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## ABSTRACT

Results are presented from a study designed to identify (1) characteristics of teacher education programs in the United States concerned with preparing personnel for early childhood education, and (2) the procedures used to select students for these programs. In addition, program trends related to these aspects of teacher education programs were identified. A questionnaire relating to program characteristics, and admission and retention requirements was developed and sent to 343 institutions of higher education preparing early childhood education teachers. In general, results from 172 programs responding indicate that early childhood teacher education is a relatively new activity for most institutions, with over half (57.6 per cent) being in existence for 10 years or less. Almost two-thirds of the programs (64.8 per cent) are housed in departments of colleges of education rather than child development or similar units. The primary criteria for admitting students to these programs are grade point average and test scores. The primary criteria for retention in these programs is grade point average and a practicum performance by college personnel. Finally, the main criteria reported for graduation from the program is the successful completion of courses and demonstration of competence. Results are discussed and a copy of the questionnaire is appended. (Author/MP)

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A Study of Programs to Prepare  
Early Childhood Personnel

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A Study of Programs to Prepare Early Childhood Personnel

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Introduction

Over the past one and one-half decades the number of programs for young children has increased steadily. While the total number of children ages 3-5 has declined from 1966 to 1974 from about 12.5 million to about 10.4 million, the percentage of children enrolled in preprimary programs has increased from less than 30% to over 40% in this period (preprimary enrollments, 1975). With this growth in the number of children served and the number of programs in operation has come an increase in the number of persons staffing them. No accurate figures are available for this number since early childhood personnel are not necessarily certified by states nor do they have to be graduates of teacher training programs.

Preprimary programs consist of kindergartens, nursery schools, day care centers and a range of special programs designed to serve particular populations or particular ends. Personnel for these programs are prepared in a number of different educational institutions, including 4 year colleges and universities, two year community and junior colleges, and even in vocational programs of high schools.

In their recent review of studies of the preparation and certification of early childhood teachers, Spodek and Saracho (1982) could identify no studies of early childhood teacher education programs, although studies are available of teacher education programs and their clients more generally conceived (e.g., Lewin and Associates, 1977). Much of the literature of early childhood education suggests that important teacher qualifications are rooted

in the basic personal characteristics of teachers as opposed to the competencies that might have resulted from the participation in teacher training programs (e.g., Almy, 1975). This would suggest that selection characteristics of various teacher education programs might be as important in developing teachers as are program characteristics.

This present research study was an attempt to identify characteristics of teacher education programs in the United States concerned with preparing personnel for early childhood education and the selection procedures they were currently using. In addition, program trends related to these aspects of teacher education programs were identified.

#### Procedures

No authoritative directory of institution preparing early childhood education teachers. The best source of such information available is a list of institutions of higher education preparing early childhood education teachers compiled by the ERIC/EECE and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Rothenberg, 1979). This list, though incomplete, identifies 343 programs in the United States. These institutions thus are the population for our study. A questionnaire relating to program characteristics and admission and retention requirements and characteristics was developed and sent to each institution on the list. Responses were then tallied for each item on the list and analyzed. The sample included 172 programs responding to the questionnaire, 50 of the total population. This sample, was self selected and might not be representative of the total population.

### Results

Early childhood teacher education is a relatively new activity for most institutions, with over half (57.6%) being in existence for ten years or less. Almost two-thirds of the programs (64.8%) are housed in departments or colleges of education rather than child development or similar units. The overwhelming majority of these programs (87.8%) lead to state teacher certification. In more than half of the institutions reporting, 60% or more of the students receive dual certification, primarily early childhood and elementary certificates. An overwhelming majority of the institutions offer preparation at the Bachelor's level (88%) while more than half offer Master's level programs 54%.

Over the last several years, many of the programs have experienced increases in their enrollment in spite of the fact that enrollment in teacher education have been decreasing in their period (see table 1).

Table 1

HOW MANY STUDENTS WERE ADMITTED TO YOUR PROGRAM IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS?

Number of Students	0 or No Answer	1-20	21-40	41-60	61-80	81-100	101 +
<b>NEW STUDENTS</b>							
1979-80	47	48*	31	25	6	6	9
1974-75	84	35	24	9	6	4	10
1969-70	124	15	13	7	3	3	7
<b>TRANSFER STUDENTS</b>							
1979-80	82	79	5	3	2	0	1
1974-75	115	46	5	2	2	1	1
1969-70	146	21	3	1	0	1	0

\* Number of schools responding in category

While many institutions reported an increase in enrollment, most of those reporting stated that their student population had not changed in relation to the geographic region from which the students came, in ethnic diversity of their student body, or in the age or sex of their students (male-female ratio).

The primary criteria for admitting students to the programs studied were grade point average (67%) and test scores (68%). The primary criteria for retention in these programs was grade point average (90%) and evaluation of a practicum performance by college personnel (83%). Lastly the main criteria reported for graduation from the program was the successful completion of courses (94%) and demonstration of competence (75%).

While more than one-half of the programs reported that over 60% of their students come to them directly from high school, many of the programs admit up to 20 per cent of their students or transfers from junior colleges, other 4-year colleges, or are students returning to school after raising families.

The majority of respondents reported that they expect enrollments to continue to increase or to remain the same, while criteria for admission, retention and graduation are expected to remain constant in immediate future (see Table 2).

Table 2

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS FUTURE TRENDS IN YOUR PROGRAM?

	Increase	Decrease	Remain Same	No Answer
Enrollments	62	21	81	8
Criteria for Admission	58	0	104	10
Criteria for Retention	62	0	100	10
Criteria for Graduation	46	0	115	11

### Discussion

One of the impressions given in the field of early childhood education is that the vast majority of its practitioners are prepared in child development or home economics programs. This does not seem to be the case in the programs surveyed here. The respondents were primarily housed in education units within their institutions and seemed to have their close ties with programs preparing elementary teachers as evidenced by the dual certification available. The picture given here may accurately reflect the situation in the field, it may be an artifact of the directory from which the programs were selected or, it may result from the way in which the surveys were routed within the institutions contacted. It is also possible that some programs preparing practitioners do not identify themselves with teacher education. If graduates are defined as child development practitioner, for example, a recipient might view the questionnaire as irrelevant and thus not worthy of responses. We have no way of knowing how teacher education is defined in each institution. In addition, many early childhood practitioners are prepared in community colleges in two-year Associate of Arts degree programs, in one year programs, or in field based programs preparing individuals for the Child Development Associate Credentials. These programs may or may not be considered as teacher preparatory and they do not lead to standard teaching credentials. Without much greater resources than we had available, we would not be able to better identify the various forms of preparation in the field and arrive at a sense of confidence about the representativeness of any survey.

/ The increases in enrollment over the past decade reported by the respondents seems anomalous when compared to enrollment trends in other

areas of teacher education. These increases, however, may be a function of the youth of the programs. During the initial years of any college program enrollments tend to increase, especially considering the baseline from which they originate. Thus the figures reported do not indicate that early childhood is a particularly vigorous area of teacher education. In most cases the programs have remained small. Two thirds of the institutions reported that they had admitted forty or fewer students during the previous year.

The size and relative youth of these programs may create problems in regards to their survival, in spite of the ability to attract increased numbers of students. The Bureau of Labor Statistics have indicated that in 1990 the demand for preschool and kindergarten teachers will be increased by 26.2 percent as compared to 1978. This is significantly greater than the increase of 5.2 percent expected in the demand for all teachers. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1981).

Early childhood teacher education programs may be among the politically weakest in institutions of higher education. Because of their relative youth and size, they have few faculty involved in the programs, many of whom will be nontenured, lacking both the positions of authority and the scholarly reputations of more senior faculty in other programs. When decisions are made in times of economic crisis in higher education, such as the present one, it is possible that these programs will be most vulnerable. Whether they will continue to grow vigorously (or even exist) and meet the future demand remains to be seen.

Other concerns raised from this survey relate to standards of quality for the programs. One index of a program's quality is whether it is



accredited; in teacher education, through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE's accreditation standards tend to relate to specific areas of specialization. Since NCATE has no standards for early childhood teacher education, these programs are generally accredited as Elementary Education programs. While there are certainly attributes that elementary and early childhood teacher education programs have in common, and where standards of quality would be comparable, there are also differences in the demands made on teachers in elementary programs as compared to early childhood programs. Thus some of the standards imposed on programs preparing early childhood teachers and seeking accreditation would be inappropriate. This may be a threat to the integrity of the early childhood programs, causing them to be more similar to programs preparing elementary teachers than would otherwise be the case.

At present the National Association for the Education of Young Children is developing a set of standards for the accreditation of early childhood teacher education programs. Whether these standards, when established, will be adopted by NCATE and, if adopted, whether they allow early childhood teacher education programs to become more unique remains to be seen.

The maintenance of current criteria for admission to early childhood programs may be problematical. Pugach reported that Pratt (1977) proposed three reasons for selective admission: 1) the desire to dissuade potentially poor teachers; 2) during a teacher surplus the need to certify only the most talented; and 3) the need for exclusion prior to program admission since

teacher education has traditionally had such a low failure rate. They raised the question of whether current standards are exclusive enough to maintain a high level of candidate. Many critics of education believe that it is much too easy to become a teacher.

Pugach also reported that Meyers (1979) summarized the need to control the quality of candidates prior to admission . . . "I don't believe that our teacher training intervention strategies are so powerful that they compensate for poor quality in students. I am firmly convinced that you build quality teacher training programs around the quality of the students you allow in the program. Compromises in entrance requirements are compromises in quality (p. 36-37)."

Rigorous selection criteria, however, may well work against lower and lower-middle class students who have used teaching as a means for improving their social status (Turner, 1975). Higher selection criteria may force early childhood teacher education programs to eliminate some students or to provide these students with remedial programs that will help these students to meet the criteria for admission into teacher education.

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# Appendix

## A STUDY OF PROGRAMS TO PREPARE EARLY CHILDHOOD PERSONNEL:

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### DATA TABLES

TABLE 1

How many years has your program been in existence:

0 - 5 years	27
6 -10 years	72
11 -15 years	25
16 + years	32
No Answer	16

TABLE 2

What is the level of preparation in your program?

Associate	20
Bachelor	152
Master	94
Other	
Ed. D.	16
Ph.D.	14
Ed. S.	10

TABLE 3

Does your program lead to a state  
teaching certificate?

Yes	151
No	14
No Answer	7

Other credentials?

Yes	46
No	106
No Answer	20

TABLE 4

What is the department affiliation of your program?

Child Development	15
Education	127
Home Economics	26
Human Services	3
Other	20
No Answer	5

TABLE 5

What percent of your students receive dual certification or are double majors?

0 - 20%	81
21 - 40%	16
41 - 60%	14
61 - 80%	7
81 - 100%	46
No Answer	8

Which combination is most common?

Elementary & E.C.	94
E. C. & Spec. Ed.	32
Other	22
No Answer	30

TABLE 6

How many students were admitted to your program in the following years?

Number of Students:	0 or No Answer	1 - 20	21 - 40	41 - 60	61 - 80	81 - 100	101 +
NEW STUDENTS		*					
1969-70	124	15	13	7	3	3	7
1974-75	84	35	24	9	6	4	10
1979-80	47	48	31	25	6	6	9
TRANSFER STUDENTS							
1969-70	146	21	3	1	0	1	0
1974-75	115	46	5	2	2	1	1
1979-80	82	79	5	3	2	0	1

\* Number of schools responding in category

TABLE 7

What percentage of your students come to you...

	0/No Answer	1 - 20%	21 - 40%	41 - 60%	61 - 80%	81 - 100%
Directly from High School	49	13	7	18	41	44
From High School with time out for family rearing, work experience, etc.	73	80	10	5	4	0
Transfer from Junior College	57	85	24	3	2	1
Transfer from a four-year institution	76	86	6	1	1	2

TABLE 8

What criteria do you use for admitting students to your program?

High School Graduation	106
High School Class Rank	35
G.P.A.	116
A.C.T. Test Scores	39
Test Scores on S.A.T.	51
Other Tests	38
Recommendations	65
Other Criteria	74
No Answer	8

TABLE 9

What criteria do you use for retention in your program?

Maintain G.P.A.	156
Evaluation of Performance in Practicum...	
1) by college personnel	143
2) by center personnel	86
Other:	26
1) Self-evaluation	4
2) Cooperating teacher	3
3) Recommendations	3
4) Field experience	3
No Answer	5

TABLE 10

What criteria do you have for graduation from your program?

Successful completion of courses	162
Final comprehensive examination	43
Demonstration of competence	130
Final project	17
Final paper	19
Other	42

TABLE 11

In the last five years have any of the following changed in any appreciable way?

	Increased	Decreased	Remained Same	No Answer
The number of students graduating from your program	73	58	35	6
The number of students applying to your program	75	58	30	9
The criteria for graduating from your program	63	2	96	11
The criteria for admission to your program	50	2	110	10

TABLE 12

Has the population enrolled in your program changed in any of the following ways:

Geographic representation	Yes	23
	No	134
	No Answer	15
Ethnic diversity	Yes	29
	No	132
	No Answer	11
Age	Yes	47
	No	114
	No Answer	11
Sex	Yes	28
	No	127
	No Answer	17

TABLE 13

What do you see as future trends in your program?

	Increase	Decrease	Remain Same	No Answer
Enrollments	62	21	81	8
Criteria for Admission	58	0	104	10
Criteria for Retention	62	0	100	10
Criteria for Graduation	46	0	115	11