and be able to do for young children and families as a result of their preparation? What should experienced and accomplished National Board Certified Teachers know and be able to do? The details of how higher education programs organize their courses and field experiences are less important than what students in those programs can accomplish as a result.

• **Emphasis on assessment of outcomes.** Combined with this emphasis on outcomes is an emphasis on continuous assessment of professional growth in relation to these outcomes. Each set of standards is accompanied by expectations that higher education programs (or, in the case of National Board Certification, the Board) should use an organized, fair, and effective assessment system related to the standards. Evidence from such a system can be used not only for purposes of accreditation or National Board Certification but also to help professionals improve and to improve the programs in which they are enrolled.

• **Balanced attention to knowledge, skills, and dispositions.** Each of these standards documents recognizes that early childhood professionals need knowledge (concepts and background grounded in both the liberal arts and professional specialization), combined with practical skills and dispositions. For example, abstract or conceptual knowledge about mathematics alone does not give a teacher of 4-year-olds everything she needs to be effective. Yet technical skills alone—how to present a math-based activity

Opportunities to develop dispositions

Disposition outcomes should be considered in the same intentional and systematic fashion as knowledge and skill outcomes when designing and implementing both initial and advanced early childhood professional preparation programs. What opportunities will the program provide to allow candidates to acquire the knowledge and skills that are prerequisite to demonstrating dispositions? For example, the ability to think reflectively necessarily precedes the disposition to reflect on one's teaching. How will the program provide opportunities for candidates to see dispositions modeled by program faculty, other candidates, and early childhood professionals in the field? How will the program provide multiple planned opportunities for candidates to practice and demonstrate desired dispositions? When will opportunities to observe, practice, and demonstrate dispositions be provided throughout the program?

—*John Johnston*,
University of Memphis

so that it will interest 4-year-olds—yield a shallow curriculum and poor results if the teacher lacks a sound mathematics knowledge base. Finally, if the teacher does not have professional dispositions (such as the belief that all children can learn), her well-conceptualized, well-taught math curriculum may benefit only a few children.

Linking the standards with a broader system of early childhood professional development

The standards in this book present a relatively comprehensive description of high-quality professional preparation and credentialing in colleges and universities and of certification of accomplished teachers who already have a college education and professional experience. However, the system of early childhood professional development is broader than that.

To be most effective, these standards need to be reflected in the content of community-based training, whether or not that training carries college credit. Such training is required in most states for staff in licensed child care programs. Ongoing training is also required for Head Start and Early Head Start staff, as well as for those working in public school kindergarten, prekindergarten, and the primary grades. Federal child care initiatives oblige states to create professional development plans, providing new opportunities for these standards to have a broader impact.

Another key component of the field's professional development system is the Child Development Associate credential. The CDA began as a noncredit, job-embedded credential but has increasingly been linked to college credit. With college credit, staff in Head Start and child care programs who are awarded the CDA may be better positioned to make the transition to associate and baccalaureate institutions. The CDA Competency Standards include six goals that closely align with the NAEYC standards for early childhood professional preparation. As these parts of the system become more connected, it will be important to emphasize the links between the CDA goals and the expected outcomes in the NAEYC standards for both associate degree and baccalaureate programs.

Additionally, all early childhood practitioners, whether or not they have degrees and certification, and whether or not their jobs require ongoing training, should experience continuing, in-depth, job-embedded professional development. This kind of professional development helps all practitioners—teacher aides, college faculty, directors, home visitors, and so on—to update their knowledge base, refine the skills that are most important in promoting children's development and learning, and reflect on their own growth. NAEYC's core standards and their key elements can easily serve as a guide for those planning ongoing staff development.