

Competencies and Credentials for Early Childhood Educators: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?

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Child Trends

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- Feb. 5, 1918 – May 20, 2008
- First Director of Research for Head Start, 1965
- Commissioned Lazar Report
 - Demonstrated long-term efficacy of high quality ECE
 - Prevented massive cuts in funding sought by Nixon administration





Overview



- Based on older research:
 - High quality preschool experience reduce the SES achievement gap
 - Teacher education improves early care and education (ECE) quality
- More recent research
 - Challenges the assumption that pre-service education reliably improves quality
 - Documents that certain kinds of training improves quality

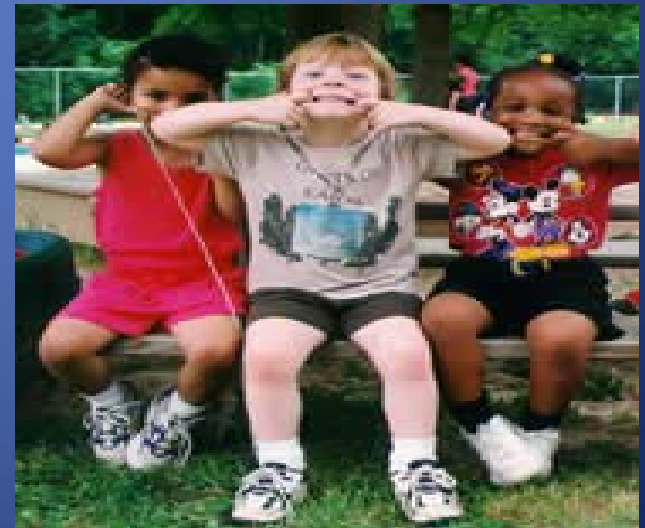
High Quality Child Care Experiences

- Strong evidence linking high quality child care experiences to better outcomes for low-income children:
 - Entry to school
 - K-12 education
 - Adult outcomes
- More modest evidence in observational studies



High Quality Early Care and Education

- High quality early education and care includes
 - Close teacher-child relationships
 - Frequent sensitive interactions between child and teacher
 - High quality instruction
 - Respectful, effective behavior management
 - Parent Involvement



Video – Quality Early Care and Education

- Video produced by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission for Building a Healthier America
 - Discusses and demonstrates quality care
 - Features the FPG Child Care Center

High Quality Child Care Experiences

- Access to quality ECE viewed as a means to improve school-readiness skills for low-income children
- Led to wide-scale funding of programs presumed to provide high quality ECE
 - Head Start
 - Pre-kindergarten Programs
 - Subsidies



Promoting High Quality ECE

- Early research: BA degrees & higher quality ECE
 - National Staffing Study
 - Cost, Quality, and Outcomes
 - NICHD Study of Early Child Care
 - Smaller Studies
- State/federal policies requiring BA degrees & teaching certificates



- Head Start
 - 50% of teachers in a center
- State Pre-Kindergartens
 - 29/38 states: at least some lead teachers in a center

Other Evidence

- Degrees do not guarantee quality
- Teachers with a BA may be more effective under some circumstances
 - In ECE setting with limited infrastructure for monitoring and support (Vu et al., in press)
 - In responding to in-service professional development (Early Reading First Evaluation)
- Professional development, including pre-service teacher education, requires team approach
 - Ginsberg et al, 2006; Dickinson & Brady, 2005

Contrary Finding – Teacher Education and ECE Quality

- Evidence differs from earlier findings
 - 3 large studies reported no association controlling for other characteristics
- Why might findings differ:
 - Cohort effects- differences in who is obtaining a BA in ECE now v. at earlier time
 - Differences in measures and methods



In-Depth Study to Examine Education-Quality Association



- Secondary data analysis
 - Data from 7 large preschool projects were analyzed
 - NCEDL/SWEEP Pre-Kindergarten Project (11 states)
 - North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Evaluation
 - Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Evaluation
 - Family and Child Evaluation Study (national study)
 - Early Head Start Evaluation
 - Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research
 - NICHD Study of Early Child Care
 - Early, D. M., Maxwell, K. L., Burchinal, M., Alva, S., Bender, R. H., Bryant, D., Cai, K., Clifford, R. M., Ebanks, C., Griffin, J. A., Henry, G. T., Howes, C., Iriondo-Perez, J., Jeon, H. J., Mashburn, A. J., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Pianta, R. C., Vandergrift, N., & Zill, N. (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills: Results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development*, 78(2), 558-580.

Secondary data analysis



- Consistent methodology used in analysis of data from all 7 projects
 - Used same definitions of teacher education
 - Type of Degree
 - Certification in ECE
 - Degree in ECE or related field
 - Standard measures of quality and child outcomes
 - ECERS or ORCE
 - WJ Applied Problems & Letter-Word, PPVT or PLS Receptive Vocabulary
 - The same analytic methods that accounted for
 - Missing data
 - nesting of children in classrooms

Findings

- No consistent pattern of association between any index of teacher education and either classroom quality or child outcomes
- Explanations
 - Newness of ECE pre-service programs
 - Pre-service programs may not provide instruction reflecting current research and beliefs about effective practices
 - Reverse selection biases
 - Differences in who remains in ECE v. elementary education depending on degree status



National Survey of ECE Higher Education Programs

- Hyson et al. (2008) conducted web-based survey of ECE higher education programs
 - 250 institutions responded
 - Qualitative and Quantitative interview
 - Hyson, M., Tomlinson, H., Morris, C. (2008) *Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Teacher Education: National Survey Results and Recommendations for the Future*. Paper presented at the NAEYC Professional Development Institute New Orleans, LA. June 8, 2008



National Survey of ECE Higher Education Programs

My gut is there are born teachers who need to be polished, and then there are people who can learn to be teachers.”

“I have some really awful teachers that are in the schools, but I don’t think that it rests as much with the degree as with the school conferring the degree.”

National Survey of ECE Higher Education Programs

- Positive efforts toward quality improvement in higher-education programs
 - Reliance on standards in determining coursework and field work
 - Focus on teaching how to implement quality curricula correctly
- Areas of concern
 - Many not focusing on developing supportive teacher-child interactions
 - Few include research in their teaching about practices

Priorities – from survey

- Implementing curriculum effectively 71%
- Skills in using appropriate assessments 66%
- Working more effectively with families 65%
- Skills in addressing challenging behaviors 64%
- More comfort and skill working with diverse children 62%
- More frequent, supportive interactions with individual children 46%
- Knowing about and using research in their practice with children 29%

National Survey of ECE Higher Education Programs

- Capacity issues make it difficult for many higher education programs to provide consistently high quality pre-service preparation
 - Under staffed
 - Over-reliant on part-time faculty
 - Heavy teaching loads



Pre-Service Programs: Summary

- Quality of ECE training programs seems uneven
 - Relatively new for higher education
 - Typically small and under funded
 - Some changed their focus recently
 - Huge enrollment increases in many places related to degree mandates



In-Service Training Programs: Lessons learned from Recent Research

- Meta analysis on training among programs that focused on direct teaching practices or interactions with children
 - **Tailored manualized training** was the most effective ($d \sim .50$) for improving quality and child outcomes
 - Included both pre- and in-service training
 - Fukkink & Lout, 2007 *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

Individual Research Programs: Effective Practices

- **Intensive training programs with clearly defined and focused curricula and coaching** (Clements & Sarama, 2007; Dickinson & Caswell, 2007; Pianta et al., in press; Powell et al., 2007)
- **Well-defined curricula + discussions of video observations** (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Dickinson & Caswell, 2007; Pianta et al., in press)
- **Induction or on-site mentoring for entry-level teachers**
- **Coordinated training for all staff members**

Summary

- Quality of ECE is not necessarily higher when teacher has BA or more education
- Quality of ECE can be improved when
 - Teachers receive carefully selected and implemented professional development either during pre- or in-service training
- Should move beyond focus on whether lead teacher has a BA to focus on
 - The content and quality of the higher education program
 - Joint professional development of all personnel who interact with children

Next Steps for Research

- Further study of factors that might be related to improving ECE quality
 - Whether having a bachelors degree is related to being more likely to implement new programs
 - Identification of specific course requirements or internship practices related to higher ECE quality
 - Combining higher education with on-site induction or coaching
 - Coordinating professional development, including higher education, of on-site teachers within a program



Conclusions



- For higher education to reliably produce high quality in early care and education settings, we need to pay more attention to the
 - Content and quality of the degree granting program,
 - Subsequent training provided to the educator, and
 - Degree of support available to the educator in the ECE setting.
- These, and not the degree alone, are likely to lead to improved outcomes for children.