

**VALUED ADDED: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CERTIFIED TEACHERS IN THE KINDERGARTEN AND PRIMARY  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WORKPLACE**

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Teacher Quality and School Readiness

- Teacher quality is the most salient factor in young children's readiness for school
- Children in early childhood programs should have teachers with bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood
- High quality early childhood education is linked to success especially for children in high risk and low-income areas

The synthesis of research in the 2001 report from the National Research Council (NRC), *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers* pointed to teacher quality as the most salient factor in young children's readiness for school, and the report also recommended that each group of children in an early childhood program have a teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. High quality early childhood education including teacher quality along with high-quality, well-planned curriculum and child assessment was reported in several longitudinal studies as factors for long-term child success, especially for children in high risk and low income areas (Wasik, Ramey, Bryant, & Sparling, 1990; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Carolina Abecedarian Project, 1999; Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, & Zelazo, 1999; Bowman., Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, Mann, 2001)

Early Childhood Distinct from Elementary Teacher Preparation

- Specialized early childhood professional preparation is more predictive of positive child outcomes than teachers' number of years of experience.
  - Professional preparation for early childhood teachers is relevant to the age group of young children (ages 3-8yrs.) and different from Elementary teachers' preparation
  - National Association for the Education of Young Children, the accreditation institution for the National Council Accreditation of Teacher Education requires-specific college-level preparation which includes:
    - a foundation in child development, theory, research, and
    - training in developmentally appropriate instructional practices, and
    - supervised field experience with young children ages 3 – 8 years of age
- ✓ Early childhood preparation also includes specific skills to identify children with special needs for early referral and early interventions than may reduce longer term complications and reduce more extensive special education in later Elementary and High school

Studies have found that even among non-degreed teachers, the number of hours spent in trainings and workshops in specialized early childhood education preparation is more predictive of success in positive student-teacher interactions than the number of years experience a teacher may have (Honig & Hirallal, 1998; Kontos, Howes, & Galinsky, 1997; Kontos & Wilcoz-Herzog, 2001). The National Center for Early Development and Learning's Multi-State Pre-Kindergarten Study of 238 classrooms across six states also found that quality was higher when teachers had some level of specialized preparation in early childhood (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, & Barbarin, 2005).

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) recommends that Colleges of Education include professional preparation and certification for Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers that is specific to the ECE field and is not just an adaptation of preparation elementary teacher certifications. The AACTE also adds that teachers have, at a minimum, a four-year college degree and specific [professional preparation] in early childhood education. Early Childhood Education(ECE) involves a *specific and unique body of knowledge, practice, and attitudes*, which must be included in the curricula of prospective ECE teachers. Early Childhood Education pedagogy is *distinct* from other education disciplines (AACTE, 2004 p.7)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), consistent with AACTE recommendations, has identified that teachers in high quality Early Childhood Education programs should have field-specific college-level preparation which includes a foundation in child development, theory, research, and training in developmentally appropriate instructional practices, and supervised field experience with young children ages 3 – 8 years of age. NAEYC, the accreditation institution for NCATE,

state conclusively that Early Childhood teacher preparation programs must provide unique professional preparation for teachers of this age group of children. NAEYC / NCATE underscore - that the preparation of teachers for the primary grades [using] a traditional elementary model should NOT be labeled Early Child Education (ECE).

In fact, most Early Childhood teacher education programs include coursework that includes specific skills to identify children with special needs for early referral and early interventions than may reduce longer term complications and reduce more extensive special education in later Elementary and High school (Early & Winton, 2001). During observations for children's key expected developmental milestones, those areas where children have special needs will be readily detected and referred for further evaluation.

#### Unique Learning and Development of Young Children ages 3- 8 years - Specialized Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

- ✓ Young children are transitioning from sensory learning to more abstract learning
- ✓ Early Childhood teachers are prepared in strategies to scaffold children's learning
- ✓ Early Childhood teachers learn observational assessment strategies that inform key instructional decisions for children this age

During these periods of preoperational thought and concrete operational thought as young children are transitioning from learning through their senses, there is a need for teachers to develop an experiential base for children to connect new ideas with developing abstract thought (Kamii, C., & J.K. Ewing, 1996). Guidelines published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) stress the importance of teachers' scaffolding new knowledge and skills in ways each child understands by allowing the child to act upon new knowledge through their existing knowledge and skills—even more important for this developmental level of young children. Scaffolding learning is something teachers themselves must learn to do first, suggesting the need for a distinct preparation program for Early Childhood teachers.

Early childhood teachers learn observational assessment strategies based on the brain research, not taught in Elementary Education teacher education programs (Rushton, S.P., 2001). Standardized assessments for program and child outcomes alone have been misused for high stakes placements during the kindergarten and primary grades, especially since young children do not always have the linguistic capabilities to express themselves accurately on assessments. Multiple measures, which include performance assessments along with standardized assessment used by specialized early childhood educators, provide more accurate and comprehensive views of children's needs and interests to use in planning successful learning activities.

#### Misunderstanding Curriculum Implementation based on Standards

- ✓ Curriculum for young children ages 3 -8 should not be "watered down" elementary curriculum and assessment
- ✓ Programs developed by specialized early childhood educators, such as center-based activities with effective teacher scaffolding lead to increased positive outcomes for young children
- ✓ The pace and medium and medium of play-based learning provide for not only accurate learning of new information, but play provides for the motivation of children to love learning throughout their schooling years.

State and federal policies have created a new focus on early childhood standards, curriculum, child assessment, and evaluation of early childhood programs. One important initiative in many states - Universal PreK for 4 year olds has shed new light on the importance of high quality early childhood education. Teacher preparation that is distinctly early childhood and not "watered-down" elementary is required to meet the needs of young children and their families considering the demands of this legislation. Attention on early childhood education programs without comprehensive understanding of the needs of young children ages 3 – 8 years old has sometimes led to misuses of curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002).

Without specific preparation in working with young children, curriculum may be "pushed down" to young children and result in "didactic teaching, bored and listless kids, and an aimless curriculum" (Black, 2003; McDaniel, Isaac, Brooks, & Hatch, 2005). Preschool and then Kindergartens and primary grade teachers should instead use more developmentally appropriate curriculum and developing the readiness skills that underpin the academic skills learned in later elementary school and into high school. Doing more or easier worksheets is not what young children age 3 – 8 need to develop needed social and academic knowledge and skills. Recent emphasis on program evaluation provides scientific evidence that certain program qualities developed by specially prepared Early Childhood educators, such as center-based activities and play-based learning with effective teacher scaffolding do lead to increased positive outcomes for young children (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2005) cite theory and research studies that play-based learning has historically, and continues to be, at the center of a quality early childhood curriculum. A vast amount of research in the field of child learning documents the positive cognitive and social outcomes when young children are allowed to be active in play as they learn new concepts. The pace and medium provide for not only accurate learning of new information, play provides for the motivation of children to love learning throughout their schooling years. Children solve problems by exploring toys and manipulatives, building with blocks, pouring water, sifting sand, looking through microscopes, reading books and many more activities that link to positive cognitive growth, language development, social skills, and fine and gross motor development.

Teachers from early childhood preparation programs have multiple experiences in which they fine-tune their facilitation of play and enhance verbal interactions. The ACEI position on Play: Essential for All Children (Eisenberg & Jalongo, 2002) state that teachers need to plan for children's engagement in play (including dramatic play and blocks) so it is linked to classroom topics of study. Early Childhood teachers *can* also help to enrich, extend, and cognitively upgrade children's peer play, while reducing the impact of social and individual differences (Farran & Son-Yarborough, 2001; Leseman, Rollenberg, Rispen, 2001).

#### Everything (almost) You Needed to Know You Learned in Kindergarten

- ✓ Kindergarten teachers who have a strong background in social and emotional development help children develop self-regulation skills of planning organizing their work
- ✓ Kindergarten teachers help children develop the work-related skills that contribute to children's success in reading, mathematics, vocabulary, general information and alphabet skills with lasting results through the primary grades; conversely children with poor work-related skills are a risk factor for low academic achievement at the beginning of school and continuing into the early school years.

Successful kindergarten teachers with specialized early childhood preparation that includes a course in Social and Emotional development realize importance of young children's development of underlying regulatory strategies or self-regulation that help lead to academic skills (Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network, 2000). Kindergarten teachers realize that children this age are still developing those skills and cannot be rushed into academics without these related regulation skills (Rimm-Kaufman, Early, Cox, Saluja, Pianta, Bradley, & Payne, 2002). Self-regulation is a necessary school-related activity that children need to develop early to be successful throughout their school years. Self-regulation is a metacognitive activity in which children plan and monitor their progress toward goals, as well as adapt strategies improves their chances of success. Young children who are successful in problem-solving apply basic self-regulation skills of planning and organizing significantly more than unsuccessful problem solvers when faced with complex tasks (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989; Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003).

McClelland, Morrison, and Holmes (2000) study of 540 Kindergarten children found that young children need to develop BOTH interpersonal skills and work-related (also called learning related) social skills. Interpersonal skills include behaviors such as interacting positively with peers, playing cooperatively, sharing, and respecting other children; whereas work-related skills encompass behaviors like listening and following directions, participating appropriately in groups (such as taking turns), staying on task, and organizing work materials. In general, work-related skills tap the domains of independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation (Cooper & Farran, 1991). McClelland, et. al. found that at the beginning of kindergarten, work-related skills contributed to children's success in reading, mathematics, vocabulary, general information and alphabet skills, beyond the influence of other important child, social, and family and sociocultural variables such as a child's IQ, entrance age, amount of preschool experience, ethnicity, parental education level, and home literacy environment. These work related skills continued to be a predictor of these same children's academic successes through the second grade.

#### And Early Childhood Teachers in First-Third Grade Are Important, Too

- ✓ Children in first grade perform better with teachers whose instruction is direct and children received regular feedback on their work
- ✓ Children with social, behavioral, or academic problems when placed with high-instructional quality teachers can overcome these challenges in first grade.

The following research is clear that the need for teachers with specialized preparation in early childhood Education does not end when children are promoted from PreK or kindergarten, especially for children at-risk for school success. Hambre & Pianta (2005) found that of the 910 first grade children in their study, children with mothers' with less than a four year degree who were placed in high-instructional quality classrooms with teachers whose instruction was direct and children received regular feedback on their work, performed as well as students with more highly educated mothers on achievement tests.

Further researchers found that children with social, behavioral, or academic problems when placed with these high-instructional quality teachers could overcome these challenges in first grade. “These data suggest that what teachers know, feel, and do are the critical determinants of student learning—both academic and social. Sure, subject-matter knowledge is useful, but so is a teacher’s understanding of students as social beings.” (Hambre and Pianta, interviewed in *Education Week*; see also Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, 2001; Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002).

But Shouldn't Children Have Gotten that Nurturing and Learned Social Skills in Preschool?

- ✓ Children who attend high quality preschool will come to school with many of the needed readiness skills.
- ✓ BUT, children from low income families, those who are *most* in need of additional academic and social opportunities are *least* likely to attend preschool.
- ✓ AND if children from low income families do attend preschool, they are *most* likely to attend *poorer quality* preschool.

Children who attend high quality preschool will come to school with many of the readiness skills. In fact, two significant studies found that the effects of quality preschool last well into adulthood (Barnett, Young, & Schweinhart, 1998). BUT children from low income families, those who are *most* in need of additional academic and social opportunities are *least* likely to attend preschool. And if children from low income families do attend preschool, they are *most* likely to attend *poorer quality* preschools.

According to Snow in the publication *Preventing Reading Failure*,(1998), those children are likely to begin school less prepared to learn to read unless they receive early intervention are preschool children:

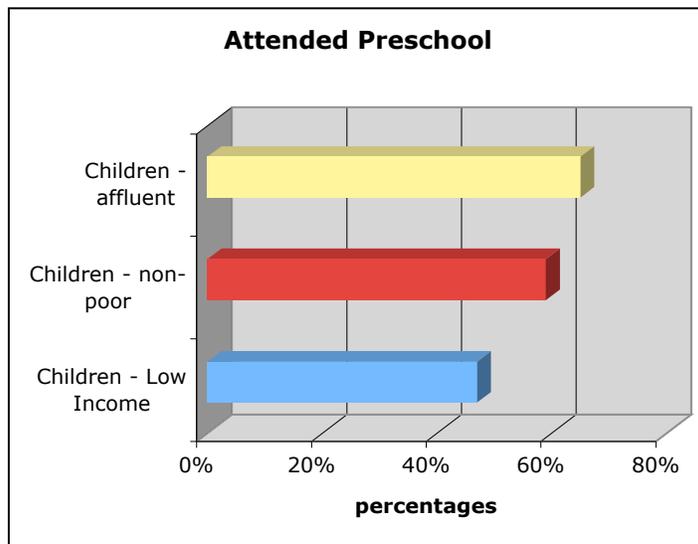
- living in low-income communities
- with limited English proficiency
- slated to attend an elementary school where achievement is chronically low
- suffering from specific cognitive deficiencies, hearing impairments and early language impairments
- whose parents have a history of reading problems.

A National Center for Education Statistics study compared entering kindergarten children from disadvantaged and the most affluent families (*Table 1*). The study found that only 47 percent of children from the most disadvantaged families had attended either preschool or Head Start. In contrast, 59 percent of non-poor children and 65 percent of those from the most affluent families attend some kind of preschool (Coley, 2002; Lee & Burkum, 2002; Mead, 2004)

But even more alarming - several studies have found that *few preschools* for children of *any* family income level (high, middle, NOR low) are considered *high quality*!(*Table 2*)

Most of the children in the US are NOT attending high quality preschool programs to prepare them for elementary school; to prepare them for life (Espinosa, 2002)

**Table 1**



**Table 2**  
Preschool Quality Study Findings based on ECERS scores

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1998) study of early care for children through age 3 in nine states	8% were rated <i>poor</i> , 53% <i>fair</i> 30% <i>good</i> 9% <i>excellent</i>
The Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study (1999), large scale study examined full-day child-care centers in four (4) states	Only 24% had total average scores in the <i>good to excellent</i> range.
The Massachusetts Cost and Quality Study (2001) described the quality of community-based programs serving preschool-aged children 17	Average scores - <i>almost good</i> Most scores - <i>minimally adequate</i> range

**Valued Added, Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certified Teachers in the Kindergarten and Primary (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade) Elementary School Workplace**

1. ECE teachers enter teaching already prepared with specialize knowledge and skills learned through college coursework and related practical experiences to **teach the needed social and interpersonal skills young children need**, while teachers with Elem would need *additional inservice trainings* to acquire and then develop those skills.
2. ECE teachers would be more specifically prepared in how to guide, support, and scaffold the **early work related study skills and academic skills that young children need for district assessments and NCLB mandates** because they understand child development and learning needs of young children including transitioning children to emerging skills needed to succeed in Kindergarten and Primary grades, as well as for later grades.
3. ECE teachers are prepared in **performance assessment and observation tools, that align with typical child development to identify a child’s special need**. Early identification can save the child, family, and school from excessive remediation in later grades --sometimes saving excessive special education remediation time and dollars later.
4. There is an overwhelming need for teachers in, K, and 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grades with specific preparation in the area of Early Childhood Education, especially for those **children who did not experience any preschool at all AND for the majority of young children (from ALL income levels) who did not attend a quality preschool**.

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