

Gateways to Opportunity

ECE Credential Level 6

Level 6 Skill Areas: Direct Route

Applicants seeking the ECE Credential Level 6 through the direct route demonstrates mastery in three Skill Areas. Mastery is defined as self-awareness about the nature and impact of one's interactions with others, comprehensive knowledge (theory, principles and/or best practices) and specific skills related to the application of knowledge to practice. Supporting documents are to be submitted for each Skill Area identified by the applicant. More than one supporting document may be submitted per Skill Area. A narrative written for each Skill Area, following the guidelines provided, must demonstrate the applicant's ability to apply knowledge and skills at an advanced level relative to the Skill Area and the supporting documents.

The ECE Credential Level 6 identifies seven Skill Areas. These Skill Areas are built on the achievement of knowledge and skills for the ECE Credential Level 5. The seven Skill Areas are:

1. **Advocacy** is defined as purposeful action that promotes and protects the rights and needs of children, families, and colleagues. Advocates use evidence- and research-based information to recommend improvements and influence outcomes for children and families as well as the profession. Professionals understand the legislative process, social issues, and public policies that impact and influence the lives of children and families and those within the profession.
2. **Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Research** are the avenues by which professionals initiate, generate and acquire knowledge and skills related to areas of expertise in the ECE profession. Professionals study issues and topics through action research, literature reviews, critical reviews of information, as well as other methods of inquiry. Through critical reflection, professionals discern what is valid and appropriate for dissemination through formal and informal means.
3. **Communication** is defined as a network or system of information transformation or exchange, including thoughts, opinions, needs, feelings and ideas, by various means, among professionals, stakeholders, colleagues, and families. Professionals engage in the transmission or exchange of information employing diverse strategies with the goal of creating meaning or shared understanding.
4. **Leadership** is defined as the ability to motivate others to work together to identify and achieve common goals. Professionals utilize their knowledge, skills, dispositions, and personality traits to bring about change that will improve the lives of children, families, and colleagues.
5. **Reflective Practice** occurs when professionals evaluate personal and professional practices and ideas in relation to standards, ethical principles, evidence-based practices, and outcomes. Through this process, professionals develop a greater sense of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their interactions with colleagues, young children, families, and the community at large.
6. **Collaboration** occurs when two or more individuals work together toward achieving common goals. These goals relate to supporting and enhancing the ECE profession and to enhancing the quality of care and education for young children, birth through age 8 and their families.
7. **Innovation** is defined as change in current practice or process, or the useful application of new inventions or discoveries. Professionals engage in creative thought processes, critical thinking, and application of successful practices within the profession or within other areas or knowledge bases to bring about new ideas.

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Application Guidelines: Direct Route

A. Artifacts

Applicants will submit supporting documents, hereafter referred to as artifacts, that clearly demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge to practice, within the ECE field, in each of the three Skill Areas that have been identified. Artifacts must directly relate to and clearly demonstrate mastery of the related Skill Area. Each artifact is to be named and briefly described, on the Artifact Cover Page, to show its connection to the related Skill Area. More than one artifact may be submitted per Skill Area. Only artifacts that provide clear evidence of the ability to apply knowledge of the Skill Area to professional practice within the ECE field at an advanced level will be accepted.

NOTE: Send only copies of artifacts as these will not be returned.

B. Narrative

The applicant will complete and submit a professionally written narrative for each Skill Area. The narrative must focus on the applicant's ability to apply knowledge to practice at an advanced level in the ECE field. Each section of the narrative must be clearly labeled and the narrative must demonstrate the applicant's ability to communicate at an advanced level.

Narrative Presentation

Demonstrate the ability to communicate and present ideas at an advanced level.

The narrative will be reviewed for professional writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure), the organization of ideas, and expression of thought.

Introduction

Include a statement of purpose and an overview of the narrative in the introduction. Clearly refer to the Skill Area and the supporting artifact(s).

Elements of Skill Area

Identify and describe specific knowledge (theory, principles and/or best practices) and skills used in the creation and/or use of the supporting artifact(s).

Understanding of Skill Area

Analyze and reflect on the knowledge and skills applied in the development and/or implementation of the artifact(s). Make reference to the Skill Area and clearly demonstrate an understanding of the Skill Area and the connections with the artifact(s).

Impact of Artifact(s)

Analyze the professional and personal impact of the supporting artifacts relative to how each demonstrates a mastery level of the Skill Area. Specifically speak to how the knowledge and skills developed in this Skill Area have been applied regarding the use of the artifact(s) and the impact of the artifact(s) on practices within the ECE field.

C. Professional Contributions in ECE

The applicant is to submit six Professional Contributions, completed in three different areas (see Professional Contribution Guidelines) within the last five years. This is an endeavor that contributes to the ECE field at an advanced level and goes beyond the scope of a position or of job duty.

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Evaluation Guidelines: Direct Route

A. Submission of Materials

After all components of the application are complete, submit all of the required materials to INCCRRA for review. These materials will be reviewed to determine whether the applicant has demonstrated mastery, comprehensive knowledge and skills, based on the narrative essays and artifacts submitted for each Skill Area.

The following components are to be submitted for evaluation.

For each Skill Area where mastery is being identified:

- Artifact(s), with Artifact Cover Page
- Narrative

For each Professional Contribution:

- Professional Contribution Cover Page
- Artifact

B. Evaluation

Each component must meet the requirements for the ECE Credential Level 6 to be awarded. If needed, an applicant will have the opportunity to resubmit each component of each Skill Area for a total of two times.

Narrative Presentation

Each narrative, based on the applicant's ability to communicate at an advanced level. Two areas will be evaluated: Professional Writing and Professional Organization. The applicant will have the opportunity to work with a Gateways to Opportunity Counselor to make changes and/or additions, and resubmit a narrative for a subsequent review, for a total of two times.

Artifacts and Narrative Presentation

Each narrative will be reviewed in relation to references to the artifact(s) submitted as supporting documentation for the related Skill Area.

Professional Contributions

Each Professional Contribution will be reviewed based on the degree to which the endeavor represents an activity at an advanced level in the ECE field, the contribution of the applicant is clearly identified, the description shows a clear connection to the identified area of the endeavor, and the artifact supports the contribution.

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Skill Area Artifact Cover Page

Name: _____

Registry ID: _____

Skill Area: _____

Artifact: Name If submitting more than 1 artifact, please list each one separately.	Connection to Skill Area Briefly describe why you chose this artifact to document mastery in this Skill Area (100 words or less). Please articulate your role in the artifact.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Skill Area Narrative

Applicant Name: _____

Registry ID: _____

Skill Area: _____

Name of Document: _____

Complete and return this form with the application for the ECE Credential Level 6. On this form, complete and submit a professionally written narrative for each Skill Area. Each narrative must focus on your ability to apply knowledge to practice at an advanced level in the ECE field. Each section of the narrative must be completed, and the narrative must demonstrate your ability to communicate at an advanced level. **Type all information.**

<p>Introduction</p> <p>Include a statement of purpose and an overview of the narrative in the introduction. Clearly refer to the Skill Area and the supporting artifact(s).</p>	
<p>Elements of Skill Area</p> <p>Identify and describe specific knowledge (theory, principles and/or best practices) and skills used in the creation and/or use of the supporting artifact(s).</p>	
<p>Understanding of Skill Area</p> <p>Analyze and reflect on the knowledge and skills applied in the development and/or implementation of the artifact(s). Make reference to the Skill Area and clearly demonstrate an understanding of the Skill Area and the connections with the artifact(s).</p>	
<p>Impact of Artifact(s)</p> <p>Analyze the professional and personal impact of the supporting artifacts relative to how each demonstrates a mastery level of the Skill Area. Specifically speak to how the knowledge and skills developed in this Skill Area have been applied regarding the use of the artifact(s) and the impact of the artifact(s) on practices within the ECE field.</p>	

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Professional Contributions

A Professional Contribution is an endeavor completed outside the workplace that contributes to the field of early care and education, or an endeavor completed in the workplace that goes above and beyond a job description. The contributions must have been completed within five years of the date the applicant's portfolio is sent to the Gateways to Opportunity office.

The activities that demonstrate contributions to the field of Early Care and Education fall into six areas. The six areas represent a range of professional activities in which practitioners engage to improve the field. Examples follow each area. Other comparable activities may be considered.

1. Program Improvement

- Successfully brought an early childhood and/or school-age program through national accreditation
- Received a Quality Rating Improvement System Rating
- Implemented Program Improvement Plan(s)
- Served as a consultant to other programs serving young children, and their families

2. Service in a Leadership Role in a Professional Organization

- Served on a community board as a representative of early care and education
- Served on a local, state, or national advisory board for an early care and education organization
- Served on a local, regional, or statewide committee to promote early care and education issues
- Held an elected office in a local, state, or national early care and education organization
- Served on a committee for an early care and education organization to organize a conference, community-wide advocacy event, or other major event
- Coordinated or helped plan for an annual event (e.g., Week of the Young Child)
- Served on a statewide committee, for a particular cause, for a minimum of two years. (e.g., Illinois Birth to Three Institute Advisory Board)
- Participated in a project that requires collaboration in a multidisciplinary approach to work with young children, and their families. (e.g., Committee work that spans at least two years on a regional early care and education conference that brought in professionals to share resources)
- Demonstrated collaboration and communication at the community level. (e.g., work with early intervention systems)

3. Presentations/Training

- Presented at an annual conference (e.g., Leadership Connections, Embracing Change, local ILAEYC conference)
- Presented/trained through or for a local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency
- Trained for First Aid/CPR (through American Red Cross, American Heart Association)
- Served as a validator for NAEYC or NCCA
- Presented trainings focused on early care and education that are Registry-Approved and meets the criteria for Credential-Approved training
- Presented at a national conference (e.g., Zero to Three National Training Institute)

4. Advocacy

- Served as a social work consultant/evaluator for Department of Child and Family Services
- Organized rallies or trips to rallies
- Wrote letters to legislators about an issue regarding children/families
- Organized advocacy event in the local community for children/families
- Wrote a letter to the editor about an issue regarding children/families
- Demonstrated impact through an advocacy event that changes the public views regarding services to early care and education
- Provided consultation to an elected official regarding issues impacting early care and education
- Provided testimony at a public hearing on early care and education issues

5. Writing and Publication

- Wrote articles for Early Childhood/School-Age themed journals
- Wrote center newsletters that are distributed to families and staff
- Wrote policy and procedure manuals for staff/parent handbooks
- Wrote Early Childhood/School-Age textbook
- Published an article in a peer reviewed journal that focuses on early care and education
- Wrote a publication that has been juried and distributed for use with early care and education caregivers and/or families
- Assisted in the writing of state early care and education learning guidelines

6. Research/Grants Writing

- Wrote a Request for Proposal for a grant (e.g., Quality Improvement Funds)
- Served as a grant reader/reviewer
- Wrote a dissertation/thesis
- Conducted a research study (e.g., That demonstrates how family involvement in the community builds skills in changing the time that families volunteer in the center)

Each contribution requires the following documentation:

- A thorough description of the contribution and how it clearly defines the work specifically targeting and impacting the early childhood field
- Evidence which describes the work and how it impacts the field at the local, state, national or international level
 - o If letters are used, a minimum of two letters must accompany each contribution.
 - o A sample of the contribution could be provided if the contribution is too large to submit.
 - o Photos or testimonials must include a written narrative.
- Clearly articulate your participation in the endeavor.

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Cover Page, Professional Contributions

For each Professional Contribution, provide the name of the document included as evidence of the endeavor. Also, include a brief description that details how the endeavor contributes to the ECE field and represents an activity at an advanced level. Also, clearly articulate your participation in the endeavor. Please limit the description to 150 words. Provide the name of the activity, location, date, contact person, and contact information. One form must be completed with documentation for each contribution attached. Please type the information.

Applicant Name: _____

Registry ID: _____

Professional Contribution Area: _____

Name of Document: _____

Description of Professional Contribution:

Location: _____

Date(s): _____

Contact Person: _____

Contact Information (phone number or email): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Skill Area Examples

An applicant for the ECE Credential Level 6 must demonstrate mastery in three Level 6 Skill Areas. Artifacts are to be submitted for each Skill Area identified by the applicant. More than one supporting artifact may be submitted per Skill Area. The supporting artifact(s) must be accompanied with a narrative following the guidelines provided. Each section of the narrative must be clearly labeled and the narrative must demonstrate the applicant's ability to communicate at an advanced level.

PLEASE NOTE: The examples included in this document are excerpts from narrative essays and do not reflect the entirety of what an applicant has submitted.

A. Artifacts

Cover page

Example:

Skill Area: Collaboration

Artifact: Proposal for Developing an Early Childhood Mental Health Training Program

Description:

This artifact represents collaboration not just between four professionals from different organizations, but a potential collaboration between three institutions, with the goal being to create an innovative delivery system for mental health training throughout (the region). I was involved in this process because of my background in managing mental health training programs, my understanding of delivery across several types of service systems, my knowledge of hybrid-style course teaching, my familiarity with state credentialing systems, and my ability to teach within different areas of the program. This allowed me to use my expertise to help (the region) develop a meaningful training program to meet the needs of its professionals.

B. Narrative

Introduction

Example:

Collaboration, selected excerpts

Authentic collaboration is key to the work done in caring for and supporting young children and families in order to maximize their potential to achieve their goals. This collection of artifacts helps to document some of the ways I have collaborated with others in order to improve services and outcomes for young children and families.

Elements of Skill Area

Example:

Leadership, selected excerpts

Through reflecting on multiple leaders I have known, books and articles on the art of leadership that I have read and studied, and also on my own experiences as a leader, I have developed a personal leadership style that tends to be greatly collaborative, strengths-focused, team-based, reflective and open to innovation. It is that style that will primarily be represented in my thoughts here.

I believe that one of the most important facets of being a good leader is the ability to be reflective—the ability to consider one's own beliefs, values, and experiences as they relate to a particular situation as well as the ability to look openly at specific situations and seek to understand them.

Also important to this process is good, strong communication. I believe that a good leader is someone that strives to communicate clearly with others, and encourages open communication within any team. Because communication plays such a strong role in how a team perceives its members and its mission, a strong leader will intentionally use strong, written, verbal, and non-verbal communication to share ideas with the team's work.

Understanding of Skill Area

Example:

Leadership, selected excerpts

I truly believe that leadership is an art form and is best developed through a continuous process of practice, reflection, and adaptation. While I have only a limited selection of my leadership in the artifacts that I have submitted with this skill area, I have been learning the art of leadership my whole life. When I consider what I knew and understood about leadership at the age of nine when I lead an Olympics of the Mind team as a co-captain, and then think about what I knew and understood a decade later as I dreamed up and planned my first large-scale youth leadership conference from the ground up, and then I think about what I know and understand today, two decades later, I can see that here has been a steady progression in my knowledge and understanding of leadership.

For that reason, each of the artifacts listed here has been most relevant in that it depicts yet another opportunity I had to grow in my role as a leader. Rather than seeing each as an accomplishment, I see each as a part of the bigger process of continuous molding and shaping – a process that will continue forever.

Impact of Artifact(s)

Example:

Collaboration, selected excerpts

While many of the activities changed local practice (within an institution or within a department), others had the power to inspire additional professionals to enact similar changes. Opportunities to present workshops and classes about collaborative processes and how they helped me to be part of a team that achieved a common goal have helped the field in a larger way by enabling our changes to spread to others, as well.

The artifacts, collectively, speak loudly about collaboration as a whole and impact my perception and understanding of collaboration. Key to this understanding has been the realization that collaboration can look many different ways, and can also involve very different types of people. As I looked through my artifacts, I also realized that some represented collaboration between department in an institution, each bring expertise (and training) to the table to create a cohesive plan. Within that same process, I also realized that collaboration meant working for a common good (the good of the institution) and how much that meant that no one was more important than any other. Other artifacts represented collaboration between institutions; others between professionals from very different disciplines, coming together to share their knowledge to improve a system or to solve a problem. In addition, some artifacts represented collaboration that relied more on the sharing of knowledge while others represented a greater sharing of experience. In the end, the dissimilarity among these artifacts has reminded me that collaboration experience can also look very dissimilar, but that they have all still fulfilled the ultimate goal of collaboration, which is to use everything that a variety of people can bring to the table to construct the best plan or outcome available for any particular situation.

My hope is that each collaboration represented here has left everyone involved with a feeling of success because of the process. In this way, I hope that the truest impact on the field is that of each collaborative success feeding people's desires to engage in collaboration once again.

C. Professional Contributions in ECE

Example:

Artifact

Formal letter from contact person detailing contributions

Description:

The Review Committee is comprised of Professionals that work together on behalf of Gateway to Opportunity to review current entitled institution application for Gateways Credentials. Using our knowledge of key learning benchmarks, best educational practice, and state goals furthering early care and education as a professional career, we help to grant entitled status to individual institutions of higher education. We also work to provide clarity and feedback to Gateways about ways in which to strengthen the Entitled process, as well as simplify (and demystify) the Entitled application pathway so more institutions will feel prepared to successfully complete the process. As a representative of this committee, I also recently offered a 10-minute presentation during a breakout session at the Gateways Higher Ed Forum, helping participants to understand the value of entitlement, as well as explaining the process and strategies for completing the application process.

Location: INCCRRA, Bloomington, IL

Date:

Contact Person:

Contact Information:

EXAMPLE