

**Leading for Change: Anyone, Anytime
Inaugural Karen Kaye Memorial Lecture
May 15, 2010
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I am honored to give the inaugural lecture in this new series dedicated to Karen's lifelong work on behalf of children, families and the early care and education workforce. I hope our conversation today will help us bring her vision to fruition.

As you heard, my connection to this community began long ago. I grew up near here, attending University High School, and as Patti mentioned, I worked at Connections for Children, my first job in the field after many years as a teacher of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. I came to Connections with a desire to help those working in homes and centers caring for and educating young children each day, though I was no longer a teacher myself. During my time at Connections, I also gave birth to my now almost 28 year old son, receiving tremendous support as a new parent from my colleagues at Connections, and at PICS, a wonderful infant/toddler center which some of you might remember.

The topic at hand today is leadership. Each of us may have somewhat different definitions that come to mind when we think of the word "leader" and different pictures of someone who we would consider to be a leader.

Leadership is a topic that almost all of us have opinions about. We may or may not see leadership the same way; and there is no one right

way. It's very personal. But since we don't typically ask people to define leadership, we often just assume people share our definition.

As you probably guessed from the title of this talk, in my mind, leadership has to do with working for change. That is because the status quo (the system we have in place now) doesn't work as well as it should, and I believe it must be transformed if we are going to guarantee all children have access to high quality early learning environments with teachers and providers who are well prepared, adequately supported and rewarded for their critically important work. I could spend hours focusing on what doesn't work, but I think this jingle -- which was part of the Worthy Wage Campaign in the 90s -- captures the problem with our ECE system pretty well:

Parents can't afford to pay,
Teachers and providers can't afford to stay--
For our children, join us in finding a better way!

So that's why I am focused on leaders as agents of change.

I have five criteria I use to define ECE Leaders. As I define leadership:

- 1) Leaders are *agents of change*; they are skilled at working to improve the ECE system for children, families and practitioners.
- 2) Leaders are *defined by what they do*, not by their role. A family child care provider, an assistant teacher, a lead

teacher, a director, a college instructor -- anyone can be a leader. Position does not determine leadership.

- 3) *Leaders are developed, not born.* Leadership can be learned.
- 4) Leaders *empower others* to work toward improving the ECE system. They encourage innovation, action and engagement of others to *accomplish their goals*.
- 5) *Leaders are visionaries, not managers.* They work toward something better, not just preserving things as they are.

I am going to share a story which tells you how I came to this view of leaders for ECE, and also provide some examples of leaders currently at work in our field.

In 1992, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) held its first Professional Development Institute here in Los Angeles. This was shortly after my colleagues, Carollee Howes and Deborah Phillips and I released the National Child Care Staffing Study, conducted in 225 child care centers in 5 cities across the country. We found that the education, specialized early childhood training and pay of teachers played a critical role in child care quality, and the quality of programs in turn influenced children's learning and development. This finding was not limited to care provided in centers -- another study conducted about that time focused on family child care also found training and education to be key to quality.

At the Conference, I was asked to participate on a panel to discuss what teachers and providers needed to know to be effective, and specifically I was asked to comment on whether advocacy was a skill necessary for teachers and providers to learn. I was very nervous about the panel, because it was one of the first times I had ever presented in front of a large audience (there were 800 people!), but mostly because I would be on stage with some of my ECE idols, particularly one whose writing about teachers had influenced me deeply.

I began my comments describing some of the conditions that early childhood teachers commonly faced -- no paid time for planning, too many children with too few adults, no subs so teachers worked when ill or without enough help, little incentive for more education and, of course, low pay, and the high turnover it fueled. I described how these conditions often kept practitioners from establishing warm and caring relationships with children, tending the fires of children's curiosity and love of learning, and fostering their development and readiness for school. Thus, I argued that teachers and providers should be trained to be advocates who understood and were effective in the realm of policy and politics. I argued that as long as their working conditions prevented them from implementing best practices for children, it was important to speak out and try to change them.

As I stepped away from the mike, my idol stepped forward—to my surprise, as it wasn't her turn and said, "Marcy is wrong. If teachers do a

good job, they will be rewarded with what they need in terms of pay and all the rest.” I was stunned, and once I recovered from my embarrassment, I felt angry, too. I had no idea of how to respond, but luckily, once the clapping of those who agreed with my idol died down, others jumped up to defend my comments.

At that moment, my notion of leadership began to change.

Even though my idol was an elder who held an esteemed place in the field -- a “leadership” position -- I realized that she was managing what was, not envisioning something better. She was also squelching an emerging young leader (yes I was once young). In my far less prominent role, I was the one acting as a leader, because I was trying to improve things for children and practitioners, while she was defending the status quo at a time when the National Child Care Staffing Study, and others that would follow, found that only 15 percent of child care settings were rated as good or excellent in quality and most were mediocre.

And of course the need for change, for challenging the status quo, continues. A Rand Corporation study of the quality of California’s early care and education system, released in 2009, similarly found only a small percentage of high quality programs, with most in serious need of improvement.

Last year I was invited to teach in a master’s program in Early Childhood Leadership at Mills College that is based on notions of leadership similar to mine. Funded by First 5, the program is explicitly designed to

support a linguistically and culturally diverse ECE leadership. It draws people from a variety of roles (teachers, providers, directors, those working in R&R, etc) and helps them build the knowledge and skills needed to influence the policies and politics that impact the quality of early learning environments.

I have chosen four out of the 32 participants in this program to date to tell you about today. Each of their stories gives me hope for our field. When the students started in the Mills Program, they viewed leadership as something they aspired to learn about, and thought that perhaps *someday* they would become leaders. They did not see that could be, or already were, leaders though most had been working in the field for many years.

I will start with Melanie* who began in the field as a nanny. In that role, she frequented a park where many licensed family child care providers brought their children. They noticed Melanie's skills in relating to all the children on the playground and encouraged her to start her own business. That was 15 years ago. Since then, not only has she established a thriving family child care business, but she also has earned an AA, BA and next month Melanie will complete an MA degree.

Melanie's timing for becoming a provider was good because a program called CARES (Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards) had just been established in California. CARES provides monetary rewards to child care providers (center teachers, administrators and family child care providers) based on their education levels and

*All student names have been changed.

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continued commitment to their education and professional development. CARES also offers career counseling, tutoring, help with computers and a host of services to help practitioners in the field access and succeed at higher education.

In San Francisco County, where Melanie lives, family child care providers can receive higher reimbursement for caring for low income children if their homes receive a certain quality rating. Melanie noticed that many providers, including her, were not advancing on the rating scale (and thus not getting higher reimbursements). Many were taking classes and going to workshops and she wondered what the problem was. It turned out that they were not using bleach to clean tables before and after children ate and at counters where they prepared food. They were all using an alternative product, as effective as bleach, which had the benefit of not aggravating asthma in children and adults, as bleach is known to do. They had started this practice under the guidance of the County Department of Health.

The providers, including Melanie, tried to get the Gateway to Quality program (which does the rating and determines the reimbursement) to change the bleach requirement. No luck. Gateway to Quality said any change would have to be approved by the people in North Carolina who had designed the rating scale. A letter to North Carolina yielded no better result. Then Melanie had an idea. She approached the people at the Department of Health, explained the problem and enlisted their help. Her

contact at the Department of Health agreed to call the folks in North Carolina, and a phone call later, the alternative to bleach was approved. They will also be posting a memo on their website approving an alternative to bleach for anybody using the scale (FIDCR) around the country.

Melanie is an agent of change.... what she does defines her leadership; she is dedicated to empowering herself and others to improve conditions for children and adults.

Now I would like to tell you about Theresa, a preschool teacher in the Berkeley Unified School District. The 20 children in her class speak six different home languages. Despite her considerable education and training, Theresa felt unprepared for the linguistic complexity in her classroom. Having come to the United States from the Philippines in her teens, she knows the importance of retaining one's home language for maintaining a tie to one's family and culture. Ironically, none of the children in her class speak her native language, Tagalong.

Theresa is acutely aware of how important it is that teachers establish meaningful relationships with the parents of children who are dual language learners, parents who may be learning English as well. When Theresa asked other more seasoned teachers how to handle the linguistic situation in her classroom, she got the same advice. Ask for a translator to

come in for conferences, or ask your assistant teacher to translate. That's what Theresa tried, but she wasn't satisfied. It was uncomfortable and awkward with an outside translator, whom Theresa often didn't know, and when she did the conferences with the assistant teacher, the assistant teacher and the parent would begin talking in their native tongue, and Theresa was left out of the conversation, unable to further establish a relationship with the parents.

But Theresa didn't give up. She asked parents to come to the first conference of the year to tell her about what they do at home with the child, as a way to signal her interest in their role in the child's life. She let them tell her what they wanted her to know, rather than giving them information. She also started brushing up on Spanish, because that was the most common language, other than English, spoken by children in her class.

And she had another idea. She would take her progress notes on each child, and would use Google Translate so each parent would have information about their child in their primary language as well as in English. These translations signaled to the parents her respect for their language and her commitment to trying to improve communication. As she says, "I told the parents that it might not be perfect translation but at least they get the main idea about what I want to tell them about their child. By the 2nd conference of the year, parents know that I can understand some Spanish and I know which parents understand some English. In these cases we have

our conference with me talking in English with some Spanish and them talking in Spanish. It works out.”

While still not perfect, especially for the parents who speak languages other than Spanish, the translations are helping the parents and Theresa feel more comfortable with one another. She notices more parents are signing up for conferences, coming to meetings and helping out in the classroom when they can. Still Theresa knows it could still be better. Recently she approached her school principal, explained how the issues around language were affecting her and other teachers, and asked for the principal’s help in bringing other teachers together to talk about these issues. The principal has now set up a leadership committee for such professional learning time!

Theresa, too, is an agent of change -- what she does defines her leadership. She is always working toward something better, not just settling. She is skillful in working with parents, empowering them, and is committed to engaging others to accomplish her goals.

Let me next introduce you to Sarah. After teaching in preschool for many years, she became a professional development coordinator for a large Head Start agency which employs about 40 teachers and assistant teachers. As you may know, Head Start increased requirements for teachers and assistants in 2008 and, by 2013, half of the teachers in any

agency must have completed a BA degree, and the assistants must earn their Child Development Associate Credential. When these new requirements were announced, Sarah was charged with helping everybody enroll in the necessary college classes to meet the requirements.

She learned about the relevant courses offered in her community and shared the information with the teachers and assistants. She was surprised by the response or, more accurately, the lack of it from the teachers and assistant teachers. She learned that, even though there was money to go to school and paid time off to attend classes, very few teachers and assistants were signing up. She tried distributing the information again, but still no received response. So she decided she needed to figure out what was going on. She committed herself to speaking individually with every teacher and assistant, to learn from them directly why they weren't enrolling in school.

A few people had decided they were going to retire, rather than go back to school. But the others were eager to earn their degrees, and recognized the great opportunity they had because their employer would support them with time and money to go to school. What was stopping them wasn't cost or concerns about missing work or caring for their families.

Instead, their fear was about being back in school, and particularly about having to take a math class! So Sarah got permission from her director to approach the community college and to use some of their

agency's professional development funds to offer a math class for these teachers and assistants in one of the centers, geared for adults who hadn't done math for many years and using examples from early childhood settings so that teachers and assistants would see the application of what they were learning to their everyday work with children. And so began the journey back to school for many of these women -- because of Sarah's vision and action.

Sarah is an agent of change---what she does defines her leadership. She is skilled at working with practitioners, empowering them, and looks to achieve things in new and creative ways.

Finally, let me tell you about Zoila. When I first met Zoila ten years ago, she had just finished college, and was working in a child care center and working on her MA degree. She applied and was hired to become a part time research assistant on for a study I was conducting at UC Berkeley. Her knack for research, her ability to carefully observe and record what she saw in centers and homes, combined with her experience with young children soon led to me offer her a full-time, permanent position. She accepted, because it meshed with her interests, but also because she knew how hard it would be to repay her education loans by working as a preschool teacher.

It was wrenching for her, because she loved her center, and she had always assumed she would teach children, like her mom, Monica. Zoila grew up in the child care world, where Monica worked in an infant program for children of migrant farm workers. (In fact, Monica has worked in the same center for about 33 years. She herself was working in the fields, with two young children—Zoila and her older brother—when the center opened for migrant farm worker families. Monica wanted to be with her children each day, so she applied for one of the assistant teacher positions. Today, she is a Master Teacher in the program).

Zoila had returned to school because she felt committed to using her education—to ensure that children who spoke a language other than English were supported to be bilingual -- like she herself was -- developing fluency in both their home language and in English. She recognized that many dual language learners found themselves in early childhood settings with no adults who spoke their home language, and she came to realize that many teachers were struggling because they did not share a common language with children or their parents.

This struggle was underscored in her center in San Francisco where she found herself at a loss, not unlike Theresa. Although she is bilingual in English and Spanish, it did her little good when faced with a crying child (Thomas) calling out in Chinese for something to comfort him when his mother dropped him off at school. (He kept saying gaw gaw --which is Chinese for brother -- and Thomas' brother was in the next room. Zoila

couldn't go get Thomas' brother, because she didn't know what Thomas meant until one of the other children told her.

These experiences led to her master's thesis in which she documented that children who are linguistically isolated in a classroom, without a teacher who speaks their language, actually are spoken to less than other children who have an adult linguistic partner. Zoila's research is helping to pave the way for changing the thinking about what skills teachers and providers need to become well-prepared.

Zoila also focuses on the needs of teachers and providers who are themselves English Language Learners. There was a local CARES program in the county where Zoila's mom and some of her coworkers are employed, and it provided support for them to take a course at their local community college. After the first class, Monica called Zoila to tell her how worried she and her colleagues were about the class they were taking. They were having difficulty understanding the instructor who lectured exclusively in English. They felt they would grasp the information better if it were in Spanish. As Zoila was telling us about the problem, she realized that she knew the woman who ran the CARES program, and she picked up the phone and suggested that CARES should pay the cost of a translator for the class. That's what happened. But a few weeks later, her mom called again, worried about the quality of her paper if she wrote it in English, which was all the instructor would accept. So Zoila urged her mom to write it in Spanish, and she would translate it.

This experience strengthened Zoila's commitment to findings ways to support more people to become college instructors who speak Spanish and the other languages that so many of our providers and teachers speak. Now Zoila is heading up a study in our center called Learning Together, which tracks the experiences of a very linguistically diverse group of teachers and providers who are earning their BAs in 6 colleges across CA (CARES funding again). She is encouraged that many talk about wanting to continue for their Master's and become those instructors. She herself will soon be completing a doctoral degree, focused on teachers' strategies for working with children who are dual language learners.

Zoila is an agent of change—what she does defines her leadership. She is dedicated to learning new skills that empower her and others to improve conditions for children and adults.

I think these four stories effectively describe and help to define leadership in ECE. To review:

- 1) Leaders are agents of change; they are all committed to and skilled at working to improve the ECE system for children, families and practitioners.
- 2) Leaders are defined by what they do, not by their role or position. A family child care provider, a teacher, a professional development coordinator, a university

researcher-- their stories show that anyone can be a leader, all can be leaders.

- 3) Leaders are developed, not born. Leadership can be learned. None of these women initially saw herself as leaders. In some ways they are still not entirely comfortable with the label, but their experiences in school and their continual support of one another is changing their self definition). Leadership is always a work in progress. Anyone can learn to lead.
- 4) Leaders empower others to work toward improving the ECE system. All encourage innovation, action and engagement of others to accomplish their goals. (And leaders need support from others. All of these women -- remember they were all in the Mills Leadership Program in EC together -- had one another and mentors who encouraged them to act as agents of change).
- 5) Leaders are visionaries, not managers. All are working toward something better, not just preserving things as they are.

Melanie, Theresa, Sarah and Zoila -- and other leaders I know -- also share certain *personal* qualities and what might be described as the 3 essential leadership qualities:

1) Leaders demonstrate perseverance/alguien que persevera

- Melanie kept going pushing to find a resolution to the bleach problem.
- Theresa kept looking for better strategies for communicating with her families.
- Sarah kept digging to unlock the resistance among teachers to taking classes.
- Zoila keeps searching for new ways to document problems and system solutions to address the needs of our linguistically diverse child and practitioner population.

2) Leaders are systems thinkers, pensador mas alla de lo personal

- Melanie looked beyond her own rating problem, noticed it was happening to others, sought to understand why and how the system could be changed.
- Theresa is pulling others together so that it is not just her classroom that gets better, but all teachers in her school can benefit from each other's knowledge.
- Sarah made the connection between individual stories and bigger barriers affecting many teachers, and sought a group solution.

- Zoila focuses on how to build a better educational and leadership pipeline for our linguistically and culturally diverse workforce.

3) Leaders are Committed to ongoing learning/

alguien comprometido con el aprendizaje permanente

- Melanie has taken every advantage of opportunities to advance her formal education and improve her practice.
- Zoila too has invested in her own education to learn the skills to become an action researcher.
- Theresa and Sarah demonstrates reflective practice, always questioning her approach, trying new things and reflecting on how well they work. They are always seeking new opportunities to learn from others.

I want to take a moment here, and talk about the **Leadership Learning Gap** that I mentioned in the beginning and ask you to think about what it is that leaders need to know about and be able to do? What are the competencies that undergird leadership development (programs like this and the one at Mills, as well as professional development opportunities for those who won't be pursuing degrees). This topic, no doubt, could take us well into the evening. My colleague, Lea Austin, and I have developed a curriculum (and are about to start a book to be published by Teachers College Press) which begins to grapple with how to fill the leadership

learning gap. In the next few minutes, I will give you a super quick overview of what we think are the essential areas for learning and offer you a taste of some of the activities we use to help people build the necessary skills.

Simply put, we want leaders who are competent in the realm of **policy, politics and power**, in addition to whatever other areas of knowledge and skill they need for the many roles they may fill.

- 1) **Policy:** We need leaders who understand the lay of the land, all the components of the system and how they fit together. They need to know more than their own neighborhood or sector, and they need to understand how the larger world of policy operates.
- 2) **Politics:** We need leaders who understand how we ended up with the system we have, who the stakeholders are and who has less and more influence on how decisions are made.
- 3) **Power:** We need leaders who understand personal and collective power and action, and are able to strategically exercise influence to achieve their goals.

Finally, I want to return to my first story before I close. About six months after the conference in 1992, I received a letter in the mail from my (fallen) idol. I was surprised, and frankly nervous about what she might say. Her note began with her admitting she had been wrong. Many people had spoken to her about her comments at the conference, and challenged her to reconsider her ideas. She said she so wanted teachers to be able to

focus only on their work with children, on improving their practice, that she wanted me to be wrong. But she realized that our current system didn't give teachers what they needed and she agreed that advocacy skills were necessary.

She hoped I would accept her apology. I did, of course.

The experience turned out to be an important gift. She helped me to see that leaders are human, and like any of us, can misstep. At that moment at the conference, despite her position and title of leadership, she defended the status quo. In writing that note, she helped me to see that true leaders learn from their mistakes, if they are willing to change, not just the ECE system, but themselves. Leaders may not lead every time or in every situation, but they can emerge at anytime.

We all know how important scaffolding and support is to children as they venture forward to try and learn new things. So it is for all of us, especially when we are leading for change which feels risky because we are trying to do things in a new way.

In my 40 + years in the field, my ability to speak out about the things teachers and providers need, has been made possible by mentors (such as Betsy and others), because of those I have mentored like Melanie, Theresa, Sarah and Zoila, who have in turn taught me so much, and by close friends (like Patti) who help me sort through my feelings of nervousness and doubt, and colleagues, like Rory Darrah, whom I met when thirty-five or so years ago, when we were teaching in child care centers. Rory's and my work

together has spawned the National Child Care Staffing Study, the Worthy Wage Campaign, the CARES program, and helped to launch the Mills Program, among other things. There was no way I would give this talk today before Rory made some suggestions and gave her “Ok.”

As I close, I would ask you to take a moment to reflect upon what you are doing right now to lead for change or something you could or would like to be doing. How can you lead for change? During the rest of our time together today, I hope we can all hear about your ideas and help you make them happen—by discussing what you might need to learn, who you need to involve, and who can support you in your efforts.

Leading for change means ANY OF US CAN LEAD, AT ANYTIME.

THANK YOU.