



# TEACHER EDUCATION AND HIGH QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION

*Findings from the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium indicate that having teachers with formal education in child development is associated with higher program quality.*

policy brief

## **Background**

In 2001, university researchers and state program partners in four states (Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska) initiated the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium (MCCRC). The focus of the Consortium's work is to conduct a large longitudinal study on a range of issues associated with child care quality and conditions. Across the four states, a random selection of 2,022 child care providers participated in the study representing licensed infant, toddler, and preschool centers including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, license-exempt centers, and licensed and unlicensed family child care homes. In Missouri, 517 providers participated in telephone interviews. Of those, 110 providers were randomly selected to have a researcher visit her program to conduct an on-site assessment of child care quality.<sup>1</sup>

## **A National Perspective**

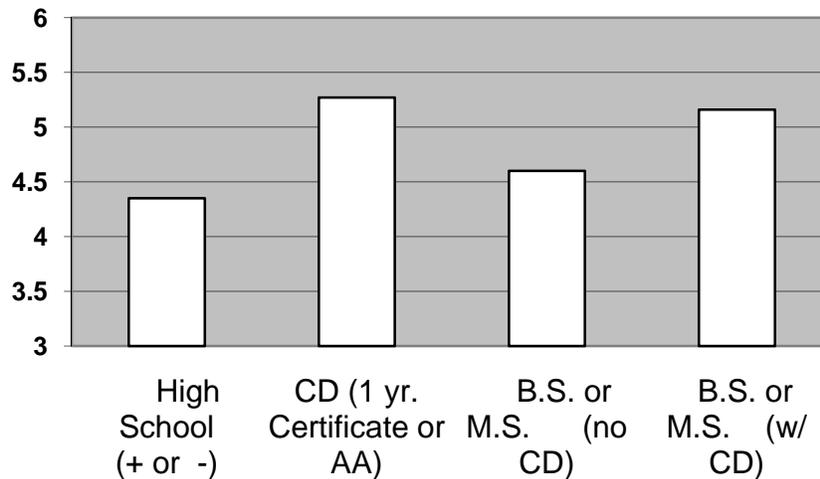
Across the nation, most states do not regulate the credentials needed by early childhood teachers. This includes prior experiences (e.g., supervised internships or training) and education (e.g., entry-level teacher education requirements).<sup>2</sup> One recent study indicated fewer than 50% of lead teachers in center-based programs have a four year degree (field of study unspecified).<sup>3</sup> Although teacher education tends to be low, research indicates a positive relation between the quality of early childhood programs, teacher education levels, and child outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Higher quality early childhood programs tend to employ teachers with more education and these same programs are associated with positive child outcomes. Research indicates high quality care has long-term benefits for children.<sup>5</sup>

## **Research Findings**

Based on the MCCRC study findings, the education level of early childhood teachers in Missouri is quite low. Approximately 31% of the teachers had a high school degree or less and another 30% had some type of education/training beyond high school but the education/training did not matriculate to a degree or certificate. A small percentage of teachers (22%) reported having a one- or two-year certificate/degree in child development (e.g., a Child Development Associate [CDA] or a degree from a community college). The last group, 16% of the sample, were teachers with at least a bachelor's degree. Several findings, related to teacher education, were associated to the licensing status of the program or the type of early childhood program:

- Teachers in licensed centers more frequently reported that they had completed the process to earn a CDA credential and they reported having more formal child development-related education than teachers in license-exempt centers.
- Teachers in licensed family child care homes, when compared to unlicensed, subsidy-receiving homes, were more likely to hold a CDA credential.

## Teacher Education with or without Child Development (CD) and Program Quality



### **Environmental Rating Scale:**

7 (Excellent); 5 (Good); 3 (Minimal), and 1 (Inadequate)

### **Education Levels:**

**High School (+ or -):** Individuals who had not yet graduated from high school, had a GED or a diploma, or had some type of education past high school but it did not matriculate toward a degree.

**CD (1 Year Certificate or AA):** Completed a one-year certificate, a CDA, or an AA in child development.

**B.S. or M.S. (w/o CD):** Completed one or more higher education degrees but the degrees did not have a child development emphasis.

**B.S. or M.S. (w/CD):** Completed one or more higher education degrees and the degree(s) had a child development emphasis.

Teacher education, with an emphasis in child development (CD), is positively correlated with higher scores on the environmental rating scales (for more information, see first endnote). The only two groups of teachers who worked in programs that had a quality score above the good (5.0) range were teachers with a formal education in the area of child development. The difference between the high school group and the one-year CD certificate/AA degree is statistically significant (4.4 and 5.3 respectively). The difference between the two other groups is not statistically significant. Rather, a trend, consistent with the first finding that child development education does make a difference in quality care, is indicated.

### **Policy Recommendations**

We know that children who attend higher quality programs enter school more prepared and we know that teachers with specific training in child development provide higher quality experiences in early childhood programs. It is time to consider:

- Requiring more education for our teachers of young children.
- Retaining the teachers who have more education – we must support efforts to ensure higher salaries and benefits for early childhood professionals.

<sup>1</sup> Each child care program was observed for two- to three-hours using one of the following instruments: Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale- Revised, Family Day Care Rating Scale, or the Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale

<sup>2</sup> U.S. House Ways and Means Committee. (2000). Green book. Retrieved September 17, 2002, from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/2000gb/sec9.txt>

<sup>3</sup> Early, D. M., & Winton, P.J. (2001). Preparing the workforce: Early childhood teacher preparation at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 285-306.

<sup>4</sup> NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2002). Child-care structure – process – outcome: Direct and indirect effects of child-care quality on young children's development. *Psychological Science*, 13(3), 199-206.

<sup>5</sup> Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M.L., Kagan, S.L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., Rustici, J., & Zelazo, J. (1999). *The children of the cost, quality, and outcomes study go to school: Executive Summary*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

(Thornburg, K., Scott, J., & Mayfield, W., 2002)

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***For a complete list of references or more information about this topic, contact the Center for Family Policy & Research***  
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