

THE NEW EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO
**Overcoming
Goliath**

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Facing Goliath

Let's Talk!

Cowardice asks the question—is it safe?
Expediency asks the question—is it politic?
Vanity asks the question—is it popular?
But conscience asks the question—is it right?
And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither
safe, nor politic, nor popular;
but one must take it because it is right.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

This book speaks about *change and change-makers*—early educators asking an essential question of conscience: Are we doing the right thing?

The CAYL Institute (Community Advocates for Young Learners) was established in 2004 to provide a forum for early educators to ask questions, and to seek answers, about our work. A basic CAYL Institute (pronounced “kale”) premise is that during this dynamic era of interest in early learning, early educators must be better organized, equipped, and empowered to lead change for both children and themselves.

In the decade since the CAYL Institute’s inception, we have engaged in intimate, trusting discussions with hundreds of early educators as they define their dreams, hopes, and fears about change. Representing their voices, this book addresses the questions posed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from the perspective of early care and education practice:

Is our work popular? Largely due to the successful advocacy of early educators, the public has more interest and more willingness to invest in our work than at any time in history. Once an obscure occupation, early care and education is now a growth industry and a topic of public discourse.

Is our work politic? With public interest comes public scrutiny and new perspectives. Once-novel voices—governors, economists, and school boards, for example—now weigh in and take action about young learners. Our hopes and excitement for change are tempered by concern that the early childhood agenda is moving forward without the full benefit of the experience and expertise that we, as early educators, can bring to the enterprise.

Is our work safe? Many early educators sense the arrival of a new era—gigantic change—for the profession. Many worry that the changes challenge our field’s accumulated wisdom, question our practices, and rush too quickly toward academic outcomes. Many of us feel unsafe—intimidated, negated, and isolated—in the face of a tsunami of proposed changes.

Are we doing the right thing? We cannot deny the gap that exists between *what we know* and *what we do* in practice. We have much to offer, and at times the best of our theory, philosophies, and approaches go unheeded or underutilized.

Do we have the courage and support to take a position that may be neither safe, nor politic, nor popular because we know it is right? In order to take a position and stand strong in the face of obstacles to that position, we as professionals need to become a more strongly organized, effective field of practice. We need professionwide leadership!

Are we doing the right thing?! Most children still do not receive high-quality early care and education. Even as millions of dollars have been invested in early childhood systems and infrastructure, the people who work on the front lines earn low compensation and few benefits in spite of rising expectations about their qualifications and the results they will produce. If we acknowledge the realities about what young children need from us, what are our responsibilities to take action? And how exactly do we do so?

Facing Goliath

Many fine analyses of the challenges facing both young children and early educators have shed light on the status of the early education profession. Valora Washington (a coauthor of this volume) and Stacie Goffin struck a chord with their 2007 book, *Ready or Not: Leadership*

Choices in Early Care and Education,² by noting two predominant ironies in our field:

First, the field's knowledge base has exploded in recent years, but this new knowledge has not been implemented consistently and systematically across early care and learning settings. This irony is characterized as a "performance gap;" and
Second, although the public's understanding about the importance of wisely designed preschool programs continues to grow, early educators face a "credibility gap" when we fail to address poor-quality practice or to insist on the necessary resources to do the job well.

Goffin and Washington encouraged us to act with greater urgency, to better define our purpose and responsibilities in order to counterbalance the prevailing strength of these external influences. But while we educators hear and concur with these calls to action, some of us feel paralyzed. To the individual practitioner, the job ahead might seem too big—too Goliathan—to take the first steps.

In the well-known story of David and Goliath,³ David's community faced the same emotions: They believed in the righteousness of their cause, but they hesitated to act. Who among us has not felt the quiet despair of feeling weak in the face of the strong?

What Can We Do?

This book speaks about *obstacles to change*—wavering courage, gigantic challenges, and uncertain responses when we feel intimidated, neglected, or isolated. But we know these behemoths, these Goliaths, can be overcome.

It speaks of *the tools of change*—acquired wisdom and knowledge, habits of mind that focus on constructive challenge, and alliances that build us spiritually and professionally, individually and collectively.

For early educators, change is nonnegotiable. The size, force, and direction of change is huge. This book proposes strategies we can use in the face of gigantic odds.

The New Early Childhood Professional recounts some of the heroic stories and strategic approaches used by early educators who participated in the CAYL Fellowship programs between 2004 and 2014. Sensing her peers' thirst for courage and community, Valora Washington established the CAYL Institute to deeply immerse practitioners from

different parts of the field, such as elementary schools and family child care, in constructive, active learning that stimulates innovation. The CAYL Institute fosters collegial debate, cooperation, and coordination, typically nudging participants out of their comfort zones to define their own truths and pursue appropriate solutions.

Based on the experiences of CAYL Fellows, this book shares a specific framework—a practical road map—for taking actions to challenge the Goliaths among us. This book offers:

- Four progressive paths with 11 interconnected steps to help every early educator become an architect of change.
- Five smooth stones—resources and tools, just like the stones David carried in his rough cloth bag when he faced Goliath—for each of the interconnected steps.
- An opportunity to reflect after reading each step with questions that will help you apply each step to your own circumstances.

Toward Becoming an Architect of Change

The New Early Childhood Professional suggests a four-path framework with 11 steps toward becoming an architect of change in early care and education (see Figure I.1). Change begins as we *ANALYZE*—think and reflect—about the challenges before us. Then, we—architects of change—*ADVANCE* our cause through planning and preparation, which allows us to understand the asymmetrical nature of our efforts, decide how to face Goliath, and strengthen our collective vision and identity. Now the architects of change are ready to *ACT* with courage and boldness; we align what we know with what we do, beginning with our everyday challenges. Finally, we *ACCELERATE* change by working within a confidential community, focusing on what we want (rather than what we don't want), and communicating impact. Each step in the four-path framework represents a progression that builds on and is interdependent with the others.

The Five Smooth Stones

David brought five smooth stones to the challenge with Goliath. Why five smooth stones? The many stones represent the fact that we must be prepared for whatever faces us: Many ideas, strategies, and people

Figure I.1. Eleven Interconnected Steps Toward Becoming an Architect of Change

Chapter 1: ANALYZE!—Think and Reflect

Step 1: Reality—Face It! We must be honest and contemplative about the challenges and capacities that represent the paths that lie before us.

Step 2: Respect Our Knowledge. We know more than we think we do! We have yet to bring the full power of our knowledge to bear in our work.

Chapter 2: ADVANCE!—Plan and Prepare

Step 3: Recognize Symptoms of Asymmetrical Conflict. We need to recognize the factors of isolation, intimidation, and negation when they occur.

Step 4: Reassess Your Willingness to Face Goliath. Now comes the critical decision: advance or retreat?

Step 5: Revelation—Know Your Vision and Identity. To realize our vision, we must affiliate, belong, and connect to one another and to our profession.

Chapter 3: ACT!—Be Brave and Bold

Step 6: Join a Confidential Community and Share Leadership. As we strive for personal mastery, each of us must share strategies and encourage one another.

Step 7: Begin with Your Everyday Challenges. Think about the issues that you face every day. This is the place where you begin your work.

Step 8: Align What We Know with What We Do. We must use what we know every day, in every situation, in every interaction with a child, parent, peer, or administrator.

Chapter 4: ACCELERATE!—Believe and Achieve

Step 9: Focus on What You Do Want, Not What You Don't Want. Too often we worry away our hours and days thinking about the negative, and focus on what we don't want to happen.

Step 10: Don't Walk Alone—Gather Your Allies. It is simply unwise to walk up to Goliath and face him down without colleagues, friends, and supervisors.

Step 11: Get the Word Out—Document and Communicate Impact. Just as the story of David and Goliath is part of our shared mythology and heritage, our stories as early educators must be recorded for future generations.

are necessary to achieve important goals. If one doesn't work, we do not give up; we have additional ideas in our bags.

Throughout *The New Early Childhood Professional*, we offer resources and tools to use when taking each step, to move forward personally and professionally. We suggest that you keep these five smooth stones in your rough cloth bag as you face your own Goliaths.

Take Time for Reflection

After each step, we offer questions to help you relate that step to your own circumstances. Becoming an architect of change will require a lifetime of investigation. And, as John Dewey taught us, we do not learn from experience—we learn from *reflecting* on our experiences.⁴ We would add that active testing of what you are learning is also essential.

One lesson we have learned is that early educators have precious little time to reflect. We encourage you to take time for these reflections, either alone or within your community, to expand both your heart and mind.

Our Hopes

We have four major hopes for this book.

We hope that *The New Early Childhood Professional* **will help you become architects of change, not simply reactors to the change occurring around us.** You can learn how to change the rules of the game rather than be overwhelmed by Goliath-sized obstacles. We can repeatedly stand awestruck at the size of our problems, or we can practice patterns of action that set and sustain a course of change. Each of us has the ability to be exceptional so that every child, regardless of zip code, has a world-class early education.

We hope that because of *The New Early Childhood Professional*, **you will learn and gain insights from the experiences of the early educators who have shared their stories.** These change agents talk about the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and strategies they used to address their everyday Goliaths, often without an influx of large sums of money or other resources.