

**“Excellence and Equity of Care and
Education for Children and Families Part 3”
Program Transcript**

FEMALE SPEAKER: Ms. Vazquez, in our final conversation, I'd like to speak with you about equity and excellence in the early childhood professional preparation and in the early childhood profession. Let's talk about two major issues. One is the wage inequity in the early childhood field I don't think it's a secret that working in the field is very poorly compensated. And, secondly, are the working conditions in the field themselves, including the lack of mentors, the lack of time for reflection on what happened during the day, the lack of collaboration opportunities, and so on. What are your thoughts on these issues?

FEMALE SPEAKER: The way that I see it, and I have grown into the profession, we need to take more assertive steps in terms of professionals. And I think that some of that work is happening. But we need to take more assertive steps in to the respect of our profession. We are still viewed as babysitters. And that was a very difficult concept. English is my second language. So when I think of a babysitter-- and I translated it into Spanish-- I can't even find the word. I don't sit on children. That's not what I do.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Interesting.

FEMALE SPEAKER: We need to take, like I said, assertive steps. Because what we do does not lack any professionalism. We have a lot of preparation and studying to do before we sit in the classroom and before we prepare a lesson. There is a lot that comes to part in order for children to leave the classroom and feel confident, for the children to come into the classroom and want to come the next day.

That takes a lot of work. And it's not something that happens magically. True, some teachers are instinctively ready to work with children. They know how instinctively to connect with children. Others have to work harder at it. Nothing wrong with that. I'm not sure that doctors are all born ready to cure.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Exactly.

FEMALE SPEAKER: On the other hand, I think that we are in an uphill mode. We're moving towards where nurses are. That's the way I see it.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Interesting. Yeah.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Once upon a time, nurses were not considered professionals. Mom, grandmother, aunt, anyone could come and assist and take the place of a nurse when it was aiding someone who was ill or who got taken ill.

And it took a lot of work and took a lot of time for their profession to be recognized. And now it is recognized.

So we're in that, I think, in-between place where we are putting forth our voice and letting people know that we're not babysitters, that there is something that happens in the classroom. But we haven't yet been able to articulate that. And I do hold ourselves responsible. I don't think someone else can come and do it for us. If we know what we're doing, we should be able to articulate what it is that we do.

And because of that, we get paid as if we're doing a job that anybody could do. What I find interesting is that for the most part, when I've shared with friends or colleagues that I work with children and that I love four-year-olds, the first response is to say, I couldn't do it. That's a lot of work. So it's recognized.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Right. It is.

FEMALE SPEAKER: It's not like if it's not obvious. But we haven't been able to validate that recognition. And we need to be able to do that. We need to talk about how much time we spend of serving, what assessments do we use, how is it that we plan, how is it that we recognize the needs children have so that we can come to the level that we need to be. But that's the biggest piece, I think, that because we're associated with a profession that really anybody can do it.

FEMALE SPEAKER: So there is a real, not just perceived, but a real inequity that has to do with, on the one hand, the misunderstanding about our profession-- that it is not really seen as a profession, per se-- and the actual work that's being done. So there's a lot of talk these days about excellence in teaching, academic preparation for the field, emphasizes this excellence very well. Can you speak a little bit to the tension between the academic ideal of the preparation and the reality of the work with children?

FEMALE SPEAKER: It really is a painful conversation for me when I think about what and how we've gotten to where we are as professionals. We have many teachers and many paraprofessionals that are in the classroom that are doing wonderful things with children because intuitively they know what to do. They know how to build relationships with children. And they landed in the profession because they didn't speak English. They landed in the profession because there weren't enough resources at home so that they can become doctors or lawyers. They landed in the profession because by accident they used to babysit and someone said you can come into the classroom.

And in some ways, in making this transition into academics, we're devaluing the contributions that those individuals have made into our field. And we're coming to a place where now we want BAs. We want Masters in the classroom. We don't necessarily pay as much, but we want BAs, and we want Masters.

And I think that somewhere along the line, we need to reach a compromise. We need to figure out how is it that we pair them up. Because an education or a coursework without the experience, without having had an opportunity to practice, doesn't have as much value either. And that we haven't come to terms with that.

We have the academics, and I have run into colleagues who say, no, I wouldn't hire that person. Or no, I don't understand how is it that they have been able to stay in Head Start for so long if they don't have an AA or they don't have a BA. There are many ways of building a profession. And while it's important that we go to school, that we get a degree, that we get acquainted with the many philosophies and many approaches to working with young children, there is a human value. There is a human essence that cannot be taught.

FEMALE SPEAKER: That brings me then to the question of how one assesses a quality professional. a quality teacher. And I think that's one of the other ends of the debate currently going on. How do we actually value and evaluate somebody who has been in the profession for a while and somebody who is studying to become a professional? And what I hear you say, if I hear you right, is that there has to be some kind of compromise, that at the same time that we professionalize the profession, if one could say it this way, one would also have to find a way to value the experience that a person who has been in the field for a while brings and naturally does the right thing. Is that somehow what you're saying?

FEMALE SPEAKER: And that's where mentoring comes into place.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER: That we have mentors in our profession. We haven't used them well. Mentoring is not a relationship about I know more and that's what you're coming to me, so that I can teach you what I know. It's the same as in the classroom. It's about getting to know each other. Where do we complement each other? How do we complement each other? And it's an opportunity for those paraprofessionals who happen in the field, who do wonderful things, to share what they do, and for those who are coming into the profession, who are getting the schooling and getting the philosophy and getting the theory, to come and share that and have a meeting of the minds.

We're in a transition. I'm not advocating for this to continue to be the pattern for us. We definitely need to be professionalized. We need to get to the status where the nurses are. We work hard to be where we're at. And it's an investment. And it's a life investment when we come into the field. But we do need to figure out how is it that we make that transition without devaluing and without wasting the resources that we already have.

FEMALE SPEAKER: It's exactly that merging off the existing people in the field who have the experience and have proven themselves to be valuable to the profession, and the new blood in the profession that has a different academic background, and where the connection is not so much as one replacing the other, but one and the other cooperating and learning and working, learning from each other, working together. Right?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Right. And it's not a foreign concept. This is what we do in families. Early childhood education is not just about child development. It's not just about learning about the child. It really needs to expand further.

We need to look at our profession holistically, just like we look at the children coming into the classroom as part of the family and part of society and a community. We need to look at our profession and our professional growth in the same way. We need to get educated and get informed about working with young children.

But we can't afford not to prepare ourselves and building relationships and communicating with adults. That is part of what we do in the classroom. That is part of what we do in our work. We need to develop skills that allow us to have these articulated conversations with other professionals and with parents without making one be more important than the other.

And we also need to sharpen up and brush our skills in leadership. We are role models for the children, for the parents, for our community. Anything we do has an impact. And it comes with a responsibility. And we need to be aware of that responsibility. How we approach others, how we represent, how we speak about our profession needs to breed and shine and project those the skills of leadership that we want to bring into the classroom.

So for those of you are getting an education, look into that. Take classes on management. Take classes on social studies. How is it that our society has been formed is just as important as knowing PIJ stages of development.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Our students listened to other childhood professionals and HR professionals, who talked to them four courses back about the importance of passion in our profession. And I just wanted to ask you, talk to us about passion.

FEMALE SPEAKER: You have to go into the field with doing something that you like to do. It's something that has to feed you. It's not something that you can create. To me, it's the inspiration.

I don't know that I can take care of the environment. I don't know that I can take care of not all of the trees being destroyed. But I certainly know that I can make a contribution in someone else's life by simply being kind and being honest. And

that, to me, is by far more important than anything else that happens throughout my day. Because children take that and then live with it.

I've had children who are now adults come back. They're twice the size I am, and they still call me Teacher Delilah. Nothing replaces that. And that's where the passion comes in. It's in those contributions, those small contributions, and recognizing that we're making small contributions today that will pay off tomorrow.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Ms. Vazquez it was a pleasure to have these conversations with you. And we thank you so much for sharing your expert voice with us. Thank you very much.

FEMALE SPEAKER: My pleasure.