

WholeChild

Developments



MIDWEST WHOLECHILD DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Fall/Winter 2003

Volume 1, Issue 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

**Imagine That!
Teacher Education
for Early Childhood
Professionals**

L. Carol Scott

**From Babysitter to
Childhood Educator
– The Journey to
Professionalism**

Shirley Stubbs Gillette

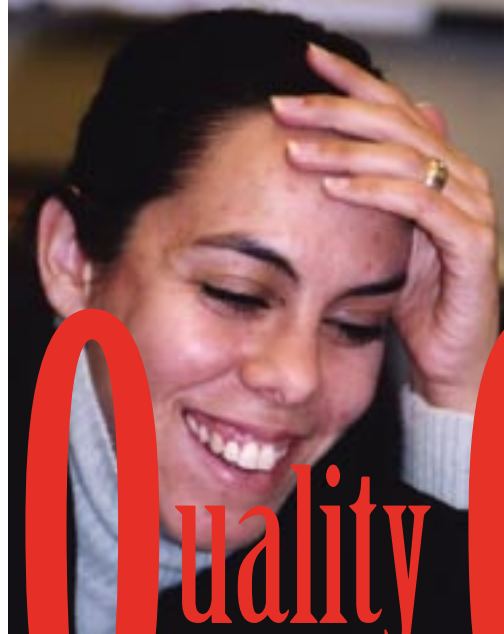
**Advocacy
for Child Care –
The Power to Make
a Difference**

Sandy Braden

**Magazine Survey
Let Us Know
What You Think**



8001 Conser, Suite 280
Overland Park, KS 66204
913 341-6200



Quality Connection

The link

between professional development and the quality of care and teaching of young children



Imagine That! Teacher Education for Early Childhood Professionals

L. Carol Scott, PhD



L. Carol Scott, PhD, is a consultant in early education systems development. She holds a master's degree in early childhood education and a doctorate in developmental and child psychology, both awarded by the University of Kansas, Lawrence. She is currently working on an initiative to create better access to early childhood education programs as well as business planning and an entrepreneurship curriculum for family child care business owners.

Imagine that it's the first day of kindergarten. All the neighborhood parents are bringing their fresh-faced, excited or anxious, backpack-laden youngsters into the kindergarten classroom of your local elementary school. A group of excited and anxious parents have gathered around the teacher as the children begin to put away their backpacks and explore the classroom. One parent, eager to get to know the teacher, asks where she went to school. The teacher replies, "Oh, I don't have a degree in early childhood education." She smiles brightly, "But I do get ten hours of workshop training every year!"

Imagine that! How do you think parents of school-age children would react to the knowledge that their child's teacher has no college education in how to teach and nurture the minds of their young children? Do you think they would accept ten hours of workshop training, knowing that this teacher will provide the foundation their children will need for reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies?

Yet parents accept this level of education in their children's teachers every day in early learning programs for children from birth to age five. These programs serve children during the period of their most rapid brain development, when the true foundations of all future learning are literally built from scratch. Every success children have in elementary school and beyond can be directly tied to the quality of the environments they were in before kindergarten. Yet, teaching staff in most states' early learning programs – that's right, in child care centers, preschools, and family

child care homes – have lower education requirements than beauticians, manicurists, and dog groomers.

A Brief History

The importance of teacher education for the future well being of the education system cannot be overestimated or left to chance.

This quotation from a recent article in the Sunday Times of South Africa refers to K-12 education and could easily have come from our own country's history. Less than 100 years ago, education for children ages eight to fourteen was not required by all states. Before 1918, children did not need to attend school and teachers were not usually educated. They were young, unmarried, women, available for teaching by virtue of not having children of their own. Now that same history and quote seem to apply to programs that serve children from birth to the day they enter kindergarten.

We no longer accept that teachers in kindergarten and the early grades can educate children without specialized professional preparation. But we routinely accept nothing more than a high school diploma and a few hours of workshops each year for teachers of children younger than kindergarten. Family child care providers and the classroom staff in child care centers and preschools are certainly educators of children from birth to five. They and the children's parents are the two most crucial ingredients in their later success in school and in their lives beyond graduation. No imagination is needed here. Research from hundreds of studies in

neuroscience over the past ten years, and in child development over the past thirty years provides conclusive evidence that the early years are the most significant learning years of a child's entire life.¹

Recent research concludes beyond any doubt that the education of teachers in early learning programs is the most significant factor in determining the quality of the program for children. On September 23, 2003, the Trust for Early Education (TEE) released a new study that showed that prekindergarten teachers with bachelor's degrees and specialized training in child development raise prekindergarten program quality and provide better outcomes for children. According to the author, Marcy Whitebook:

The evidence is clear and convincing: teachers with bachelor's degrees are more successful in the classroom and do a better job at preparing children who are ready to learn upon entering kindergarten. The teacher behaviors and skills that have the greatest impact on program success are best achieved through a four-year college degree with specialized training in early childhood education or child development.

Whitebook's report, which reviews eight major research studies on prekindergarten quality, includes several critical findings on the importance of having bachelor-qualified teachers in prekindergarten classrooms.² Two findings are most important:

- Prekindergarten teachers with a bachelor's degree were found to be

significantly more sensitive and less detached in their interactions with children than were teachers without a bachelor's degree.

- Children in programs led by a teacher with a bachelor's degree received higher language scores and exhibited a higher level of peer play than children taught by teachers without a bachelor's degree.

More than anything, parents want their young children to be happy, well adjusted, and ready for success in school. Higher levels of teacher education in their children's early learning program are needed to provide these outcomes. As parents become increasingly better informed as consumers of early learning programs, they are beginning to seek programs that employ teachers with degrees in early childhood education or child development.

Research from hundreds of studies in neuroscience over the past ten years, and in child development over the past thirty years provides conclusive evidence that the early years are the most significant learning years of a child's entire life.¹

Incentives and Disincentives

At first, they may be frustrated. According to *The Status of Early Learning in the Greater Kansas City Area – 2003*, only 16 percent of the teachers in area child care centers and only 16 percent of family child care providers currently hold degrees in early learning (associate and bachelor levels, combined). However, these figures are trending upward. In the 1996 status report, only 11 percent of center staff and 1 percent of family child care providers held degrees.

Over the intervening years, the Fern Webster Fund at the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning has provided scholarships to over 600 early learning professionals. Already, 140 of these teachers and family child care business owners have earned degrees using Fern Webster Fund scholarships, while another 330 continue to take classes and move toward graduation. A total of 17,000 college credit hours have been logged.

So why is it taking so long to change the entire system? Members of the early childhood workforce are just as clear as parents about what they want. They want professional recognition for the important job they do and professional wages to go with the respect. It's not too difficult to imagine their goal, but they are caught in a dilemma.

Can workers who only take ten to twelve hours of workshop training each year expect to make the same wages as those who hold bachelor's degrees? Certainly not. But, as those who are riding the crest of this trend toward increased professional development in early learning programs are finding out, professional wages don't automatically follow the earning of a credential. A massive reform of the early learning field is needed and is on the way. The pending federal requirements that Head Start teachers must earn bachelor-level degrees points in that direction.

In the meantime, Kansas City-area early learning teachers with degrees are still earning an average of \$8.25 per hour, as compared to the \$23.57 per hour earned by an elementary school teacher. According to the 2003 Status Report, more than 50 percent of family child care providers earn less than \$15,000 per year, after taxes and business expenses.

Professional development – as defined by college degrees – will eventually lead early learning teachers to professional status and higher compensation. Salaries have increased in a slow but steady trend over the past several years. Many policymakers in the Kansas City metropolitan area and across the country are seeking effective solutions to these wage and education gaps affecting the teachers of our youngest children. A grant-funded program that supports higher wages at forty local child care centers is showing significant improvements in quality care for children. For example, these centers recently reported a turnover rate of 9.5 percent, as compared to a metrowide average of 42 percent.

Moving Ahead

The way out of this dilemma is clear but difficult. Professional development – professional degrees – must come before professional compensation advances. Low wages serve as a disincentive for the early learning workforce. “Why should I go to college and earn a degree,” workers ask, “to keep making \$8 per hour?” Because you'll never earn more than that until you do earn degrees – all of you.

Clearly, professional development is the answer, no matter which side of the child you are connected to. Higher levels of professional development in child care center teachers and family child care providers will get parents the kind of nurturing and support they want for their children's success. Achieving higher levels of professional development will get child care center teachers and family child care providers the respect and – eventually – the compensation they so richly deserve.

Imagine that!

Notes

1. For more information, see results at age 27 on children from the Perry Preschool Project research by Dr. Lawrence J. Schwienhart; results at age 21 on children from the Abecedarian Project research by Dr. Craig Ramey. See also *Rethinking the Brain*, by Rima Shore, for insights into the positron emissions tomography research by Dr. Harry Chugani, a neuroscientist at Michigan's Children's Hospital. Finally, the executive summary of *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, provides an excellent summary of key issues.
2. The full report is available for download at www.trustforearlyed.org. The Trust for Early Education (TEE) was established in 2002 by The Education Trust with a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and other funders. Contact Amy Wilkins of the Trust for Early Education, 202-293-1245, ext. 295, for more information about TEE.

