

FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR AND EDUCATE FLORIDA'S CHILDREN

Research Brief

“Quality of child care is as excellent as the expertise and knowledge of the early childhood teachers working with the children.” DeBord & Boling (2002)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early childhood teacher professional development is a topic with explicit meaning for children birth through five and their families. Before considering changes in the current professional development system by increasing demands for education and training for early childhood teachers, research must be conducted in order to assess the availability and accessibility of professional development programs and to identify best practices.

In this system is the process of articulation which is the linking together of programs, faculties, campuses and community entities in order to allow normal advancement and a smooth transition through the educational system and to maintain continuity in the student's academic program (Wheelock College Institute for Leadership and Career Initiatives, 2003).

Currently, there is no documentation of the articulation of early childhood coursework from 2-year institutions of higher education to 4-year institutions in Florida. This can cause many students to run into road blocks when many of their courses from another program do not transfer to other programs. Such obstacles can keep students from increasing their educational attainment given lack of resources, time and elevated frustrations.

Research examining these systems of early childhood teacher education would provide crucial information for university, college, and community college administrators, as well as policymakers to assess Florida's current structures that formally educate those who provide care and education to children and to make decisions effecting quality improvement efforts.

Status of Research

Little is known about early childhood teacher preparation programs as a whole. The lack of research on the professional development of early childhood teachers in Florida identifies the need for continued investigation to ensure that early childhood teachers' needs for knowledge of quality practices and principles are addressed. Such knowledge impacts children's immediate and long-term development and it is critical that the issue of professional development be further investigated to ensure adequate preparation of early childhood teachers in Florida.

On-going Research

The focus of current research in Florida is the general status of articulation, effective strategies being used by selected training and education programs, and how to best move forward in expanding current practices and formalizing early childhood education professional development systems.

Research indicates the importance of coursework and specific training in child development and child care, but has not focused on an integrated system of articulation and formal education progression. To this end, the Florida Children's Forum and the Florida Head Start Collaboration Office have initiated preliminary research to inform practice in institutions of higher education in Florida. A comprehensive approach, including research and analysis of current systems, is believed to be necessary before modifications to the system can occur.

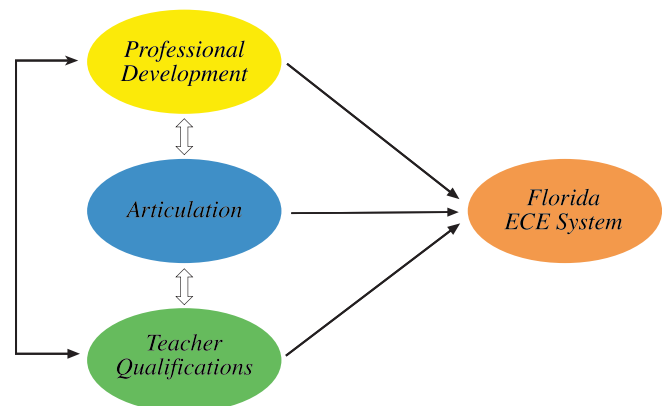
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING CURRENT ISSUES

- *Availability, accessibility, and quality of early childhood teacher preparation programs are critical aspects of the professional development system in Florida.* It is now, more than ever, critical that quality early care and education services are available and accessible given great numbers of children are spending time in care outside their home that is not of sufficient quality to build adequate foundations for later learning and adult success.
- *Improved child outcomes in early care and education must involve a commitment to the success of each early childhood teacher who interacts with children on a daily basis.* Formal education systems must support the professional development of early childhood teachers and provide them with necessary tools and knowledge to provide for children's early learning.
- *Research is necessary to determine the extent to which early childhood education is accessible, how and by whom it is delivered, and whether or not coursework articulates toward a four-year college degree.* It is imperative that the approach toward a seamless early care and education system includes support, training and education, and resources that better enable early childhood teachers to accommodate children's developmental needs.
- *Improving articulation among institutions of higher education requires a collaborative effort and investigation of the current education system.* Improving higher education articulation must be a collaborative effort. People who represent different types of training and education—high schools, technical schools, apprenticeship programs, two- and four-year colleges/universities, alternative education programs, experiential learning, and distance learning—must work together, sharing knowledge and developing a common vision.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PREPARATION SYSTEMS IN FLORIDA

Professional development has been directly linked to quality care in numerous studies and reports (Cornelius, 1988; Ghazvini & Mullis, 2002; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990; Howes, Galinsky, Shinn, Sibley, Abbott-Shim, & McCarthy, 1998). Because of this important link, careful consideration, planning, and action are warranted before requirements for early childhood teacher qualifications can be modified. In Florida, strides have been made in this area through previous collaborative efforts.

The Pathways to Professionalism project, for example, brought partners of early care and education to the table to review available research and best practice materials with the intended outcome of developing an articulation system for early childhood teachers in Florida. As a result, progress was made with the identification of position levels and corresponding education requirements for each level. This project and other related work provide a foundation for continued progress for professional development standards in Florida. Given the heightened attention teacher qualifications have been given in relation to the Universal Prekindergarten System, the time is ripe for a renewed commitment to move our early care and education system forward in the area of professional development. As a part of this effort, research will be necessary to support and provide direction for professional development in Florida.



Professional development, articulation, and teacher qualifications are related concepts, all with undeniable impacts upon the early care and education system for young children in Florida.

FLORIDA'S PROGRESS

Consideration of early childhood teacher expertise and knowledge is significant on many levels. Teacher expertise and knowledge about child development is critical to children's early learning and quality care. For these reasons, professional development is a fundamental issue related to early care and education. What follows are the benchmarks of progress in Florida relative to training and education in early childhood education and related studies.

State Mandated Coursework & Other Credentials

Minimum Training Requirements: All child care facility personnel, except volunteers who work less than 40 hours per month, must complete and pass a competency exam for the Department of Children and Families approved 40-hour Introductory Training. Child care facility personnel must begin this training within 90 days of the date of employment and complete both Part I and Part II within one year from the date the training began. The below chart outlines current credentials and degrees available for the pursuit of early childhood teachers in Florida.

CURRENT CREDENTIALS & DEGREES AVAILABLE

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Introductory Child Care Training	<p>Part I - Introductory Training <i>Introduction to Child Care (20 hrs)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and Local Rules & Regulations • Health, Safety & Nutrition • Child Growth & Development • Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect <p>Behavioral Observation & Screening Training (10 hrs)</p> <p>Part II - Introductory Training Specialized Modules – participants chose one module (10 hrs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infant & Toddler Appropriate Practices • Preschool Appropriate Practices • Special Needs Appropriate Practices • School-Age Appropriate Practices
Child Development Associate (CDA)	A Child Development Associate is a national credential, recognized throughout the United States, which is issued by the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C.
Child Development Associate Equivalency (CDA Equivalency)	The CDA Equivalency is a Department of Children and Families approved training program that provides a similar level of training as the CDA and meets licensing requirements.
Director Credential	The Director Credential is a comprehensive credentialing program consisting of educational and experiential requirements at two levels, foundational and advanced.
Associate of Science Degree (A.S. Degree)	An Associate of Science program provides the knowledge necessary to perform and excel in a particular profession. Some of the credits earned in an A.S. degree program can be transferred to a four-year college or university; however, the A.S. curriculum is not considered equal to the first two years of a bachelor's degree.
Associate of Arts Degree (A.A. Degree)	An Associate of Arts program is a two-year (full time) course of study that covers the core materials needed to complete the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree.
Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S Degree)	An Associate of Applied Science is a two-year (full time) course of study that provides the student a degree in a chosen major in technical/occupational areas and is intended for students who plan to enter the work force after completion of program requirements.
Bachelor's Degree	A Bachelor's Degree is awarded after 120 credit hours of post-secondary coursework (typically 4 years of full time) at a four-year college or university.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN FLORIDA

At this time, there is no formal statewide articulation, or formal progression, from one education level to the next. For example, if an early childhood teacher has his/her CDA, this coursework and classroom experience does not necessarily translate into basic coursework for college credit at a community college or university. Likewise, if an early childhood student has earned an Associate of Science degree with an emphasis in child development, there is no formal assurance that this coursework will translate to meaningful college credit

at a state university or private college. Collaborative research is currently being conducted to examine levels of articulation that do or do not exist amongst post-secondary, credit earning programs that provide training for those in the early care and education field. The preliminary results of an extensive and on-going case study investigation of four Florida counties revealed many insightful system characteristics of institutions of higher education moving forward in their professional development strategies.

Polk Community College – Lakeland, FL

- The current articulation agreement available at the high school level in Polk County translates into the transfer of two courses by fulfilling the appropriate criteria of a “B” grade and as the overall grade point average, an acceptable portfolio, and an essay exam. The high school teacher is required to complete training with the community college and incorporate content and strategies into the two courses offered at the high school level.
- The articulation agreement in the Polk Community College for students with a valid national CDA accepts three credit hours for the course Introduction to Early Childhood Education.
- A formal articulation agreement exists between Polk Community College and the University of South Florida (USF) Lakeland for the transfer of credits from the community college Associate of Science degree (A.S.) to USF Lakeland programs.

Hillsborough Community College – Tampa, FL

- A formal articulation agreement exists between Hillsborough Community College and USF Lakeland for the transfer of 63 credits from the community college Associate of Science degree (A.S.) program to USF Lakeland programs.
- Plans are for this agreement to eventually reach USF Tampa campus and St. Petersburg College although students are very willing to travel to the USF Lakeland campus given the benefits of credit transfer.
- A goal of the Hillsborough Community College’s early childhood management A.S. program is to prepare teachers to be UPK ready.

Miami-Dade Community College – Miami, FL

- Miami-Dade Miami Dade College has an articulation agreement with Miami-Dade County Public Schools for students who complete the high school four year Tech Prep Program in Family and Consumer Sciences. Students receive six credits at the community college with the possibility of an additional three credits by exam. The credit is awarded after the student has completed a total of 15 credits at Miami Dade College in courses prescribed in the A.S. degree curriculum.

University of South Florida – Tampa, FL

- The Bachelor of Science in Applied Science (B.S.A.S.) degree program is a “capstone” or “inverted transfer” degree for community college Associate of Science (A.S.) degree graduates. The flexible degree plan has been developed by USF under certain provisions of Florida legislation to remove constraints from the transfer process, recognize past work as transferable credit to the university, and afford new opportunities for A.S. degree holders to pursue and acquire a distinctive USF Bachelor’s degree.

Daytona Beach Community College – Daytona Beach, FL

- Following the blueprint offered by Polk Community College, the Daytona Beach Community College is working with the University of Central Florida towards a possible articulation agreement. Seminole Community College, Brevard Community College, and Santa Fe Community College all want to be included in this articulation agreement with UCF when it occurs.

BACKGROUND ON QUALITY

Quality Child Care and Early Learning

It is now widely accepted by neuroscientists and child developmental professionals alike that the first five years of a child's life are most critical for school success and are a foundation for adult productivity (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000; Kroll & Rivest, 2000; NICHD, 1999; Zaslow, Calkins, & Halle, 2000). In the early years of a child's life, development occurs at a rapid pace and profound changes take place in cognitive development, language, and social skills. Rich learning environments and positive, prosocial relationships contribute to a child's developmental progress (Kroll & Rivest, 2000). Achieving the goal of accessible, affordable high-quality early care and education experiences for children is only possible with the formation of a coordinated system of services in states and communities that are supported by financing strategies that provide the necessary resources (NAEYC, 2001). State-level planning and support for a coordinated system of early care and education is one facet of achieving goals relative to quality care. More specifically, initiatives relative to direct services that enhance the quality of early care and education programs must be explored. A thorough understanding of the impact of quality is vital for the success of early care and education in Florida.

Quality Care Impacts Families and Communities

Recent changes and trends in family dynamics have brought significant changes to the daily lives of many children (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002). The need for dual incomes, family constellations of single-parent families, and movement from welfare to work have increased the need for early care and education services (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Kagan & Bowman, 1997). It is estimated that 53% of all 3- and 4- year-old children are enrolled in early care and education programs including Head Start, child care centers, and preschools (Zaslow, Calkins, & Halle, 2000). It is now, more than ever, critical that quality early care and education services are available and accessible. Unfortunately, the reality of child care in Florida, and in our nation, is that while it is inevitable that great numbers of children are spending time in care outside their home, they are not in settings of sufficient quality to give them adequate foundations for later learning (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; NICHD, 1999).

For the sake of children's welfare in Florida, it is imperative that consideration be given to the knowledge that the physical and material environment, family en-

vironment, and social and community environment can all affect a young child's healthy development (Shields & Berhman, 2002). The pattern for family involvement in children's formal learning is established during the early care and education years (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000).

Families are children's first teachers, and early childhood teachers must engage families and ensure open communication and positive relationships that support children's development. It is critical that the professional development of early childhood teachers prepares them to incorporate and include families in the early care and education system.

Quality Care Impacts Children's Development

Strong programs keep staff long-term and have low turnover, employ staffing patterns with primary care systems, use a team approach, and maintain the same peer groups of children during transitions (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000; Shields & Berhman, 2002). It is imperative that the approach toward a seamless early care and education system includes support, training and education, and resources that better enable early childhood professionals to accommodate children's developmental needs.

Children's social, emotional, and learning outcomes are influenced by the quality of care received. The amount and length of time a child participates in high-quality settings, as well as the consideration given to individual needs and development, influence child outcomes (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000; Shields & Berhman, 2002; Zaslow, Calkins, & Halle, 2000). Children are best served and learn more in small group care settings with experienced early childhood teachers who have time to plan for children's individual development. Additionally, the early care and education system must account for quality factors such as knowledge that the younger the child, the more individualized the programming must be for quality outcomes to occur (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000). Improved outcomes in early care and education must involve a commitment to the success of each caregiver and adult who interacts with children on a daily basis. Formal education systems must support the professional development of early childhood teachers and provide them with necessary tools and knowledge to provide for children's early learning.

The National Research Council released *Who Cares for America's Children?*, in which researchers concluded that overall education and training specific

to child development are related to positive outcomes for children, with training as the more important factor (Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990). Specific to Florida, authors of The Florida Child Care Improvement Study reported that an increase in required professional preparation and an increase in training hours for teachers resulted in improved overall quality, as well as improved teacher responsiveness (Howes et al., 1998). Overall, researchers have concluded that years of educational experience, formal or otherwise, have a positive correlation with teacher quality. Therefore, in studies related to this issue, researchers conclude that teachers with bachelor degrees generally provide higher quality care and interactions.

Preparation of Early Childhood Teachers

Through program evaluation, investigation, and assessment of early childhood teachers' opportunities to access education and training, many researchers have addressed the need for accessible, quality early childhood teacher preparation programs (Arnett, 1989; Bordin, Machida, & Varnell, 2000; Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, & Russell, 1995; Cornelius, 1988; Early & Winton, 2001; Rhodes & Hennessy, 2000; Saracho, 1988; Sluss & Minner, 1999). Early and Winton (2001) found that early childhood teacher preparation programs do have a presence in the higher education system, but that faculty and staff are often not sufficient in number to meet the demand for coursework. Cornelius (1988) concluded that the skill set necessary for the provision of quality care requires that additional training and coursework be made available to early childhood teachers. Availability, accessibility, and quality of early childhood teacher preparation programs are critical aspects of the professional development system.

Predominant structural features of early childhood programs related to teachers include teacher background, such as training and education, as well as teacher/child ratio and group size (Bordin, Machida, & Varnell, 2000; Dunn, 1993; Epstein, 1999; Ghazvini & Mullis, 2002; NICHD, 2002; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Hoes, & Cryer, 1997; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Research in this area indicates that those structural components of early childhood programs are related to overall quality and provision of care, and thereby warrant attention by policymakers making decisions about the professional development of early childhood teachers. Additionally, policymakers must also consider the impact of structural and process components of quality on the functions of early childhood teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Relationships between children and parents, children and early childhood teachers, and parents and early childhood teachers all shape the development of a child. From an ecological systems perspective, children and adults development and function within the context of relationships within complex layers of the environment, each impacting the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For example, children are affected by processes that are not direct components of their every day experiences, such as the condition of the workforce, state licensure requirements, community-level planning and implementation of quality initiatives, and state-level laws and policies.

Understanding how institutions of higher education can support and improve quality initiatives that promote the professional development of early childhood teachers, and ultimately influence the development of young children is critical to the early care and education of Florida's children. Ensuring that early childhood teachers striving to gain increased child development knowledge are guaranteed a formal articulation path toward their professional development goals is vital and cannot be overlooked. A formal articulation system cannot be underestimated given the potential of the larger benefits received by early childhood teachers, the children in their classrooms, and society at large. Educating early childhood teachers reaches far beyond benefiting the individual teacher - children receive the long-term, life-long benefits of the highly prepared and educated professional by receiving higher quality care and foundational education, and society reaps the benefits of the future school and adult successes children have the potential of offering given the opportunity.



Florida's Collaboration for
Young Children & Their Families

A HEAD START STATE COLLABORATION PROJECT



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