

Who's Missing at the Table?

Leadership Opportunities and Barriers for Teachers and Providers

Marcy Whitebook

I understand beauty and leadership in similar ways. Both come in many forms, yet in any given culture, we can easily identify the form of beauty or leadership that is most highly valued and acknowledged. My understanding of beauty came to me more than a quarter-century ago, as a college senior in the late sixties, participating in my first women's consciousness-raising group. Ten of us—young, healthy, and lovely in a variety of ways—told our life stories, invariably sharing the familiar pain we all felt about our shapes, features, and coloring. Slowly we came to realize that each of us judged our own appearance in relation to our internalized view of the cultural norm of beauty. (As a woman with dark curly hair, I compared myself most unfavorably to blond Julie Christie, who was then in vogue.) We were failing to appreciate, enjoy, or value our own considerable gifts. That shared understanding released enormous amounts of positive energy, allowing us to acknowledge and value our beauty and, most important, to relax the hold of self-defeating energy.

I would suggest that the early childhood community is likewise caught in the grips of culturally sanctioned notions of leadership and, as a consequence, fails to recognize the full spectrum of leaders among us. In so doing, we stifle important, creative energy in our field, restricting our understanding of who leaders are and preventing the valuable contributions and perspectives of many. Specifically, acknowledged leadership in our field tends to mirror the larger society values that demean caregiving work performed by women and involving children. As a result, the acknowledged leaders in our field typically do not work directly with children, and the leadership qualities of those that do each day are routinely overlooked.

I raise these issues not to invalidate our current leadership but rather to argue for creating a more diverse and representative acknowledged leadership in the early childhood field (I know that my own status in the early childhood field is in many ways directly proportional to my distance from the actual work of caring for children. And yet, I believe, the degree to which I am effective as a leader is directly linked to my own experience working in the classroom and my connection to those who currently are teachers and providers.) Expanded understanding and opportunity for leadership for teachers and providers empower all of us who want to improve the image of child care work. Upgrading societal understanding of the skill and importance of early care and education work is essential to garnering the resources that will lead to greater financial reward for teachers/providers and, ultimately, better services for children and families. If our field does not value the contributions of teachers and providers, it is highly unlikely that the rest of society will.

We cannot fail to remember the crisis in our field. Both the quality of early care and education services and jobs are declining at an alarming rate (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips 1990). Our current strategies to improve programs for children and jobs for their caregivers are unequal to the daunting obstacles we face. We need new ways of looking at the problems that characterize our early care and education system. The greater inclusion of teachers and providers will expand our leadership not only in numbers but in the breadth of potential ideas.¹

Characteristics of the acknowledged early care and education leadership

Who currently constitutes the identified leadership in our field? Although only limited studies of early childhood education organizations have been conducted, I have some strong hunches about what more extensive examinations would reveal. My impressions, drawn from more than a quarter of a century working in early care and education and from discussions with teachers and providers, suggest the following characteristics.

The acknowledged leaders of the early care and education field *are not* typically practitioners who spend their days working with children. They may or may not have done so in their past. Frequently, if these leaders worked with children, it was long ago and under dramatically different circumstances. This characteristic of our leadership distinguishes us from other professions, such as medicine or law, in which practitioners rise to positions of status and power. Nurses and K-12 teachers sometimes assume more visible leadership roles, often because their professional organizations explicitly represent their interests and promote them as field leaders. In contrast, the largest professional association in our field, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as well as most of the other national organizations, seldom even includes teachers and providers in its slate of candidates for the Governing Board.

Acknowledged leaders in our field typically hold advanced degrees beyond the bachelor's. This is somewhat predictable because our field is highly educated. More than half of center-based teaching staff and regulated family child care providers have some college background. Among center-based teachers approximately one third have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips 1990; Cost, Quality, & Child Outcomes Study Team 1995). But because of the low pay and lack of recognition for working with young children, many with advanced degrees in the field leave the classroom or home - even if they would like to continue. The net result is a leadership cadre with few teachers and providers and the impression that leadership positions are open only to those who hold higher degrees.

A high proportion of our leaders are associated with a university or other institution of higher learning. Many others work in a government department or resource-and-referral agency. Few come from the family child care homes and the relatively small, community-based programs, both for-profit and nonprofit, that characterize our field. Center directors who are identified leaders often hold management positions within a larger system or chain, rather than working closely with a particular group of staff and children. Because of their educational backgrounds and jobs, most of the acknowledged leaders in our field earn incomes that are several times greater than even our most highly educated and tenured teachers and providers. As a function of their jobs and income, our identified leaders have greater freedom to travel, attend meetings and conferences, and write about their experiences in the field. The acknowledged leadership also includes a greater proportion of males and Caucasians than constitutes the larger early childhood workforce (National Black Child Development Institute 1993).

Barriers to teachers and providers assuming greater leadership roles

As the analogy about beauty suggests, there is a distinction between acknowledged, or recognized, leadership and actual leadership. In discussing the absence of teachers and providers in acknowledged leadership roles in the field, I do not mean to suggest that teachers and providers fail to show leadership qualities. Rather, their leadership often goes unrecognized by those outside the classroom or home. And teachers and providers too rarely occupy positions of power and visibility in which they could act as spokespeople for decisions and policies that influence the distribution of resources in organizations and programs. A number of intertwining factors discussed below contribute to the dearth of acknowledged leadership among teachers and providers.

Failure to recognize and value teacher and provider leadership skills

As anyone who has ever worked with a group of children knows, effectiveness requires well-honed leadership skills. One has to guide, both directly and indirectly, the interactions and movements of many young children (and adults) through space and time. Facilitating the transition of a group of children, for example, from high-energy outdoor play to more lowkey circle time, and then on to a snack, strikes terror in the hearts of many novice caregivers. The leadership skills required often do not resemble the more traditional notion of a leader as someone who commands authority and respect and directs others. Leadership skills in an early childhood environment require a more subtle and participatory style that is barely visible to the untrained eye. While co-workers know who has these skills, because they are invisible in the greater society, which views child care work as the natural proclivity of women, they are often difficult to acknowledge in oneself and in colleagues. Even less obvious to people are the many adult skills required of teachers and providers as they interact with coworkers, parents, grandparents, foster parents, volunteers, trainees, and other professionals. Effective teachers of young children are

also supervisors and teachers, and therefore leaders of adults. The style of leadership utilized by effective early childhood teachers and providers with their peers does not call attention to itself, but it nevertheless requires careful honing and practice.

The leadership skills that teachers and providers develop while working with children and families can be applied relatively easily outside the classroom or home, if there is adequate support and recognition. Teachers and providers can translate what they know about working with children and adults to other situations. But all too often, when they participate in settings outside the center or home, their skills and experience are not recognized or valued, and they are, perhaps unwittingly, excluded from information or processes, which in turn limits their participation. For example, in public policy discussions, child care teachers and providers lack access to the most recent information on proposed legislation and thus remain silent in discussions. Most do not receive newsletters or other bulletins that provide policy updates. But teachers and providers have valuable insights about the implications of policy changes for children and families—implications that often are unrecognized even by those more aware of the nuances of a particular bill. Teacher and provider voices are often muffled by those of us who volunteer our opinions, often repeatedly, and we fail to consider whether our group process encourages or ensures everyone an opportunity to share their perspectives. When our early care and education meetings assume certain types of knowledge, neither recognizing the range of information and perspective that people bring to the table nor people's comfort level in the particular venue, those with the least sanctioned skills and experience are often hushed.

The lack of support for teacher and provider leadership roles is related to another contradictory phenomenon in the early childhood field. Although we identify ourselves as educators, we often restrict what we know about how humans learn to our work with children and pay relatively little attention to adult learning and growth (Jones 1986). Most of our conferences and meetings and much of the writing in our field mirror more traditional forms of pedagogy and communication that are less accessible or inviting to many teachers and providers. Our restricted teaching and leadership styles also fail to reflect or encourage the cultural and linguistic richness that is so evident in the early childhood workforce.

Insufficient compensation and its consequences

Inadequate pay fuels high rates of job turnover among early care and education workers, forcing many of our most experienced and skillful practitioners to seek jobs outside the classroom or home, and even the field (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips 1990; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes 1993; Cost, Quality, & Child Outcomes Study Team 1995). Among those who stay, many work second jobs to earn sufficient income to support themselves and their families or, in the case of family child care providers, work exceedingly long hours that make participating in leadership activities difficult or impossible.

The lack of sufficient resources in early childhood settings, combined with practitioners' meager earnings, results in limited access to professional development, participation in advocacy, or other experiences for many teachers and providers. Many leadership activities, such as conferences and meetings, are held during the work week. Teachers and providers usually can attend only if they can be paid for their time and a substitute caregiver can be arranged, but the limited resources in the field make this difficult and all too rare. Payment for travel to meetings, accommodations, and meeting/conference fees are beyond the financial reach of most practitioners.

Insufficient organizational representation for teachers and providers

Relatively few child care teachers and providers maintain organizational ties; only 14% of center staff teachers belong to any professional or occupational group (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips 1990). Even fewer center staff (4%) belong to a union, although this percentage varies by the sector of the industry (Morin 1991). (Nearly 25% of Head Start workers are represented by unions, and even greater proportions of public school child care teachers work under a collective bargaining agreement, but virtually no workers in for-profit centers have union recognition.) Most family child care providers do not belong to organizations, and many have limited or no contact with other providers (Galinsky et al. 1994). Regulated family child care providers and those who

participate in the Child Care Food Program are more likely to be involved in family child care associations (Galinsky et al. 1994). But the majority of child care workers do not participate in organizations that enable them to build sanctioned leadership skills or to assume acknowledged leadership roles among their colleagues.

Most organizational options for teachers and providers also include members from a wide variety of early childhood roles. Typically, teachers and providers are only one of several occupational groups within these organizations, and they must struggle to make their voices heard among a competing chorus of other interests. Within their union locals, child care employees often constitute a small minority of the membership, which may comprise service workers or teachers of older children. The same dynamic operates for teachers and providers within NAEYC.

By far the largest organization in the early childhood field, NAEYC has experienced growth paralleling that of the industry as a whole in the last two decades. From modest beginnings in the 1920s as the National Association of Nursery Educators, which represented nursery school teachers and university-based child development professors, NAEYC now numbers 96,000 members, organized in several hundred regional Affiliates. From 1975 to 1990 alone, NAEYC's membership grew four times larger. Only a handful of teachers or providers have been elected to the Governing Board in recent years. Similarly, while the organization's peer-reviewed journal *Young Children* publishes articles for frontline practitioners and includes practitioner-written articles, in fact, few of the articles are written by teachers not associated with an institution of higher learning.²

Promoting teacher and provider leadership roles

Articulating and validating the skills involved in child care work, building a career development ladder that supports better compensation and rewards training, and consciously creating organizational roles for teachers and providers are all necessary steps toward building a more diverse leadership in the field. (These efforts will help diversify the leadership not only by job role but also by ethnicity, as teachers and providers are disproportionately women of color.) In recent years, targeted efforts have been made to acknowledge and build leadership roles for teachers and providers. Profiled below are the Worthy Wage Campaign and early childhood mentoring programs.

The Worthy Wage Campaign, initiated in 1991 by members of the Child Care Employee Caucus within NAEYC, is coordinated by the National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force, formerly the Child Care Employee Project. The campaign is a nationwide grassroots effort to empower child care teachers and providers to mobilize to reverse the early care and education staffing crisis. It now consists of more than 200 member groups in 39 states, plus the District of Columbia and Canada. The campaign is organized around the following three principles:

1. creating a unified voice for the concerns of the early care and education workforce - which overwhelmingly comprises teachers and providers - at the national, state, and local levels;
2. fostering respect for those who work with young children by improving their wages, benefits, working conditions, and training opportunities; and
3. promoting the accessibility and affordability of high-quality early care and education options that meet the diverse needs of children and families. (Child Care Employee News 1992)

The campaign recognizes the importance of local efforts by child care teachers and providers in bringing the staffing crisis to awareness in their communities yet acknowledges that this voice remains weak or absent in most communities. As the campaign evolved over the last several years, local membership groups have developed and many teacher/provider leaders have emerged. As one Seattle-based teacher explains, "The Worthy Wage movement is the nest where in the last three years I have grown tremendously as a leader and a believer in myself and my work with kids" (B. Wiley, personal communication, June 1994). Local campaigns engage in a variety of activities to build the confidence and skills of teachers and providers as spokespeople for the profession in their communities.

Recently, the National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force, responding to requests by local campaigns for assistance, created the Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP), a curriculum and training process for child care teachers and providers. The training is geared to people at a variety of levels of experience in leadership, organizing, community action, and advocacy—newcomers meeting with other teachers and providers for the first time, budding leaders who have some experience but want to strengthen their skills, and experienced leaders who need help in nurturing new leadership and replenishing themselves. The curriculum is designed around the three critical stages of empowerment: coming to awareness, engaging in inquiry and analysis, and taking action. The training helps teachers and providers articulate their own stories, interpret these experiences in the larger context of history and community, and use that knowledge to identify appropriate steps toward change.³

Early childhood mentoring programs, another significant development in recent years, promote teachers and providers as leaders in the field. Though the programs vary in structure, often because of state and local regulations and sources and amounts of funding, most of the several dozen now in operation across the country are committed to four common goals:

1. retaining experienced and skilled teachers and providers in early childhood classrooms and homes by providing them with financial incentives and recognition of their skills;
2. offering learning opportunities for skilled teachers and providers, particularly in the areas of peer coaching, reflection, leadership, adult development, anti-bias work, and advocacy;
3. providing learning opportunities for novice caregivers (protTgTs) with their more experienced teacher/ provider colleagues to further their joint professional development; and
4. improving the overall quality of early care and education programs in the community. (Whitebook, Hnatiuk, & Bellm 1994)

Mentoring programs build leadership by acknowledging the skills teachers and providers already have and by helping them to extend their abilities. In so doing, mentoring programs help stem the turnover that is so destructive to our field and enable new teachers and providers to see that they can be recognized for their work with children and adults. Mentors speak eloquently about the process.

I've been a family child care provider for 20 years. By becoming a mentor and responding to people's questions, I am realizing how much I know. (Whitebook, Hnatiuk, & Bellm 1994, 15)

Becoming a mentor is another step in learning from each other. There is so little respect for this field that we don't recognize what we know or have to offer. The mentor program has changed that - there is a new sense of professionalism and respect....It's different because teacher and providers are talking instead of being talked about. (p. 17)

The program encouraged me to find the strength inside of me. It gave me a voice. We need change, and it can't happen unless we are heard. (p. 12)

Her work with children almost seemed magical; she had such an easy way of guiding and nurturing. Since she has become a mentor ... she uses the same skills with student teachers, gracefully helping them to question and adapt what they do. (L. Gardinier, personal communication 1995)

Almost all of the mentoring programs create time and offer support that enable providers and teachers to become involved. Most include some financial reward for the mentor through a stipend or raise in salary. The programs recognize that good teachers are good advocates and help mentors work on a wide range of skills. Several programs include set aside time for mentors to engage in the larger community as advocates and spokespeople.⁴

Beyond these more formal projects, a number of programs and organizations support and promote teachers and providers by pursuing a combination of strategies. Underlying each of these strategies is recognition of the

importance of bringing child care teachers and providers to the tables where decisions are made, and, equally important, the necessity of creating appropriate resources that permit those who work directly with children to take advantage of these opportunities. The strategies include

ò more convenient scheduling, coverage, release time, and financial assistance. Meetings, conferences, and advocacy events can be planned to accommodate teachers' and providers' schedules. Paid leave time can also increase participation in these activities by practitioners. Paid, reliable substitute coverage reduces the conflict that workers feel in leaving the children in their classroom or home program to pursue professional development activities. Groups wanting to involve teachers and providers should consider providing financial assistance for child care, transportation, program fees, and accommodations which otherwise limit access to activities outside the home or classroom.

ò acknowledgment of the full range of teacher and provider skills. Teachers' and providers' efforts to build skills related to their work with adults, as well as their work with children, require support. Inservice or community training for teachers and providers can focus on adult relationships within early care and education settings and related issues of adult learning, diversity, and leadership styles. Teachers and providers recommit to the field through engagement in learning processes that validate the full range of their job duties and contributions. Redefining leadership, for example, to include teamwork or sensitive support for a child with special needs serves as important professional recognition.

ò support for advocacy as a vital part of professional development. The definition of career development for teachers and providers can be expanded to include advocacy activities and participation in community forums as representatives of the early care and education field (Whitebook 1994). To facilitate teacher and provider participation, paid leave and substitutes or other coverage are essential. For example, when centers are asked to send a representative to a community meeting, they may select and support a teacher to attend. United Front Child Development Program in New Bedford, Massachusetts, offers teachers not only annual paid professional-development leave but also three days of paid advocacy leave so that they may participate in community rallies or other events to improve early childhood services. Workers at the United Front Child Development Program are unionized, so they also have the option to take union leave from their jobs, without loss of seniority and with a guarantee of employment. During the leave they may work for their union and be trained in local organizing and other aspects of teacher representation.

Teachers and providers should be encouraged to participate in other advocacy efforts that encourage their leadership (e.g., the Worthy Wage Campaign, mentoring programs, the leadership and diversity projects coordinated by NAEYC Affiliates, or the new Head Start Leadership Fellowship). Centers and organizations can provide supports to enable teachers and providers to participate. For example, Step One School in Berkeley, California, provides release time to teachers working on community education efforts for Worthy Wage Day. Some NAEYC Affiliates and family child care organizations provide scholarships or stipends to enable their members to take advantage of career development opportunities in the community.

ò restructure leadership bodies of early care and education organizations, including centers. Teacher and provider representation in leadership positions must be proactively sought if it is to be assured. For the teachers and providers who constitute one third of the National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force board, the organization covers all travel and leave costs, for example. For other organizations with limited contact with teachers and providers, such policies require active outreach and recruitment. Because of the lack of value placed on their work and the lack of recognition for their leadership, teachers and providers may not see themselves as capable of participating. At the center level, encouragement and support may mean reserving slots for teachers on governing committees and providing compensation for additional hours beyond the scheduled workday.

ò attention to diversity. As leadership positions in the field open up to those people who work directly with children, we must ensure that these opportunities reach teachers and providers from the full spectrum of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. This may require programs and organizations to examine their approach to diversity and their assumptions about leadership and learning and to develop multilingual training and other resource materials and/or provide translation services. (See Moore, chapter 8.)

Conclusion

Those of us who participated in women's consciousness-raising groups years ago have not escaped the influence of cultural norms of beauty. But as we now come to terms with our middle-age faces and bodies, we have an understanding that helps us navigate the years with more self-acceptance and appreciation for ourselves and other women. And I think we contribute in some indirect ways to a broader understanding of the range of physical attractiveness.

My hope is that the early childhood field will begin to recognize and challenge the cultural standards of leadership that silence many of our most creative and dedicated colleagues. We can challenge the internalized low value placed on child care work in the greater society that is reflected in the limited presence of teachers and providers as our acknowledged leaders and spokespeople. By so doing, we can develop a group of leaders who are willing to question the status quo and to take the necessary risks to make working with young children a career that people can afford to pursue and a career that is respected.

Notes

1. Thanks to members of the Worthy Wage Campaign and the Early Childhood Mentoring Alliance for their assistance in helping me understand leadership issues in the field. Special thanks to Dan Bellm, Alice Burton, Robert French, Laura Gardinier, Patty Hnatiuk, Rosemarie Vardell, and Claudia Wayne for their assistance with this article.
2. A number of teachers and providers within NAEYC want the organization to take a stronger position on compensation. These members tend to be college trained and educated, and many identify strongly as professionals. These teachers and providers view NAEYC as the organization that should represent them on economic issues. In part, many want this because NAEYC does a very good job providing its members with the latest in research and other information relevant to their work with children. It seems to them a logical extension of NAEYC's function as a professional organization. Many also believe, however, that NAEYC's success as an organization is relatively independent of teacher/provider membership. NAEYC ironically has experienced enormous growth during the same period that teachers' and providers' wages and levels of program quality have dropped substantially. Many in the NAEYC leadership would like to see compensation improve, but the issue carries less urgency than it does for teachers and providers struggling to make a living for themselves and their families (Katz 1994; From Our Readers 1995).
3. Training can be arranged through the National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force office (1-800-URWORTHY).
4. For more information about specific programs and the network of individuals and groups involved in mentoring, contact the Early Childhood Mentoring Alliance, coordinated through the National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force.

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Commentary

by Alice Walker Duff

The famous John F. Kennedy quotation "Ask not what your country can do for you-ask what you can do for your country" always reminds me that the key to success is finding the right questions to ask. In her chapter, Marcy Whitebook asks, "Who's Missing at the Table?" In this commentary I attempt to amplify the Whitebook chapter by asking different questions about leadership in early care and education. The questions are tools to help clarify current understanding of leadership in our field and to better appreciate the Whitebook chapter. The goal is for all of us to envision possibilities that, when realized, will substantially improve our field.

Improving the field is the point of the Whitebook chapter. After asking the title question, Whitebook explains why she thinks early care and education teachers and providers are not acknowledged leaders or spokespersons in their own field. Describing successful programs that challenge current cultural standards of leadership, she suggests how teacher/provider leaders can develop. However, the fundamental question - Why does it matter? - is not asked and is only partially answered in the text. That omission is intriguing. Only when we understand the importance and value of inclusion are we motivated to achieve it.

The Whitebook chapter generates a myriad of questions for each of us in the field. From my perspective the most important one is, Are we telling the truth? It is closely followed by others: Do we mean what we say? Are we taking responsibility for our beliefs and actions? Are we holding others accountable for their beliefs and actions? Are we doing what we can for ourselves and not hiding or waiting for someone else to do it for us? Are we seeking positive outcomes for everyone? Do we want success more than we fear failure? Are we people - not saints, victims, or martyrs? Until we can answer these questions in the affirmative for ourselves and the field in general, teachers and providers will continue to be devalued, unfairly compensated, and absent from the policy table. In addition, the majority of the care we provide will be mediocre. Quality affordability, and accessibility will continue to elude the vast majority of us. Why? Because complex questions get inadequate answers when meaningful participation from significant segments of relevant populations is missing. Inclusion makes us stronger and more effective.

We are not telling the truth about leadership in our own field, and I believe it is debilitating us. I attempt in this commentary to tell the truth as I see it. The purpose is not to assess blame, or ignite guilt, but to encourage a rigorous, honest look at leadership in our field for the purpose of its well-being. This well-socialized provider has been reluctant to speak difficult truths in public, but serious times require risks. From this beholder's eye, leadership in our field is in serious condition. We are faced with unprecedented challenges without confidence in how to resolve them. Never before have so many families and children needed our services. Not since the Great Depression has the perceived relationship of need to identified resources been so out of balance. As I see the unspoken, but broadly accepted, truth, we in the field are self-interested, territorial, competitive, defensive, and scared. We do not seem to accept that we are human.

The problem is not that we have these human traits. The problem is, we do not know how to effectively handle them. In self-defense we deny them. Too frequently we are dishonest about our motives and beliefs. Our beliefs seem to scare us. Having talked to, worked with, and observed legions of people in this field, I think we fear that the best and the brightest are not in this field. We fear challenges to our assumptions. We fear our fundamental societal problems are not "fixable." We fear that, if we win, someone else must lose. We fear that we don't have the answers to our most difficult questions. And we are afraid that we do not have the power, or are not able, to effectuate the answers we do have. We are afraid of the truth because we think it is too difficult or too ugly. Do these fears sound familiar to you? What is your list of unspoken truths?

Whatever the truth is, we are not saying it where and when it matters. We even question if it matters. We need the courage to speak the truth to people who have recognized power. First, and most important, we must gather the courage to let down our well-developed defenses and speak the truth to ourselves.

It may be hard to understand or appreciate why it is important to speak difficult truths in public. It may seem that all it does is expose dangerous weaknesses and thus make us more vulnerable. In fact it does. However, it does something else that is less obvious but more powerful. The truth unleashes incredible positive energy. Whitebook and her friends experienced the release of positive energy when the truth of their beauty was recognized and spoken. Speaking hidden truth also allows attention to be focused on fundamentals. An incredible amount of individual and organizational energy is used trying to keep secrets, maintain illusions, and avoid reality. Thus, in addition to finding new energy, truth eliminates huge time wasters. It actually enables accomplishment of goals and exchange of ideas. What about those exposed weaknesses? Will they be our demise? If they are exposed and left unattended, probably so. But, if they are exposed and attended to, they increase our strength exponentially and increase our power.

In our imposed or selected roles of victim, saint, or martyr, we deny that we are powerful individuals. That denial keeps us trapped in the status quo and keeps us from being leaders. How do we change the status quo? It is a skill that can be taught and must be taught to a wide spectrum of people, especially teachers and providers. It starts with at least one person confronting a consequential question of value and will. While the answer lies within each individual, the solution requires both individual and collective action, conducted both locally and nationally. While articulating and assigning priorities is important, matching time, talent, and financial resources to priorities is essential. Setting goals and time lines, monitoring progress, seeking feedback, revising plans, and working daily is how change occurs. Knowing this, why have we not significantly improved the compensation of early care educators? Tell yourself the truth-about yourself and those you know.

Reading Whitebook's thought-provoking chapter, I ask myself, Am I part of the problem or the solution? What have I done to create, promote, allow, or accept the conditions she describes? I hope this commentary prompts you to ask yourself the same questions. The answer for me is that leadership for direct-service providers has not been a priority. I have not taken responsibility for changing the status quo for teachers and providers, and I have missed opportunities to raise issues of inclusion and compensation.

The next time you attend a gathering focused on any level of policy, ask yourself the following questions: What is the purpose of this meeting? Who are the stakeholders? How are their experiences and concerns included in this meeting? Do we have sufficient inclusion? What would be a better way - in terms of outcomes and resources - to be inclusive? What can be done to make meaningful inclusion possible? What can I do about it? Do not be afraid

to ask these questions in the context of race and gender. Solutions may seem impossible, but when time frames are expanded, the seemingly impossible becomes possible.

What is the truth that keeps teachers and providers, African Americans, Latinos, and other people of color away from the table where decisions are made? As Whitebook pointed out, we in early care and education tend to mirror the larger society. We do not understand the value and need for diversity. We hold values that demean caregiving work performed by women involving children. Likewise, we mirror the values that demean people of color, especially men of color. As Whitebook observes, our values result in excluding people who work with children and people of color as our acknowledged leaders. If inclusion is not convenient, we do not extend opportunities to use and develop leadership skills. My experience matches her hunches about the leadership in our field.

Not only is our view of leadership mired in dysfunctional values, but it is also limited by narrow frames of reference. As Kagan and Bowman point out in chapter 1, attention to early childhood leadership issues has been sparse, despite the acknowledged importance of the subject. We still act as though leadership comes naturally.

In addition to Whitebook's illustrations, here are some specific suggestions to improve our leadership abilities. We need to spend money on leadership development. Personal, agency, corporate, association, and governmental budgets must reflect this priority. When parents become true partners with caregivers, greater personal and political will develops to support the field. We must recognize, celebrate, and reward - both financially and psychically-leadership.¹ Early care and education professionals need to seriously consider politics for themselves.² As we use mass media and technology to support our field, we can develop our leadership skills and improve the status of the field. Responding to talk radio shows, writing letters to the editor, and communicating on the Internet through home pages and chat rooms are powerful development activities and ways to raise the public consciousness.

I expect that a common reaction to the Whitebook chapter is, It can't be done, because we can't conceive of how to do it now. We do not have highly developed skills in management or systems change or inclusion. But there are ways to have meaningful inclusion at policy tables and ways to develop early care and education leadership and improve our field. We will find them and implement them if we speak the truth not only to power brokers but also to ourselves. We need to heed the wisdom of Nelson Mandela, prime minister of South Africa, who points out that our worst fear is not that we are inadequate. He insists that our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. If we don't tap into that power now, teachers and providers will continue to be undercompensated, undervalued, and exhausted-and they will be unavailable for our children, families, economy, and future.

Notes

1. The National Black Child Development Institute, for example, recognizes leadership with the annual bestowing of the Sarah Harbin Award. Think about the consequences of every organization doing so and publicizing it in the media. I look forward to the day when the Sarah Harbin is as famous and sought after as the Oscar.

2. Maxine Waters from South Central Los Angeles is an exemplar. Grounded in her Head Start experience, she has been a leader for early care and education in both the California State Assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives.