What’s in a name, Rumpelstiltskin? Collective professional identities and the urgent task of reinventing early childhood education and care

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The good news first: more and more countries in the Global South and Global North (including Ireland) are adopting ambitious, integrated early childhood policy frameworks, often in direct reference to the need to establish a ‘Competent System’ (Urban et al, 2011, 2012) for young children and their families. The emerging (and welcome) systemic turn has invigorated efforts to professionalise the early childhood workforce. However, well-intended policy agendas meet a field characterised by tensions and power imbalances arising from a backdrop of under-developed collective professional identities. In my contribution I argue that who ‘we’ think and say we are as an early childhood profession matters just as much as our collective ability and preparedness to ‘name’ the critical issues that shape the context for our professional practice: dramatically changed life situations of children and families, dysfunctional relationships between public and corporate interests, the fast approaching ‘tipping point’ in a global humanmade climate crisis, to give only three examples. Together, they present both challenge and possibility for finding our collective identity as an early childhood profession and, in the process, contributing to reclaiming early childhood as a public responsibility and common good.

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