

## From The SoapBox...Surrounded by Soap Bubbles

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### **The Utter Significance of Caregiving as a Profession to Society and Throughout the Life Course -- And This Time Somebody *Else* Said It!**



When your Soapbox columnist is totally excited about something, she gets out her bubble-blowing supplies, jumps up on her Soapbox and goes to it, to celebrate.

So listen to this: "Raising our estimation of the value and importance of caregiving and the skills we need to do it well. **In economic terms, caregiving is investment in human capital, our most precious asset as a society**" (Slaughter, 2015, p. 102). She points out the low pay and low status of caregivers and caregiving. And in her front page article in the *New York Times Book*

*Review*, the reviewer states, "Slaughter would like to see caregiving become a professionalized, middle-class occupation" (Blair, September 27, 2015). Right on!

Imagine... a book touting the absolute value of caregiving is reviewed on the first page of the *New York Time Book Review*. Even though many are probably sick of my habit of touting the *New York Times* as the source of the latest thinking and advances on topics pertinent to us, the *Times* in this case has certainly done it again.

Slaughter writes about caregiving in the context of providing it in a way that supports working women so that they may be more deservedly able to advance in the workplace.

But the themes and the needs are totally shared with child and youth work as we know it and thus serve to extend the range and significance of the work. To top it off, she recognizes that "At the other end of life, educated

caregivers can expand the length and quality of life for the generation that is leaving the stage" (p. 106). Absolutely!

So what does this mean for us?

First of all is to review again the notion of 'what is a profession'. I have suggested before that any human service field that is age or category group specific isn't a 'full' profession given the established criteria for them (VanderVen, 1992). So we are not a profession...yet. However, we have many of the characteristics of full professions, such as training and education, definition of the scope and competencies of the field, a professional association, communication methods such as journals and a very strong "Online" presence. These contribute for our readiness for the next step.

One thing we can do is re-establish our connection with the huge field of early childhood care and education. Back in the early 80s, well-known early childhood educators participated in the Conference-Research Sequence which developed core curriculum applicable to normal and exceptional children and youth from birth on. Early childhood care is included in the ACYCP certification competencies. But this initial connection seems to have diminished over the years. In the meantime the field of afterschool or out-of-school care has surfaced. The early childhood field has taken it on (for children up to age 8) and it has become a well developed field independently. Here again, the competencies across fields are essentially the same.

The time is opportune. Two recent books have come out about the need to professionalize early childhood care and education. *The New Early Childhood Professional: A step-by-step guide to overcoming Goliath* (Washington, Gadson, and Amel, (2015) and *Professionalizing early childhood education as a field of practice: A guide to the next era* (Goffin, 2015). While neither seems to be built on recognition of the characteristics of full professions and the fact that there are other fields serving people at various phases of the life course that are doing exactly the same thing nonetheless these books both provide specific guidance and inspiration for empowering people to take forward steps.. Their overall message and action-encouraging insights can be helpful to all of us, not just those who identify solely with early childhood.

How about it? Are we going to take those next steps to bring caregiving to the national forefront? The time is now. There are others who share our concerns and voice. Let's get connected- or re-connected - and act on our

common interests and similarities to cross boundaries and lift caregiving to the crucial role it plays in society's wellbeing.

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