



ASSOCIATION FOR
**Early
Learning
Leaders**

**National
Accreditation
Commission**
FOR EARLY CARE AND
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

WORDS MATTER

We Are Early Educators.

This conversation is not new. This conversation is not always easy. This conversation is, however, necessary.

An article published by HuffPost in May 2014, “Day Care Disrespect: Why What We Call Child Care Matters”, discussed the need for a shift in terminology and made a compelling argument using a then-recent study from Science on the benefits and value of early childhood education and a New York Times article that referenced the study.

Here is an excerpt from the HuffPost article by Dr. Katherine Rose, Texas Woman’s University:

“In March, a study was published in Science magazine that contained remarkable statistics about the effects of good child care on later life. Briefly, it was found that not only did people who received stimulating, appropriate care in their earliest days have stronger cognitive abilities, compared to a control group who did not, they were also notably healthier physically once they reached adulthood. This study makes plain what logic has always dictated but what we in the United States don’t always act on at the institutional level. Good child care from the earliest days -- both at home and when the parents are at work -- is absolutely crucial to the development of healthy, productive adults.

The authors of the study use the term "high quality early childhood program" to describe the kind of care that the children who grew up to be healthier received. But when the story was reported in the New York Times, the paper used the term "full-time day care" to describe the program. For those of us in the field of early childhood development, the term day care, so common that even an august institution like the New York Times would use it, day care is a maddening phrase. Here's why: the term day care diminishes how complex and nuanced offering good quality child care is.”

Nearly a decade has passed, and an abundance of research has been completed to further support the validity and importance of the work we do, and yet we still battle to be seen as more than “daycare workers” and “daycare centers”.

Here are just a few reasons why the words we use matter to both early educators and those who rely on them to provide children with the very best starts in learning and in life:

1. **Research Supported Need for Early Education:** Research overwhelmingly tells us that establishing educational foundations in our youngest learners plays a crucial role in shaping a child's development and future success.
2. **Educational Emphasis:** The term "daycare" may imply a focus solely on supervision and custodial care rather than education. Using terms like "early childhood education" and "early learning" emphasizes the educational component of the services provided, highlighting the critical importance of learning and development for young children.
3. **Professional Recognition:** Professionals in the field of early childhood education prefer terms that reflect the educational nature of their work. Using these references helps acknowledge and affirm their critical role in a child's development.
4. **Stigma:** The term "daycare" carries a stigma that downplays the significance of the work done by educators in these settings. This term often inhibits our ability to attract quality talent to fill vacancies in early education classrooms.

How do we change the narrative? Internally, we must consistently infuse each role and each person in early education with significance and professionalism and change the way we see and value ourselves and the important work we do. Externally, when we encounter "daycare" references, we must respectfully and consistently share the story of what we do, why we do it, and why it matters. We have seen some changes from "daycare" to "child care," and that is a positive step in the right direction. In the article "The Curriculum of Care", author Carol Garboden Murray explains, "The pedagogy of care is an applied science. Now more than ever, we possess brain research demonstrating that children learn from the moment they are born, and the most meaningful lessons are embedded in care." Care is not something we do in addition to or instead of education. Care is education. This is the real story of who our amazing early educators are and what they do. While we are encouraged by the progress being made, there is still work to be done to change the "daycare" narrative, and we all have a part to play.

Many of the incredible people who have chosen this career path had no idea that when they said yes to that first job opportunity in early education, their lives would be forever changed. As you experience the joy and awe of introducing young children to the magic and wonder of learning and watching them grow and evolve, you realize that this is so much more than a job. It is a vocation and calling that has life-changing implications. The simple truth is this. We do not care for days. We proudly and passionately steward the very first educational and life foundations of the world's most valuable resource, children. We are early educators.

Resources:

HuffPost

Science Magazine

Dr. Katherine Rose, Texas Woman's University

New York Times

"The Curriculum of Care", Exchange Press