Looking Beyond Government: The Transfer of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Model across States

By Janelle Kerlin with Elizabeth Reid and Jennifer Auer

Largely beneath the radar are programs generated and implemented by state-level nonprofit organizations that are then passed on to and implemented by nonprofits in other states.

Increasing attention focused on the low quality of child care in America and the importance of the early childhood years has resulted in a number of public and private initiatives to improve early care and education. While the federal government has earmarked funds for improving the quality of child care through such programs as the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)[1] and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and has strived to improve Head Start, decisions on how to programmatically address the issue have largely been left to the states. Using federal and other funds, state governments have implemented a variety of programs to improve the quality of child care and have often shared program ideas among themselves. Largely beneath the radar are programs generated and implemented by state-level nonprofit organizations that are then passed on to and implemented by nonprofits in other states.

Child Care Services Association (CCSA) of North Carolina provides a model of a nonprofit organization that started a statewide initiative to address the problem of low-quality child care and then helped to transfer the program to other states. In 1990, CCSA began an education and compensation scholarship program for 21 child care workers in three North Carolina counties. As of August 2003, the program, now known as the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Project, had spread to 23 states and is annually providing more than 15,000 scholarships (Sue Russell, personal correspondence, August 25, 2003). This study examines factors that supported, promoted, and challenged the transfer of the T.E.A.C.H. model to four states: Florida, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington. It finds that effectively transferring a program from a nonprofit in one state to a nonprofit in another state happened through four overlapping stages and multiple roles by child care advocates.

The four states in the study were selected because they reflect a variety of situations in which the transfer of T.E.A.C.H. has taken place. States were chosen based on when they adopted T.E.A.C.H. and the type of initiating group, the type of implementing organization, the funding sources, and the political environment (see table 1). In the four selected states, on-site and telephone in-depth interviews were conducted with 74 leading figures in the transfer, development, funding, and implementation of T.E.AC.H. Interviewees included nonprofit child care administrators, child care providers, state and city agency administrators, legislators, governors' and legislative assistants, business leaders, foundation officials, and early childhood educators and advocates.

Stages of Nonprofit Policy Diffusion

Research on the transfer of the T.E.A.C.H. model found four overlapping stages of policy diffusion among nonprofits. The first two stages speak to the transfer of the model to another state, while the last two

TABLE 1. *Overview of T.E.A.C.H. States in the Study*

State	Type of initiating organization	Type of implementing organization	Year implemented	Route to broad funding
Florida	National business organization	Child care resource and referral agency	1995	State legislature
Pennsylvania	Foundation initiative	Child care professional association	1998	State agency with legislative approval
Indiana	Public/private partnership	State association for the education of young children	1999	State agency
Washington	City government	Child care resource and referral agency	2000	Foundation

speak to the wider spread of the idea within a state:

- diffusing the policy idea to a state;
- replicating the policy model;
- achieving broad funding;
- taking the program statewide.

Diffusing the Policy Idea to a State

The first stage of nonprofit-to-nonprofit policy diffusion is the transfer of a policy idea to a state—in this case, the spread of information about the T.E.A.C.H. project to the four study states. Ultimately, the driving force behind any policy diffusion is the idea or perception that a given policy innovation works. From its earliest days, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project, begun by CCSA in North Carolina, provided program results that fostered a view among many in the child care community that it addressed some of the most urgent problems facing the child care industry nationwide. Through scholarships for college credit, paid release time from work, a salary increase or bonus upon completion, and a teacher commitment to stay for a period of time in child care (see sidebar), the T.E.A.C.H. project increased the pay and education of child care providers in the program and reduced turnover, according to CCSA statistics (CCSA 2002). In North Carolina, the statewide turnover rate dropped from 42 percent in 1994 to 31 percent in 1999 (CCSA 2000). Documentation by CCSA on the education, compensation, and retention of child care providers in the T.E.A.C.H. project in North Carolina brought increasing outside attention to its apparent ability to affect the factors underlying low-quality child care.[2]

Formal and informal networks and forums were instrumental in spreading news on a national level of the apparent success of T.E.A.C.H. Particularly important was the fact that the originator of the T.E.A.C.H. project, Sue Russell, was connected to the professional child care world through her involvement with the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Children's Defense Fund Child Care Initiative. Through informal conversations and formal presentations at annual conferences of these and other organizations, Russell eventually informed thousands of child care professionals about T.E.A.C.H. Media stories and the discussion of T.E.A.C.H. by early childhood researchers and advocates followed. In short, T.E.A.C.H. was becoming a nationally known education and compensation program for child care workers. This exposure not only informed future players who would bring T.E.A.C.H. to a state but also

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project addresses the problems of poor education, low compensation, and high turnover in the child care sector by providing early childhood professional development opportunities for teachers, directors, and family child care providers.

The four components of T.E.A.C.H. directly target the problems of the child care industry:

Educational Scholarships—cost-shared funding for tuition, books, and travel and often paid release time.

Formal Education—attainment of an established number of college credits toward a credential or degree in early care and education.

Compensation—a salary raise or bonus upon completion of the education component.

Commitment—commitment of the scholarship recipient to remain in the sponsoring child care organization or child care field for a period of time on completion of the education component.

The exact configuration of scholarship dollars, college credit, compensation amount, and commitment time is connected to the type of scholarship model developed for use in a given state. Some of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarships currently being offered include:

- State-mandated credentials
- Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
- CDA Assessment and CDA Renewal
- Apprenticeship program
- Associate degree
- Baccalaureate degree
- Mentor

Underlying the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project are four principles that direct its administration:

Partnership—Scholarships are funded by a partnership between T.E.A.C.H., the scholarship recipient, and the sponsoring child care program. The T.E.A.C.H. portion of the scholarship is often funded by a mix of public and private dollars and pays the largest share of the cost.

Diversity—T.E.A.C.H. seeks to address the diversity of the early childhood workforce by offering equitable access to scholarships across the different types of child care providers (including for- and not-for-profits, pre-K, Head Start, family child care, and religious-sponsored), their geographic locations, educational levels, and age and ethnicities.

Use of Existing Systems—T.E.A.C.H. makes use of existing community college and university early childhood programs for the education of scholarship recipients. Increased enrollment by T.E.A.C.H. scholars often strengthens the early childhood education system in a state.

Collaboration—T.E.A.C.H. seeks to engage the entire early childhood community in a state to improve access to formal education and raise awareness about the connection between education, compensation, and workforce needs. Every state T.E.A.C.H. project has an advisory committee.

Source: CCSA (Child Care Services Association). 2001. *T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® —A National Strategy.* Information portfolio published by CCSA.

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facilitated the buy-in of many other state and local players who would make it possible to replicate T.E.A.C.H. once it arrived.

In addition to national networks, this study found that in each of the four study states, the state environment was ready to entertain a policy proposal on child care. National- and state-level research on the quality of child care, statewide awareness-raising events focusing on children and care, and new statewide programs in the area of early childhood development all worked to

turn attention to broader child care issues. From this environment, organized groups seeking solutions sprang up from diverse settings, including a national business collaboration, foundation, public/private partnership, and city government. These became the initiating organizations that eventually brought T.E.A.C.H. to their states.

Replicating the Policy Model

This second stage considers the actual transfer of the policy model from a nonprofit in one state to a nonprofit in another state. This stage begins when the originating nonprofit (in this case CCSA) starts to interact with project initiators in another state and continues through to the actual transfer of program components to the implementing nonprofit. Training and technical assistance provided by the originating nonprofit to the new nonprofit T.E.A.C.H. agency (usually selected through a bidding process by the initiating organization and CCSA) facilitated effective replication of the policy model in the state. Positive outcomes were achieved by transferring a model that was flexible enough to adapt to a new environment yet fixed enough in several key areas to maintain program integrity. Often, groups that initiated the policy transfer acted as supportive mediators for the T.E.A.C.H. administering nonprofit as it faced initial obstacles and challenges.

Achieving Broad Funding

Establishing a broad funding base was crucial for implementing T.E.A.C.H. on a statewide basis. Initial funds for T.E.A.C.H. came from businesses, foundations, or city governments and were generally limited to support of the project in one or several cities. However, a much more substantial amount of funding was needed to take the program statewide. In three of the states, this broad funding came from public funds that a state set aside from the federal government's CCDF. Typically, states authorized $1 million

or more per year for T.E.A.C.H. In Washington, advocates were unable to access this level of public funding, and mostly private funds supported T.E.A.C.H.

Several factors came into play as T.E.A.C.H. advocates sought broad funding. First, the advocates were skilled in framing T.E.A.C.H. in different ways to appeal to different funders. In particular, after implementation, T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients became valuable advocates for ongoing public or private funding because they could speak of their personal experiences with T.E.A.C.H. Second, state and federal policies were an important source of public funding for T.E.A.C.H., and at times related policies generated reasons why T.E.A.C.H. should be supported. For example, CCDF and TANF had specific set-asides to improve child care quality, and these funds were main resources for funding T.E.A.C.H. Also, advocates stressed that T.E.A.C.H. scholarships could help child care providers meet state Child Development Associate (CDA) credential requirements. Third, the structure of the state government system and the location of key supporters dictated how to target advocacy efforts in a given state. For example, in Florida, key state legislators and respected child care advocates were uniquely positioned to get T.E.A.C.H. funding passed in the state legislature. In Indiana, policymakers in the state's Family and Social Services Administration were well placed to facilitate funding through that agency.

Taking the Program Statewide

Once broad funding was secured, the next task was to take T.E.A.C.H. to child care providers across the state. Often the first large infusion of money left T.E.A.C.H. agencies overwhelmed: they needed to learn the intricacies of administering the program and, at the same time, quickly fill hundreds of scholarship slots

across the state. To ease statewide implementation, T.E.A.C.H. often started in counties with easy access to community colleges that had early childhood education programs. State professional early childhood associations and other state higher education networks were enlisted to help recruit scholarship recipients. Perhaps the biggest challenge was expanding the administrative capacity of T.E.A.C.H. agencies, especially finding staff with appropriate management skills. Ongoing training, technical assistance, and monitoring by CCSA provided some assurance that the transferred program maintained its integrity over time.

Key Roles of Child Care Advocates

At each stage of policy transfer, child care advocates filled certain key roles: the policy originator, the researcher advocate, the program operationalizer, the state agency insider, and the lobbyist advocate. These roles were not always limited to one person. A role could be shared by more than one person, or the same person could fill several roles. Understanding the importance of these roles at different stages can be instructive to advocates who want to share policy initiatives across states.

In the first stage, diffusing the policy idea to a state, key roles include the policy originator and the researcher advocate. In this study, the policy originator, Sue Russell of CCSA, served as an important vehicle for getting the word out about T.E.A.C.H. Her connection to the national early childhood community and her willingness to give presentations about T.E.A.C.H. at conferences were instrumental in reaching child care advocates looking for solutions to the problem of low-quality child care in their states. Her documentation of T.E.A.C.H. outcomes in North Carolina gave the policy model a sense of legitimacy for many child

care advocates. The role of researcher advocate, on the other hand, was fulfilled by one or more people in the T.E.A.C.H. initiating organization in each study state. The individuals in this role were charged with researching different program options that could be used to address the goal of improving child care in the state.

Key roles for the second stage of replicating the policy model are the policy originator and the program operationalizer. As the policy originator of T.E.A.C.H., Sue Russell placed great importance on replicating a framework that had been tried and proven in the development of the T.E.A.C.H. project in North Carolina. The person who filled the program operationalizer role was the T.E.A.C.H. coordinator in the nonprofit agency administering T.E.A.C.H. in each of the states. This person was responsible for the day-to-day management of T.E.A.C.H. and for setting up the project according to the agreement made with CCSA and under its guidance. This role required a host of management skills and experience accessing and working with early childhood programs, higher education, public finance, and private funding systems in a state.

In the third stage, achieving broad funding, key roles include the state agency insider and, in states where significant public funding was obtained, the lobbyist advocate. For example, the lobbying team that helped win T.E.A.C.H. funding in the Florida state legislature consisted of a welfare agency director and a child care lobbyist. Their success was attributed in part to the fact that strong advocates from both inside and outside state government were sending a unified message. In Indiana, one individual appeared to fulfill both roles. As a state agency insider, she was deputy director in the Bureau of Child

Development; as an advocate, she was founder and cochair of the Indiana Child Care Fund. She had strong working relationships with the two governors and first ladies who held office during the development of T.E.A.C.H.

The role of program operationalizer, played by the T.E.A.C.H. coordinator, was key in the fourth stage of taking the program statewide. In every study state, the operationalizer actively took T.E.A.C.H. to community colleges and universities, went on the road to present the program at conferences and to child care groups, and was the first to navigate the database and essentially manage the entire project. Indeed, the success of the project at this stage hinged on the management and recruitment skills of the T.E.A.C.H. coordinator. When these skills were in place, the project steadily gained momentum and grew, and when they were not, it was hampered by the problems that arose.

Conclusion

Nonprofit organizations are taking the lead in developing innovative policy to improve the quality of child care. Child care advocates who attempt to transfer child care policy across states should be aware that concurring events play an important role in the successful diffusion of nonprofit programs. In the case of T.E.A.C.H., a policy solution developed in North Carolina converged with a growing national awareness of the problem of poor quality in child care and federal funding opportunities. Child care advocates seeking solutions to the problem of low-quality child care often had limited time and few technical and financial resources. The availability of what appeared to be a proven "off-the-shelf" model and funds (particularly from federal sources such as CCDF

and TANF) were basic to the successful diffusion of this nonprofit child care program. The convergence of the problem, a solution, and a favorable policy environment for funding created a "policy window" of the type discussed in Kingdon's (1995) work on setting policy agendas. In the nonprofit transfer of policy from state to state, child care advocates must also be ready to bring together people who can fulfill the key roles found at each stage of nonprofit policy diffusion.

Endnotes

1. This is sometimes referred to as the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG).
2. All of the statistics on T.E.A.C.H. in this report are based on the T.E.A.C.H. project's own assessment of its activities. As of this writing, no comprehensive outside study on the effectiveness of T.E.A.C.H. has been completed.

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