

Getting Teachers from Here to There: Examining Issues Related to an Early Care and Education Teacher Policy

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Abstract

Most early care and education teachers are not required to have attained a bachelor's degree (BA) prior to working with young children. Because of the research base demonstrating that teachers with a BA specifically related to early childhood play an integral role in the provision of high-quality early care and education, there have been increasing calls for new policies with regard to the educational requirements for those who teach and care for young children. Although instituting a new "BA policy" is a key component in improving the quality of early childhood education, there are various "getting from here to there" issues that would also need to be considered, particularly if the policy's goals include increasing the credentials of the current workforce. This article explores two of these issues: the constraints facing early care and education teachers in improving their credentials and the capacity of teacher preparation programs to support the policy and in turn help create a qualified and knowledgeable workforce. Given that New Jersey has recently adopted such a policy for teachers in its state-funded preschools, findings from studies focusing on this effort are used in order to illustrate these issues. The article concludes with implications for policy makers and researchers in terms of optimizing implementation of a BA policy and ensuring that policy-related supports are working.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, there has been a growing recognition of the benefits of high-quality early care and education (ECE), particularly in terms of improved academic and developmental outcomes for lower-income children (Barnett, 2002). Quality in ECE is related to how a program is structured and what type of experiences children have within those programs, but one of the most crucial variables is teacher education and training (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000). In short, teachers with a bachelor's degree (BA) in early childhood education or a related field tend to have higher-quality classrooms (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002).

Despite this recognition-and perhaps reflecting the disconnect between research and policy (Zervignon-Hakes, 1998)-most ECE teachers are not required to attain such a level of education. There are "no state or national standards or certification processes for teachers of young children" (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 261) in the United States, and ECE programs within individual states follow different sets of regulations (Morgan, 2003). Just 14 states require teachers in both public and nonpublic, state-funded preschool programs to have both a BA and specialized training in early childhood (see Table 1) (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2004). Most states do not require teachers in private ECE centers to undergo *any* preservice training, much less have a BA in early childhood or another subject (Ackerman, 2004b). As a result, researchers (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002; United States General Accounting Office, 2003) estimate that only about half of teachers who work in private ECE settings or Head Start have an associate's degree (AA) or BA degree. Perhaps not surprisingly, additional research suggests that the quality of most ECE is mediocre (Cryer & Phillipsen, 1997; Helburn et al., 1995; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999).

Table 1

Minimum Educational Requirements for Teachers in State-Funded Preschools*

Required Credential or Training	States
None	
Nonpublic settings only	Virginia
Public & nonpublic settings	New Mexico
Credits toward a Child Development	

Associate (CDA)	New York (9 credits) ^{1**}
CDA	
Nonpublic settings only	Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Wisconsin ²
Public & nonpublic settings	Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut (plus 9 college credits), Delaware, Hawaii (plus 1 year experience), Kentucky
College credits	Massachusetts (1 early childhood education classes & 9 months' experience) ³
Associate's degree	
Nonpublic settings only	Iowa, ⁴ Michigan (plus CDA), Washington
Public & nonpublic settings	Georgia, Ohio
Bachelor's degree (BA) only	Louisiana ⁵
BA & teaching certification	Kansas, Louisiana, ⁶ Maine, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin ⁷
BA & specialized training related to early childhood	
Public schools only	Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Oregon, Virginia, Washington
Public & nonpublic settings	Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia
Master's degree	New York ⁸

*Source: Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman (2004).

** 1—Nonpublic settings only; 2—Head start only; 3—Nonpublic settings only; 4—Head Start only; 5—NSECD program only; 6—8G, LA4, and Starting Points programs only; 7—4K program only; 8—teachers in any experimental or public universal prekindergarten settings who did not obtain a BA prior to 1978 only.

Because of the significant research base demonstrating that teacher training plays such an important role in the kind of interactions and activities young children receive in ECE, there have been increasing calls for new policies requiring all ECE teachers to have a BA (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Focus Council on Early Childhood Education, 2004; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2001). Although instituting a new "BA policy" is a key component in improving the quality of ECE, there are also "getting from here to there" issues that need to be considered if teachers are to meet the requirements of such a policy. This point is particularly salient if the policy's goals include increasing the credentials of the currently employed Head Start and private ECE workforce. The purpose of this article is to explore the issues related to two key facets of a new BA policy: the constraints facing currently employed ECE teachers in improving their credentials and the capacity of teacher preparation programs to support the policy and in turn help create a qualified and knowledgeable workforce. Given that New Jersey has recently adopted such a policy for teachers working in its state-funded preschools, this article uses findings from studies focusing on this effort in order to illustrate some of these issues. The implications for policy makers and researchers in terms of implementation priorities and future research are also identified. To begin, the rationale for a BA policy is provided by outlining the research examining high-quality ECE.

High-Quality Early Care and Education

Recent research (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2003) suggests that 68% to 84% of 3- to 5-year olds are cared for by someone other than a parent much of the workweek, with the majority of children enrolled in some sort of center-based ECE program. These programs can include state-funded preschools, private child care centers, and Head Start centers. No matter what the setting, however, the benefits of ECE are dependent on the quality of the individual program.

Benefits of High-Quality ECE

High-quality ECE benefits children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Reviews of studies (Barnett, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002) examining the effect of both smaller demonstration programs, such as the Carolina Abecedarian and High/Scope Perry Preschool programs, and large-scale programs, such as Head Start, reveal the social, cognitive, and academic success for participants in these programs. Short-term effects include gains in IQ scores and better social behavior, as well as higher language skills and better scores on pre-reading and pre-math achievement tests. Long-term school-success effects include higher scores on academic achievement tests, greater high school graduation rates, and less grade retention or placement in special education. In sum, high-quality ECE not only has the potential to help children start school "on the right foot," but correlates with higher long-term academic outcomes, as well.

High-quality ECE also benefits the greater community, particularly in its ameliorative effects on later antisocial behaviors (Yoshikawa, 1995). These findings are illustrated when examining the smaller demonstration programs that have served as models of high-quality ECE. For example, participants in the Chicago Child-Parent Center program had lower school dropout and juvenile arrest rates (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). When interviewed at age 23, former students in the Perry Preschool program were found to have higher rates of voting in presidential elections and fewer criminal arrests (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Children who participated in the Abecedarian Project had lower rates of teenage pregnancy and illegal drug use and higher educational attainment (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002).

From an economic perspective, these school-related and social benefits also provide a financial return to both participants and the greater community. Benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program shows an internal rate of return of between 3% and 7% (Masse & Barnett, 2002). The Perry Preschool program had a benefit-cost ratio in excess of 7:1, meaning that for every dollar spent, individuals or the greater community received a return of over \$7.00 (Barnett, 1993; Weikart, 1998). A similar result was found for the preschool portion of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers program (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002). These benefits have prompted economists (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003) to argue that ECE programs should be considered economic development initiatives, much as state and local governments tend to view subsidies to private business and sports franchises.

Components of High-Quality ECE

Many families, community members, and policy makers might think an ECE setting's quality is assured if a facility is "state licensed." It should be noted, however, that licensing is not always a guarantee of quality and instead may only define "the minimum that is required as essential to prevent harm" (Morgan, 2003, p. 68). Conversely, high-quality ECE has been defined as "that which is most likely to support children's positive development" (Helburn et al., 1995, p. 1).

Children's development can be supported in various ways, reflecting the different aspects of quality. From a parental perspective, quality may include feeling welcome and being treated with respect (Katz, 1994; Mooney & Munton, 1998), thus facilitating further parental involvement in ECE (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). Teachers' wages also play a role in quality. Higher wages enable centers to hire better-qualified teachers, which in turn contributes to both lower turnover rates and more secure attachments between children and teachers (Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Scarr, Eisenberg, & Deater-Deckard, 1994).

Most research related to quality indicators, however, distinguishes between structural and process quality and is from the perspective of what the child experiences. Classrooms contain structural components that affect quality, such as the number of children, the staff-child ratio, or the physical environment of the room (Cryer, 1999; Harms, 1992). As quantifiable variables,

these aspects of quality are often controlled through state licensing regulations (Gormley, 1999). Structural variables can also be considered as inputs that influence "process variables," or the kinds of experiences children have within classrooms on a day-to-day basis (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). These experiences would include the activities children participate in, the interactions they have with other children, and, most importantly, the interactions they have with their teachers.

In order for these variables and experiences to be considered both high quality and "developmentally appropriate," they should also take into account how children develop and learn, and how that development and learning might best be supported (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Low-quality, developmentally inappropriate classrooms have been found to have few or no interactions between teachers and children, and any interactions that do occur tend to be harsh or insensitive. Children also have little opportunity to interact with each other or participate in appropriate learning activities (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997).

Conversely, high-quality, developmentally appropriate classrooms feature many meaningful interactions between children and teachers and their peers, whether working one-on-one with a teacher or within small-group or large-group activities. Children also have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of age-appropriate activities, which are responsive to their individual interests, developmental abilities, curiosity, and home language and culture (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Espinosa, 2002; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999). Kramer (1994) explains:

Good teachers ask questions that motivate children. They are comfortable with leaving conclusions open; their questions are open-ended and investigate their students' thinking...they allow children to do most of the talking and encourage them to risk ideas and ask their own questions. They are ready to facilitate the growth and development of concepts by providing materials and experiences through which children may deepen their understanding. (p. 32)

In sum, good teachers help children build on their emerging understandings and skills by introducing them to new activities and engaging in interactions that are sensitive, responsive, and foster children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; de Kruif, McWilliams, Ridley, & Wakeley, 2000; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997).

Role of Specialized, BA-Level Coursework in Quality

No matter what dimension of quality is being examined, one of the most crucial variables leading to high-quality ECE is teacher education and training. Although attainment of a BA alone has been shown to positively affect teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate classroom practice (McMullen & Alat, 2002), teachers with a BA in early childhood education or a related field tend to have higher-quality classrooms (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002). Various studies suggest that a concentration in early childhood coursework seems to be positively correlated not only with teachers' beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate practice but also with more appropriate classroom practices (McMullen, 1998, 1999, 2003; Vartuli, 1999). Preservice teachers who are enrolled in early-childhood-related certification programs have been shown to favor developmentally appropriate practices on a more consistent basis than those students who are enrolled in elementary education certification programs (File & Gullo, 2002), even when practicum teachers do not share the same beliefs (Smith, 1997). Teachers who have received specialized training in early childhood also display more interactions that facilitate young children's language, cognitive, and social skills (Honig & Hirallal, 1998).

Furthermore, an examination of teachers' formal education levels, early childhood training, and

overall classroom quality in the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes study (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002) suggested that "caregivers with a BA or BS in early childhood education or a related field were rated substantially higher on the global measure of classroom quality" (p. 10). Howes, Whitebook, and Phillips (1992) also found that teachers who had both the most sensitive and least harsh and detached behavior were those with both a BA and specialized, college-level early childhood training. In the end, "more knowledge in early childhood education does appear to influence beliefs, attitudes, and practices of teachers" (Vartuli, 1999, p. 510), which in turn influences the quality of care and education young children receive.

Challenges of Implementing a New BA Policy

Given the roles that both a BA and specialized coursework play in teachers' abilities to offer children a high-quality ECE experience, one might assume that policy makers in all 50 states should simply upgrade their standards and require every ECE teacher—both future and currently employed, and in every type of setting—to obtain these qualifications. These qualifications are especially critical given that research suggests that most preschool classrooms are of mediocre quality (Cryer & Phillipsen, 1997; Helburn et al., 1995; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999), and just 7% of private ECE centers nationwide have received accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children, considered to be a benchmark of quality (Surr, 2004). The BA policy would seem to ensure that young children would not be "penalized" for living in a state with lower standards and would also guarantee that teachers had the same minimum educational background whether they worked in Head Start, state-funded preschool, or private ECE settings. This latter point is important when considering that middle- and lower-class parents or families with limited English proficiency may not have access to—or the ability to pay for—the same quality of care as upper-class families (Clifford, Cochran, & Kagan, 2003; Morris, 1999; Powell, 1997; Ranck, 2003; Schulman, 2000).

Overall Policy Considerations

Seemingly straightforward policy initiatives, however, are not necessarily self-actualizing in terms of achieving their premises or goals. The school reform literature provides more than a few examples. For instance, allowing community stakeholders to replace traditional school governance structures is supposed to "enable those closest to classrooms and students to make decisions that can most benefit learning and achievement" (King, Louis, Marks, & Peterson, 1996, p. 246). In practice, "the creation of structures to involve [stakeholders such as] parents is, by itself, not enough to ensure their substantial involvement in their children's education" (Beck & Murphy, 1999, p. 100). Policies mandating the use of new books and materials have little impact on teachers' daily work if they do not know how to integrate these resources into students' learning or maximize their use (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003). Similarly, merely instituting new state-based standards may not be enough to improve student outcomes (Cohen & Hill, 2000, 2001; Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2003). As important as many of these initiatives might be, "more is needed than good intentions or even good program designs to achieve effective policies" (Levin & Ferman, 1986, p. 312), especially when initiatives involve various actors and stakeholders (Gallagher, Clifford, & Maxwell, 2004).

Instead, getting "from here to there" involves a consideration of multiple policy-related variables. In addition to determining whether a policy solution will have a direct impact on addressing a particular problem, policy makers must take into account the tractability of the problem itself (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1981). Tractability refers to the ease with which something can be controlled, shaped, or even changed. Assessing tractability also requires policy makers to gauge how difficult it would be to get a target group—such as teachers—to comply with a desired outcome. As McLaughlin (1991) notes, having the "motivation and commitment" to undertake an initiative is often reliant upon a group's "assessment of the value of a policy or the appropriateness of a strategy" (p. 187). Policy actors must perceive the need

for the change as a significant priority, as the short-term personal costs of becoming involved in a new activity or approach can often appear to outweigh the long-term benefits (Fullan, 1991). Policy makers must therefore also be mindful of what type of policy tools might be appropriate, whether they be a mandate that prescribes or proscribes behavior, some sort of inducement or incentive for encouraging compliance, or a combination of several approaches (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

Furthermore, although the institution of a new policy might appear to be "enough" to encourage compliance, policy makers must also look at the "specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process" (Elmore, 1980, p. 604) and ask whether those actors have the ability and resources to attain the targeted behavior. Policy makers need to also determine how much capacity these actors have to accomplish a policy's objectives. "Smart" policies will take capacity issues into account and be designed to both capitalize on areas of strength and ameliorate deficiencies (Ingram & Schneider, 1990). Successful policy initiatives will also employ both pressure to reach a policy's goals and support for doing so (McLaughlin, 1991).

In summary, although the "BA for every ECE teacher" policy might seem to be a straightforward way to ensure children's access to high-quality ECE, reaching the goals of such a policy also hinges on an understanding of its contextual challenges. Before adopting a new BA policy, then, policy makers would need to examine both ECE teachers' personal challenges in obtaining a BA and specialized training, as well as the capacity of teacher preparation programs to provide the necessary coursework.

Teachers' Personal Challenges

Meeting the requirements of a new BA policy may not seem to be overly daunting to someone who attended college immediately after high school, who has already graduated from college, or who did not need to worry about the costs of higher education. ECE teachers, however, face various personal challenges in obtaining a BA. These challenges include the constraints of being an adult learner, lack of academic experience, possible language and cultural barriers, and the minimal wages that are standard in the field.

The Constraints of Being an Adult Learner. First, "getting qualified" may be problematic when viewed from the perspective of the individual ECE teacher, who on average is a 39-year-old woman (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Adult learners can face various problems and constraints when attempting to obtain a college degree. These constraints can include one's ongoing personal and professional responsibilities and the resulting logistical hurdles that can make it difficult to attend class. Degree attainment for adult learners is often hampered by delayed enrollment in college, part-time attendance, concurrent full-time employment, and nonspousal dependents. The family and work responsibilities of older women students, in particular, often make it difficult to find enough time to complete individual course requirements (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974; Cross, 1981; Horn & Carroll, 1996). Indeed, teacher preparation programs across the United States have found that one of the biggest challenges to increasing the qualifications of ECE teachers is the "competing work or family related responsibilities" of their students (Early & Winton, 2001, p. 297).

Academic Insecurity. Second, ECE teachers may also be first-generation students who are insecure about their ability to successfully complete college coursework (Jones & Watson, 1990; McConnell, 2000; Padron, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). This sense of insecurity is understandable. Thirty-three states do not require teachers in private ECE settings to have any preservice training (Ackerman, 2004b); teachers in these states are not required to have undertaken college coursework, or even hourly, noncredit workshops before beginning to work in an ECE setting. Teachers may thus not have the experience or educational background necessary to feel confident about tackling college coursework.

In addition, successful first-time college students often employ "scaling down" techniques as a

way to navigate the higher education system (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). This strategy utilizes instructors, mentors, advisors, and peers to reduce the confusion related to registering, classwork expectations, and receiving academic assistance. As first-generation students, however, ECE teachers may not have "pave-the-way" role models and thus do not know how to "scale down." They also may not have the cultural capital-the skills or experiences that others might have because of their social status or cultural background-necessary to sort through these types of problems (Valadez, 1993).

Language Barriers. Third, the cultural and language background of the ECE workforce might pose another barrier to improving ECE teachers' qualifications. Various workforce studies (Burton et al., 2002; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002) suggest that African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians form a significant proportion of the ECE workforce in many areas of the United States. These ethnicities are not well represented among faculty in early childhood programs at two- and four-year colleges (Early & Winton, 2001). In fact, the "difficulty [in] attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty" (Early & Winton, 2001, p. 297) was cited as the top faculty-related problem by directors and chairs of early childhood teacher preparation programs throughout the United States.

This discrepancy poses problems when teachers are not proficient in English yet wish to take coursework in order to improve their credentials. For example, the Child Development and Family Studies Department at City College of San Francisco has found that there is a need to offer advisement in English, Cantonese, Spanish, and Vietnamese, yet they have great difficulty in both recruiting native-speaking instructors and finding language-appropriate materials for use in their early childhood curriculum (Santos Rico, Villazana-Price, Donovan, & Cheng, 2003). In New Jersey, there is so much demand for Child Development Associate (CDA) coursework in Spanish that several child care resource and referral agencies and community colleges offer this type of language-specific training. However, no four- or five-year college or university early childhood teacher preparation program in the state offers required coursework in Spanish (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004).

Inability to Pay for Coursework. Fourth, even if ECE teachers have the academic capacity to successfully undertake college-level coursework, their salaries often offer little ability to pay for it. A recent nationwide survey estimates that the average hourly rate of pay for child care workers in 35 states is \$8.50 or less. Of the 10 states that have average pay rates of over \$9.00 per hour, just one-Massachusetts-breaks the \$10 per hour threshold (Center for the Childcare Workforce, 2004). In New Jersey, the mean annual salary for child care workers is just \$17,210 (New Jersey Department of Labor, 2003). This annual amount translates into \$8.60 per hour and is just 39% above the federal poverty level for a single parent with one child (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). The average Head Start teacher earns \$21,000 per year (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003).

The constraining aspects of these salaries in terms of teachers' ability to pay for college coursework are illustrated when using the example of a hypothetical teacher in New Jersey. The per-credit cost for coursework at one of the state's four-year teacher preparation programs is \$159.50 (Montclair State University, 2004). Two 3-credit classes would therefore cost \$957. If an ECE teacher made just \$8.60 per hour, she would have to spend between three to four weeks of net wages just to pay for these two classes. An additional week of wages would be needed to cover the costs of books and student fees. If the ratio of wages to tuition remains the same for the length of time it takes a teacher to complete her degree, she would have to spend over one-third of an already minimal paycheck each term in order to increase her credentials.

Institutional Challenges

The challenges in obtaining a BA are not limited to the personal capacity issues of the current ECE workforce. Policy makers must also consider issues related to their state's teacher

preparation programs in terms of articulation and the institutions' capacity to help create a qualified and knowledgeable workforce.

Articulation Problems. The first institutional challenge is related to where ECE teachers might begin their journey toward complying with a new BA policy. Nontraditional or first-generation learners may feel more comfortable taking for-credit coursework at two-year colleges (McConnell, 2000). Given that tuition at public four-year institutions is 74% higher than at two-year colleges (Center for Community College Policy, 2000), the latter would seem to offer a logical starting point for ECE teachers.

Many four-year teacher preparation programs, however, do not allow articulation of a two-year college's early childhood classes (Shkodriani, 2004). In New Jersey, for example, almost all of the community colleges offer some type of associate's-level early childhood education degree, but articulation into teacher preparation programs is limited to between one and three courses from a few specific schools and is capped at nine credits (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004). These policies are not predicated solely on "turf-protection" but instead reflect concerns about the quality and content of coursework. Furthermore, New Jersey requires teachers in private ECE centers to have a minimum of a CDA credential (Division of Youth and Family Services, Department of Human Services, & State of New Jersey, 1998), which involves 120 clock hours of instruction in topics such as health and safety and children's social and emotional development (Council for Professional Recognition, 2000). Almost half of New Jersey's community colleges offer for-credit CDA coursework, but only one four-year college in the state will accept that coursework as transfer credit (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004). The lack of articulation between two- and four-year colleges has been categorized as one of the most important barriers in ECE teachers' attainment of a BA (Cassidy, Hestenes, Teague, & Springs, 2000; Early & Winton, 2001; Phillips & Jordan, 1999).

Capacity of Teacher Education Programs. Even if issues related to articulation were adequately addressed, policy makers would also need to examine whether their state's teacher preparation programs had the capacity to address the demands of the new BA policy. "Capacity" in terms of teacher preparation programs involves two distinct areas. First, it refers to a program's ability to serve the numbers of students who would need to upgrade their credentials. Early and Winton's (2001) research suggests that early childhood teacher preparation programs nationwide do not have enough full-time faculty members to adequately serve all of the ECE teachers who would need to increase their credentials. In New Jersey, half of the state's four-year schools cited the lack of full-time faculty in early childhood programs as a barrier to expanding the recently instituted preschool through grade 3 (P-3) teacher certification program (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004).

Second, capacity also revolves around an institution's ability to offer the type of early childhood teacher preparation program that would result in a highly qualified workforce. "Qualified" in this sense does not just mean attainment of a specific degree and credential. Rather, "initial professional preparation...requires rigorous and relevant preparation for the contemporary realities of teaching" (Isenberg, 2001, p. 17), including working with children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds or children who may have special needs. In a study of 689 preschool teachers working in New Jersey's state-funded preschools, Ryan, Ackerman, and Song (2004) found that over half felt that they needed additional training in the areas of working with children who were English-language learners or who had special needs. In short, if policy makers wish to support teachers' efforts to increase their credentials, they must also support their ability to access high-quality teacher preparation programs.

Implications for Policy Makers and Researchers

The research summarized in this article demonstrates that high-quality ECE matters in terms of children's academic and social outcomes. Furthermore, high-quality ECE provides additional benefits to the entire community. High-quality ECE programs, however, do not automatically

result from meeting state licensing standards or hiring staff, anymore than a restaurant can automatically produce high-quality meals merely by hiring waiters, installing a grill or oven, or meeting sanitation standards. Instead, high quality results from specific structural components, as well as the activities and interactions that children experience in ECE. Research suggests that teachers who have attained a BA specifically related to early childhood are best able to offer children a high-quality ECE experience.

In a similar fashion, although adoption of a BA policy is a key component in providing high-quality ECE, the policy itself may not necessarily result in ECE settings that are staffed by highly qualified teachers. Not only may the current workforce face various personal constraints in attaining a BA, but teacher preparation programs may not have the capacity to meet the demand for highly qualified teachers, as well. In addition, given the minimal salaries of teachers in most Head Start centers and private ECE settings, one wonders how many college graduates holding teacher certification would willingly remain working in these settings. Although beyond the scope of this article, the "salary issue" poses a constraint in terms of current teachers' ability to pay for college coursework and in terms of retaining these teachers once they increase their qualifications. In short, adopting a new BA policy may be easy compared with considering all of the issues related to such a policy. Because of these various issues, however, there are two key implications for policy makers. First, optimizing implementation of a BA policy will most likely require ongoing, multi-level, interrelated support. Second, determining what supports are necessary-and how they can be equally optimized-will most likely require carefully constructed, concurrent research.

Optimizing Implementation

Optimizing implementation of a BA policy will require various supports to be in place, especially for the currently employed ECE workforce. The personal constraints of teachers in Head Start centers and private ECE settings present contextual challenges to reaching the policy's goals. These teachers will most likely be unable to work toward a BA if they are not provided with scholarships that cover the cost of tuition, books, and fees. They may also need special advisors who can facilitate their entry into higher education, as well as appropriate language supports. Given teachers' professional and personal obligations, policy makers may also wish to ensure that teachers do not have the additional burden of traveling great distances to access coursework. ECE teachers may also need support in terms of child care for their own children while they attend classes.

Optimizing implementation will also require the cooperation of a state's higher education system and, more specifically, its teacher preparation programs. If two-year college coursework is more accessible, affordable, or appealing to the majority of ECE teachers, institutions of higher education may wish to coordinate coursework so that there is greater articulation between various programs. At the same time, however, policy makers need to examine the content of teacher preparation programs, especially in terms of their focus on early childhood coursework. Teachers' attainment of a BA may do very little to improve ECE quality if their coursework is not relevant to teaching young children. Policy makers must also look at the populations that would be served in their state's ECE settings and also ensure that any issues that are particularly relevant to their state-such as a growing population of English-language learners-are adequately addressed in early childhood teacher preparation programs.

Policy makers might be tempted to view the process of integrating these supports as too complex and, rather than dealing with all of them at the same time, seek instead to prioritize supports and adopt a "one strategy at a time" approach. In other words, policy makers might feel that implementation of a new BA policy would be easier if they could institute a "scholarships now, academic advising later" tactic. A review of various early childhood initiatives (Bryant, Maxwell, & Burchinal, 1999; Knitzer & Page, 1998; Miller, Melaville, & Blank, 2002), however, shows that their potential for success arose precisely because of the realization that

none of the individual participating partners could effectively fulfill a program's goals alone. In short, "each component could be strengthened and expanded" (Miller, Melaville, & Blank, 2002, p. 2) by virtue of the fact it was partnered with other resources at the same time.

Lessons of New Jersey

The case of New Jersey provides a useful model for illustrating this point. In 2000, teachers working in state-funded preschools—which are housed in public schools, private centers, and Head Start centers—were mandated by the New Jersey Supreme Court to obtain a BA and P-3 certification by 2004 as part of a high-quality ECE initiative (Abbott v. Burke, 2000). The state responded in a multi-level fashion. New Jersey has provided support in the form of scholarships for teachers and a central clearinghouse to administer this financial aid. It has also worked toward providing salary parity for teachers working in private preschools that participate in this initiative and has given extra funding to four-year teacher preparation institutions in order to offer the P-3 (Coffman & Lopez, 2003).

The teacher preparation institutions that offer this specific endorsement have also responded to teachers' needs for different routes to P-3 certification. Teachers can obtain the P-3 through various BA, master's-level, post-baccalaureate-related, and alternate route programs (Ryan & Ackerman, in press). These colleges and universities also offer P-3 coursework in parts of the state that do not otherwise have access to four-year teacher preparation programs. Some of the larger consortiums that are contracting with the state to provide preschool in their private ECE centers have also hired staff to specifically help teachers deal with "nontraditional student" issues (Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004). After four years, it is estimated that approximately 90% of these preschool teachers will meet the court's mandate (Ryan & Ackerman, 2004). In sum, these experiences echo Fullan's (1993) contention that implementation of a complex reform requires a "combination of individuals and societal agencies" (p. 41) in order to reach a policy's goals, rather than relying on just one aspect.

Ensuring That Supports Are Working

It should be noted, however, that New Jersey has experienced some snafus of its own. Some of the teachers participating in the scholarship program have experienced problems with timely tuition payments to their respective schools (Ackerman, 2004a). In addition, a recent study (Ryan & Ackerman, 2004) suggests that one-third of the teachers who are enrolled in coursework leading to this new credential do not intend to remain in their jobs in their state-funded, private preschools once they obtain their degree. Despite the state's efforts to achieve salary parity between public and nonpublic preschool providers, these teachers indicated that they would prefer to work in public school settings because of the better benefits and working conditions. Although staff with a BA degree and P-3 certification may be an essential part of a high-quality ECE setting, so is a stable, low-turnover workforce (Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990, 1998). There have also been problems—as previously discussed—among teachers who feel they need additional training in working with children who have special needs or whose first language is not English (Ryan, Ackerman, & Song, 2004).

The second key implication for policy makers and researchers, then, is that research is not only needed to determine what kinds of initial supports might be needed if a BA policy is put in place, but that ongoing, formative research is also needed to determine whether the supports that are intended to assist teachers in obtaining their BA are "working" (Weiss, 1998). One might assume that this process can be measured strictly through the numbers of ECE teachers who obtain a BA related to early childhood. Research should also provide, however, the opportunity for all stakeholders involved in this new policy to provide feedback regarding whether the underlying mechanics and strategies of the BA policy are in need of any "midcourse corrections" (Weiss, 1998, p. 25). This research could include feedback from teachers with regard to

accessing scholarships and coursework, as well as the usefulness of their studies in terms of its relevancy to their current classroom context. Instructors and key stakeholders in teacher preparation programs could also be given the opportunity to provide feedback on issues related to the capacity of their programs. State stakeholders could supply data on funding, including amounts provided and requests that could not be fulfilled. Researchers could also track changes in classroom quality through such measures as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998).

In conclusion, we know that better-educated teachers are in the best position to provide high-quality ECE to this nation's young children. The enactment of a new policy requiring all ECE teachers to obtain a BA related to early childhood is one step toward improving the quality of care and education that these children receive, whether they are enrolled in private ECE settings, Head Start centers, or state-funded preschools. In the end, however, we need more than new policies; we need to make sure that policies also provide the kinds of support that can help ECE teachers truly get "from here to there."

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