

Shifting Perceptions: Elevating the Role and Recognition of Family Childcare Professionals

BY DR. YVONNE SHELENE WILLIAMS, ED.D.

Recently, I attended the annual conference of the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), where I had the opportunity to present a workshop and interact directly with family childcare (FCC) professionals. This experience was refreshing and inspiring. Our discussions encouraged family childcare professionals to consider community perspectives and critically assess business and professional practices and behaviors that could contribute to negative perception of their profession. During the workshop, many FCC professionals shared their frustration with the community and their colleagues who challenged their roles, questioned their legitimacy as business owners, and reduced them to children's care.

It is crucial to recognize the potential of family caregivers to positively influence their business and professional reputations. The workshop, "Let's Talk... Community Voices on Family Childcare: Advocating for Recognition," presented by Robyn Kelton and I, is based on my doctoral research. It aimed to illustrate that even a single change could alter the perceptions of family childcare and highlight the important contributions that FCC professionals make to early childhood education and their communities. By improving business and professional practices, these professionals can change community views, helping others recognize that family care is a legitimate profession that educates and cares for children and recognizing their dual roles as educators and business owners.

During the session, utilizing technology proved to be highly effective in engaging participants and delivering information in a compelling way. This approach encouraged FCC professionals to reflect more deeply on their practices and implement changes that enhance perceptions and drive business growth. By using various tools, participants were able to share their insights and access data in a manner that promoted greater engagement and clarity. They also observed how technology facilitated collaborative efforts to reshape perceptions of their profession. Overall, this interactive experience deepened discussions and empowered attendees to apply their insights in their work environments, fostering continuous improvement and innovation.

The experience highlighted the professionals' enthusiasm for learning and refining their practices. Discussions about family childcare professionals often include terms like caring, fun, and passionate, which is encouraging. However, it is disappointing that not everyone fully recognizes the unique value that family childcare professionals bring through their professional achievements, educational backgrounds, empowerment as women business owners, and overall contributions to the community and early childhood education.

Additionally, the meeting revealed that these professionals wanted more recognition and support from colleagues and the wider community. Many expressed the need for formal opportunities to demonstrate

their expertise and achievements and suggested that visibility and recognition could further improve the value of their work. This desire for validation underscores the importance of continuing efforts to promote and improve the status of family childcare professionals within a broader social framework. This includes participation in professional development that supports child readiness and helps children transition smoothly into kindergarten. Additionally, they should have opportunities to articulate the benefits of their work, such as building relationships with children and their families, which fosters family engagement and collaboration to meet children's needs.

In conclusion, the workshop highlighted family childcare professionals' deep passion and commitment to educating and caring for young children. It also emphasized their frustration about being undervalued by the community. The workshop gave them valuable opportunities to change perceptions and affirm their role as legitimate educators and influential entrepreneurs.

By integrating technologies and reflecting on the findings of my research and discussions, participants were inspired to re-evaluate and improve their programs, further emphasizing their essential contributions to early childhood education and community development. It is important to recognize that refining practices is an ongoing effort in which advocacy plays a key role in changing perceptions and achieving the recognition FCC professionals deserve.

***Yvonne Williams, Ed.D.** is a Quality Training Specialist at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. In this role, she serves as a National Anchor for the Program Administration Scale (PAS) and Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care (BAS). Prior to this position, she worked as an Assessor and Training Specialist conducting ERS, BAS, and CLASS assessments for the state of Illinois. She has always been passionate about working with families and young children and successfully completed research on family child care programs. Yvonne holds a master's degree from National Louis University in early childhood administration and a doctorate in the teaching and learning program at National Louis University. Yvonne has held additional positions within the early childhood education sector as a licensed group family childcare provider and an adjunct instructor for National Louis University, Rasmussen College and Joliet Junior College. Combined, Yvonne has over 17 years of experience in Early Childhood Education.*