



higher education: a closer look

by Gwen Morgan

As the United States moves toward expanding programs for pre-kindergarten children — in Universal Preschool (UPK) movements — we in higher education are asking ourselves some how-to questions about implementation. The following are nine facts about higher education.

■ **Demand is growing for teachers qualified with a bachelor's degree in Early Care and Education (ECE).** Thirty-eight states have state-funded Pre-K, and 33 of them increased their enrollment in 2008 (NIEER Yearbook, 2008). More than 200,000 skilled and knowledgeable teachers will be needed in ECE classrooms if UPK voluntary programs were nationwide, as estimated by Dick Clifford at the University of North Carolina's Frank

Porter Graham Center. We know that young children are vulnerable to harm if their teachers lack the necessary early childhood skills and developmental knowledge. We know that the expected positive results of Pre-K education — engaged learning, emotional resiliency, social skills, and academic achievement — are related to early childhood teaching skills and knowledge.

■ **The capacity of Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) is inadequate to meet this demand.** There are not enough current teachers with ECE knowledge and skills to come close to meeting the estimated demand. Approximately 1,551 IHEs grant degrees in ECE. Of these, 56% are 2-year institutions, and 44% are 4-year institutions (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Ginder, & Miller, 2007; Maxwell, 2006).

■ **The number of college degrees in early care and education (ECE) is small compared to the demand.** There were 27,000 U.S. graduates with degrees in ECE in the four-year period 2003-2006, including both 2- and 4-year degrees. That makes only 6,250 degrees a year during that period.

■ **College degrees in ECE are relatively new, because developmental science**

is relatively new. Some began as ECE teacher training institutions and the first became a college in 1889. In 1923, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund funded the development of new ECE teacher preparation programs in higher education, led by Lawrence K. Frank. Frank once remarked that he looked forward to the programs developed in the Departments of Home Economics because they had a long-standing history of working in partnership with families. Twenty years later, when the Kaiser Shipyards created an exemplary ECE program for working families during wartime, they hired all the ECE college-trained teachers they could find in the nation.

Prior to federal funding for ECE in 1962, there were said to be only four colleges granting ECE degrees. Graduates of these few early childhood degree programs started their own programs for children. Many were employed to work in parent cooperative programs or other licensed child care programs, or went on to become faculty in the new departments being created in 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education. They left a legacy of classroom practices and traditions in the field of practice.

■ **The percentage of degreed ECE teachers and directors in the workforce**

Ms. Morgan has been at Wheelock College since 1972 as adjunct faculty, and as a leader in national research projects. Currently, she is Senior Fellow for Early Education and Care Policy. In her years in the field, Ms. Morgan has worked with others to found many new organizations, including: The KLH Child Development Center; The Advanced Management Seminars for Child Care Directors at Wheelock; The National Association of Regulatory Administrators (licensors); Work/Family Directions; Wheelock's Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education; The Child Care Action Campaign; and The Forum on Professional Workforce Development at NAEYC.

has been losing ground. In 1983, 43% of teachers and directors in the early childhood workforce had degrees; but two decades later, in 2004, the percentage had shrunk to 30% (Hertenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005).

- **The current ECE degrees are granted through a hard-to-classify array of different departments at the 2- and 4-year level.** A recent study of ECE degree programs found that 73% of bachelor's degree programs in ECE are housed in Schools of Education, and most of the remainder are in departments called Child and Family Studies, or Home Economics. The 2-year degree programs in ECE are classified as follows: Education 17%; Social or Behavioral Sciences 17%; Child Development or Family Studies 12%; Health-related Departments 11%; Arts and Sciences 9% (Maxwell, 2006).

To provide an example of the variability of the degrees offered, six California colleges are working together in a collaborative regional workforce development project in Santa Clara and Alameda Counties. Among the six, their ECE degrees had four different titles: 1) Child Development; 2) Child and Adolescent Development; 3) Liberal Arts Studies with Concentration on Child, Family, and Society; and 4) Human Development with an Early Childhood Emphasis and a Teacher Educator Minor.

The variety makes it difficult to classify and compile national statistics on the number of colleges offering ECE degrees. Some articulation agreements resolve differences, as in the case of the California examples above.

- **Most articulation agreements between the associate and the bachelor's degrees, whether voluntary or mandated by the states, fail to resolve the barriers to transfer credit** (Gross & Goldhaber, 2009).
- **Not all ECE degree programs are accredited by NAEYC/NCATE.** Since

it is difficult to get a list of all the colleges that grant degrees in the field, it is impossible to determine what percentage of colleges offering ECE degrees are accredited by the standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for ECE accreditation of 2- and 4-year colleges.

- **Not all teachers qualified with ECE degrees demonstrate ECE knowledge and skill in the classroom.** New research brings us a startling realization. Even if we multiplied the number of colleges and their graduates by ten, we still might not have enough teachers who have the basic competencies associated with successful child outcomes. Academic credentials do not correlate with ECE competencies. Degrees and other structural characteristics of an early childhood program do not guarantee engaged learning, academic achievement, social competence, and emotional resiliency for children. In one study, teachers and children were observed in the classroom and teachers' competencies were rated by the CLASS instrument in two major teaching areas: emotional support and instructional support. The study found that only 15% of highly-qualified teachers received the highest rating on both these dimensions. Most were mediocre and some were not competent.

The need for systems-level changes in workforce development

The nine facts summarized above add up to a serious problem for the ECE field. Many states are making changes in their workforce development systems to assure high-quality ECE programs for young children. These changes in state-level workforce development systems will need to solve the cross-sector systems problems that infect the ECE field:

- inconsistent standards, not aligned across funding streams
- lack of policy alignment across the different funding streams
- lack of continuity for children
- unaligned role qualifications
- inequitable compensation, and
- formidable barriers that block the pathways toward degrees for adult workers in the ECE field

In Part 2 of this article, I will describe some promising practices in early childhood workforce development that address two bridges that are being built: 1) A bridge that allows a participant to walk into a college course, carrying some of her past recorded coursework, training, and supervised experience; and 2) A bridge between the 2- and 4-year degrees. Both of these bridges are important. Both are essential to the capacity of IHEs to produce ECE graduates.

References

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