

From Child Care Provider to Professional Educator: Funding for Professional Development is Changing the Face of Child Care

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We used to call it training. Twenty-five years ago, at the beginning of my career in early education, educational opportunities for those who worked in child care centers and family child care homes, Head Start and other preschool were all workshops and conferences. And we called it training.

Today, research from neuroscience requires that we acknowledge that child care centers and homes, Head Start and other preschool programs are all engaged in early education. They are responsible, along with parents, for most of the capacity of the “school-ready” brains that enter kindergarten. So, we are required to acknowledge that those who work with children in these pre-kindergarten programs are also educators – not “providers” of custodial care or babysitters. We must, then, also acknowledge that the educators responsible for the most important years of a child’s education can’t get by on “training.” They must be provided with myriad experiences to develop them – continuously shape them – as professionals.

Professional development for early education teachers, regardless of where they work, falls into three broad categories:

- Credential-earning higher education
- Continuing education
- Reflective teaching practice

New federal and state mandates and programs are rapidly increasing the consumption of credential-earning higher education by the Kansas early childhood workforce.

Fifty percent of Head Start teachers are required to hold a college degree in early childhood education by September 2003. Early Head Start teachers are required to obtain a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. In preschools funded by Title I, paraprofessionals are now required to have a two-year degree in early childhood education.

In Kansas, the movement to professionalize early education has brought us:

- A pilot of the federal Early Childhood Apprenticeship Program, a scholarship and support program to help current employees earn the CDA and the Early Childhood Apprenticeship certificate.
- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood ® Kansas, a scholarship program to help current employees earn two- and four-year degrees in early childhood education.
- W.A.G.E.\$, a compensation program that enhances the low salaries of early education teacher, to help employers retain these professionals.

- The new teacher license for early childhood education, which certifies teachers from birth through third grade for competencies in early childhood education and early childhood special education.
- A state regulation that requires Head Start and Early Head Start employees of school districts to be certified early childhood teachers.

Also in Kansas, the Access to Early Childhood Higher Education (AECHE) committee is supporting faculty and students through strategic planning, research and communications. The committee's work, funded by a grant from the Region VII Head Start Bureau, is supported by leadership from the Departments of Social and Rehabilitation Services and Education, KACCRRRA, and the Region VII Head Start Quality Improvement Center. The AECHE committee has published a directory of early childhood certificate and degree programs at Kansas institutions of higher education and a list of all infant/toddler-specific coursework available in Kansas. A third publication, detailing early childhood articulation agreements between Kansas' two- and four-year colleges and universities, will be available in early 2003. The AECHE committee also provides professional development for college and university early childhood faculty, and facilitates their communication, planning and decision making.

At the cusp between 2002 and 2003, this is the landscape of professional development for early childhood educators in Kansas. And 25 years ago – just 10 years ago – we had workshops and called it training....