

Research Notes

Published by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University

SUMMER 2008

Professional Development: The Landscape of Opportunity in Early Care and Education

In its position statement on professional development, NAEYC reinforces the prevailing wisdom of the field that early childhood staff should have ongoing training to improve their knowledge and practice.¹ While state licensing standards interpret this recommendation differently, leaders in the field are in staunch agreement that professional development is an essential component of administering high-quality programs.

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership recently conducted a study to understand more about the different kinds of professional development experiences offered in center-based early care and education programs.² The research sought to answer three questions: 1) What professional development opportunities are most frequently offered in centers? 2) Do professional development opportunities offered vary by program type? 3) Is the level of education of the director related to the provision of professional development offered to teachers?

Sample and Measures

The *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* (ECWES)³ was administered to 2,285 early childhood teachers in 176 programs in 17 states. The ECWES measures ten dimensions of organizational climate. For this study, the *Opportunities for Professional Growth* subscale was used. This subscale taps into teachers' perceptions regarding whether particular activities that support their professional growth are available in their programs. The proportion of staff responding affirmatively to an item was converted to an item score which ranged from 0-10 points. Item scores were then added together to derive a total subscale score (0-100 points). Center directors were administered a survey to obtain information on their level of education and the type of program in which they worked.

Findings

Table 1 provides a rank ordering of the professional development opportunities that teachers perceive are offered to them most frequently.

As can be seen by these analyses, child care programs do support teachers' professional development by offering in-service training and encouraging staff to improve their level of competence. However, activities that require more resources, such as implementing a career ladder for professional advancement or providing released time for teachers to observe in model programs is not as readily available at centers.

Table 1. Rank Ordering of Different Professional Development Opportunities Provided by Programs

The center...	The Mean
• Provides on-site staff development workshops	9.63
• Encourages staff to share resources with one another	9.35
• Encourages staff to learn new skills and competencies	8.84
• Provides released time to attend conferences	7.10
• Provides a library of professional books for staff to use	6.65
• Provides tuition reimbursement for college courses	6.08
• Provides guidance for professional advancement	4.84
• Subscribes to professional journals and magazines	4.59
• Provides released time to visit other programs	2.77
• Implements a career ladder for professional advancement	2.76

To understand whether different types of center-based programs provide different levels of professional development support, an analysis of variance was conducted. ANOVA for the overall model found $f=5.15$; $p=.0001$ with all post hoc tests referenced yielding p values of $>.05$.

Table 2. The Provision of Professional Development by Center Type

Type of Center	N	%	Mean	Range
For-profit, private proprietary or partnership	34	19%	44	10 - 84
For-profit corporation or chain (e.g., Kindercare, Children's World, La Petite Academy)	20	11%	41	14 - 64
For-profit corporate sponsored (e.g., Bright Horizons Family Solutions)	7	4%	66	55 - 76
Private nonprofit independent	48	27%	51	15 - 85
Private nonprofit affiliated with social service agency, community center, or hospital	29	17%	56	26 - 81
Private non-profit sponsored by federal, state or local government	29	17%	45	22 - 67
College or university affiliated	9	5%	57	15 - 82
Total	176	100%	49	10 - 85

Continued on back page

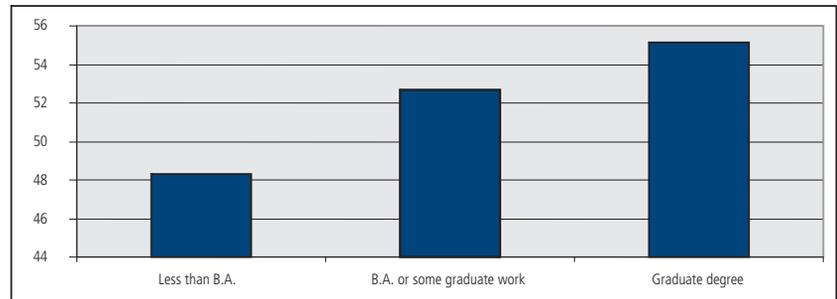
The results of the data analysis suggest that for-profit, corporate-sponsored programs offer more professional development opportunities than private and chain for-profit programs or publicly supported nonprofit programs. Further, nonprofit centers associated with social service agencies offer more professional development opportunities than private, nonprofit centers. It is important to note that less than 5% of centers in this study were classified in the for-profit, corporate-sponsored category. Additional research is needed to determine if this sample is representative of how well this sector of the industry supports the professional development of early childhood practitioners.

Of the 118 directors providing information on their level of education, 24% had completed less than a B.A. degree, 38% had completed a B.A. degree or some graduate work and 38% had completed a master's or doctoral degree. By examining their center's average *Opportunities for Professional Growth* scores, it can be seen that directors who are more highly educated tend to provide their teachers with slightly more opportunities to enhance their professional growth.

Implications for Practice

Improving the quality of early care and education has become a top priority for early childhood advocates and policymakers. Providing teachers with professional development opportunities is considered a paramount strategy to improving quality and children's developmental outcomes. In general, state-level quality improvement dollars have been used to improve classroom materials and support on-site and off-site training.

Figure 1. Directors' Level of Education and the Provision of Professional Development Opportunities



Advocacy agencies that have been tasked with providing quality improvement support may consider building qualified substitute pools to help child care programs provide released time for teachers to observe model programs and attend college classes. Earmarking some of these dollars for staff compensation as teachers improve their professional development and providing further funding for T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships or other scholarship models that require a commitment from the recipient to remain in the field would be an effective strategy for supporting and retaining highly qualified teachers.

Local child care resource and referral offices that have been tasked with improving child care quality may also consider providing additional outreach to private and chain for-profit programs to help them access community-based training opportunities and assist them in developing and implementing professional development plans.

It is important to note that while directors with higher educational levels in this study did tend to offer more professional development opportunities to their teachers, directors from all types of programs still only provided moderate support for professional development. In part, this could be due to the fact that many directors have not had specialized training in supervision, coaching, and mentoring staff.

Strengthening state licensing standards to require that directors have a minimum of a B.A. with specialized training in program administration would be a bold step toward improving their ability to professionally support their teachers. Helping individual programs implement career ladders tied to increased compensation for their teachers would be another important strategy to improving teacher competence and thus children's learning and achievement.

It is also important to note that this research did not attempt to evaluate the quality of the professional development opportunities offered to staff employed in these programs. Future research should examine the quality of training and which types of professional development opportunities have the most impact on improving classroom practices and children's developmental outcomes.

References

1. National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1993). *A conceptual framework for early childhood professional development: A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Washington, DC: Author.
2. The Center acknowledges the research support of Lisa Boggess whose master's thesis on this topic was the impetus for this Research Note.
3. Bloom, P.J. (1996). *Improving the quality of work life in the early childhood setting: Resource guide and technical manual for the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* (Revised edition). Wheeling, IL: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University.

For further information about research conducted by the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, call 800-443-5522, ext. 5060. Funding for the Center's Research Notes is provided by the McCormick Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Illinois Department of Human Services. Individuals may photocopy and disseminate freely.