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Professional Development Needs and Interests of Early Childhood Education Trainers

Teresa A. Byington
University of Nevada, Reno

Michelle T. Tannock
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract

An online survey of early childhood education (ECE) trainers was conducted to assess their professional development needs and determine any differences between new and experienced trainers. Trainers identified teaching techniques and resources commonly used. The survey information is guiding the development of ECE trainer criteria in a southwestern state. The majority of survey respondents were female, Caucasian, and held a bachelor's degree or higher. ECE trainers were interested in receiving professional development on adult learning principles, teaching techniques, utilizing the latest research in ECE, and designing and presenting effective training. Participants indicated a preference for receiving training through online training modules and 2- to 3-hour training sessions. Trainers most frequently used handouts, lecture, and small and large group activities in training. ECE trainers expressed interest in participating in round table discussions and receiving monthly email messages containing trainer tips. The results of this study indicate that the ECE profession would benefit from strengthening the quality and quantity of professional development offered to trainers.

Introduction

The impact of training and education on child care providers has been the focus of extensive studies (Doherty, Forer, Lero, Goelman, & LaGrange, 2006; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Ghazvini & Mullis 2002). However, research on the professional development needs and interests of early childhood education (ECE) trainers has been limited.

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It may be assumed that individuals choosing to be ECE trainers already have the necessary education and experience needed to teach and train child care providers and other early childhood professionals. Some states have established ECE trainer criteria to specify qualifications, but criteria vary from state to state (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 2010). For example, in Georgia, a Trainer I is required to hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, have 3 years of ECE classroom experience and 60 clock hours of training on adult learning, and complete a 40-hour trainer's course (Georgia Early Care and Education Professional Development System, 2010). In contrast, a New Mexico Master Trainer I must hold an associate's degree or higher in early childhood education, have a minimum of 2 years of experience working with children, and present at least 20 hours of training with adult learners in the past 3 years (New Mexico Children Youth and Families Department, n.d.).

ECE trainers educate a diverse early childhood workforce with varying degrees of education, training, and

experience. This workforce in turn teaches populations of young children with a wide range of ethnicities, cultures, languages, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009). The skills, abilities, and learning approaches essential to delivering effective professional development merit examination.

Adult Learning

A greater understanding of how adults learn would help trainers structure educational activities designed to meet the needs of the learner (Merriam, 2008). Adult learning is more than just a cognitive process; it is influenced by life experiences and self-direction (Collins, 2004; Lawler, 2003). According to Collins (2004), training is most effective when adults are involved in planning the training and when instructors apply the following four principles:

1. Adults learn best when new information builds on their prior knowledge and experience. Teachers of adults are likely to find greater teaching success when they help learners connect past experiences to current information (Collins, 2004).

2. Adults are more motivated to learn if they are active participants and when they are viewed as partners in the learning process.

3. Adult learners are concerned with actual practice and want to apply their knowledge to present/personal situations within a problem-solving context. Participants become engaged in the learning process when they believe that the training meets a personal need and that they can integrate and apply the information to their current situation (Karagiorgi, Kalogirou, Theodosiou, Theophanous, & Kendeou, 2008; Lawler, 2003).

4. Adults benefit from training designed to contribute to their self-esteem and their personal and professional growth. A respectful, safe, and comfortable learning environment promotes optimum learning (Collins, 2004; Lawler, 2003). The application of adult learning principles can strengthen professional development outcomes.

Professional Development

Although there is a lack of research on the professional development needs of ECE trainers, many studies have examined the impact of training on the early childhood workforce. Professional development for child care providers has been shown to have positive impacts on children (Powell, Diamond, Burchinal, & Koehler, 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Fukkink and Lont (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of caregiver training focused on the question, "Does training matter?" The authors analyzed peer-reviewed publications dated 1980 to 2005 and concluded that specialized training with a focus on teacher-child interactions demonstrated a significant positive effect on the competence of child care providers. Results of the meta-analysis indicated that child care provider education and training appeared to be better predictors of child care quality than did provider age, employment experience, or mental health.

Ghazvini and Mullis (2002) found that the best predictors of higher-quality care and sensitive caregiver-child interaction in centers were (1) specialized training of caregivers, (2) higher adult-child ratios, (3) use of planned activities in the classroom, and (4) less perceived stress. Caregivers with formal and informal training in early childhood education were rated as sensitive in interactions with children. They provided higher-quality care than did caregivers with lower levels of training, even after adjusting for the caregiver's experience and differences related to adult-child ratios and type of classroom (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002).

Specialized child care provider training (Doherty et al., 2006; Ghazvini & Mullis, 2002), informal training (Burchinal et al., 2002), and continuous training (Norris, 2001) are correlated with higher-quality care. Training staff members has been shown to increase quality of care in infant-toddler classrooms (Campbell & Milbourne, 2005). Child care teachers with a more comprehensive education had higher-quality child care classrooms and better child outcomes (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). A teacher's professional development played an important role in how he or she educated young children (Bowman et al., 2000). Professional development enhanced teacher knowledge and skills, which led to improved teaching abilities and increased child achievement (Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008; Yoon et al., 2007). Teacher experience, teaching degrees or certification, and coursework in subject matter and pedagogy also have been shown to contribute to positive educational outcomes (Rice, 2003).

However, professional development efforts are not always seen as increasing a teacher's skills and ability to improve child outcomes (Karagiorgi et al., 2008). Helterbran and Fennimore (2004) assert that teachers sometimes view professional development as irrelevant, ineffective, and unrelated to needs of the children they teach. Professional development varies in content and format. In some cases, training requirements of a state or organization focus on the number of hours or credits completed by teachers instead of linking training to specific, relevant participant needs (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). Training is frequently offered through traditional trainer- or teacher-directed learning experiences (e.g., short workshops) with limited or no follow-up on learning attainment (Karagiorgi et al., 2008). These factors can decrease the effectiveness of the training.

An improved approach to professional development that includes a shared vision for planning, implementing,

and evaluating training has been recommended (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004; Buysse et al., 2009). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1993), to be effective and promote positive outcomes for children and families, professional development opportunities must meet the experience, background, and roles of caregivers with a diverse range of qualifications, experiences, and employment positions. Promising practices for professional development included training that was content specific, aligned with instructional goals, and sustained over time (Buysse et al., 2009). Professional development was found to be most effective when it was comprehensive and well integrated (Landry, Anthony, Swank, & Monseque-Bailey, 2009). Meaningful changes in teachers' knowledge and practice resulted from purposeful professional development combined with continued support (Ackerman, 2007; National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2008; Sheridan et al., 2009). Training was deemed most effective when participants gained a sense of ownership for self-development and created a continual cycle of learning (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

Professional development of early childhood teachers and child care providers has the potential to increase positive outcomes in children; therefore, determining the components of relevant and meaningful training is essential. Examining the professional development needs and interests of ECE trainers, those who train the teachers and child care providers, may offer insights into the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for effective instruction.

The purposes of this study were to assess the professional development needs and interests of Nevada's ECE trainers and to determine any differences in needs and interests between new and experienced trainers. Teaching techniques and resources commonly used by trainers were also identified. The advisory committee of the Nevada Registry (a clearinghouse of all trainer and training approval) recommended that ECE trainers be required to meet predetermined trainer criteria based on education and experience. The researchers in collaboration with the Nevada Registry conducted a statewide online survey to determine the current status of ECE trainers in Nevada. This information now guides the development of ECE trainer criteria.

Methods

An online survey method was selected in order to give all ECE trainers in the state an opportunity to participate and to reach the largest number of trainers within a limited time frame. The survey was designed to collect both demographic information and the participants' perceived professional development needs and interests.

Survey Content

The survey was composed of 31 questions. Demographic information was collected on gender, age, race, current position, employer, education level, and length of time in the ECE field. Questions included length of time as a trainer, number of trainings conducted, number of people trained, resources used to develop trainings, and types of training topics presented based on Nevada's eight Core Knowledge Areas (Table 1). Core Knowledge Areas are used to classify professional development into board categories. Each Core Knowledge Area is further broken down into core competencies or skills needed by adults working with young children (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 2009).

Table 1
Nevada's Core Knowledge Areas (CKA)

Core Knowledge Area	Average Ranking of CKA from 1 (most often presented) to 8 (least often presented)
Environment and Curriculum	2.59
Positive Interaction and Guidance	3.20
Human Growth and Development	3.81
Observation and Assessment	3.98
Health, Nutrition, and Safety	4.32
Family and Community Relationships	4.47
Leadership and Professional Development	5.26
Management and Administration	6.01

Respondents indicated the types of resources and information accessed to develop training. Trainers were presented a list of 16 different teaching techniques, including lecture, small group activities, and icebreakers. The participating trainers were asked to rate how often each technique was implemented during training (i.e., never, occasionally, half of my training, most of my training, or all of my training).

ECE trainers were asked to rate their interest level (low, medium, or high interest) for 15 topics related to teaching adult learners (e.g., designing and presenting effective training for adult learners, creating a positive emotional climate for involving participants). Of particular interest to the researchers was whether trainers had

received any instruction on teaching adult learners and if they would be interested in receiving training on this topic in the future. Participating trainers indicated ways that they supported their own professional development (e.g., attending conferences, completing college courses, keeping up to date on the latest research). They were also asked to select how they would prefer delivery of professional development (e.g., online training, training conferences).

Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed to 277 ECE trainers registered on the Nevada Registry's database. Nevada state child care licensing only accepts training clock hours from trainers approved by the Nevada Registry. An email notice was sent to all trainers indicating that an online survey was forthcoming. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey using the Dillman (2000) Tailored Design Method for Internet Surveys (email notice, email letter with survey, email follow-ups). Following the email notice, an email letter was sent that included the link to the survey. Two follow-up email messages were sent thanking those who had participated and inviting those who had not responded to complete the survey.

Potential respondents were informed that any individual information would be kept completely confidential and would only be released in aggregate form. They were advised that completing the survey was voluntary and submission of the survey implied passive consent to participate in the study.

Results

The findings of this study are presented in the following five areas: (1) respondent characteristics, (2) training frequency and focus, (3) teaching techniques and resources used, (4) professional development for trainers, and (5) teaching adult learners. Differences between new trainers (fewer than 3 years of experience) and experienced trainers (more than 10 years of experience) are described.

Respondent Characteristics

One hundred and sixty-six of the 277 identified ECE trainers responded to the survey (60% response rate). The average response rate to electronic surveys is 34% (Shih & Fan, 2008). The majority of respondents were female (97%), Caucasian (83%), and held a bachelor's degree or higher (74%). Of those indicating that they held a degree, 61% stated that the degree was in the field of early childhood education. Twenty-five percent had completed a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and 72% had worked in the field of ECE for 10 or more years. Trainers classified their current employer and employment position. The highest percentage of ECE trainers worked at a private child care center (28%) and listed administrator, director, or assistant director as their current position (42%). Twenty-seven percent of the trainers stated that they had been a trainer in the field of ECE for more than 10 years, 36% 4 to 10 years, 27% 1 to 3 years, and 10% less than one year. Not surprisingly, new trainers were younger than more experienced trainers (Table 2).

Table 2
Respondent Demographics

Demographic	Percentage of Respondents
Gender	
Female	97%
Male	3%
Ethnicity	
Caucasian/White	83%
African American	8%
Hispanic	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%
American Indian	1%
Other	2%
Age	
50 or older	30%
40 to 49	30%
30 to 39	28%
18 to 29	12%
Education	
Doctorate degree	1%
Master's degree	37%
Bachelor's degree	36%
Associate's degree	14%
High school graduate or GED	12%
CDA (Child Development Associate) Credential	

Yes	25%
No	75%
Current Position	
Director, assistant director, or administrator	42%
Trainer/consultant or professional in higher education	22%
Lead/Head Teacher	13%
Child care resource and referral or licensing specialist	9%
Family or group home care	2%
Other (e.g., Head Start supervisor, Literacy coach)	11%
Employer	
Private child care center	28%
State agency	15%
Self-employed	14%
Head Start	9%
Higher education	7%
Resource and referral	6%
Public schools	6%
Other	11%

Training Frequency and Focus

All training of child care providers in Nevada must be approved by the Nevada Registry in order to meet child care licensing training requirements. Sixty percent of the trainers indicated that they presented fewer than 12 trainings per year. Sixty-five percent stated that they do not charge for their training, and 55% of the self-reported trainings were open to the public. Generally, state agencies do not charge for training, and directors train staff free of charge. The greatest numbers of training were conducted in the Core Knowledge Areas of Environment and Curriculum, Positive Interaction and Guidance, and Human Growth and Development (see Table 1 above).

Teaching Techniques and Resources

Participating ECE trainers were presented a list of 16 common training techniques used to teach adult learners (e.g., PowerPoint, handouts, small group activities). They were asked to indicate how often they used each of the teaching techniques in their trainings. The response scale for identifying use was as follows: never, occasionally, half of my training, most of my training, or all of my training. Table 3 highlights each teaching technique and the percentage of ECE trainers indicating the use of the technique in at least half of their training. For example, 86% of trainers indicated that they use handouts in half, most, or all of their training; 73% used lecture; and 72% used small group activities. Respondents were able to include additional teaching techniques, which resulted in the listing of Webinars or Web site programs, field trips, and monthly book/article reading discussions. Experienced trainers indicated using a greater variety of teaching techniques than did new trainers.

Table 3
Teaching Techniques

Technique	Percentage Using Technique > 50% of the Time
Handouts	86%
Lecture	73%
Small group activities	72%
Large group activities	69%
Games or learning stations	60%
Hands-on or make-and-take projects	60%
Icebreakers	59%
PowerPoint	53%
Questionnaires/assessments	52%
Role play	49%
Video/DVD	37%
Music and/or movement	32%
Flipcharts	26%
Personal reflections or journal writing	19%
Overheads	17%
Other (e.g., webinars, field trips)	14%
Panels	7%

The majority of trainers indicated that they used the following resources to develop their training: materials developed by trainer (82%), research and/or journal articles (69%), materials developed by state agencies (45%), pre-packaged commercial training (31%), and materials developed by Cooperative Extension or higher education programs (22%). A higher percentage of experienced trainers (91%) reported using self-developed materials compared to new trainers (76%).

Professional Development for Trainers

Respondents were asked to indicate the method of delivery that they preferred for ECE trainer-specific professional development. The highest interest reported was in receiving training through online training modules or 2- to 3-hour training sessions. Experienced trainers reported less interest in online training modules than new trainers did. Moderate interest was listed for training at a preconference event or during the annual Nevada Association for the Education of Young Children Early Childhood Conference. The lowest level of interest was expressed for 2- to 3-day training seminars.

Trainers reported supporting their own professional development by attending local training on early childhood (73%), attending state (52%) and national (50%) ECE conferences, and completing college or university ECE courses (39%). Survey respondents additionally listed reading peer-reviewed research journals, taking online training courses, presenting at conferences, and attending leadership training as ways that they supported their own professional development.

The survey presented 15 potential training topics related to teaching adult learners. The list of topics was developed based on ideas from the Nevada state Trainer Criteria Workgroup and a review of common themes found in various ECE publications on designing effective training. The original list of about 25 topics was trimmed and consolidated to the final 15 items. The participants indicated whether they had high, medium, or low interest in each topic. Survey results indicated that the top three topics of interest were (1) utilizing the latest research in early care and education, (2) understanding adult learning principles and styles of learning, and (3) teaching techniques (e.g., learning stations, role play, games, facilitated discussion). A complete listing of the ranking of training topics is provided in Table 4. Survey respondents also listed two additional topics— training on licensing regulations and teaching adult learners how to effectively use behavior management skills. New trainers reported higher interest in creating an effective physical environment and using audiovisual materials than did experienced trainers.

Table 4
ECE Trainers' Interest in Training Topics

Topic	High Interest	Medium Interest	Low Interest
Utilizing the latest research in ECE	58%	35%	7%
Understanding adult learning principles	55%	34%	11%
Teaching techniques	52%	39%	9%
Designing and/or presenting effective training	51%	35%	14%
Creating a positive emotional climate	46%	37%	17%
Applying theories of child development	44%	42%	14%
Improving presentation skills	42%	32%	26%
Incorporating prekindergarten standards	40%	39%	21%
Inclusion/special needs	39%	44%	17%
Troubleshooting: disruptions, behavior	39%	34%	27%
Icebreakers and opening activities	39%	34%	25%
Incorporating core knowledge areas	38%	46%	16%
Using audiovisual materials	32%	43%	25%
Creating needs assessments/evaluations	29%	48%	23%
Creating an effective physical environment	26%	45%	29%

Survey participants were asked to indicate what motivated them to learn. The top three self-reported choices were (1) information relevant to current needs or concerns (92%), (2) personal improvement or sense of accomplishment (90%), and (3) desire to help others (87%).

Teaching Adult Learners

Almost half (49%) the trainers reported that they had taken a class or received specific training related to teaching adult learners. The percentage was higher for experienced trainers (71%) than for new trainers (31%). Eighty-two percent indicated an interest in taking a future class on adult learning principles.

Trainers specified that they stayed up to date on early care and education issues and trends by regularly utilizing Web sites related to ECE (87%) and reading publications such as *Young Children* (78%), ECE books (67%), and research journals (56%). New trainers reported using Web sites most frequently, whereas experienced trainers reported accessing information more often by reading publications. Eighty-nine percent of

the trainers were interested in receiving monthly emails containing trainer tips, and 73% stated that they would like to participate in quarterly networking round table discussions designed for trainers to share ideas. Experienced trainers expressed the highest interest in trainer tips and quarterly networking discussions.

Discussion

The results of this survey suggest that greater consideration should be given to the professional development of ECE trainers. It is essential that trainers be knowledgeable, qualified, highly effective instructors who have mastered training skills and who keep up to date on the latest research, concepts, and applications in the field of early childhood (Georgia Early Care and Education Professional Development System, 2010). According to survey respondents, a high percentage of training materials were developed by the trainers themselves, which invites the question of whether trainings they provide are consistently based on current research. In Nevada, trainers submit a training outline that is reviewed by the Nevada Registry. If the topics listed in the outline are deemed to be developmentally appropriate, training approval is given. The Nevada Registry does not actually observe the training or see what information is presented.

Participating ECE trainers indicated that they used research and journal articles as resources when developing the professional development training that they provided; however, it is generally understood that competent trainers need to possess more than just knowledge and experience in a topic area (Georgia Early Care and Education Professional Development System, 2010). Understanding of adult learning principles is also essential to ECE trainer effectiveness, enabling the trainers to provide professional development that is grounded in adult learning principles and is responsive to participants' skills and abilities.

Over half of the participating ECE trainers reported that they had attended a national and/or state conference in the past 2 years, yet it is unclear whether they subsequently used knowledge gained from conference attendance in the development of training. This uncertainty about whether training is based on current research calls for the attention of governing bodies such as state child care advisory boards. Clearly, those providing training must continually update their skills and knowledge base in order to teach the most current and effective educational practices to early childhood educators. It is promising to see that ECE trainers had high interest in receiving additional training on utilizing the latest research in ECE, understanding adult learning principles, and designing and presenting effective training.

Directors of child care centers often become ECE trainers in order to train their staff members. Forty-two percent of the respondents to this survey indicated a current employment position of administrator, director, or assistant director of a child care center. Although it is convenient and cost-effective for directors to train staff, the scope and depth or effectiveness of the training that they provide may need to be evaluated.

The majority of participating ECE trainers reported teaching fewer than one training session per month. Only 16% of trainers stated that they conducted two or more trainings per month. These ECE trainers were primarily employed by state agencies specializing in ECE training development and implementation.

Ninety-two percent of the participating ECE trainers indicated that receiving information relevant to current needs or interests motivated them to learn. They also indicated being highly motivated to learn when they felt a sense of personal accomplishment or improvement. This suggests that trainers themselves must be more than just receivers of information; they must feel actively involved in their own learning processes.

Survey participants listed training in particular Core Knowledge Areas (e.g., Management and Administration, Leadership and Professional Development, and Family and Community Relationships) as being presented to early childhood professionals the least often (see Table 1). The Nevada Office of Early Care and Education subsequently initiated a meeting of ECE training organizations to strategically plan future training priorities and to ensure that a full range of Core Knowledge Areas are targeted during the development of new training.

The participants reported using a variety of teaching techniques for delivery of training, with handouts and lecture listed as the most frequent techniques. This finding suggests that additional training on teaching techniques may be warranted, especially for new trainers. Overall, the high interest expressed in designing and presenting effective training indicates willingness by ECE trainers to strengthen and develop their teaching.

ECE trainers participating in this study reported a high interest in receiving further professional development. Many stated that they were already taking online training courses and utilizing Web sites to support their professional development. A majority of respondents expressed a desire to receive additional training online, which is consistent with the emergence, reported elsewhere, of computer technology as an effective tool for early childhood professional development. Performance feedback via electronic mail (Hemmeter, Synder, Kinder, & Artman, 2011), online coursework (Landry et al., 2009), and Web-mediated consultation (Pianta et al., 2008) have demonstrated positive results. The use of such technology in the professional development of ECE trainers should be further explored.

The results of the survey utilized in this study can provide suggestions for the types of professional development that ECE trainers are interested in receiving. The results also indicate that diverging needs and interests of new and experienced trainers must be taken into consideration. It is also evident that ECE trainers could benefit from receiving professional development focusing on adult learning principles and topics of high interest such as utilizing the latest research in ECE, employing a variety of teaching techniques, and designing

and presenting more effective training for adult learners.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this study. First, data collection was limited to ECE trainers in Nevada, restricting generalization of findings. The use of a self-administered survey limited the depth of information that could be gathered. The interest expressed by a trainer may not accurately reflect her or his actual need for specific training, which might have been garnered through other methods. In addition, indicating a need or interest in training topics may not translate into attendance at relevant training sessions. Factors such as location and timing of classes could also influence attendance. This study does, however, provide information related to the professional development needs and interests of a specified group of ECE trainers.

Recommendations

The ECE trainer survey discussed in this article offers insight into the current profile of trainers in Nevada. The following recommendations are based on the findings from the survey:

1. Professional development opportunities for ECE trainers should be expanded to include training on topics of high interest to the participants in this study, such as adult learning principles.

2. ECE trainer criteria should be established to ensure that trainers are knowledgeable in key areas and are qualified to teach or train early childhood professionals.

3. A statewide evaluation and quality assurance system for ECE professional development should be created and implemented to effectively evaluate the impact and validity of training experiences offered to early childhood professionals.

Professional Development Opportunities

To increase the effectiveness of their professional development, ECE trainers need to receive instruction on how to implement learner-centered teaching. Potential starting points are suggested by the high interest expressed by survey respondents in learning how to utilize the latest research in ECE and gain a greater understanding of adult learning principles. Engaging trainers in lifelong learning and reflection on current practices and beliefs can in turn strengthen the instruction that they provide (Gill, Kostiw, & Stone, 2010). Effective training can motivate learners to implement appropriate practices and be responsive and effective in teaching adults with diverse backgrounds.

ECE Trainer Criteria

Findings from this study suggest some recommendations specific to the state of Nevada, which might also be used by agencies in other states interested in improving ECE professional development. The Nevada Training Criteria Workgroup was charged with developing standards and requirements for ECE trainers. The rationale for developing and implementing criteria for trainers is twofold. First, it is assumed that having consistent standards for trainers will help to promote high-quality training. Second, standards can guide early childhood professionals in making informed decisions when selecting trainers and training for their professional development. It is recommended that the Trainer Criteria Workgroup proceed in four steps. First, review the criteria for ECE trainers used by other states. Second, develop ECE trainer criteria based on information from this study and the review of other states' criteria. Third, develop a phased-in implementation of trainer criteria for the state of Nevada. Finally, evaluate the effectiveness of the newly established criteria. Ideally, consistent national ECE trainer criteria will eventually be established to support the implementation of higher standards of professional development throughout the United States.

Creation and Implementation of Evaluation and Quality Assurance System

Evaluation of training quality is an important component of a training approval system. Creating a strong evaluation process and quality assurance system is essential. Quality assurance determines whether the system is meeting established standards and outcomes (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 2009). A quality assurance system should include components such as participant evaluations, periodic observations of and follow-up with trainers, and/or an online survey of training participants. As the results of this study demonstrate, trainers are seeking validation and standards for their practices. The Nevada Registry would be an ideal candidate for providing validation and standards. Trained evaluators should conduct observations of ECE trainers and collect feedback from training participants to enhance the quality of professional development.

Further research is required to determine how the amount, intensity, content, and quality of professional development is related to teacher and child outcomes. Characteristics of an effective trainer and training

instruction must be identified. One question needing further study is whether the background and education of an ECE trainer influences the effectiveness of training. Other areas to explore include factors related to the effectiveness of ECE training when various teaching techniques and adult learning principles are used. The needs of culturally diverse learners also warrant further study.

Summary

The professional development of child care professionals has been shown to produce positive outcomes for children (Bowman et al., 2000; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). However, limited research has been conducted on whether the background and education of an ECE trainer is related to the effectiveness of the training given. ECE trainers participating in this study indicated an interest in receiving professional development in adult learning principles, teaching techniques, and using the latest research in ECE. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and the state Trainer Criteria Workgroup are exploring the development of online training modules to address these needs.

Surveys, such as the one developed for this study, conducted in additional locales, could be utilized to determine whether trainers are prepared to provide high-quality learning experiences for the ECE workforce. Moreover, the ECE profession would benefit from strengthening the quality of professional development offered to trainers. Trainers have the power to transform teaching practices in early childhood settings and inspire classroom teachers to implement higher-quality approaches. Professional development of early childhood teachers is a critical element in increasing the quality of ECE programs. Educators can gain and maintain knowledge, skills, and competencies through high-quality training.

As with the ECE workforce, trainers should be offered continued, and varied, professional development opportunities designed to meet their needs and interests. The expansion of professional development opportunities for ECE trainers, the development of ECE trainer criteria, and the creation of an evaluation and quality assurance system will strengthen the quality of the training given to early childhood professionals.

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Author Information

Teresa A. Byington is an assistant professor/extension specialist in early childhood at the University of Nevada, Reno/University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. Her research interests focus on early childhood professional development (training, coaching), social-emotional development of young children, and child obesity prevention.

Teresa A. Byington
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
University of Nevada, Reno
8050 Paradise Road, Suite 100
Las Vegas, NV 89123
Telephone: 702-940-5421
Fax: 702-222-3100
Email: byingtont@unce.unr.edu

Michelle T. Tannock, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of early childhood education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her research interests include rough and tumble play, prosocial behaviors, and targeted mentoring. Dr. Tannock has published her findings internationally and presented her research at international conferences.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Education
Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative

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