







Successful Inclusion of Family Child Care Providers in Higher Education Degree Programs and Courses: A Research-to-Practice Guide

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Introduction

Many family child care providers have reported challenges and barriers to accessing, participating in, and successfully completing a college degree. This guide provides strategies, tips, and resources on how to successfully include family child care providers in higher education degree programs and courses in early childhood education. We include a review of the literature, proactive strategies for higher education, and proactive strategies for use by family child care providers.

The guide draws upon a review of existing published literature, as well as from a current study conducted by the authors (Douglass, Benson, Hodges-Hunter, Wiles & Stardrum, 2015) about family child care providers' experiences in higher education degree programs. This study consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews with ten family child care providers who completed all or some of a college degree program, as well as with faculty and staff from higher education or professional development programs serving family child care providers. The interviews focused on providers' experiences in higher education, factors influencing their experience, barriers faced in completing their degree, and examples and recommendations about how higher education can be more inclusive of family child care providers. The results from this study confirm findings from prior research about the barriers that family child care providers face (Connaghan & Zimmerman, 2007). In addition, our study offers new insights about how to successfully include and support family child care providers in higher education programs.

A Review of the Research

Higher education is important for the professional development of family child care providers, just as it is for center-based or school-based early educators. Increased earnings and financial stability are one potential benefit of completing a college degree. Research studies have found that family child care providers with college degrees tend to earn more than providers without college degrees (Gerstenblatt, Faulkner, Lee, Doan, & Travis, 2014). Another benefit of higher education is increased knowledge, skills, and competencies in the areas of child development, early learning, teaching, and family engagement. Higher education institutions should be prepared to serve family child care providers with programs that are inclusive, supportive, and relevant.

Furthermore, family child care providers serve large numbers of infants and toddlers, and thus play a central role in supporting the healthy growth and development of children from birth to age 3. Family child care providers serve more infants and toddlers than center-based child care providers (Morrissey & Banghart, 2007). Eighty percent of family child care providers serve infants and toddlers, as well as preschool-age children (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2013).

In a recent national survey of early educators, almost one-third of family child care providers had earned a college degree, compared to more than half of center-based early educators (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2013).

Taking a closer look, a 2006 California study examined the differences in education level between family child care educators and center educators for those with B.A.'s, broken down by race and ethnicity. About 14 percent of the family child care providers in California have a B.A. or higher.

What Does the Research Tell Us About Family Child Care Providers and Higher Education?

- Approximately one-third of licensed family child care providers have a college degree (an associate or bachelor's degree).
- About one-third of these providers have a degree in early education or a related field; the other two-thirds have a degree in an unrelated field.
- The majority of family child care providers do not have a college degree.

(National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, 2013; Whitebook et al., 2006)

B.A. Breakdown by Race and Ethnicity						
	White	African American	Latino	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other	
Licensed family child care providers with a B.A. or higher	47%	17%	15%	16%	5%	
Center teachers with a B.A. or higher	59%	6%	13%	15%	7%	

Source: Whitebook et al., 2006

Other differences between professionals working in homes versus those working in centers are also apparent from a 2006 California study:

Family Child Care and Center Child Care Education Characteristics					
	Family Child Care	Center			
Location of higher education institution for B.A.	30% non-U.S. based	16% non-U.S. based			
Degree in early childhood education or related field	34% A.A. or above	64% B.A. or above			

Source: Whitebook et al., 2006

Thirty four percent of licensed family child care providers who had an associate's degree or higher attained their degree in an area related to early childhood education, as compared to 64% of center-based teachers who have a bachelor's degree or higher. Thirty percent of family child care providers earned their bachelor's degree from an institution outside of the United States, as compared with 16% of center-based teachers (Whitebook et al., 2006). The percentage of family child care providers with a bachelor's degrees or higher has been shown to vary across racial and ethnic groups. In California family child care settings, 47% of White licensed providers had a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared with 15% of Latina/o providers, 17% of African American providers, and 16% of Asian/Pacific Islander providers (Whitebook et al., 2006).

Family child care providers are a very diverse sector of the early education workforce. There are family child care providers with graduate degrees, and those with a high school education. Some earn very low salaries, while others earn more substantial salaries. For example, Fuligni Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, and Karoly (2009) studied the diverse educational pathways and professional development experiences of early educators in Los Angeles County, California. They found that family child care providers had the largest variation in education level obtained, when compared with private and public preschool teachers. Because of this diversity, broad generalizations about the family child care workforce can be misleading.

The important implication here is that using only one approach for supporting family child care providers in higher education is not likely to work in the same way, and have the same impact, for all family child care providers. By recognizing this diversity, higher education can more effectively create responsive and flexible programs and systems. Now, we turn our attention to a range of strategies and options for successfully including family child care providers in higher education degree programs and courses.

Strategies and Tips for Higher Education

How can higher education degree programs and courses be most inclusive of family child care providers? This section begins with a description of some of the key challenges that family child

care providers report about their experiences in higher education. Then, we present a wide range of strategies and practices that can support the success of family child care providers in accessing higher education and completing a degree. We include concrete strategies, tips, and sample documents as resources for those seeking to make higher education more inclusive and relevant for family child care providers.

Barriers and Challenges

A first step in designing more inclusive higher education programs is to understand the common barriers reported by family child care providers. Common barriers and challenges are noted below.

Financial Barriers. Early educators, and particularly family child care providers, generally come from lower income households than other college students, so returning to college after time away from school, or entering college for the first time, can be a financial burden (Strategies for Children, 2010). Providers may even be sending their own children to college, or balancing other financial burdens. The low wages typically earned by family child care providers can also be a financial barrier. Therefore, financial support is an important factor for increasing access to higher education for family child care providers.

Lack of English Language and/or Developmental Coursework in Basic Academics. Some family child care providers require English language instruction and developmental or remedial coursework in basic academic skills (Strategies for Children, 2010). This coursework is often either not available or not accessible to the family child care providers who need it.

Lack of Access to College Services and Coursework. Many college students who are studying early childhood education are considered nontraditional students, because they work full-time outside of school. Many of them also have family responsibilities in addition to work and school. These nontraditional students are at a higher risk of dropping out of college (Sakai, Kipnis, & Whitebook, 2014). In our study (Douglass et al., 2015), family child care providers who attended college reported that many college offices close at 5 p.m., leaving them without access to essential college services such as financial aid, academic advising, the bursar's office, the registrar, and services for students with disabilities. Returning to school later in life as a nontraditional student can be intimidating, as one provider explained in our study, "Just getting up the courage to take a college course, when you haven't for years and years...I remember that the first college course I took; I remember walking in there shaking. I was just so nervous, because it was a college course. I hadn't taken one since I was 19."

The schedule of classes or attendance polices can act as a barrier to accessing higher education. For example, many colleges offer required courses only during the day, when providers may not be able to attend. Instructors may take off points for tardiness, and providers who must wait for late parents to pick up their children may not be able to get to class on time consistently. Another example is online classes, which can reinforce isolation and pose technological challenges. While online classes may be convenient, some providers find the

format challenging. Because family child care work can be isolating, many providers prefer the interactions, connections, and relationships in face-to-face classes. Furthermore, the technological challenges that many face with an online course can create another barrier for providers.

As one family child care provider in our study explained, "I've taken online classes in the past and I've had trouble navigating them, so I like going and actually listening to the teacher and being able to ask questions. The thing I find most valuable is listening to my classmates and being able to ask questions there. So you can kind of miss that piece when you're online. I know it's more convenient, but it limits you if you're not really that great in using the [online] programs that they want you to use."

Time and Competing Demands. Time and competing demands are a significant barrier for many providers, who often run their full-time 50–60 hours per week business alone without assistance. As one provider in our study explained, "Just finding the time is always hard. I work 50 hours a week, and a lot of time classes would start before I was done with work. I would say time would be the biggest barrier in pursuing my education." Another provider shared, "I had to close my family child care business to complete my practicum and student teaching. I student taught all day in the school system and waitressed at night and on the weekends to earn money. This left me with only late nights and some weekend time to do assignments and readings."

Gaps in Coursework Content. Invisibility or marginalization of the family child care sector is commonplace in many colleges and universities. Early childhood courses often do not recognize or acknowledge family child care as a formal and respected early childhood education and care setting. For example, assignments, readings, and class sessions may only address center-based or school-based classroom settings.

In addition, course content often does not include infants and toddlers or mixed-age groupings. Courses may be focused on children ages 3–8 and may not adequately address or include infants and toddlers. Courses also often do not address mixed age group settings, practices, teaching, and caregiving approaches appropriate for mixed age groups.

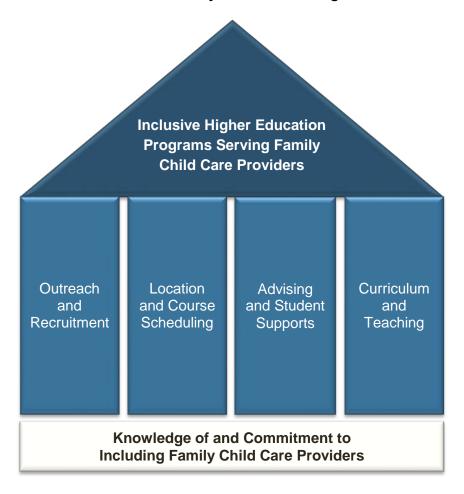
Strategies for Success

While the list of challenges and barriers may seem daunting, the flip side of those challenges points to a set of concrete strategies for becoming more inclusive and supportive of family child care providers (Sakai et al., 2014; Strategies for Children, 2010). When we interviewed family child care providers for our study, they provided specific examples and stories about the things that helped them to succeed and complete their college degree. We share some of those lessons and stories below in our presentation of strategies and tips for higher education.

In this section, we present a framework (see next page) for thinking concretely about ways to build a higher education program that is intentionally inclusive of family child care providers.

There are several key areas in which higher education institutions can redesign policies and practices to be intentionally inclusive of family child care providers. These strategies can be implemented across various components of higher education institution programs, including 1) outreach and recruitment; 2) location and scheduling of courses; 3) advising and student services; and 4) curriculum and teaching. Next, we present each strategy and include specific examples to illustrate what each might look like in practice.

Framework for the Inclusion of Family Child Care in Higher Education Programs



Outreach and Recruitment

Be intentional about naming and including family child care providers in outreach and recruitment activities and materials.

- Reach out to family child care systems, networks, and professional groups and associations.
- Reach out to agencies and organizations that interact with family child care providers to get your program's information to them. For example, contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture-sponsored Child and Adult Care Food Programs and your state's family child care licensing agency.

[Sample outreach flyer]

Are you an early childhood teacher or family child care provider who wants to earn a bachelor's degree in early education?

Enroll now in our daytime, evening, or weekend classes!

Apply for a new scholarship program that helps cover the costs of tuition!

Contact: [provide information here]

 Indicate that family child care providers are included and welcome. Specifically mention them, for example, if you are conducting outreach to early educators (see the sample outreach flyer).

Provide key information about factors that may affect a provider's ability to access higher education.

- Provide comprehensive information and support for understanding financial aid opportunities, eligibility, and application processes. Family child care providers may not even consider higher education as an option if they do not know what financial aid or supports are available to them.
- Establish policies that facilitate transfer of credits from prior coursework or credentials toward the college degree. For example, one higher education program we spoke with offers a Child Development Associate[™] (CDA) Credential pathway to an associate degree program, in which the CDA[™] Credential counts for one of the required field placement courses.

Location and Scheduling of Courses

Locate courses in convenient, community-based settings.

Hold classes in the existing community, rather than always in a college setting. Provide child care to students while they are in class, offer flexible schedule and course formats, offer credit for previous learning or work experiences, and support the financial aid application process (Connaghan & Zimmerman, 2007).

Provide more than one way to complete the degree.

- Offer multiple options for course schedules, including late evening, weekend, and blended online and face-to-face formats. While a cohort model has some benefits (Sakai et al., 2014), many providers report a preference for greater flexibility, so they can choose to take courses over time that fit into their schedule, rather than having to fit a college's schedule into their life. What works for some may not work for others.
- If online courses are a planned option, consider ways to blend online learning with some face-to-face components. A provider in our study who completed an online bachelor's

degree program suggested having "some face-to-face interaction, maybe at the beginning and end of a course. Maybe [online chat] or a webinar, just to listen to the instructor's voice or a classmate's voice. My program was all writing and I couldn't even picture another person."

Advising and Student Services

Make academic advising and student and career supports responsive to the needs of family child care providers.

- Provide an in-depth orientation. Front-load supports as students enter the program, e.g., orientation, academic and personal support, and help with adjusting to higher education expectations and academic culture.
- Embed advising or other supports into each course. For example, an academic advisor can be assigned to each early childhood course and scheduled to visit the class once or twice during the semester. This provides an opportunity to share information among students and the advisor.
- Institute a "high touch" academic advising program. For example, academic advisors can make regular check-in calls with providers.
- As a provider in our study explained, "As a family child care provider you are isolated, so any little bit of support, you are thirsty for, you take it and you absolutely use it.

Make academic advising and student and career supports accessible to family child care providers.

- Services can be made accessible for family child care providers (and many other nontraditional students) by making them available online as well as in the evenings and on weekends. These services should include academic advising, financial aid, information technology, services for students with disabilities, and bursar and registrar services. A full range of needed academic supports may include the following:
 - Academic advising
 - Writing lab
 - Assistance with financial aid resources and applications
 - Tutoring for non-early childhood courses such as math and English
 - English language learner writing support
 - Technology and library research support
 - Services and accommodations for students with disabilities
- One provider in our study described the flexibility and accessibility of her program: "The best thing was we could go in on a Saturday morning and all the resources were available, at all times. They had open arms for us. And I feel that made it accessible, even on a Sunday afternoon."

 Advisors must be available and accessible during evenings and weekends, not just weekdays 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Also, establish academic advising meetings each semester to guide appropriate course selection and facilitate degree completion.

Make academic advising and student and career supports inclusive of family child care providers.

- Include family child care careers in career advising.
- Present family child care as a legitimate and respected career option, along with other early education careers in settings such as Head Start, public schools, early intervention, and community-based child care.

Curriculum and Teaching

Build family child care into the content of courses.

- Include family child care in course syllabi, readings, class activities, and assignments.
- Think about language in course syllabi and classwork. Be inclusive of family child care settings and environments (not just classrooms) in syllabi, assignments, and class activities.
- Think about all age groups, including infants and toddlers, as well as mixed-age groups.

Include family child care settings as a field placement option.

- Include field placement instructors with family child care expertise. For example, one higher education institution provides a family child care mentor for field experience courses, enabling the provider to complete the practicum in her home business with 4 hours of expert mentoring and supervision each week.
- Include appropriate observation and assessment instruments for family child care settings, such as the Family Child Care Rating Scale (FCCRS) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) and the Business Administration Scale (BAS) (Talan & Bloom, 2009), as well as standards for accreditation by the National Association for Family Child Care. These family child care-specific tools can serve as a guide on best practices and standards for professional practice. They provide a language for talking about and assessing professional practice in ways that are aligned with the family child care sector and the unique nature of the teaching, learning, and caring in that environment.
- Develop field placement assignments that align with the family child care context as well as the developmental context for learning. For example, rather than require that observations of all students by the faculty supervisor take place during a formal lesson, also include an option to observe and assess a caregiving routine.

Establish respectful and supportive relationships between faculty and family child care providers.

• In early childhood education, we understand that relationships matter. Develop supportive and respectful relationships with family child care providers. Recognize their expertise and leadership, and incorporate that into the course as a resource. As a family child care provider in our study described, "Four of my professors [in my B.A. degree program] forged relationships with me during my time there. They truly made me and the other

- family child care providers feel valued because they saw us as equally important as the other students coming from more traditional sectors of the education system."
- Be sensitive to the need for flexibility. Do not expect all family child care providers to fit into a program model or approach that was designed for teachers in schools.
 - As one provider in our study explained, "My [practicum] instructor was really helpful in allowing me to work in his observations around my schedule. He came when it worked for my schedule rather than my being available to fit his schedule. He made this exception for me as a family child care provider that he did not have to make for other students working in centers with supervisors on site. It could have been a showstopper if I had to close my program to do observations but he made it happen."
- Create opportunities for students to build supportive relationships and networks with one
 another. Online technologies offer new ways to develop networks for sharing and learning
 collaboratively. For example, the Coaching Companion is an online digital observation
 and feedback tool, accessible at: https://earlyeducatorcentral.acf.hhs.gov/online-digitalobservation-tool.
- Continually cultivate cultural competency among faculty and higher education staff as an essential skill, particularly when working with nontraditional students and adult learners.

Build the family child care expertise of your faculty and staff.

- Educate faculty and program staff about family child care. The table on the next page highlights some of the key features and characteristics of family child care settings that are distinct from those of more familiar center-based settings. Understanding the work environment and its characteristics can help guide the development of relevant assignments and coursework.
- Hire a diverse faculty that includes those with experience and expertise in family child care. According to one of the providers in our study, this helps by "being able to relate to someone and feel like they could relate to your experience." Another provider described a faculty member with knowledge of family child care: "I had one instructor, not a family child care provider, but she worked supporting family child care providers. Her comments related better to my postings online and to my experiences in a smaller setting with younger children. I did not have to imagine I was in a center or public school classroom."

Features of the Work Environment	Family Child Care Setting	Center- or School-Based Setting
Where children spend their day	Home of the provider	Classroom or school
The program administrator/leader	Provider	Director or principal
Where children eat	Often in the kitchen or dining room	Classroom or cafeteria
Other adults in the environment	Provider's family members	Other teachers, professional staff
Ages of children assigned to a teacher/provider	Mixed ages, often infants through preschoolers together in one group	Typically age-segregated: infants, toddlers, or preschoolers
Work hours and schedule	Potentially 10+ hours/day; may include early mornings until early evening; no breaks during the day.	8 hours/day, typically with a short break during the day
Time for planning and professional development	Only during the evenings or weekends, because there is usually not another adult present to care for the children and allow the provider to have planning or professional time.	Depends on the center- based setting, but time may be available during the day when staffing allows for classroom coverage.

Strategies and Tips for Family Child Care Providers

Family child care providers participating in our study had a number of strategies for success, as outlined in this section. The section closes with a showcase of one provider's journey through higher education. Her story highlights the strategies she used over many years to complete her associate degree, then her bachelor's and master's degrees, and ultimately a post-master's certificate in early education research, policy, and practice.

Family Child Care Provider Strategies for Success

Get informed. Sign up for your state's early education and professional development email list to receive notices of new professional development offerings of college courses, scholarships, and grants. Visit these websites often for updates. Also visit your college's financial aid website for grants and scholarships. Explore all options for financial aid and grants to help you pay for your education, and take advantage of any mentoring or coaching supports offered by your state or college.

Be realistic and allow yourself to take the time needed to complete your degree. If you are running a family child care business and working on your college degree, it may take extra time to complete your degree. Some providers take periodic breaks, or take just one class per semester, in order to balance the many demands of working and going to school. Be realistic in

your goals and learn to ask for help when needed (e.g., instructors, tutors, family, friends, other family child care providers, and fellow students).

Be proactive with your academic advisor. The importance of advising cannot be stressed enough. Meet with an advisor to create a map of the coursework requirements for your degree, along with a reasonable timeframe and financial aid plan.

Apply and enroll in the university as a degree student as soon as possible. This will help to ensure that you take the right courses to complete your degree more quickly.

Create a time management plan. Consider ways to balance your schedule to include family, work, and academics. One family child care provider we interviewed explained that when she went on a vacation, one of her goals was to write a paper.

Build a support network. Don't get discouraged. Find your support systems, and use them. The families of the children served might even be a support. Form relationships with other family child care and early educators in your classes for academic as well as emotional support.

Contribute. Believe that you have something important to contribute, and share your perspectives and experiences in class.

Study. Find a safe, quiet, or comfortable place to study and complete your assignments.

Share your story, and let's build a supportive community of providers!

Provider Profile: Family Child Care Provider Diane Hodges-Hunter's Higher Education Journey



Diane Hodges-Hunter has been a family child care provider for more than 21 years. In this section, she shares her journey from associate degree to post-master's certificate.

I have been a family child care provider for more than 21 years. Family child care is very dear to me and my purpose as a mother. I went back to college in 2000, after realizing my passion to care for children and help mothers. Also, I realized the example that I would be setting for my own children, who were 10 and 12 at the time of my graduation. It was important to support their future higher education by completing mine.

It took 4 years to gain my associate degree in early childhood education. I only had the time to take a class here and there, because my children were very young and my day began at 6:30 a.m. and sometimes didn't end until 11 p.m. I juggled my career with soccer, basketball, and football practice and parents arriving late, just making it on time for classes. Thankfully, I had support from other team parents and coaches. I attended community college year round, even during the summer.

The biggest support I encountered while working on my associate degree was actually from one of my child care program parents. My husband unfortunately was not always able to leave work at a consistent time, due to the nature of his work. One of my parents, with whom I had an extremely close relationship, would either take my children home with him or stay at my house while I went to school. Because of his help, I began to call him "my big son" for helping me make it to class, and eventually I graduated.

Since time is so critical in my work, flexibility is important for me as a provider, and as an important support for parents who aren't always able to leave their jobs on time. I have worked for many in this situation, such as parents who have jobs as teachers (who stay late to work on lesson plans and meetings), hairdressers (with clients who are not able to come until after 5 p.m., and 2–3 hours needed to finish a specific hair style), correctional officers (mandatory lockdowns mean they are unable to leave prison), and nurses (with the possibility of leaving work at a different time every day). Most of my parents were single parents and depended on me for extended care as their main backup. So, I understood the importance and the need for flexibility. It was a mutual situation—whenever I needed help, I was blessed with their support. However, scheduling classes did continue to be a challenge.

I felt motivated to continue going to school due to my love of learning, learning from others (future teachers), having kind and helpful instructors, and being excited about implementing what I learned into improving my child care program. When I entered college, I had already worked for 7 years as a home-based child care provider. I wanted to become more effective as an early learning provider. Prior to attending school, I could not easily link my everyday activities

and routines to knowledge of child development. One woman in class wanted to open a home daycare, others were studying to become teachers in public and private schools, and others wanted to move up into a program director position.

During the last semester of my associate degree, I learned that the state department of early education and care was beginning a program to help family child care providers obtain their degree. I would not have gone further with my education without this financial help. I would have stopped at the associate degree level, which I paid for out of pocket and with grant money from the community college. The state early educator financial support was the single reason why I chose to continue on. It caused me to aggressively continue to work on obtaining the bachelor's degree, which was completely paid for by the state. However, I became hooked on learning and continued on to obtain a master's degree in management. I am still hooked on learning.

It was also during the last semester of my associate degree program that I changed my family child care license to a Large Family (10 children) license, and my cousin became my certified assistant. I am sure it was my trust in her ability to love the children as I did that allowed me to relax and take the time to finish school work. Having someone you can rely on makes a huge difference when you are self-employed. That allowed me to go full throttle while having a back-up person. Having my cousin really made the difference that gave me the time during the work week sometimes to complete assignments.

I was also able to complete my practicum with my instructor's observations in my home, which was extremely helpful. My instructor was a kindergarten teacher, and I looked forward to her coming because she provided on-site feedback on my practice. She gave me expert advice about teaching colors, the alphabet, and creating a dramatic play area. She had taught for more than 25 years and was looking into retiring. Another instructor was a huge supporter of my home child care. She would give me extra time if I needed it. For both these instructors, it was their first time ever visiting a family child care setting. It meant the world to me that they made me feel respected for doing important work. After this experience, I was even asked by the department head to facilitate a practicum for another family child care provider.

During my bachelor's program, I had opportunities to network and get to know others in the community, including their work and struggles. It was a different relationship from my associate program because there were a variety of degree programs grouped together in many of my classes. Having a diversity of careers, not just education majors, showed me other options and taught me how systems are connected in the community. It also increased my thoughts about possible future job opportunities. It was good because I had worked from home for so many years.

The relationships I developed while attending school encouraged me, supported me, and always reminded me that I wasn't alone. I spent many nights at local college libraries with classmates finishing up assignments. It was useful to have the ability to go to local college libraries, which stayed open late and enabled me to get out of my work environment. There was

the ability to print our papers and use their resources, computers, and books. However, regrettably, one of these colleges no longer allows students not attending the college to use their library after 6 p.m., and printing is no longer free. It was important for me to have a safe, quiet place to study late at night and meet classmates to finish assignments. I am very grateful to have been able to access their facility.

My final comment is a special thanks to a professor who has inspired me to be a leader for change in my profession. She is the only instructor who shared that she once worked in family child care as a provider. When she disclosed that she had worked in family child care, it inspired me to expand my own career path. As a student in her class, it made me relax and feel the powerful effect of sharing experiences with her. That's why it is important for family child care providers, parents, and preschool and kindergarten teachers to meet and know each other. This will enhance the skills we can develop by becoming empowered and working together.

Our stories must be shared to bring family child care providers closer to their educational goals and dreams. Family child care providers can bring their experience of the challenges of providing home-based child care into their higher education courses, making the courses relevant to their learning and their work. In doing this, we become the hands that hold each other up, and we move together, upward.

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