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## ABSTRACT

The training of child caregivers is a key factor in the provision of quality day care for young children. However, little is known about what types of training for day care providers are most effective in promoting children's development. Several issues related to training and credentialing need to be addressed: (1) Do day care home providers need the same training as center-based caregivers? (2) Should the training of prekindergarten teachers differ from that of center- or home-based caregivers and, if so, how? (3) Do teachers of 4-year-olds in the public schools need four years of college training or is a degree from a child care training program in a community college adequate preparation? and (4) Should uniform, enforceable regulations be established for credentialing of child caregivers/prekindergarten teachers? Closely tied to credentialing issues is the question of whether preschoolers should be taught using a didactic, teacher-directed approach or a child-centered approach. (NH)

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## Training Day Care Providers

Brenda Krause Eheart

As more mothers of young children participate in the work force, the provision of quality day care is rapidly becoming a major concern for early childhood educators, researchers, policymakers, employers, and parents. A key to quality day care is the provision of specific training in child care for caregivers. Both the National Day Care Study (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979) and the National Day Care Home Study (NDCHS) (Divine-Hawkins, 1981) conclude that training is a powerful index of competence for caregivers and is strongly and positively linked to program quality. While few would dispute the conclusions, there are debates to be resolved related to day care training issues.

### Defining Training

Before training can be implemented effectively, a common understanding of what is meant by day care training is needed. Authors of the NDCHS concluded, "The specifics of training proved to be one of the most difficult dimensions of professionalism to tap" (Singer, Fosburg, Goodson, & Smith, 1980, p. 173). Precise variables to assess the type, intensity, and duration of training have not been constructed. Consequently, we know very little about what types of training can be most effective in promoting children's development in day care programs.

### Training Credentials

In developing clearer and more precise definitions of training, we are confronted with issues related to credentialing. Day care teachers are employed primarily in two settings: day care centers and day care homes. Recently, however, they have begun to work in public school early childhood programs. Do day care home providers need the same training as center-based caregivers? Does the training of prekindergarten teachers need to differ from that of center- or home-based caregivers and, if so, how? Currently there are no answers to these important questions.

Also at issue is the establishment of uniform, enforceable regulations. At present there are no uniform standards for prekindergarten teacher qualifications. Many argue that there is variation in the enforcement of regulations and that 100 percent compliance is an

unrealistic expectation. Krause Eheart and Leavitt (1986) argue, however, that legislating training requirements is one strategy to offset problems of enforcement and compliance. They write:

It does this in two ways. First, it can be assumed that trained caregivers are providing at least minimal levels of quality care, and second, as is not the case for other licensing standards, the concepts of compliance and enforcement do not apply to training once it has been implemented. (p. 130).

Without an appropriate, uniform, and enforceable credentialing system the professional status of day care workers will remain in question.

### Teaching Approaches

An issue closely tied to credentialing is how preschool age children should be taught. Is a didactic, teacher-directed approach more effective, or is a child-centered approach where the teacher's primary responsibility is to be responsive and supportive better? Equally debated is what children should be taught. Should programs emphasize basic academic skills, or should they provide experiences that emphasize growth in all developmental areas: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual?

Powell (1986), in a review of program models and teaching practices, concludes that there may not be one best approach to teaching young children. He suggests that we need to "focus on finding the best match between child and program" (p. 66). Clearly, as we learn more about effective teaching practices to be used with preschoolers, our teacher training programs will change.

### Amount of Training

The issues of teaching approaches and credentialing lead to the question of how much specialized training is necessary for day care teachers. The answer depends, in part, on whether discussion is focused on child care based in centers, homes, or public schools.

Most early childhood educators agree that college-level preparation in early childhood or child development, with supervised experience working with young children, is essential background for center staff

(NAEYC Position Statement, 1986). Currently, however, licensing requirements in only eight states legislate specialized training for preschool teachers (Young & Zigler, 1986). The amount of college-level preparation or the need to meet Child Development Associate (CDA) competency standards, when legislated, usually relates to day care positions as teaching assistants, teachers, or directors. Similarly, the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, the accreditation division of NAEYC, has established a voluntary day care accreditation program which includes criteria for amount of training in relation to job titles and levels of responsibility.

What requirements are necessary for teachers of 4-year-olds in public schools? NAEYC strongly suggests that college-level preparation and experience is essential for achieving developmentally appropriate early childhood programs. Given this, how much preparation is necessary? It can be argued that if it is necessary to have four years of college training to teach 5-year-olds in the public schools, the same amount of training is necessary to adequately teach 4-year-olds. Many, however, have suggested that a degree from a child care training program in a community college is adequate preparation (*Federal Register*, 1985). Others, including Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, argue that early childhood teachers need less preparation than traditional four-year teacher certification and that differences in training, jobs, and roles imply different salaries (1986, p. 2).

Perhaps the most debated issue is the amount of training necessary for day care home providers. Family day care provides approximately two-thirds of the child care in the country, yet Krause Eheart and Leavitt (1986) found in an interview study of 150 providers that about one in every three providers had training and that more than half of the providers did not want training. Exacerbating this picture is the fact that 94 percent of all day care homes are unregulated. Day care home providers see themselves as women who love and care about children, but not as professionals. From their perspective, a love of children and lots of patience are necessary qualifications—training is not.

### Conclusion

Sixty years ago, there were 157 nursery schools, nationwide. Early childhood teachers did not need training to be considered effective because teaching was considered an inherent art (National Committee on Nursery School, 1929). Today, there are over 67,000 child care centers (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986) and at least 1.8 million family day care homes (estimated from the NDCHS in 1981), and training is recognized as essential to the provision of quality day care. This recognition has been accompanied by the emergence of many difficult issues

related to training definitions, credentials, approaches, and amount of specialized training. With day care rapidly becoming an American institution (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986), these training issues must be addressed, questions answered, and conflicts resolved. Only then can our children be assured of a quality day care experience.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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