

## Ready or Not Seminar Discussions: Frequently Asked Questions/Voiced Concerns

**Q:** We have already made plans for our Mentor Seminar time this year. Do we have to drop everything and only discuss this topic?

**A:** No. We acknowledge that each Seminar is different. You and your Mentors may have already planned to explore some topics this year or need to spend some of your Seminar time focused on other issues. We are all learning as we go along. We suggest that you introduce the plan, get feedback from your Mentors, then proceed at a pace and in a way that best fits your Seminar.

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**Q:** Is this discussion mandatory?

**A:** We appreciate that the Mentor Program has never before had a statewide topic for any one Mentor Seminar, much less a year-long theme. This is an adventure, an exploration of new territory, on many levels. We want to consider Mentors and Seminar Facilitators partners in this adventure, as fellow explorers. The significance of this discussion will diminish significantly unless it is a statewide discussion, so we strongly urge every Seminar to participate in the process.

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**Q:** Our Mentors discussed “School Readiness” at length last year. Are you saying that we have to go back to this same topic?

**A:** No. We believe that the discussion process we have introduced approaches each of the defining intents from a new perspective. We are not suggesting that you devote lengthy discussion to defining the characteristics of, for example, “School Readiness” as that concept has been defined by others. Rather, you explore together, by way of discussing teacher competencies, what YOUR MENTORS THINK teachers should know and know how to do in order to provide the needed support to children and families in order for them to be ready—AS YOUR MENTORS DEFINE “READY”—for kindergarten and beyond. You may wish to separate this into different discussions, one for kindergarten readiness, and one for readiness for grades beyond, in terms of emotional intelligence, embracing exploration and pursuing inquisitiveness, characteristics that will serve children far beyond kindergarten.

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**Q:** NAEYC has already done extensive work on teacher competencies. Other groups in California are working on this issue concurrently. Isn't it too late to make a meaningful impact?

**A:** No! California is in the process now of deciding on Teacher Competencies, so the Mentor Seminar discussions cannot start soon enough. Your Mentors may want to refer to NAEYC's work on teacher competencies or tap into California's current advanced discussions on this topic. **However**, we urge you to support your Mentors in thinking outside of these boxes. The teacher competencies work done by others broadly addresses all aspects of teaching, not the specific *Defining Intent*s that we are asking your Mentors to explore. They may think of new competencies or begin to question or refine the competencies considered by other groups.

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**Q:** What if the Mentors in my Seminar believe that one or all of five *Defining Intent*s provided for the discussion are inappropriate or inadequate?

**A:** Note that the very first step in the discussion of each *Defining Intent* is to identify the key characteristics of that Intent. This discussion provides a critical opportunity for Mentors to elaborate, narrow, or specify what that Intent means to Mentors—NOT how the NAEYC, legislators, parents, ECE advocates, or even the Mentors' programs define the Intent, but how Mentors understand it. Mentors may want to research other descriptions and definitions, but that research should inform, not limit their discussion. So, for example, your Mentors *might* identify key characteristics of the *Defining Intent* "Nurturing, Loving Care" to be:

- Developing and nourishing teacher/child relationships as a platform for brain development and learning.
- Creating and maintaining a physical environment that promotes safe exploration.
- Providing continuity of care from birth to kindergarten.
- Modeling supportive, positive interactions with adults and children at all times.
- Practicing positive discipline.
- Etc.

Playing this example out, if THE *Defining Intent* of ECE were to provide Nurturing, Loving Care, the competencies that teachers would need would include deep knowledge of brain development, learning theory, continuity of care models, positive discipline, etc.

Even if your Mentors believe that one or more of the "selected" *Defining Intent*s should not be considered by policy makers, please encourage them

to follow the process through the grid. They (and you) may be surprised at how rich the discussion is. Remember: Keep it hypothetical!

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**Q:** What if the Mentors in my Seminar believe that all five *Defining Intent*s should be combined or added to in order to comprehensively describe the goals of ECE?

**A:** Encourage your Mentors to resist the “both/and” thinking that has been a strength of our field but has also served to hold us back from the hard choices that we need to make. Remember there is public ambivalence about our field because we don’t clearly define our purpose.

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