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ABSTRACT

There is a consensus among professionals about the content of programs that prepare educators for the early childhood level, and particularly about a core knowledge base. However, there is little consensus on the minimum levels of hours and credits needed to adequately prepare early childhood educators, and on the professional roles and responsibilities to be assumed at the various levels. Research indicates that formal education and specialized preparation for educators result in improved quality of care for children. However, the number of teachers with such training is insufficient to staff all classrooms. There appear to be emerging needs for training that the field is not prepared to handle. As for model practices of educational training, baccalaureate programs are erratic because of their reliance on state certification standards. In-service training has become a substitute for adequate pre-service training. There is a weak relationship between in-service training and improved teacher behavior. Steps must be taken to provide improved training programs, but early childhood educators must clarify their long-term goals before these steps will enhance progress. Appended are a table that offers a comparison of teacher preparation guidelines and a figure that concerns early childhood professional knowledge at various levels of professional preparation. (BC)

Preparation and Professional Development Programs for Early Childhood Educators: Adequacy of the Knowledge Base

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The work of NAEYC over the past 10 years has provided ample opportunity to explore questions of the adequacy of the knowledge base for preparing early childhood personnel. These comments will address the portions of questions 1, 2, and 3 regarding the level of coverage, content of preparation, and model practices, about which NAEYC's experience can be most informative. NAEYC has been involved in two simultaneous strands of standard-setting and enforcement -- establishing standards for professional preparation and establishing standards for model programs for young children. This experience provides a valuable perspective from which to comment on the adequacy of the knowledge base for early childhood preparation.

NAEYC developed standards for teacher preparation in baccalaureate programs (1982), associate-degree granting institutions (1985), and advanced-degree programs (1989). The standards for baccalaureate and advanced degrees are approved by NCATE, thus requiring that early childhood programs in institutions' seeking NCATE accreditation be reviewed by NAEYC for compliance with these guidelines. Since 1982, NAEYC has reviewed approximately 300 early childhood teacher education programs through our involvement with NCATE. Current activity relevant to teacher preparation includes the development of a position statement on teacher certification and a Model for Early Childhood Professional Development that will define professional roles and levels of preparation.

NAEYC's activity relevant to establishing standards for professional practice goes back to our involvement in the development of the CDA competencies and includes development and implementation of a national accreditation system for early childhood programs, development of position statements on developmentally appropriate practice, and currently development of guidelines for curriculum and assessment.

Questions 1 & 2: Level of coverage and content of preparation

All of these position statements were developed through a similar process -- review of the literature, review of existing standards, and consensus review by literally thousands of early childhood professionals. These experiences lead us to conclude that there is enormous consensus in the field regarding the content that should be included in an early childhood preparation program. Table 1 summarizes the content required by each set of teacher preparation guidelines, an examination of which reveals considerable congruity across guidelines. The congruence of these guidelines identifies a "core" knowledge base agreed upon by the field (see Figure 1).

What the field does **not** have consensus on is the minimum levels of hours and credits needed to adequately prepare early childhood educators. Likewise, there is

not agreement as to the professional roles and responsibilities that should be assumed by individuals with different amounts of preparation. This lack of consensus became abundantly clear in responses to NAEYC's draft Model of Professional Development. It is safe to say that not only was there no consensus in the responses, but they almost represented mutally exclusive, non-reconcilable points of view (a situation that has not occurred in any of the other consensus reviews conducted in the last 10 years). The responses also mirrored the individual background and professional role of the reviewer. For example, associate-degree holders and faculty liked the Model because it separated the associate-degree from CDA, and qualified an associate degree holder as a teacher. Baccalaureate degree holders and faculty disliked it for the same reasons. Many people thought the amounts of preparation too low for the roles ("A CDA should not be considered a professional"), while many others were concerned that they were too high and rejected individuals who come into the field through alternate means than higher education. Despite the latter concern, if there is anything in the response to the Model that can be identified as a trend, it is a shared goal (or attitude) toward upgrading the pre-service professional requirements for the field.

The questions of breadth and depth of preparation persist, but there seems to be one possible compromise for obtaining consensus on minimum levels of hours/credits. The current accepted "minimum" appears to be 9-12 credits of preparation based on the CDA competencies, including supervised field experience with children. This reflects the projected standard of the new training model for CDA that is proposed by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition. Perhaps we could propose an "ideal minimum" qualification for a teacher of young children as 30 credits of professional preparation including 300 clock hours of supervised field experience with children. This amount of professional preparation (reflecting the consensus aspects of the various teacher education guidelines) could be obtained in one-year of study in a certificate or Council Model program, or it could be obtained as part of an associate-degree program, or it could be the professional core of a baccalaureate degree.

This proposed "ideal minimum" raises another question of the importance of formal education in addition to specialized preparation. Research indicates that formal education plus specialized preparation predicts higher quality experiences for children. Suggesting that anything less than a baccalaureate degree is a sufficient qualication for early childhood teachers sets the field apart from mainstream education and would undoubtedly perpetuate unequal salary structures. The disagreement over the importance of formal education is becoming more pronounced within the field, if the response to the draft Model is any indication.

Unfortunately, all of this thinking must be constrained by reality. Our assumption is that the current workforce in preschool and child care does not begin to reflect the levels of preparation desired in the Model, although we do not have clear data about how many providers exist or their levels of professional preparation. We can infer from the National Child Care Staffing Study and the GAO Study of accredited programs that the average level of preparation is higher than licensing requirements would predict; but we know from our experience with programs seeking

accreditation (which are obviously not a random sample) that the goal of having an associate-degree level teach . (or a CDA) in every classroom is not achieved, much less having a baccalaureate-level teacher. In addition, the staffing crisis is obviously taking a toll and directors report anecdotally that they cannot find qualified staff. One positive note is that we have recently heard anecdotal reports that enrollments in early childhood education programs at the 2-year and 4-year college levels are very healthy. However, it seems likely that more of these graduates will be attracted to better paying public school early childhood positions than to child care.

A final question that can be informed by NAEYC's experience is "Are there emerging new needs for training that the field is not prepared to handle?" Certainly, the areas mentioned (multilingual, AIDS, and substance abuse) are areas that the field does not appear ready to handle. It seems that as always, we are making it up as we go along on inadequate knowledge and materials. Of equal, perhaps greater concern however, is the fact that there are unmet needs in training areas where we should already have existing knowledge and resources. The most pressing needs for training that we observe from our accreditation experience and membership requests are: curriculum, observation and assessment of children, health and safety, multicultural and anti-bias, working with parents, promoting social competence (guidance), and integrating special needs children.

Question 3: Model practices, what works best?

One of the most frustrating aspects of administering our accreditation system and participating in NCATE Folio Review is to observe how poorly the early childhood knowledge base intersects with practice. The areas listed above as weaknesses in practice are not surprising given weaknesses we have observed in preparation programs. Our major concern about baccalaureate preparation is that it is driven by state certification standards. Only half the states even offer specialized certification for early childhood, making it a real step-sister in those states and undermining the content of preparation; the other half usually certify K-3 teachers or PreK-3. Many "early childhood" programs offer no field experience with children younger than 5 outside the public school. The rarest occurance of all is coursework, much less field experience, with infants and toddlers. If we are ever to improve practice overall, we must target traditional baccalaureate level teacher education. The hodgepodge of programs at that level leads to the awkward situation of having CDA's and associate-degree holders in early childhood education better qualified than graduates of 4- and 5-year baccalaureate programs. NAEYC's current strategy is to try to influence state certification. Some states that do not offer specialized early childhood certification do not have an early childhood major at the baccalaureate level.

In the meantime, many staff members will continue to enter the workforce without adequate pre-service preparation; in-service training will be used to compensate. It is safe to say that the quality and effectiveness of in-service training varies enormously. The biggest weakness of the training system appears to be that there are no standards for trainer qualifications. Most people tout their degrees as

qualification but given what we know about the content of degree programs, this is slightly suspect as a qualification. In addition, there is rarely content relevant to the needs of the adult learner. There seems to be consensus that an important qualification is experience as a teacher of young children, but there is no mechanism for confirming that individuals were good teachers or that being a good teacher of young children translates to being a successful trainer of adults. The lack of any national standard for trainers or system for approving in-service training programs will become an urgent need when federal legislation brings more resources for training into the field. We need to anticipate and prevent a situation such as what happened in 1965 when training proliferated and much money was wasted.

Our experience with programs that are turned down for accreditation has demonstrated a rather weak relationship between in-service training and behavior change in teachers. Our recommendations for improvement usually say "Provide staff training to . . . " but too often we find that staff get training and we do not observe changes in the quality of interactions with children or curriculum. What we really need is clear information about the most effective ways to bring about behavior change in teachers. We recommend modeling of appropriate behavior preferably right in the teacher's classroom with her own group of children. But our biggest problem is finding appropriate models for practice. This is also the complaint of preparation programs in general.

Overall, there is an inadequate research base to inform early childhood teacher preparation. A recent review of the literature on this subject concludes that it tells us "virtually nothing about the character, quality, or implementation of programs, or about the releative effectiveness of different program patterns and structures" (Spodek & Saracho, 1990, page 119). That same volume identifies the need for a body of research focused specifically on preparing early childhood teachers, since most of the existing literature is on elementary or secondary teaching.

Conclusion

We know more now than we have ever known about what constitutes good practice for children and we know that specialized staff training correlates with good practice. What we are less clear about is the most effective way to prepare teachers to deliver this kind of practice. Perhaps more importantly, we are unclear of our long-term goal in this endeavor. Do we want to move the field toward a fully differentiated staffing model with different roles and levels of professional preparation comparable to nursing or other medical professions? Do we want to elevate the quality of pre-service preparation and emulate the model of teacher education in general? Do we want to target in-service preparation and certify trainers to ensure quality in recognition of the current realities of the field? Or is there some other goal we wish to pursue? We need to think very clearly about where we want the field to be in 20 years, what it will cost, and what it will take to get there. Without clarity of our long-term goal, we won't know whether the steps we take now (even if we view them as interim solutions) will impede or enhance progress toward achieving that goal.

Reference

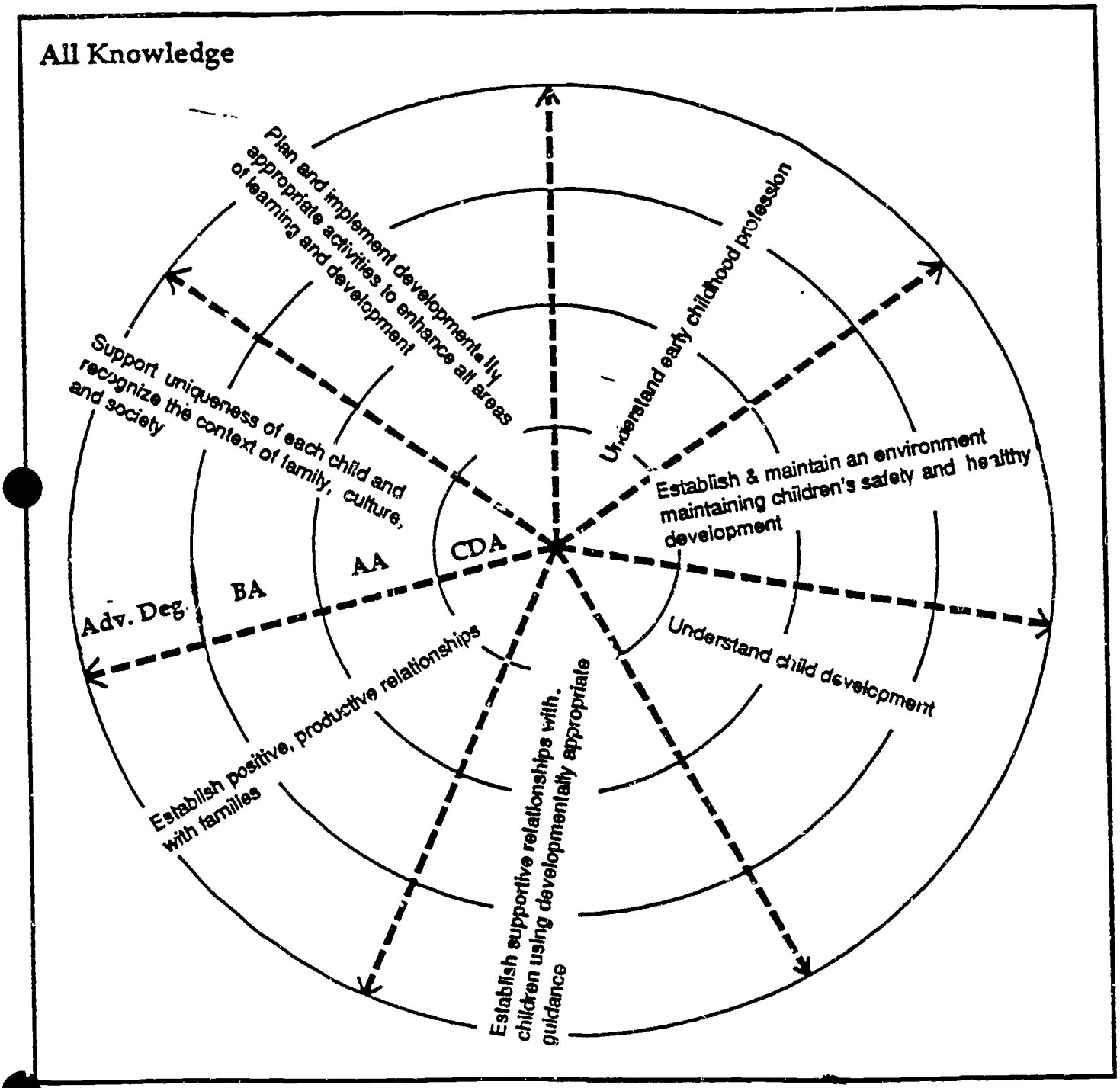
Spodek, B., & Saracho, O. (Eds.). (1990). Yearbook in early childhood education, Volume 1: Early childhood teacher preparation. New York: Teachers College Press.

Table 1. Comparison of Teacher Preparation Guidelines

Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)	Associate Degree in ECE	4/5 yr degree programs in ECE	Advanced degree programs in ECE
Prepares EC professional to assume primary responsibility for meeting the specific needs of a group of children by nurturing the children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs; setting up and maintaining the child care environment; and establishing a liaison relationship between parents and the program.	Allows EC professional to develop sufficient competence to assume responsibility for the care and education of an individual group of children in an early childhood program (center or family child care) and/or prepares graduate for upper division collegiate work in a 4/5 yr program.	Graduates possess foundation for a philosophy of teaching, a broad base of knowledge of child development, birth through age 8; special competency in working with at least one period of Early Childhood (infant/ toddler, preprimary, and primary school children); and integration of relevant principles from several disciplines in general education and professional studies.	*Masters:* Focus on the practice or the study of the practice of ECE. Advanced preparation to take on specific professional roles in applied research, teacher education or staff development, working with families, issues analysis and advocacy, and program administration.
Through a combination of supervised fieldwork and instructional coursework, individuals gain knowledge and competency in eight areas: demonstrating an introductory understanding of the early childhood profession; observing and recording child growth and development; establishing and maintaining a safe, healthy learning environment; advancing the physical and intellectual competence of children in their care; supporting the social and emotional development of children and providing guidance to them; establishing positive and productive relationships with families; ensuring a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs; and maintaining a commitment to professionalism.	General education ensures basic competency in spoken and written English and mathematics and provides introduction to the liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences. Professional studies include knowledge and theory to guide professional practice and practical experience to develop competence in working with young children and their families in a variety of settings.	General education provides knowledge and understanding of the liberal arts, humanities, and social, biological, and physical sciences. Professional studies include sound research and theory to guide practice; knowledge and understanding of principles and methodologies of teaching and learning; and practice providing a variety of supervised field experience working with children and families.	*Doctoral:* Focus on the study of ECE and its practices, including child development, pedagogy, curriculum, policy analysis, history and philosophy, and basic and applied research. Generation of knowledge, research, and analysis.
Reference: *Improving Child Care Through the Child Development Associate Program*, Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, Washington, DC, 1990.	General education includes at a minimum, coursework in English composition, mathematics, science, the humanities, and social science. Core curriculum in professional studies addresses: child growth and development—typical and atypical—with emphasis on birth through age 8; intro to EC profession, including historical and social foundations, values and ethical issues, legal issues, staff relations, advocacy, professionalism and status; curriculum planning for young children; planning, implementing, and evaluating	General areas extend written and oral communication competence, mathematical skills, and knowledge of world through study in a range of scholarly disciplines. Professional foundations and instructional knowledge integrate theory and research and practical skills in human development through the life span with special emphasis on cognitive, language, physical, social and emotional	Foundations include interdisciplinary study of sociology, psychology, history, philosophy, and anthropology with implications for ECE. Professional studies provide for advanced study of human development through the lifespan, with emphasis on child development theory and research—prenatal through age 8, role and application of theory in professional practice; methods of inquiry; development of self-knowledge through reflective inquiry; areas of speciality knowledge and competence in administration, staff training and development, program assessment, infant caregiving, policy, parenting, literacy, and technology. Internships offer opportunities for application of knowledge into practice.

Child Development Associate Credential (CDA)	Associate Degree in ECE	4/5 yr Degree Programs in ECE	Advanced degree programs in ECE
	developmentally appropriate activities, methods of child guidance and group management; intro to working with children with special needs; observation and recording of children's behavior; family and community relations; child health, safety and nutrition education and methods for establishing a safe and healthy environment for children. **Reference:** *Guidelines for Early Childhood Education Programs in Associate Degree Granting Institutions.* NAEYC: Washington, DC, 1985.	development—typical and atypical—for children birth through age 8; historical, philosophical, psychological, and social foundations of ECE; curriculum—goal setting, content, and methodology; observation of children; work with atypical children; communication and conference techniques and interpersonal skills and relations and working as instructional team; family and community relations; awareness of value issues and EC code of ethics; comprehension of cultural diversity of its implications; legislation and public policy affecting children, families and programs for children. **Reference:** *Early Childhood Teacher Education Guidelines: Basic and Advanced.* Washington, DC: 1990.	Program addresses dominant theories of human development and learning; research in social, emotional, cognitive, language, motor, and perceptual development and learning in children birth through age 8 and the study of children in the context of the family; knowledge and understanding of theories and content of curriculum and instruction and alternative teaching models and methodologies; current professional issues; assessment of child development and learning, child care and early education environments, early childhood curriculum, and assessment purposes and strategies; diverse delivery systems; program planning for children of diverse cultural and language backgrounds and different ages and developmental levels; and research methods. **Reference:** *Early Childhood Teacher Education Guidelines: Basic and Advanced.* Washington, DC: 1990.

Figure 1. Early Childhood Professional Knowledge at Various Levels of Professional Preparation



← - - - Continuum extends from knowledge necessary for implementation of effective practice to knowedge necessary for the translation and generation of knowledge.