

Early Childhood Teacher Policy in the United States: Continuing Issues, Overcoming Barriers, and Envisioning the Future

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The decentralized and fragmented nature of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system in the U.S., coupled with an ongoing teacher shortage, high teacher turnover rates, and the increasing demand for early childhood (EC) teachers, has led to low entry requirements and lenient regulations for most EC sectors. Yet, the recent call for school readiness of preschoolers is pushing the field to be equipped with highly qualified EC teachers with professional knowledge and competence. Efforts to provide quality ECEC services by improving the quality of the teaching force at various levels have been initiated in the U.S. In this paper, we describe: demographic profile of America's ECEC teaching force; regulatory standards regarding entry-level teacher requirements; condition of pre-service teacher training in higher education; and provision of professional development and retention efforts. Current trends and challenges of EC teacher policy in the U.S. are presented, and implications for EC policymakers are discussed.

Key words: early childhood policy, teacher requirements, workforce

Worldwide demographic changes in the form of increasing participation of women in labor force, child poverty, and educational disadvantage (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006) are giving rise to concern. As a way to address these concerns, in many countries, early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become an area to receive growing governmental attention. According to the OECD report, in ECEC-related policymaking at governmental level, countries have commonly faced challenges in "ensuring co-

ordinated policy development at central level; appointing a lead ministry; the co-ordination of central and decentralised levels; the adoption of a collaborative and participatory approach to reform; and forging links across services, professionals, and parents at local level" (p. 2). The U.S. is not an exception to these challenges. Taking EC teacher policy in the U.S. as its focus, this article examines the complexities of and challenges in EC policymaking.

Context for ECEC Services and EC Workforce

There are more than 20 million children under age five, comprising about 7 % of total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Approximately two-

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thirds of their mothers are in the labor force, and about 30 % of families with children are single-parent households. Demographic changes in the family, such as increased rates of mothers of young children in the workforce, coupled with a high divorce rate and teen birth rate, have led to heated discussions of ways to provide affordable, available, and quality care for the nation's young children.

Quality of care affects children's positive learning and development. Given that approximately 60 % of America's young children (birth through age five) are in at least one weekly non-parental care arrangement and about two-thirds of them are in center-based care (Iruka & Carver, 2006), the goal of providing quality ECEC services while considering the expense and accessibility has been an ongoing challenge for U.S. policymakers.

One of the critical components influencing the quality of ECEC services is teacher quality¹. While there may be different ideas about how one defines teacher quality and what its constituents are, it has been acknowledged that what teachers bring to their classroom (e.g., their educational background, professional training, and field experiences as well as their teaching philosophy and interaction style) greatly influence the process of making decisions with regard to ECEC curriculum and its implementation on a daily basis. This, in turn, affects the quality of early education experiences for children.

In the same vein, the recent education reform initiative in the U.S. that has been sweeping the country since its inception, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, specifically points out the importance of both preparation and provision of highly qualified teachers in every classroom. According to NCLB, highly qualified teachers are those who have a bachelor's degree, are fully certified or licensed by the state, and demonstrate mastery of the subject areas they teach. While teachers in the public kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) classrooms, as well as those in public pre-kindergartens receiving federal funds (Title I funds²)

are affected by this policy, most early childhood teachers³ (with various titles and job descriptions) are not direct subjects of this policy.

The Fragmented EC System and the Diversity of EC Workforce

The U.S. government at all levels (i.e., federal, state, and local) has sought to address the issue of providing quality early care and education by improving the quality of the teaching force at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teacher training. The process has not been without challenge; unlike the elementary and secondary public education system, the ECEC in the U.S. encompasses (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007, p. 23):

a wide range of part-day, full-school-day, and full-work-day programs, under educational, social welfare, and commercial auspices, funded and delivered in a variety of ways in both the public and the private sectors, designed sometimes with an emphasis on the "care" component of ECEC and at other times with stress on "education" or with equal attention to both.

Thus, due to the decentralized and fragmented nature of the ECEC system in the U.S. (Figure 1), policymakers at federal and state levels have faced difficulties in coordinating policy efforts.

As diverse as the ECEC services are EC teachers who work in multiple sectors that are operated under a variety of auspices and funding streams. Accordingly, the education and training of EC teachers greatly varies. The field has also suffered from ongoing teacher shortage and high turnover rates. A national study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1998) on child care staff showed 30 % to 40 % annual turnover rates throughout the nation. This alarming turnover rate has been persistent and is considered a staffing crisis. Whereas the increasing demand for EC teachers led to low entry

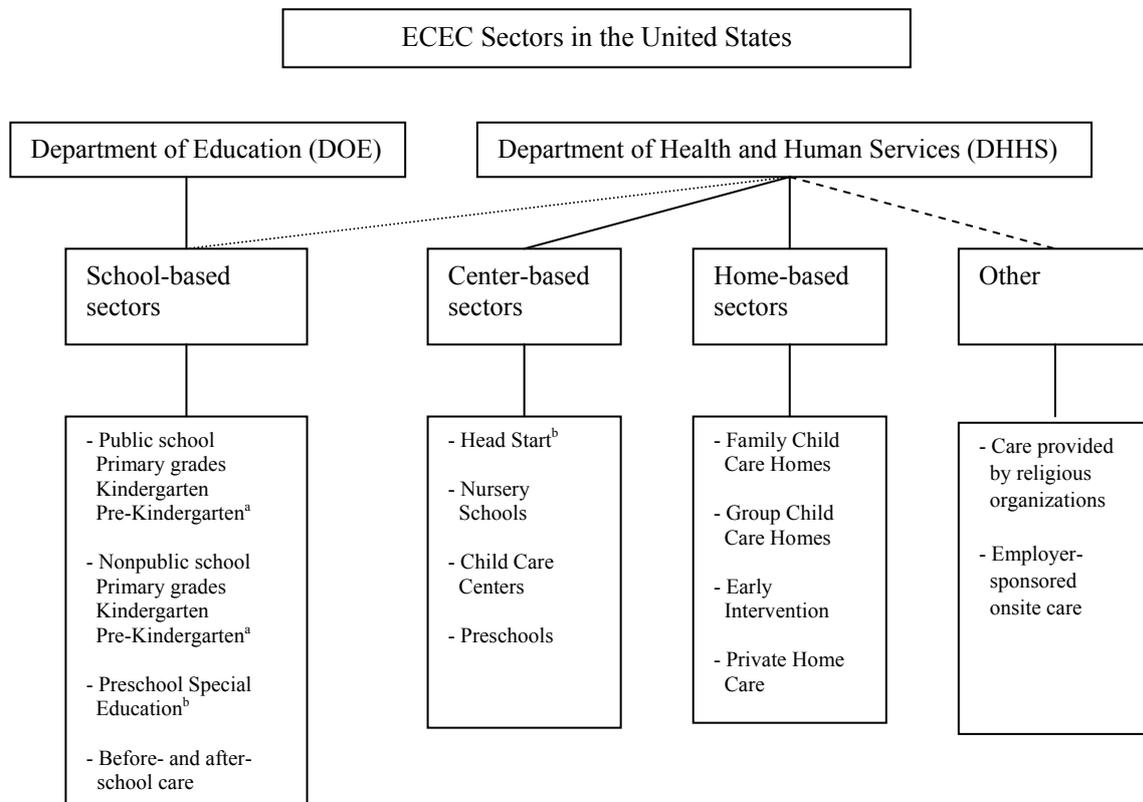


Figure 1. ECEC sectors in the United States

--- Though some sectors (e.g., before- and after-school care) are housed in public schools, their staff may be subject to DHHS regulations. ^a Funded and administered by each state government. May use center-based programs to deliver services. ^b Funded and monitored by federal government. Can also be delivered through Head Start home-based program option or home visits.

requirements in most EC sectors, increasing the complexity of the system, there is also “a conflicting push to restrict the supply of teachers to only those teachers who are highly qualified” (Tarrant, Greenberg, Kagan, & Kauerz, 2008, p.138), especially due to the NCLB and current national pre-kindergarten movement.

What is the current policy regarding recruitment, preparation, and retention of EC teachers in the U.S., what are the challenges involved, and what can we learn from it? Beginning with the historical roots and social contexts that have led to and formed the current policy framework, in the following, we

describe: (a) demographic profile of America’s ECEC teaching force, (b) regulatory status regarding entry-level teacher requirements, (c) condition of pre-service teacher training in higher education institutions, and (d) status of professional development and retention efforts.

Historical and Cultural Contexts

Historically the U.S. has had a two tiered EC system (i.e., care and education), and two dimensions of early education (i.e., general early childhood

education and early childhood special education [ECSE]). Efforts to integrate the two systems and the two dimensions in order to prepare EC teachers that can effectively serve *all* young children regardless of the divisions are underway.

Care and Education

The care and education of young children in the United States historically has been largely seen as the responsibility of families with the government only stepping in to provide financial support in terms of national security and social welfare. The roots of child care began with *Day Nurseries* (child care centers) for the children of poor working immigrant mothers and *American Infant Schools* designed for preschoolers deemed developmentally at-risk that were funded by charities. These efforts gave birth to the social stigma of child care as assistance to less competent parents, opening the door to a two tiered system of *child care* and *early education*, which laid the foundation for the fragmented system found today. The significant development of early education includes *nursery schools* and *Kindergartens*. Nursery schools, frequently linked to universities, emphasized play and parent involvement and found appeal with middle class families. Kindergartens, a pre-primary school experience, eventually joined the formal K-12 school system, bringing a rise in status and professional standards for these teachers. While child care remained custodial in nature, requiring minimal teacher qualifications, it provided a means to quickly mobilize the workforce in times of war (Nourot, 2000). This dual purpose brought a divide to the auspices of EC system along with the professional standards for teacher education. The administration of child care moved under the government bureau for social welfare, while other early education, like Kindergartens, aligned with the government department of education.

General and Special Education

A combination of a progressive view of education

and social change in the mid-1900's brought about the expansion of early education. A growing concern for the needs of children and families along with equal treatment of the citizens of the United States resulted in a series of social policy reforms allowing equal access for *all* citizens. The creation of *Head Start*, a federally funded comprehensive child development program for low-income, at-risk preschoolers, emphasized parent involvement, local control of the program, and a mandate to include at least 10 % of the children with disabilities (Guralnick, 1997). Throughout the history of ECEC, parents have played a key role in moving public policy forward. While the EC system of the U.S. is complex and fragmented, the hallmarks of the system are the involvement of parents and choice of options given to them. The lobbying efforts of parents and professional organizations broadened public responsibility for children with disabilities (birth - 21 years), entitling them to a free and appropriate education (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). This shift in policy has correspondingly influenced practice in classrooms and teacher training to include the education of all children, including those with disabilities.

Demographic Profile of America's ECEC Workforce

According to the findings from a national study (Burton et al., 2002), there are more than 2.3 million people in the EC workforce⁴ serving children ages zero to five in the U.S. The EC practitioners are employed in various ECEC service programs such as center-based programs (e.g., nursery schools, pre-kindergarten programs, Head Start, and public and private child care centers) and home-based services (e.g., family day care, relative care, and non-parental care services). Approximately one quarter of the workforce (550,000) is employed in center-based programs, with 30 % of center-based teachers caring for infants (0-18 months), about 50 % with toddlers

(19-36 months), and about 20 % work with preschoolers (three to five years).

While there is a lack of national data regarding the characteristics of ECEC teachers in the U.S., a few available studies (Burton et al., 2002; Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005; Kontos, Howes, Shinn, & Galinsky, 1992) found that teachers' educational qualifications

vary greatly depending on the auspice of the early childhood programs. On average, family day care providers' formal education levels are lower than those of center-based staff's (see Table 1).

The proportion of center-based teachers and administrators with at least a four-year college degree declined over the last two decades (Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005). Though data on early childhood

Table 1.

Demographic Profile of Early Childhood Workforce

		Center-Based Teaching Staff			Family Child Care Providers
Age	18 and younger	7%			-
	19-25	34%			8%
	26-30	17%			33%
	31-50	34%			44%
	51 and older	7%			15%
Gender	Female	97%			99%
	Male	3%			1%
Education	Bachelor's Degree or more	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Assistants</u>	<u>Directors</u>	
	Some College (including Associate's Degree)	33%	12%	69%	17%
	High School or less	47%	45%	27%	38%
		20%	43%	4%	44%

Note. From Burton et al. (2002).

Table 2.

Comparison of Center-based^a Early Childhood Staff and Other Workers

		Center-based teachers and administrators	Center-based teachers with a college degree or higher	All workers, all industries	Female college graduates
Wage/hr	Year 1984	\$8.37	\$9.76	\$12.26	\$15.14
	2003	\$10.00	\$13.35	\$13.66	\$19.23
Workers with employer-provided health insurance coverage		28%	33%	57%	66%
Workers with a pension plan		15%	21%	46%	61%
Share of workers below 200% of the poverty line		26%	31%	19%	7%

Note. From Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley (2005).

^a This figure does not include teachers in public schools.

staff in center-based programs do not include teachers in public school pre-kindergartens, Herzenberg and his colleagues posit that the education levels of early childhood staff “have fallen even further relative to the workforce as a whole, which has become better educated over time” (p. 1). Researchers attribute such declining educational attainment of early childhood teachers to low wages and benefits provided to the practitioners in the field. For example, in 2003, teachers and administrators in center-based EC programs earned only \$10 per hour in comparison to \$19.23 for all female college graduates, which amounts to about \$5,000 difference per year (see Table 2).

Among early childhood teachers in center-based programs, those who work in state-funded pre-kindergartens⁵ have higher educational qualifications and receive better salaries than teachers in privately operated programs (with slight difference between non-profit centers and for-profit centers). Pre-kindergarten teachers in public schools receive higher salaries and better benefits than their counterparts in community-based early childhood centers. Table 3

represents this distribution using the example of New York State.

Due to this difference, some pre-kindergarten teachers leave their community-based centers to work in public schools. To address this type of teacher turnover, a few states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Jersey, and North Carolina require that certified pre-kindergarten teachers in non-public schools offered comparable salaries and benefits as their public school counterparts⁶.

The big discrepancy in educational attainment of EC teachers in various sectors shown above is in part due to current regulatory status regarding entry-level teacher qualifications. In order to meet the increasing demand for a larger EC workforce, the focus of federal and state governments has been more on increasing the supply of teachers rather than on increased quality, which has resulted in setting low standards. Therefore, teacher demographics relative to training, experience, and compensation, which influence quality in ECEC, vary greatly due to regulations and funding. The next section illustrates the regulatory factors that set entry requirements for

Table 3.
State-funded Pre-kindergarten Teachers: The Case of New York State

	State-funded Pre-kindergartens in Public Schools	State-funded Pre-kindergartens in Community-Based EC Centers	
		Non-Profit	For-Profit
Educational Qualifications			
Directors with a Master’s degree or above	100%	57%	67%
Teachers with a Master’s degree or above	72%	38%	38%
Teachers with a Bachelor’s degree or above	100%	89%	100%
Assistant Teachers with an Associate degree or above	34%	28%	42%
Wages/hr			
Directors	\$22.41-\$28.54	\$19.71-\$22.97	\$17.75-\$19.00
Teachers	\$19.13-\$29.87	\$10.09-\$13.22	\$10.28-\$12.39
Assistant Teachers	\$8.83-\$9.96	\$8.31-\$10.44	\$7.81- \$8.43
Programs offering fully-paid health insurance coverage	50%	11%	0%
Programs offering a pension plan	90%	71%	11%

Note. From Bellm et al. (2002).

teachers in various EC sectors.

Regulatory Standards Regarding Teacher Requirements

Regulatory standards establish the baseline for quality in ECEC. Described in this section are regulations regarding staff qualifications for individuals who are eligible to work in four different types of ECEC settings: Head Start programs, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, private child care centers, and family child care providers.

According to Head Start regulations reauthorized in 2007, all Head Start teachers should have at least an Associate's degree (two-year college degree) by the year 2013, and half of them should be at least four-year college graduates. However, there is no statement about how the regulation is enforced if Head Start centers do not follow the guidelines. With the exception of Head Start programs, the federal government does not regulate early childhood programs and teachers. Each state government regulates early childhood programs, dictating minimum staff qualifications in its licensing regulations, which vary greatly in terms of stringency and enforcement.

The training requirements for teachers working in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs vary between public school settings and community-based programs. While each state sets different qualifications, some states require pre-kindergarten teachers in public schools to have a bachelor's degree and a teacher certificate while those in non-public schools are exempted from such requirements.

Thus, with the exception of public school teachers (primary grades, kindergarten, and some pre-kindergarten) and Head Start teachers, there is no universal policy regarding who is eligible to teach young children in private child care centers and family child care providers. Instead, each state identifies minimum pre-service qualifications for

early childhood teaching staff as a part of program licensing regulations, which in most cases do not require a post-secondary degree, even for master teachers. According to a national data set compiled by the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC, 2008), only three states (i.e., New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont) require that master teachers in center-based programs have a four-year college degree; one state (Pennsylvania) requires a two-year college degree; three states (Florida, Oklahoma, Oregon) require an early childhood specific certificate or credential, and seven states require Child Development Associate (CDA) credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. The rest do not require more than a high school diploma and varied hours of training in early childhood education. Sixteen states issue a program license when each center *or* each classroom has at least one master⁷ teacher. These lenient requirements allow many early childhood programs to be licensed even though they do not have enough qualified teachers. When it comes to the requirements for family child care providers, staffing regulations are much more lenient. Except for a few states that require providers have a CDA credential, or at least six (Delaware) to 30 (Florida) clock hours of training, most states do not even require any pre-service training at all.

Such variations in personnel requirements make the task of quality control at the entry level difficult. Some teachers are prepared through pre-service training at colleges, while others receive in-service training through workshops, seminars, and conferences after they are hired. Described below is the current condition of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Condition of Pre-service Teacher Training in Higher Education

The pre-service training of teachers is provided by

higher education institutions. Curriculum for each early childhood teacher preparation program is guided by the program standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Regarding what tomorrow's early childhood teachers should know and be able to do, the NAEYC standards are framed around the following five areas: (a) promoting child development and learning, (b) building family and community relationships, (c) observing, documenting, and assessing, (d) teaching and learning, and (e) becoming a professional. Based on these five areas, each college's EC teacher education program - at the associate's, bachelor's, or master's levels - offers various courses such as child development, building home-school relations, assessment of young children, early childhood curriculum, and leadership and advocacy in early childhood education. The minimum number of courses, required coursework, electives, and credit hours vary by college, department, or program. Each state sets a minimum number of clock hours for field-based training of pre-service teachers.

Two-year institutions or community colleges (including an option for a one-year program leading to a certificate and a two-year program leading to an Associate's degree) play a major role in pre-service training for center-based teachers, directors, and family child care providers. Some community colleges develop a memorandum of understanding with four-year colleges in order to ease the transition of their students to a higher degree level. The focus of curriculum in four-year colleges is on preparing teachers of preschoolers and early elementary students, while little attention has been given to preparing teachers of infants and toddlers.

The quality of EC teacher preparation programs at higher education institutions is monitored by national organizations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). NCATE, founded in 1954, is "a non-profit, non-governmental organization" that is "officially

recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an accrediting body for institutions that prepare teachers and other professional personnel for work in preschool, elementary, and secondary schools" (NCATE, 2008, p. 1). Currently, 632 colleges of education (out of approximately 1,200 teacher education institutions) are accredited by the NCATE (as of May 2007). The focus of TEAC, founded in 1997, has been on improving Pre-K to grade12 teacher preparation programs in the U.S. the TEAC system accredits programs through a self-study and review of evidence linked to both state and national teacher standards for subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching skill (TEAC, 2006). Currently, 140 colleges of education are accredited by TEAC.

Figure 2 outlines the process of NCATE accreditation of early childhood teacher preparation programs.

According to NCATE (2008), standards for teacher education institutions focus on "systematic assessment of candidate learning" (p. 1) and evaluate "an institution's effectiveness according to the profession's expectations for high quality teacher preparation" (p. 9). The six standards include: (a) Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions, Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation, (c) Standard 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practice, (d) Standard 4: Diversity, (e) Standard 5: Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development, and (e) Standard 6: Unit Governance and Resources (pp. 12-13).

Under the standards, teacher preparation programs offer educational opportunities for teacher candidates to gain a better understanding of the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes and to demonstrate competence in the areas that are necessary to work with young children and their families.

Faculty members in each department or program, guided by national and state standards for teacher preparation, determine the nature and scope of curriculum and practical training for teacher

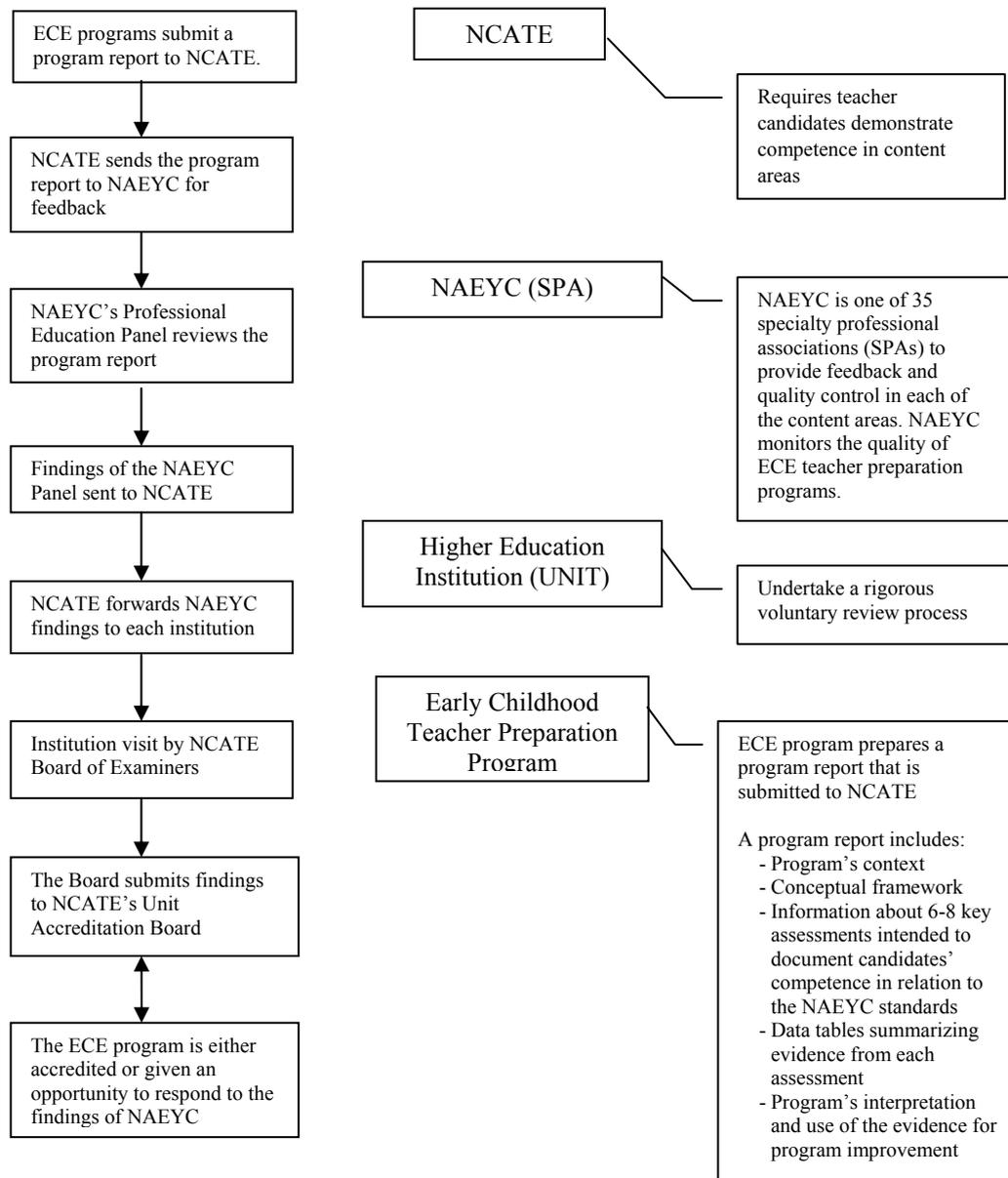


Figure 2. NCATE accreditation process for EC teacher preparation programs.
 Note. Adapted from Hyson (2003).

candidates. Despite the critical role of EC faculty in promoting the quality of teacher training programs, EC teacher preparation programs have faced challenges in staffing qualified faculty members. According to recent studies (Early & Winton, 2001;

Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; Washington, 2008): (a) most programs, due to a shortage of EC faculty, depend heavily on part-time and adjunct faculty; (b) there are variations in qualifications and preparations of faculty (e.g., a master's degree or a doctorate;

research-based training or practice-oriented training; previous EC classroom teaching experience) for offering theoretical and practical training to teacher candidates; (c) student to full-time faculty ratio of EC programs is higher than that of other teacher education programs; and (d) the majority of EC programs do not require a full course specific to working with infants and toddlers, students with special needs, students learning English, or children and families from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. These issues raise concerns about the “quality and consistency” (Tarrant, Greenberg, Kagan & Kauerz, 2008, p.142) of the nation’s EC teacher preparation programs.

Provision of Professional Development and Retention Efforts

While some teachers are prepared through two-year or four-year colleges, the majority of the EC workforce is still being hired without proper education or pre-service training. Due to the weak regulations for pre-service training requirements, where only 12 states (out of 50 states and the District of Columbia) require pre-service training of teachers in child care centers, all but 3 states require some form of in-service training once hired to increase the skills of providers (NCCIC, 2008). In-service training requirements for ECEC providers vary greatly among the states, with varying numbers of annual ongoing training hours (from zero clock hours in California and Hawaii to 30 clock hours in Maine) required for teachers and master teachers in center-based child care programs (NCCIC, 2008). In the case of public pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, 27 states require at least 15 clock hours of annual ongoing training (OECD, 2006).

While the requirements for in-service training have been lenient, in order to improve the knowledge and competence of EC teachers, various professional development systems that incentivize teachers’

attainment of advanced training, qualifications, and credentials have been initiated by many states. For example, in New Hampshire the Early Childhood Credentialing and Career Lattice program for ECEC providers builds progressive skills in 12 competencies. This program provides pathways for entry-level staff to combine in-service training, experience, and college course work to become credentialed ECEC professionals, ranging from Child Care Assistant to Lead Teacher and Center Director to Faculty/Mentor (McDonnell, 2006). To encourage credentialing of ECEC staff, incentives such as scholarship programs and wage incentives like the T.E.A.C.H (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) project along with several state initiatives (see Box 1) are in place.

Box 1. State Initiatives for EC Professional Development

- Arizona - S&CCEEDS
- California - CARES or Wage\$ Plus
- Florida- Child Care WAGES Program
- Georgia - INCENTIVE\$
- Illinois - Great START
- Kansas - WAGE\$
- Kentucky - Milestone Achievement Awards
- Minnesota - R.E.E.T.A.I.N.
- Missouri - Workforce INcentive Project (WIN)
- Montana - Provider Merit Pay Awards
- New York - Child Care Professional Retention Program
- North Carolina - WAGE\$ Project
- Oklahoma - Reward Oklahoma
- Utah - Early Childhood Career Ladder
- Vermont - \$1000 Bonus from Child Care Services Agency
- Wisconsin - REWARD

Source: Center for the Child Care Workforce
(www.ccw.org)

T.E.A.C.H. scholarship programs offer an increased salary (3 to 5%) or bonus payment to participant teachers who have reached their educational goals, and wage incentive programs reward EC teachers depending on their educational qualifications, years

of experience, and tenure (Center for the Child Care Workforce, n.d.). These initiatives are expected to contribute to reducing the high turnover rates and increasing the educational qualifications and tenure of EC teachers. Yet, some of the incentives are small one-time payments and not integrated into salary schedules, unlike those of public school teachers. In order to improve the quality of EC teachers and to retain qualified teaching staff, researchers (e.g., Kagan & Kauerz, 2008; Mitchell & LeMoine, 2005) and professional organizations (e.g., NAEYC) argue that more systematic and ongoing professional development and retention initiatives need to be implemented.

Provision of Early Childhood Teachers in Special Education

The expansion of public responsibility for the education of young children to include those with disabilities in the last 35 years has changed educational practice and teacher training in the U.S. A focus on differentiating instruction to meet the individual developmental needs of all children has facilitated the inclusion of children with disabilities in general early childhood settings with their typically developing peers (Division for Early Childhood, 2000). While early childhood teachers and special educators work more closely together than ever before, there are some significant differences in regulations and teacher preparation that still exist.

Auspice

In 2007, over 1 million children from birth to age 5 received special education and related services (therapies) (Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). The agencies that oversee the early education of these children vary with their age and the state in which they live. Within the federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]), states designate a lead government agency for service

provision to young children birth to five years old (Jackson, 1996). In some states (e.g., Maine), one agency, the *Education Department*, oversees services. In other states (e.g., New York), the *Health and Human Services Department* is the lead agency for Early Intervention Services for children from birth to age three, while the *Education Department* is the lead agency for children ages three to five. This divide in auspice is similar to the one found in ECEC between child care and formal education, which has also resulted in varied standards for teacher training and compensation.

Teacher Quality

Teacher certification specific to young children with disabilities, early childhood special education (ECSE), is currently available in over 80% of states. Additionally, in all but five states, general teacher certification now requires some course content in teaching children identified for special education services (Geiger, Crutchfield, & Mainzer, 2003). Various levels of collaboration exist between general and special education in teacher preparation. The future trend is towards new collaborative teacher education programs that provide a systematic, unified approach to teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms (Blanton & Pugach, 2007).

Teacher Supply

Within ECSE, again there is a lack of national data. However, studies tracking educator supply and demand report a shortage of ECSE teachers (Center to Inform Personnel Preparation Policy and Practice in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education, 2005; McMaken, 2003). This shortage is a contributing factor to 63% of all first year special education teachers being uncertified. Through certification requirements and professional development, this number rapidly decreases with nearly all certified by their fifth year of teaching (Billingsley, 2002). Given that preschool special education (three to five year olds) services fall under

the auspices of public education, this high level of training is due in part to the influence of NCLB with its focus on teacher quality.

Conclusion

Through an overview of the cultural and historical roots of the American ECEC system and current policies regarding teacher induction, training, and retention, this paper examined the complexity of EC teacher policymaking in the U.S. Demonstrated in the above are the diversity of settings, services, and governance structure that characterize the ECEC system of the U.S., and resulting diversity of workforce that is related to the quality of education and care. In this concluding section, we discuss current trends of the U.S. EC teacher policy and present implications for international policymakers.

Current Trends of EC Teacher Policy in the U.S.

There is a growing trend (visible in national standards, college curriculum, and accreditation procedure) to equip teacher candidates with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effectively working with diverse group of students and families and to blend teacher preparation programs, which offer interdisciplinary services to their teacher candidates for meeting the diverse roles and responsibilities in various settings. Growing research attention has been given to designing a framework for teacher recruitment, professional development, and retention that ensures a stable qualified workforce, through a coherently articulated and well-coordinated policy.

Toward a stable qualified workforce. Currently, entry requirements into the field have low standards for the vast majority of the EC teaching force. This can compromise the quality of education and care children receive. To improve the quality of ECEC workforce in the U.S., discussions regarding

minimum standards for professional teacher training across the workforce are under way. To meet the need for a highly qualified workforce, post-secondary education institutions need to put an extra effort to increase the number of qualified full-time EC faculty while continuing to improve the quality of pre-service teacher preparation programs. This will require reconfiguring teacher preparation to include a focus on infants/toddlers and on diversity of children and families, and to continue the trend of blending early childhood education and special education (Blanton & Pugach, 2007), so teachers have the knowledge and skills to work with diverse learners in ECEC settings. To retain qualified and experienced teachers in various ECEC services, strategies to provide systemic incentives according to their education, training, qualifications, years of experience, and tenure in the program will have to be further developed.

Through a well-coordinated policy. The “decentralized, complex, and uneven” (Gormley, 1995, p. 52) nature of the ECEC system and the diversity of the teaching force and governance approaches challenge the process to regulate and monitor the quality of EC teachers. In addition, the political, structural, and institutional barriers residing in this complicated context make the process of designing and implementing a unified and coherent system difficult (Barbour & Lash, 2008). Given the situation, Kagan and Kauerz (2008) assert that “the burning question is no longer solely what role government should play, but how the multitude of public and private actors and initiatives can be configured to maximize efficiency, outcomes, equity, excellence, and individuality” (p. 15). Developing a coherently articulated policy through, “coordination and collaborative planning” (p. 18), which enables systemic approaches in teacher training, regulations, governance, and funding across sectors should be given a policy priority. In doing so, articulating an agreed-upon nomenclature, career lattice, and incentive system will contribute to reducing the

complex patchwork of the ECEC system.

Learning from the U.S. EC Teacher Policy

The provision of quality ECEC has been on government agendas in many countries for many years (OECD, 2006). The recent international emphasis on universal primary education makes this issue more pressing (UNICEF, 2008). It is incumbent upon governments to assume the role of developing ECEC policy, coordinating systems and services, and regulating quality of services (Flynn, 2008). While different nations are at different stages of EC-related policymaking, governments face similar challenges in terms of increasing the “quality, effectiveness, and accountability” of their policy initiatives (Stewart & Kagan, 2005, p. 242). From the case of U.S. EC teacher policy, the following two implications emerge: situatedness of policymaking and complex interconnected nature of policy elements.

Situatedness of policy making. As presented in this paper, the fragmented ECEC system of the U.S. has a historical root based on its social beliefs. This is evidenced by the social value that “child care ... has been a private issue to be resolved within the family” (Gormley, p. 1) and that the U.S. government does not step in unless the family cannot sustain its functions, which has led to the two-tiered fragmented system. In its effort to bridge those different segments and systems, the U.S. continues to face challenges. Each nation has its own collective understanding of who is responsible for providing early care and education, who should be served by government-funded programs, and who should teach young children in EC programs. These are notions that are historically, socially and culturally bound. Stewart and Kagan (2005) assert that “no nation can simply adopt a practice from another without taking into account the cultural and national values and structures in which it is embedded” and “if we are to learn from and share our knowledge with others, we must make systematic and serious commitments to establishing mechanisms

to promote international interchange” (pp. 244-245). From an international perspective, policymakers need to consider their nations’ unique historical, social and cultural contexts in shaping policy for children and families as well as effective strategies and elements of policy initiatives (such as using standards and accountability system) learned from other nations.

Complex interconnected nature of policy elements. Diversity and complexity are the two terms that define the EC teacher policy of the U.S. The diversity that exists in the U.S. EC system can be considered a strength that provides parents a multitude of options regarding the types of services and choices. However, the diversity of rules, regulations, and standards has also caused great challenges for policymakers, because regulations and governance that affect teacher policy are inextricably linked. As seen from the case of the U.S. EC teacher policy, the low entry requirements as a response to the issues of teacher turnover and teacher shortage inadvertently maintained the status quo of less qualified and less compensated workforce than their counterparts in public schools, leading to another type of teacher turnover, in-field mobility of EC teachers (from non-public schools to public schools or from one setting to another setting that incentivizes their years of education, training, and work experience). Clear from this example is that, without attending to the interconnected nature of policy elements, a solution may invite another problem. Policymakers need to consider that true governance moves beyond a government solution to a functional framework that is sensitive to the interconnected nature of policy elements and that can coordinate and make interdependent policies (e.g., policies on teacher qualification, compensation, funding, and related regulations) mutually supportive. In doing so, policymakers will need to be cognizant of balancing the needs of multiple constituents (e.g., children, families, practitioners, communities, and governments) on various aspects (e.g., teacher quality and quantity,

general and special education, preschoolers and infant/toddlers, voluntary and mandatory participation in quality improvement efforts) at multiple levels (e.g., individual, institutional, regional, and national). More attention should be given to the way the policy contexts, challenging aspects, and stakeholders interplay and their impacts on each other. Active dialogue among international practitioners, researchers and policymakers, bolstered by willingness and commitment of policymakers to support research on ECEC policy and international partnerships, would enable to envision and build a better future for our children and families in the world.

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Notes

- ¹ Teacher quality includes: "(a) the aptitude, skills, experience, and beliefs that a teacher brings into the classroom, and (b) the structures, processes, resources, requirements, and public perceptions that influence who teaches, where they teach, and what happens in the classroom" (Public Education Network, 2002, p. 3).
- ² Title I schools are public schools that serve students from low-income families, thus receiving federal funding to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. About 55 % of U.S. public schools are Title I schools.
- ³ Teachers refer to ECEC workforce who is employed in group care and education settings serving young children. Various titles are used such as teacher, assistant, caregiver, or care provider depending on the age group they serve, job position, and the governing agencies of the programs they are employed.
- ⁴ This figure does not include approximately 2.4 million care-giving population who provide unpaid child care services.
- ⁵ Currently, more than 40 states (of the 50 states and District of Columbia) are providing publicly-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Most states deliver services through public schools and community-based early childhood centers.
- ⁶ No data has been released regarding the efficacy of this approach in reducing turnover for private center teachers. Qualitative and quantitative inquiry on the effects of this approach is needed.
- ⁷ Each state calls it differently such as lead teacher, head teacher, chief caregiver, child care associate, or supervisor.