

Facilitator Guide

Mentor Seminar Ready or Not Discussions, 2009-2010

Background Information and Impetus for this Effort

Stacie Goffin and Valora Washington's book Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education is a thought-provoking challenge to those of us who want high quality to be the standard in all Early Care and Education Settings. The authors challenge us to recognize that at this moment, in the eclectic group referred to as the "field" of ECE, understandings and opinions differ importantly about at least three things:

- **The defining intent of ECE:** Is our most important function to care for children so that their parents can work? To prepare them for kindergarten? To promote their physical and cognitive development? To promote their social development?
- **The identity of ECE:** What do we do that others can't or don't? What special skills or knowledge do we apply to the work of caring for and educating young children? Can we demonstrate our competence? Can we document it with degrees or certificates?
- **The responsibility of ECE:** Studies show that high quality Early Care and Education yields social and educational benefits to children throughout their lives, but are we willing to defend the premise that *ALL* ECE settings do so? Are we willing to take responsibility to develop and enforce a set of standards applicable to all programs calling themselves ECE programs?

At last fall's Train the Trainer Conference, co-author Stacie Goffin presented the key messages from Ready or Not. She urged teachers in particular to become involved and warned them that if they didn't, people who don't understand child development will be making decisions on their behalf. During a Breakout Session after her keynote speech, she asked the group, "Who should begin this conversation? Who should convene? Who should lead? Why aren't teachers even at the table?"

The discomfort in the room was palpable. Why? Some thoughts:

1. **The elephant in the room:** Our leaders have been reluctant to begin the conversation because of, among other reasons, "the nice factor:" they would rather include everyone from part-time aides to Rob Reiner as members of the field than introduce potential conflict and division among the people they consider colleagues. On the whole, "we," whoever "we" are, are inclusive.
2. **Teachers' Voices:** On the one hand, advocates for child care quality decry the long hours and low wages of ECE teachers, on the other, they ask "Why don't teachers fight for the field?" when on any given day, the fight may take place in the middle of the day in Sacramento or late at night on the Internet.

Stacie's questions, and the discomfort in the room, sparked two rhetorical questions:

1. If teachers need to step up to the plate and get involved in determining the defining intent, identity, and responsibility of the field, who better suited to do so than Mentors, a community of teachers selected using strict criteria for developmentally appropriate practice and environment who already meet monthly in their local communities for the benefit of their professional growth?
2. If it is too overwhelming or threatening to start with the tough questions the book asks, why can't we start with another question, focusing on children?

Beginning the Journey

We worked with co-author Stacie Goffin via conference calls and email for several months to develop an approach that we believe will help Mentors conquer the many complex and emotionally charged issues of Ready or Not one step at a time. Stacie joined us as our keynote speaker for the June 2009 Mentor Institute. Beforehand, we developed a format for discussion to pilot at the Institute.

We chose to focus on the *Defining Intent* question the book poses as the best first step for our Mentors' discussion. Mentors need to learn how to do "adaptive work," as Stacie and Valora call it. "Adaptive work strives to close the distance between people's espoused values and their actual behaviors, work that by nature usually necessitates painful trade-offs."♦ Such work will require Mentors to learn how to verbalize their values, listen to the foundations behind others' values, adapt their opinions, and accept compromise. It is the same process as negotiating a peace treaty.

Wow. That sounds hard.

As a Seminar Facilitator, your charge is to support your Mentors as they learn to work together adaptively. Our common goal is that Mentors are able to begin the discussion at a comfortable, low-conflict level. Over the course of months, we hope that they develop or refine their "peace treaty" skills: To apply their experience and knowledge to a shared problem, appreciate other perspectives, and accept concessions in the interest of the common good and the power of unity.

♦ Goffin, S. G. & Washington, V. (2007). *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, p.12 in reference to Heifetz, R.A. (1994). *Leadership without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press.

The three critical parts of our strategy to introduce Mentors to adaptive work:

1. Begin the discussion on a **hypothetical assumption**: “If this were true, then . . .”
2. Base the discussion on **what children need** to be the productive, well-balanced adults of 2035-2050.
3. Keep the discussion about **the future**: Presume that the decisions made here will have NO impact on the careers of the people in the room.

Structure & Process for Seminar Discussions

Step 1: Provide a Game Plan

Your first goal is to to charge your Mentors up, elicit excitement and pride at this opportunity to, as College of the Siskiyous Mentor Program Coordinator Kate Ashbey stated “design a cathedral that your great grandchildren will look up at in awe!” Describe, as you see fit, the dilemmas posed by Ready or Not and the rhetorical question we have asked: *If teachers need to step up to the plate and get involved in determining the defining intent, identity, and responsibility of the field, who better suited to do so than Mentors, a community of teachers selected using strict criteria for developmentally appropriate practice and environment who already meet monthly in their local communities for the benefit of their professional growth?* If you have Mentors who attended the 2009 Mentor Institute, please ask them to share their experiences with the Seminar. At the Institute, we held breakout sessions that were mini-Seminars, intended to introduce the discussion format we would roll out statewide in the fall. Mentors who participated in these breakout sessions are valuable resources for your Seminar!

Share with your Mentors that the overall plan is for the insights and decisions of your Seminar to be added to those of all other Seminars. The input from all Seminars will contribute to a synthesis in the form of journal articles and meeting presentations that will move beyond the Mentor Program to local, state, and potentially national child care advocates and policy makers. We are together clearing the path as we walk it, but this is not an academic exercise or “assignment.”

Step 2: Provide an Overview/Set Expectations

It is important to set expectations that this work will span over many Seminars and many months. Each step will build the foundation for the next. Together, you will:

- ◇ Discuss the concept of purpose, defining intent (*Ready or Not*, pp 34-38)
- ◇ Introduce the five “Defining Intents” to be discussed this year (chosen from discussion and refinement of the lists beginning on p.77 of *Ready or Not*)
- ◇ Choose the Defining Intent (DI) to discuss first HYPOTHETICALLY as if each were the DI
- ◇ Discuss the implications for each DI on teacher competencies, how they would acquire and document those competencies, and what choosing that DI as the DI would mean for the workforce of today and tomorrow
- ◇ Then and only then, after all of this rich discussion, will you as a group discuss which of the DIs actually should be the DI for the field, or in what priority they should be. This discussion is many months away and may change in nature as we learn from this process.

Step 3: Begin!

For each Defining Intent:

- ◇ **What are the key characteristics of this Defining Intent?** For example, Social Justice. What does that mean? If ALL children had access to high quality ECE in which ALL of their teachers knew how to best support them to grow into adults with a full understanding and appreciation of Social Justice, how would adults in 2035 interact with each other? What would be different than it is now? Laws? Employment practices? Social interactions? Neighborhoods? Marriage? Families? What would a socially just world look like?
- ◇ **WHAT IF** this were the Defining Intent of ECE? What competencies would teachers need to be able to provide children and their families with the highest possible quality program to meet that Defining Intent? For example, Family Support. What would teachers need to know about cultural understanding of the role of parents in a child's development? What skills would teachers need in order to provide families with information, resources, respectful guidance?
- ◇ **IF** this were the Defining Intent of ECE, and **IF** teachers needed the competencies we decided on:
 - How would they acquire those competencies? *Take classes? Observe and apprentice under a master teacher?*
 - How would they document those competencies? *A degree? A certificate? A competency test?*
- ◇ **IF** this were the Defining Intent of ECE, and . . . **IF** the teacher competencies we decided on were determined to be the necessary competencies, and . . . **IF** teachers needed to acquire and document these competencies as we decided:
 - What would be the impact on the current workforce? *Would the government need to provide assistance to allow teachers to acquire these competencies? Would wages need to increase to respond to the increased level of skill? How could currently employed teachers upgrade their skills? Who would monitor this?*
 - What would be the impact on the future workforce? *Who would choose to pursue teaching? If we decide that there are degree requirements and higher salaries, would people become teachers who don't have the passion to be "good" teachers?*

Step 4: A Guide to Sharing your Discussions

We strongly suggest that you ask one or two Mentors to take notes on key points and decisions made. Long documents are NOT what we are looking for, but rather bullet points. Mentor note-takers may just use an expanded version of “the grid” below or use the following page as a template.

“The Grid”

Defining Intent Of ECE Field	Competencies Required of teachers to accomplish this intent?	How would teachers acquire & document these competencies?	What would impact be on current & future ECE workforce?
Social & cultural competence			
Nurturing, loving care			
Family support			
Social justice			
School readiness			

Step 5: Making Tough Choices

After and only after all of the *Defining Intent*s have been thoroughly discussed, our goal is for Mentors to then have a well-informed discussion/debate about which *Defining Intent(s)* should be THE *Defining Intent(s)* of Early Care and Education. We recognize that this activity may flow into the 2010-11 Mentor Seminars or may change as we learn from each other.

Support and Resources as We Learn Together

- ◇ More Web Conferences
 - Additional introductory sessions August through October
 - One-on-one support and discussion as needed
 - Ongoing “touching base” web conferences to be scheduled
 - Broader web conferences to reach out to faculty from your departments, TriC-ECE, Director Mentors, CAEYC state & local board members, etc.
- ◇ Office Hours:
 - Every Friday beginning September 11, 1-2pm
 - Conference call with Linda and/or Ellen available
 - Call toll free: 1-888-886-3951 Passcode: 703826 (same every week)
- ◇ Copy of “Leadership Choices for Early Care and Education,” *Exchange*, July/August 2008.
- ◇ Written Guidelines: A living document to grow and change as we learn
- ◇ Website area for Seminar Facilitators: Content coming soon on our redesigned website! UserID: seminarfacilitator Password: cecmp

Discussions of Defining Intents: Notes Template

Defining Intent: Social & Cultural Competence

Repeat for:

Defining Intent: Nurturing Loving Care

Defining Intent: Family Support

Defining Intent: Social Justice

Defining Intent: School Readiness

What are the key characteristics of this *Defining Intent*, as discussed by your Seminar?

- Bullet points
- “ “

If this *Defining Intent* were THE *Defining Intent* of Early Care & Education, what would teachers need to know? What skills would they need?

- Bullet points
- “ “

If the Teacher Competencies decided on by your Seminar were required, how would teachers learn these things (acquire these competencies)?

- Bullet points
- “ “

If the Teacher Competencies decided on by your Seminar were required, how would teachers show others that they had learned these things? That is, how would they document their competencies?

- Bullet points
- “ “

If the Teacher Competencies decided on by your Seminar were required of ALL teachers, what would that mean for people who want to become teachers in the future (what would the impact be on the future workforce)?

- Bullet points
- “ “

If the Teacher Competencies decided on by your Seminar were required of ALL teachers, what would that mean for people who are teachers now (what would the impact be on the current workforce)?

- Bullet points
- “ “