

Family Child Care Educator AND Entrepreneur: Why Titles Matter

BY ROBYN KELTON

Running a home-based early care and education program is often viewed by society as ‘easy work’ or ‘like babysitting.’ However, those who work in early childhood know that the work of home-based child care is complex. Operating a successful, high-quality, and sustainable program requires deep knowledge and skill in the domains of child development and early education and in operating a small business.

In the past five years, I have seen a shift in the professional identity associated with family child care. I’ve witnessed a demand for deeper respect and acknowledgment of family child care professionals as educators. This call to value family child care professionals as early educators has been exciting and motivating to watch—the momentum is powerful and well overdue! However, a professional identity as educators is not enough to fully encompass the important role of the family child care professional. When facilitating learning specific to family child care, I make a point to use a more comprehensive title: home-based educators *and* entrepreneurs.

Oxford Languages defines an **entrepreneur** as “a person who organizes and operates a business or businesses, taking on greater than normal financial risks in order to do so.” **Small business entrepreneurship** refers to opening a business without turning it into a large conglomerate or opening many chains. These entrepreneurs usually invest their own money and succeed if their businesses turn a profit, which serves as their income (Hayes, 2023).

Like most of us, I entered this field because of a passion for educating and caring for young children. However, after many years of facilitating learning and providing support to home-based administrators, I find that I now have an equally deep passion for building up home-based administrators in their work as small business owners and entrepreneurs. While care and educational practices are critical, the entrepreneurial side of this work is equally important to recognize. After all, if the business side of the work is not successful, then the likelihood of the program going out of business is high. And given that nearly 10,000 family child care programs closed during the pandemic, we cannot afford to lose any more (Phillips, 2023).

On the business side of the work, the knowledge and skills required to operate a family child care program are extensive. Successful home-based educators and entrepreneurs must develop and implement program policies, write legally binding contracts, mitigate the risks of doing business in their home, track expenses and project budgets, maintain adequate records in order to receive family child care-specific tax deductions and benefits, and produce enough of a profit to keep the literal roof over their heads. Moreover, these program leaders need to navigate planning for their own health and well-being by acquiring health insurance, setting up retirement plans, and determining how to make a livable wage in a highly inequitable profession. And yet, this part of the work is often overlooked and under-supported.

Job titles matter both to the individual and society. Externally, titles communicate job responsibilities as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the person holding the title. Additionally, job titles appear to have a personal impact on those who hold them, allowing a person to clearly communicate their status and competencies to others, setting the stage for working relationship expectations. Job titles are also often integrated into professional and personal identity and contribute to one’s sense of self. Think about how often

“what do you do” is the topic of conversation between strangers. Furthermore, research has shown that job titles can influence a person’s attention and energy at work, increase the quality of interactions with others, and lead individuals to feel as though they are tapping into their unique capabilities (Grant et al., 2014).

I have witnessed the transformation that occurs during our [professional learning opportunities](#) such as Taking the Lead Leadership Academy, The FCC Business Institute, or individual training sessions on business topics when participants are championed as small business entrepreneurs. These learning opportunities emphasize that participants not only meet the needs of children and ensure families have access to high-quality child care, but that the businesses they run also support the economic success of their communities. Participants may begin the day feeling hesitant, but leave feeling emboldened in their status as business owners, prepared to advocate more strongly for themselves and the profession, and empowered in their roles as both educators and entrepreneurs.

Recognizing home-based early childhood professionals as educators *and* entrepreneurs raises the collective understanding of the complexity of their work and the required skill sets in both early childhood education and business and professional practice. Ideally, it also fosters a greater sense of empowerment and a deeper respect from families and society.

SELF-REFLECTION:

1. How might your job title influence your thoughts and behaviors?
 - Do you feel more competent or confident when your title matches your expertise and the work you do?
2. How do you think others perceive you and your work when you share your job title?
 - Does it align with what you hope they would perceive? If not, what might you change to shift that perspective?
3. How do the titles you use for others in this profession impact your beliefs about their work?

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