



Society for Research in Child Development

Office for Policy and Communications

1313 L Street, NW • Washington, DC 20005
OFFICE: (202) 289-7905 • FAX: (202) 289-4203

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Contact Information:

Andrea Browning
Society for Research in Child Development
Office for Policy and Communications
(202) 289-7905
abrowning@srcd.org

Preschool Teacher Education Alone Unlikely to Improve Classroom Quality or Learning

Policymakers are increasingly requiring that public preschool teachers have at least a bachelor's degree, preferably in early childhood education. Rather than focusing solely on teachers' educational attainment, however, they should take a broad approach, supporting effective and comprehensive professional development activities. An analysis of seven major studies of early care and education suggests that policies focused solely on teacher education are not likely to increase classroom quality or boost children's academic gains.

The analysis is published in the March/April 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*. It is especially relevant given the rise in state and federal funding of programs that seek to provide early education for 4-year-olds.

A group of researchers led by scholars at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill looked at seven major studies of preschool classrooms. The studies were conducted in different parts of the country and included teachers and children from varying backgrounds. Teacher education was considered over and above other potentially important factors, such as class size, length of school day, poverty, and children's skills when they started preschool.

The researchers found that, for the most part, more teacher education was not linked to better classroom quality or greater learning. Neither teacher education nor teachers' degree—including whether or not the teacher had studied early childhood education—was related to classroom quality or children's learning.

"These findings indicate that policies aimed at increasing preschool teacher education alone are unlikely to improve quality or children's learning," said Diane M. Early, a researcher at the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the study's lead author. "Instead, teachers' education must be considered as one of several factors that contribute to teacher quality, thereby improving classroom quality and children's gains. We recommend that policymakers not emphasize one component (such as teachers' education) as more important than others but instead support policies that address the multiple components necessary to provide a high-quality preschool education."

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 2, *Teachers' Education, Classroom Quality, and Young Children's Academic Skills: Results from Seven Studies of Preschool Programs* by Early, DM, Maxwell, KL, Burchinal, M (FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Alva, S (Westat Inc.), Bender, RH (RTI, International), Bryant, D, Cai, K, Clifford, RM (FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Ebanks, C (Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education), Griffin, JA (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH), Henry, GT (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Howes, C (University of California at Los Angeles), Iriondo-Perez, J (RTI, International), Jeon, H-J (University of California at Los Angeles), Mashburn, AJ (University of Virginia), Peisner-Feinberg, E (FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Pianta, RC (University of Virginia), Vandergrift, N (FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), and Zill, N (Westat Inc.). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.