

THE ETHICS OF PROFESSIONALISM:

THE ART OF DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

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When I first became an educator the idea of being a professional was seldom discussed, much less the concept that when you work with children and their families and your colleagues there would be agreement about how we would be expected to behave.

Don't get me wrong—there were subtle and implied statements about how we were to act and, looking back, an almost nostalgic view of what a 'good teacher' looked like. But for me it was not until 1991, in the form of the ECA *Code of Ethics*, that the expectations of our professionalism were made explicit. The statements included in that foundational document challenged me and others I am sure, to see ourselves as professionals who, should we choose, work to meet a demanding standard of behaviour and make concerted efforts to always do what is right in regard to our work with children and their families.

The success of the ECA *Code of Ethics*, and other efforts over the years, has helped us see ourselves as professionals who not only have an ethical responsibility to children and their families but also, importantly, to our profession. An ethic of professionalism means that we take time to consider what it means to be a professional and the ways in which we can uphold and support the profession in our daily actions. I have come to understand this professionalism as the intricate process of looking outwards to those we work with (children, families and the community more broadly) while keeping an inward eye on our own identity and the shape of our profession. The two processes are of course inter-related—when we act to uphold the best interests of children, for example, we in turn demonstrate that being an early childhood professional is about our endeavours to do what is right for those we support.

In ECA's revised *Code of Ethics* (to be released this year) the ethical expectations of professionalism have been strengthened. The ethical expectations are now to the profession and the way in which, as professionals, we make decisions that reflect positively on the work of educating and caring for children and their families. The commitments are ambitious and invite us to consider how our actions will look for the whole profession and the image of the childhood professional.

In relation to the profession I will:

- base my work on research, theories, content knowledge, practice evidence and my understanding of the children and families with whom I work
- take responsibility for articulating my professional values, knowledge, and practice and for the positive contribution our profession makes to society
- engage in critical reflection, ongoing professional learning and support research that builds my knowledge and that of the profession
- work within the scope of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications
- encourage qualities and practices of ethical leadership within the profession
- model quality practice and provide constructive feedback and assessment for students as aspiring professionals
- mentor new graduates by supporting their induction into the profession
- advocate for my profession and the provision of quality education and care.

Unlike in the past when we may have been unsure about what was expected of a practitioner in this field, we can be in no doubt that being a professional means that we have an ethical responsibility to keep one eye on those we serve and the other on doing what is right for our profession. It is an honourable pursuit that makes us proud to be an early childhood professional.

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