



Inside Gateways Newsletter—Winter 2010

Welcome to the New Year—2010—and the latest edition of *Inside Gateways*, the Gateways to Opportunity quarterly e-newsletter! As we enter a new year, it is an appropriate time to consider making resolutions that will have a positive impact on our personal and professional roles.

Millions of Americans made a list of New Year's resolutions this month that include what they plan to do, and not do, as the New Year begins. Many of these promises fall by the wayside before January ends. According to recent surveys, over 70% of these resolutions stem from a desire to improve our personal lives or relationships, and the rest are work related. We spend a significant amount (current data indicate an ever-increasing number) of our lives at work or in activities related to our professional lives. It seems logical that a significant number of our New Year's resolutions should be work related.

Did you make a New Year's resolution to positively change your professional role or career? Do you plan to pursue professional development during the coming year? Have you identified specific goals to advance your career or developed strategies and steps to meet those goals? Have you considered ways in which you could increase your skill set so that you are more marketable? Have you designed a "to do" list of what professional knowledge you would like to gain in the year ahead?

Many of us are guilty of taking the development of our careers and professions for granted. We sometimes aren't quite sure how we got to the jobs that we have...perhaps more by accident than design. As dollars dwindle and employee benefits become tighter, it is easy to decide that this may not be the best time to obtain more education or finish a degree or refresh and update our knowledge base. Today's tightened economy, with a dwindling number of job opportunities, is the most critical time to revitalize our skill set while renewing and energizing our professional knowledge. Employers hire well-trained and motivated individuals who demonstrate an active interest in furthering their knowledge as demonstrated by current education, training, and the provision of the highest quality services.

Gateways to Opportunity, Illinois Professional Development System, was created to support all early care and education and school-age practitioners in their professional development. It includes a defined career lattice with clear degrees and credentials, as well as scholarships to support further education. It also provides opportunities for practitioners to grow by setting goals with a Professional Development Advisor (PDA)! As 2010 begins, take advantage of these programs and services by visiting www.ilgateways.com or calling 1 (866) 697-8278. You can start by meeting with a PDA—at *no cost*—to map out a personalized career pathway and set goals for the coming year.

Read about two practitioners (Toni Williams-Harrison and Patty Miller) featured in this issue, who each embarked on a professional development journey. Their stories will inspire you to begin your own journey. The satisfaction they feel in having increased their professional development is evident. You can join them by resolving today that you will focus on your own professional development in 2010.

Make this year count—make a promise to yourself that you will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the highest quality services to all children and families. The year will move swiftly, and there is no better time than today to embark on your own professional development journey.

We are here to assist you in your journey.



Joni Scritchlow *and* the
Gateways to Opportunity
Professional Development Team

Credential Corner

This issue of *Inside Gateways* introduces a new Credential Corner feature that will focus on the various credentials awarded by Gateways to Opportunity. The **Gateways to Opportunity Credentials** are part of a comprehensive professional development system designed for all practitioners working with children in Illinois. The credentials were developed based on the seven Gateways to Opportunity **content areas** that are the foundation of the **Career Lattice**. The credentials awarded by **Gateways to Opportunity** are recognized by the **Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)**.

In this issue's Credential Corner, we highlight the **ECE Credential**, which validates the knowledge, skills, and experiences required to work with young children from birth through age 8.

The **Level 1 ECE Credential** is a distinct credential that incorporates the foundation of knowledge required to work in the field of early care and education. This credential can be awarded upon successful completion of 48 hours of training. The Level 1 ECE training series is offered by local Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies through the Illinois Trainers Network.

The **Levels 2–5 ECE Credentials** are symbols of professional achievement that can be earned by completing an approved program at an **entitled** college or university, or by completing a portfolio that documents education and experience. Gateways Credentials are awarded and recognized by IDHS.

The two individuals we spotlight in this issue—Tonnette Williams-Harrison and Patty Miller—received their ECE Credential while also completing requirements for additional Gateways to Opportunity Credentials. We hope their stories inspire you to find out how Gateways to Opportunity Credentials can help you validate the specialized knowledge and skills that you have already gained working with young children, grow professionally, and enhance the quality of care provided to the children and families in your programs.

Tonnette Williams-Harrison



"[Earning my credentials] helped me set short- and long-term goals for my center program and also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my accomplishments."

Tonnette Williams-Harrison (Toni) is the director/owner of the Children's Center for Creative Learning, a child care center serving children 6 weeks to 6 years of age in two locations in Chicago. The regular correspondence that Toni received from Gateways to Opportunity encouraged her to consider applying for her ECE Credential. "I knew I met most of the formal education and training requirements to receive the credential. I have always maintained a professional portfolio. Finding the time to update my portfolio and complete the application process was the most difficult challenge for me. I finally made a commitment to myself and took one week to organize my information, to request my transcripts from the universities I had attended, and to make this a reality."

Once Toni got started on the credential application process, she said the excitement continued to build. “I really enjoyed the process of reviewing the full range of my professional development and program improvement accomplishments. The coursework I have taken, annual events I have hosted, inservices I have presented, the degrees I’ve completed in the field, the letters sent to my state and local officials to advocate for early childhood education, the newsletters I have written to communicate with families in my program, and the grants I submitted for early childhood improvement activities all counted as professional contributions during the credentialing process.”

After reviewing Toni’s transcripts and application materials, Gateways to Opportunity developed a grid that let Toni know her strengths as well as the areas that needed to be strengthened. “Gateways to Opportunity staff suggested great examples of evidence in the various **credential content areas** I needed to focus on. These examples helped me set short- and long-term goals for my center program and also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my accomplishments.”

Toni’s center is a partner with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Office of Early Childhood Community Partnership Program. CPS encourages the directors in their programs to complete their **Illinois Director Credential (IDC)** and their **Infant Toddler Credential (ITC)**. Toni received her ECE 5, IDC III, and ITC 2 Credentials from Gateways to Opportunity simultaneously. Toni is currently taking additional coursework and attending inservice training events to receive the Level 5 ITC.

Toni offers this advice to others thinking about completing the ECE Credential process through Gateways to Opportunity. “Go for it! Once you start pulling your information together, you’re going to love the process. It’s like adding a stamp of excellence to your resume. The greatest reward for me is intrinsic. Knowing that I have made professional contributions to the field of early childhood education for myself, my staff, and for the children and families I serve is extremely rewarding.”

Patty Miller



“Receiving my ECE Credential is a professional achievement I’ve wanted to complete as a family child care provider—one that my program families have appreciated as well.”

Patty Miller is the owner/operator of a family child care program in Dawson, Illinois, which is located about 10 miles east of Springfield. Patty started her family child care program in 2006 soon after her daughter was born. Patty is an active member of her local day care association. When Patty found out that others in her association were working on the ECE Credential awarded by Gateways to Opportunity, she decided to do the same.

“It was a lot of work for me to complete the credential. It took about 2–3 months to do so, but it helped me to grow professionally by encouraging me to make improvements in my program.”

Staff from Gateways to Opportunity provided technical assistance over the phone to help Patty know what kinds of professional development she needed to complete to obtain the ECE Credential. “I had more points in certain content areas required by the credential and not enough points in others. The most challenging aspect was finding the specific trainings I needed at a time when I could take them.” To help complete her ECE Credential training requirements, Patty was referred to **Care Courses**, a distance learning program for early childhood professionals. “I liked the format of Care Courses. The books are well written, easy to follow, and include self-checks and quizzes throughout the material to assess your knowledge in a given area.” Patty has continued to take coursework through Care Courses in other areas of interest.

“I was worried at one point that I wouldn’t complete the ECE Credential process, but I didn’t give up. Staff from Gateways helped guide me through the process.” Patty earned her Level 4 ECE Credential, her Level 2 Infant Toddler Credential, and her accreditation from the **National Association for Family Child Care** at approximately the same time. “Working on all three of these goals wasn’t too difficult since many of the requirements overlap.”

Patty encourages other family child care providers to consider applying for their ECE Credential and to contact the staff at Gateways to Opportunity or their local child care resource and referral agency to get started. “Receiving my ECE Credential is a professional achievement I’ve wanted to complete as a family child care provider—one that my program families have appreciated as well.”

Lilian Katz: Reflections

In the last issue of **Inside Gateways**, I introduced a set of dilemmas inherent to the education of teachers—dilemmas that stem from the various, and sometimes competing, expectations placed on teacher education. My introductory reflections on “Dilemmas in Teacher Education” included a definition of a dilemma as well as a discussion of the “current practices” versus “innovative practices” dilemma. In this issue of *Inside Gateways*, I discuss a second dilemma in teacher education—the “coverage” versus “mastery” dilemma.

Dilemmas in Teacher Education: The Coverage versus Mastery Dilemma

All teachers—at every level and of every subject—have to deal with the conflicting pressures of whether to emphasize breadth of *coverage* or in-depth *mastery*. In this sense, teachers are pulled in opposite directions—the more information, concepts, ideas, theories, practices, etc., that they “cover” in the curriculum, the less their students are likely to master. On the other hand, the more teachers emphasize “mastery” of content and techniques, the less they can “cover.” We cannot do equal justice to both coverage and mastery.

Emphasizing Coverage

In teacher training and education generally, there is often pressure to expand the curriculum so as to cover more content. Rarely is it proposed that an element in a course or set of requirements be dropped.

Some pressure for expanded content coverage comes from within the field of education. For example, many advocates support sensitizing teacher education students to cultural diversity, gender stereotyping, modern methods of assessing children, and the inclusion of children with special needs.

One significant feature of teaching young children is that it requires an integration of the curriculum rather than teaching discrete subjects. Thus, students being trained to teach young children need to be generalists with a very wide range of knowledge. In the early childhood field, the content to be covered should probably also include parent education, parent involvement, and the unique relationships between teachers and parents. It is unlikely that future teachers will master the expected wide range of knowledge. The assumption is that the greater coverage will expose them to basic concepts and a range of resources to use when the curriculum and the children’s emergent interests require them to do so.

Furthermore, the settings in which our students in early childhood education programs will be teaching vary widely (e.g., private child care, state-funded prekindergarten programs, Head Start, bilingual programs, franchised child care settings). Thus, it is difficult to predict what knowledge is likely to be most useful. It would seem, therefore, to be a good safety measure to expose teachers in training to as much information and knowledge as possible about the diversity of children, communities, and curriculum approaches.

The main problem in opting for an emphasis on coverage (vs. mastery) is that the teacher education program could then be offering what might be called the “smattering approach.” Under these conditions, those in training are likely to feel pressured to “cram” or memorize bits of knowledge in order to get through their assignments and examinations. Such experience during preservice education is unlikely to strengthen a career-long disposition to delve into problems and to take responsibility for one’s own learning. Furthermore, while the wide range of information, ideas, and skills covered may be relevant and useful, preservice teachers who have not mastered them are not very likely to be able to retrieve and employ them under the pressure of the real world of the classroom setting. It would therefore not be surprising to find that student satisfaction with such courses is low and that their impact is also low.

Emphasizing Mastery

All of the suggested additional content to be covered has some merit. However, given a finite period for training, it may be wiser to opt for greater mastery of a narrower range of content and techniques. Mastery of knowledge and skills takes time, and time is in short supply no matter whether one is in a four-year early childhood undergraduate degree program or a certification-only program. Perhaps some knowledge and some teaching practices should have such high priority that their mastery should be emphasized at the expense of greater coverage of more content and techniques.

Such an approach may have its own challenges. Can the early childhood profession agree on what knowledge and skills are essential? How much child development knowledge, for example, and of what kind, is really necessary? How much of the history and philosophy of early childhood education do new teachers really need? Furthermore, the issue of optimal repetition of content across teacher education courses needs to be considered.

Strengthening Dispositions

Another way to look at the choices at hand is to consider which alternative might be related to helping future teachers develop desirable dispositions. Dispositions can be defined as “habits of mind” or tendencies to respond in certain ways to classes of situations (see Katz & Rath, 1985).

I suggest that, of the two alternatives in this dilemma, mastery of content worthy of high priority is the preferred choice. When a teacher education program is less preoccupied with course content coverage and more concerned with mastery, students have more time to delve deeply into specific topics and techniques. It is likely to allow for greater attention to the cultivation and strengthening of professional dispositions that can serve the teacher education students in the long term. A program that emphasizes mastery may lead students to consider the pros and cons of various practices in light of their appropriateness, context, and situational constraints. In-depth examination of a few central topics could be offered so as to encourage students to manifest the disposition to be reflective, to “look up” sources and resources, and to consult others. Such an approach can also encourage teacher education students to develop dispositions to be resourceful, experimental, and willing to try alternative approaches to working with children and parents, as well as to be accepting, nurturing, thoughtful, and open to fresh ideas.

Indeed, emphasis on coverage of a wide range of topics and techniques may engender a distaste for study, a feeling of having to “cram” one’s mind with collections of vaguely related facts and a laundry list of techniques. In the process, the student may develop an aversion to studying. Such a program may weaken the disposition to go on learning. Indeed, what may be most important is whether the content of courses provided is of such relevance and interest that it can build a disposition to go on learning as an element of being a professional.

The decision to emphasize mastery versus coverage requires some agreement concerning what knowledge and which skills and techniques are most worth learning. **The Professional Development Advisory Committee (PDAC)**, which informs the Gateways to Opportunity professional development system, is doing much to address the dilemma of what should have priority in professional preparation and development.

Reference

Katz, Lilian G., & Rath, James D. (1985). Dispositions as goals for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 1(4), 301–307.

Practices, Programs, and Publications

Statewide Training Calendar

“Practices, Programs, and Publications” is a new feature of *Inside Gateways*. This section of the newsletter will report on a new practice, program, or publication of interest to the professional development of early care and education and school-age and youth development practitioners in Illinois. In this issue we focus on the new training calendar on Gateways.

A new searchable, **statewide training calendar** is available on the **Gateways to Opportunity** Web site. The calendar lists professional development events (e.g., workshops, conferences, courses, and training series) that practitioners need in order to meet licensing requirements and obtain certification, credentials, and accreditation to help improve the quality of care provided to children, youth, and their families.

In its first phase, the statewide training calendar lists trainings that have been **Registry-approved** as well as trainings offered through the state's **Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (CCR&Rs)**. You can search the calendar in many ways: by date, by location (by county or CCR&R service delivery area), by the language in which the training is offered, and by topic (by CDA content area, Gateways content area, and keywords). You can also query the calendar to see which trainings have been approved for points that can be applied to earning a Gateways **credential** or that meet requirements of the **Quality Rating System**.

In the next phase of the statewide training calendar's development, other agencies within Illinois will be invited to post trainings on the calendar to provide a more comprehensive picture of professional development opportunities in Illinois. In addition, special features of interest to **Registry Members** will be added to the statewide training calendar. So stay tuned! If you have questions about the development of the Gateways to Opportunity statewide training calendar, contact **Gateways to Opportunity**.

New Gateways Resources

The following resource links have been added to the Web site since the last issue of *Inside Gateways*.

Advocacy

Early Childhood Advocacy Toolkit

Research Reports

Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as the Framework for Early Care and Education System Reform

Room to Grow: Tapping the After-School Workforce Potential

Workforce Designs: A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems

Resources

Gateways Printable Resources



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