



## The Effectiveness of Early Childhood Teachers

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### **Abstract**

The complexity of teaching and the intricacies of the varied early childhood education systems contribute to the multiple considerations regarding development, method of delivery, intended and needed outcomes, and issues and next steps for professional development in early childhood education. There are several promising practices and directions currently underway for professional development and learning. Recommendations from professional organizations as well as emerging research are providing guidance for next steps. They are calling attention to professional learning and effective teachers and their essential role in the children's high-quality experiences in early care and education settings and in developing early childhood education as a profession.

**Keywords:** *Effectiveness; Early Childhood Teachers*

### **Introduction**

Effective teaching requires continual professional learning and support. Not all teachers currently teaching in early childhood classrooms have had opportunities to develop and implement these skills and practices: in fact, professional development can serve as “default preparation” for some teachers, addressing areas in which teachers need additional information and/or practice and support. Given that teachers take multiple routes to becoming an early childhood teacher and being an effective teacher is an ongoing process, professional development for teachers with all levels of expertise is critical to developing a high-quality workforce (LeMoine, 2008). Ongoing professional development is considered critical to teachers' continued development and effectiveness. A growing body of literature demonstrates that professional learning and development opportunities for early childhood teachers can promote effective teaching strategies and facilitate best practices for teachers already in the classroom. Recent work in conceptualizing professional development in early childhood education has suggested the components and methods of professional development can interact and influence one another to ultimately improve outcomes for children and families.

Professional development has multiple components; of importance in these efforts are the words “know”, “understand,” and “use”. Knowledge is obtaining information, understanding is reflection on the

information, and using is applying the information in teaching practices. Research advances have identified two major characteristics to a successful professional development program: first, having a goal of improving teachers' practices and children's learning across a variety of areas, and second, having a professional development model that is replicable and facilitates participation and fidelity to the program (Robert C. Pianta, Bridget K. Hamre & Hadden, 2012).

The complexity of teaching and the skills required of effective teachers have been examined, and findings have revealed that professional development can change and improve some of the strategies teachers use to teach young children and the interactions they have with children (Heejeong Sophia Han, 2012). In fact, professional development for in-service teachers has been conceptualized as a change agent or "pathway" for improving children's learning experiences (E.A Parker, 2015). Although the field of early childhood education has made significant gains in understanding the experiences of young children in early childhood classrooms, many questions remain in terms of the support needed for teachers to be effective in providing high-quality experiences for young children and supporting their learning. Understanding the evolution of professional development and the research supporting current practices related to professional development underscores the importance and relevance of current recommendations in the field and illuminates next steps for the profession.

Professional development for in-service teachers as serving as both a source of content information and implementation support for teachers, to further support the development of effective teachers who can provide high-quality experiences for children across a variety of early childhood settings, as well as being important to teacher well-being and their role as adult learners. The importance and centrality of the role of the teacher in early childhood education experiences has been widely recognized in the field of early childhood education, and high-quality early education with effective teachers has been documented to be associated with positive outcomes for children, research has consistently shown the importance of children's early education and care experiences (Mashburn et al., 2008). Effective teachers demonstrate specialized knowledge in children's development and learning across multiple content areas, implement responsive and supportive caregiving and teaching, possess the skills to work with families and communities, and cultivate positive interactions and relationships with children (Jack P. Shonkoff & Deborah A. Philips, 2000).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children highlighted the interrelatedness of effective teachers with outcomes for children, defining effective teachers as those who have had high-quality preparation and participate in ongoing professional development. Professional development has the intended goals of improving child outcomes, as well as supporting, sustaining, and improving the quality and professionalism of the workforce. Teaching is a complex endeavor requiring multiple skills across several areas including knowledge/content, teaching strategies, interactions, and relationship development and maintenance, as well as positive teacher characteristics such as professional dispositions, feelings of efficacy and ultimately, longevity in the field.

### ***Early Childhood Teacher***

Professional development in early childhood education has existed for many decades and taken many forms. Professional development at the in-service level as opportunities to gain new knowledge and skill through learning experiences that are "grounded in theory and research; outcome based; structured to promote linkages between theory and practice; and responsive to each learner's background, experiences, and the current context of his/her role". Whitebook Marcy, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai and Kipnis (2009) suggested that professional development can be used as a broad umbrella term for the many professional learning opportunities and experiences teachers may have. Over the years, professional development has taken many forms: community college and university courses; in-service training sessions or workshops;

observation with feedback from a colleague; and coaching, as well as other forms of job-related technical assistance.

High-quality professional development ideally includes the development and implementation of individual professional development plans that have been formed based on the context in which they teach (Philips et al., 2016). These plans include both personal and professional goals, outline a philosophy of teaching, and include well-defined steps on short-and long-term career goals through continuing education units, clock hours, credentialing, and certification (Carla B. Goble & Diane M. Horm, 2010). Agencies and institutions overseeing a professional development system must ensure that early childhood educators know and understand the opportunities to prepare for a career in the field so that professional development plans are connected with career lattice plans to move individuals forward in their career as well as solidify the workforce.

Multiple topics in professional development exist, and these are generally related to children's development and learning such as content knowledge, teaching strategies, assessment, behavior guidance, planning, standards, interactions, and relationships. In professional development efforts, the goal has been to provide additional information and knowledge and competencies to teachers. More recently, goals of professional development also focus on supporting understanding and application of learning standards to the education of young children across a variety of settings, as well as supporting the profession of teaching (Megan E. Cox, Heidi Hollingsworth & Virginia Buysse, 2015). High-quality professional development experiences should be evidence-based, using the research on positive experiences and outcomes for children linked to the practices that support these outcomes (Megan E. Cox et al., 2015). An important consideration for professional development is that it facilitates retrieval and application, ensuring that participants have a framework for knowledge and guidance on fitting new information and knowledge into this framework for understanding and application. Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin and Knoche (2009: 385) discuss the process issues related to professional development, defining process in professional development as, "how professionals move from awareness (knowledge) to action (practice) and to adoption of particular dispositions in one's professional repertoire". These processes for meaningful growth and development include ongoing interactions and transactions (Susan M. Sheridan et al., 2009).

Often professional development is conceived detached from an understanding of how teachers deconstruct and reconstruct their knowledge as well as the context of their professional lives. A theory of change model helps to understand and support the current efforts of professional development and serves as a foundation to develop and implement future professional learning and development. Using the developmental theory of Bronfenbrenner Urie and Pamela Morris, Megan Millenky, C. Cybele Raver & Stephanie M. Jones, (2013), two aspects of professional development, learning and context, are described to assist in understanding the related theory of change. Arnold J. Sameroff & Michael J. MacKenzie, (2003) described the changes in individuals as a result of the transactional nature of interactions within contexts. In the bioecological model of development, proposed the concept of "proximal process" as the "engines of development." These interactions among people, objects, and symbols, which are repetitive, pattern-forming, and increase in complexity over time, result in expanding opportunities for learning. These aspects of developmental theory align with professional development in that teachers learn best as a result of interactions with experts, colleagues and materials available within professional development opportunities.

High-quality professional development incorporates new information and learning opportunities and continues to build the opportunities for understanding information and applying the information to classroom practices and within teaching strategies, oftentimes through the interactions of coaching. These supportive and informative interactions within mentoring and coaching are the types of interactions needed for development and change. Additionally, all professional development learning opportunities must recognize the contexts in which the skills and knowledge gained from professional development will be applied and the personal characteristics of teachers that contribute to their context of development and

learning. As Linda Darling-Hammond & Wallin Milbrey McLaughlin, (1995) stated, professional development must consider educators as both teachers and learners. Teachers' contexts can inhibit or promote their learning and application of content of professional development; as the learning and development of children cannot be decontextualized, neither can the learning of teachers. The variation in teachers' contexts influence their engagement and application of learning from professional development.

Effective professional development needs to contextualize the focus of the learning across types of programs and experiences of teachers. Thus, effective professional development opportunities will facilitate teachers' growth as professionals through supporting their evolving knowledge and personal development. To promote a high-quality system for early childhood professional development can be a catalyst to successfully address barriers to high-quality for all young children and their families. As greater consensus is gained regarding the specialized skills and knowledge needed for effective early childhood practice, there will be greater expectations and demands for such knowledge and practice, requiring a corresponding increase in support for adequate financing of program resources, including staff compensation commensurate with qualifications and responsibilities.

Although this position statement is now archived, many of the principles presented over 20 years ago remain current goals of the field, namely increased knowledge and associated compensation. The initial foci of professional development as it emerged in the field will be discussed below. Traditional views of professional development often focused on content alone, how could teachers improve literacy instruction for young children, provide engaging classroom activities, and arrange classroom to promote optimal children's experiences, development and learning? Early professional development efforts for in-service teachers intended to promote teachers' knowledge and skills in an effort to change or adopt or further develop effective teaching practices or strategies, or implement state early learning standards. These competencies generally encompassed the things teachers needed to know to do for their jobs, including knowledge of child development and understanding of research-based strategies to facilitate development, cultural competency, and antibias curriculum, inclusive and engaging practices, and strategies for family engagement, to name a few. K.M. Artman's (2010) review of 21 empirical studies focused on the outcomes of professional development indicated that the vast majority of professional development centered on social emotional teaching curriculum or the use of a specific strategy, rather than an overall teaching philosophy or approach.

Professional development efforts seem to emerge in waves of effort, reflecting the current needs or goals of the field. Whereas a focus on social emotional development and challenges was an early focus of professional development, these topics continue to be a highly requested topic for professional development. A focus on literacy emerged, as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics foci. Another limitation of these initial professional development programs was the absence of addressing or examining outcomes: neither teacher outcomes across a variety of dimensions nor child outcomes were typically included in reports of professional development efforts. Results of professional development were often quantified as number of sessions delivered and number of participants, rather than implementation of practices and teacher growth and change. Traditional methods of professional development included one-shot lectures, workshops, in-services days, and professional conferences, which often provided content to teachers with little opportunity for participant engagement and application and implementation into practice. Evidence from multiple studies indicates that relatively small percentages of teachers implement practices learned during these traditionally formatted workshops without ongoing support for application and implementation (Jessica Suhrheinrich, 2011).

A survey of the types and usefulness of professional development in early childhood programs showed that most centers do offer professional development opportunities, but less than half of the respondents indicated that they felt that the professional development improved their professional competence (McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2016). Additionally, although programs

offered several professional development opportunities, long-term support, such as comprehensive programs, which could include career guidance or ladder, coaches/mentors, support for college coursework, or release time to visit other schools or programs, were infrequently mentioned. At the same time, most participants reported feeling that professional development was important. Additional studies estimate that only 10-14% of what was learned in traditional professional development efforts was ever applied or attempted to be applied in classrooms or resulted in significant changes in performance (Dean L. Fixsen, Karen A. Blase, Gary D. Timbers and Montrose M. Wolf, 2007). As professional development opportunities been developed over time, new perspectives on the process have emerged.

### ***Teacher Effectiveness***

All professional development should use evidence-based practices based on adult learning that link research, theory and practice, and should consider the background of the adult learner. Because adults “learn as part of their daily lives,” all learning of teacher practices must be relevant and applicable to daily practices within the contexts in which teachers work (Merriam, Sharan. B., 2001:3). A meta-analysis of the Participatory Adult Learning approach suggested that the most effective methods for helping teachers practice, reflect upon, and master teaching practices through training include real-life application and role play, journaling and discussion, and the use of standards or external criteria for self-evaluation (Dunst, Carl J., & Trivette, Carol M., 2009).

Both andragogy (the discipline of facilitating adult learning) and self-directed learning theories underscore the importance of adults engaging in reflective thinking, directing their own learning through application to life experiences (Merriam, Sharan B., 2001), participating in active learning, and a solution-centered focus (MS Knowles, 1984). Meta-analytic research on both in-service and preservice teacher professional development suggested that adult learning requires the following stages to be effective: planning, application, and deep understanding, (Susan B. Neuman & Michael L. Kamil, 2010). Research has also indicated that effect sizes are highest for learning opportunities requested by teachers themselves and suggested that the more involved the learner is in evaluation and reflection of experience and goals, the more improvement is seen in teacher practices (Marilyn Chu, 2014). These findings and recommendations illustrate the potential importance of providing teachers some agency in choosing and actively participating in the professional development opportunities most relevant to their practice. From early work in professional development, three critical components of successful professional development have emerged. First, teachers need multiple opportunities over extended periods of time to learn and implement intended content. Second, professional development need to align with the context in which teachers are employed and teach. And third, active learning opportunities are crucial to learning, including the application and implementation of skills learned into classroom practices and teaching strategies (Karen E. Diamond, & Douglas R. Powell, 2011).

Effective professional development efforts, rooted in self-directed learning, begin with introducing teachers to why, or rationale for, a certain practice is important (Dunst, Carl J., & Trivette, Carol M., 2009), and include a mentoring or coaching component (Shayne B. Piasta et al., 2012). Professional development projects that give teachers opportunities to apply newly learned content and knowledge have supported the necessity of active engagement of the learner and implementation of learning for professional development to be effective (M. Suzanne Donovan, John D. Bransford & James W. Pellegrino, 1999). Furthermore, effective professional development uses adult learning and relationship-based strategies for improving teachers’ competences, as well as for facilitating their growth in professional behavior and teaching as a profession.

Professional development that focuses on self-directed learning opportunities for teachers, while integrating these opportunities into both the community surrounding early childhood educators and the larger system of professional development, has been deemed to be most effective (Phillips et al., 2016). As

part of high-quality professional development programs, it is important for the providers of the professional development to have expertise and experience in the subject matter being addressed, understand the principles of adult learning, and have appropriate credentials. Furthermore, research advances have demonstrated that professional development models must be replicable and facilitate participation and fidelity to the program. The role of professional development is to support teachers in their continued learning of competencies in the ever-evolving field of early childhood education.

Implementation science provides a framework for considering the application of evidence-based practices. (dean L. Fixsen, Sandra F. Naoom, Karen A. Blase, Robert M. Friedman, Frances Wallace, 2005) outlined three steps in adopting new practices that can be applied to professional development efforts (a) research is published, (b) an “intervention” or “toolkit” is developed from the researchers for teachers to use, and (c) implementation teams support teachers to implement those practices. These steps are important to consider in terms of the content of professional development as well as the application of research to practice. It is important to note that for research to be translated into opportunities for professional development an intervention must be developed by professional who understand the content addressed by the program. Coupled with considerations for adult learners, implementation science underscores the importance of developing hands-on learning opportunities that stem from relevant research and providing support teams for teachers to improve their practice.

Professional development has historically used a piecemeal approach of imparting knowledge and expertise across a variety of topics to heterogeneous groups of teachers in multiple contexts, perhaps because of the complexity of teaching and learning within early childhood contexts. Due to the somewhat fragmented nature of professional development research, many aspects of professional development have been studied separately from one another, with limited attention to long-term outcomes for teachers and children. Patricia Snyder and colleagues examined over 250 studies of professional development involving early child care providers and teachers and found that, although studies generally included information related to the content of the professional development and the participants, the majority of studies failed to describe the details of the coaching or follow-up implemented with teachers (Patricia Snyder et al., 2012). Specifically, with respect to follow-up of the professional development programs, few studies noted the specific dose of follow-up meetings, nor did they provide information regarding fidelity of the follow-ups.

Coaching is deemed as a critical component of effective professional development; therefore, it is important for research to engage in assessing dosage and fidelity issues in professional development as well as follow-up so that the field can develop clear guidelines for effective professional development programs that influence teacher practices in the long term. As mentioned previously, several studies have indicated the usefulness of coaching coupled with content to support teachers’ learning and application of knowledge and content into classroom practices; these include Susan B. Neuman & Linda Cunningham’s, (2009).

Examination of literacy, and Fox and colleagues’ (2011) focus on the Teaching Pyramid model. Each examined professional development models in which content was paired with coaching. In these studies, changes in teaching practices were more positive for teachers who had coaching and ongoing support; thus, recommendations stemming from research on coaching underscore support; thus, recommendation stemming from research on coaching underscore the utility of coaching and mentoring as a strategy that enhances application of learning during professional development. Almost three-quarters of the studies in the aforementioned Patricia Snyder et al., (2012) large-scale study of professional development included some form of follow-up including coaching. Given evidence of the importance of coaching and mentoring in professional development, coaching as a professional development strategy will be discussed further in the next section.

One promising practice gaining traction in professional development is the movement from one-shot lecture style approaches to facilitation of practices through coaching. Continuing evidence from

research in the area of professional learning and development has highlighted the importance of follow-up in the form of coaching for teachers' learning and implementation of practices into their teaching.

Coaching as related to professional development and learning can be defined as a relationship-based process to encourage the use of newly acquired knowledge and skills, with support and encouragement offered by an expert with specific knowledge and skills (Deussen, Theresa; Coskie, Tracy; Robinson, LeAnne; Autio, Elizabeth, 2007). Furthermore, coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills and behaviors focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group. Coaching provides the support for teachers to address understanding, correct misconceptions from professional learning opportunities, and utilize feedback from observations during the implementation phase of transferring information to practice (Odom Samuel L., 2009). Repeated studies indicated that imparting knowledge and content alone does not change practices, but additional learning opportunities in the form of coaching can change teacher strategies and interactions and are associated with positive experiences for the children in the setting.

Emerging studies of a variety of types of coaching support the idea that adding coaching to more traditional approaches to professional development holds promise. In another study of coaching using technology with professional development, examined coaching with regard to the use of descriptive praise by preschool teachers. Following a professional learning opportunity, teachers were observed in their classrooms and were then sent performance feedback in an email message with links for additional resources. This support method within professional development increased teachers' use of descriptive praise. Building on the use of technology, examined the outcomes for Head Start teachers in the areas of social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior in the classroom. All participants attended an in-person workshop on the Pyramid model, followed by a distance coaching condition or a no-coaching condition.

Teachers with the coaching after the workshop showed improvement in teacher-child interactions and classroom quality as assessed by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Robert C. Pianta, LaParo & Bridget K. Hamre, 2008a, Zulfakar, 2019). This recent work regarding coaching has moved professional development forward and provided standards and additional content and strategies for delivering professional development and supporting a high-quality work force. As the field moves forward and the model of professional development expands to consider the interrelatedness of the various factors that comprise teaching, additional areas for professional development emerge. Next, additional aspects of the profession of teaching will be considered regarding their inclusion in professional development and influence on the overall development of the workforce in early childhood education. Professional development thus requires a complex and dynamic integration of personal and professional experiences and knowledge to inform effective teaching practices. Much of this research has focused on teacher outcomes specific to content or teaching strategies including teacher-child relationships. Parallel with professional development efforts is the need to address individual teachers' personal characteristics and concerns. Early care and education teaching includes a myriad of individual and additional professional factors including satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and dispositions that are needed to effectively teach and care for young children. Teachers are one of the most important agents in creating and maintaining a positive learning environment in early childhood classrooms a feat that demands a certain set of individual characteristics.

Knowledge alone does not predict outcomes for children in early childhood classrooms. Teacher efficacy, generally considered a personal characteristic, has been shown to be positively associated with effective teaching strategies and child outcomes (Susan Chambers Cantrell, Almasi, Carter & Rintamaa, 2013). Multiple definitions exist for teacher efficacy; however, the central focus of teachers' perceptions or confidence in their ability to effect change in the children they teach is apparent in many of these definitions (Albert Bandura, 1997). Although efficacy can be viewed as a set of personal beliefs, context and change have important associations with teachers' efficacy. Findings from several studies have

suggested that teachers' education and experience are positively associated with teacher efficacy (Anita Woolfolk Hoy & Rhonda Burke Spero, 2005).

Extrapolating from these studies, it stands to reason, that participation in professional development has the potential to contribute to positive perception of efficacy. Limited studies exist that have examined teachers' changes related to perceptions after participating in professional development. The knowledge gained during these learning opportunities may be supported by concomitant changes in teachers' perceptions of confidence and efficacy in affecting growth and development in the children with whom they work. Dispositions are a complex integration of personal and professional characteristics that may inform teachers' skills but are not the same construct as teachers' skills. They include prevailing tendencies to exhibit a pattern of behavior frequently, consciously, and voluntarily (Susan M. Sheridan et al., 2009). Examples of teacher dispositions include ethical behavior, responsibility, inclusivity and affirmation of diversity, collaboration, reflection, receptivity to feedback, self-efficaciousness, and engagement and commitment to teaching as a profession (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013).

Effective childhood teacher dispositions have been said to also include passion for children and teaching, perseverance, risk taking, pragmatism, patience, flexibility, respect, creativity, authenticity, love of learning, high energy, and sense of humor (Laura J. Colker, 2008). Although this section may read as a simple list of adjectives, these dispositions are principal to the efficacy of teachers in classrooms, and require practice and commitment to actualize and become a professional. Professional development can influence teachers' dispositions through providing opportunities for personal and professional growth in the classroom as well as these professional behaviors having associations with teacher effectiveness and efficacy (Elizabeth Wadlington & Patrick Wadlington, 2011). Professional development efforts may need to intentionally address dispositions as well as teacher competencies. Teachers' dispositions are related to and often overlap with their competencies; neither, however, is sufficient without the other. Both dispositions and competencies require knowledge, understanding, and use of strategies. Teachers must be equipped with the character needed to sustain a life-long learning process, reflect on their practices, regulate their responses, engage young children in the learning process, and promote a passion for equity and advocacy both for children and for the professional in its entirety with the multiple components and varied contexts. Professional development that targets both skills and dispositions may result in improved teacher implementation of teaching strategies and structuring of the learning environment, in that teachers receive the content and understanding as well as a rationale to support their motivation to implement change.

### ***Opportunities***

Although many professional development opportunities exist in the field of early childhood education for current teachers, barriers to attending professional development and challenges in applying strategies learned must be considered in order to improve the implementation and efficacy of professional development. The early childhood workforce must grapple with additional challenges within the field, including stress, isolation, low pay, long hours, lack of support, burn-out, fatigue, and an estimated annual turnover rate of over a quarter of current teachers (Casey J. Totenhagen et al., 2016). Professional development strategies therefore must consider the systemic challenges that early childhood educators face related to both identifying and participating in high-quality professional development opportunities and successfully applying the knowledge and strategies learned through professional development. Costs of attendance and a lack of flexibility to alter teaching schedules are just few potential challenges early educators may face in their efforts to continue their learning (Phillips et al., 2006).

As a mechanism for support and facilitation of change and improvement in effective teaching practices and strategies; the field must consider who has access to professional development opportunities. In a study by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment of over 300 teachers, close to one-half of the sample reported they did not agree that their employer paid for some or all of their professional

development expenses, and over half did not agree that they were able to change their work schedules to engage in professional development programs (Whitebook Marcy, King, Philipp, & Sakai, 2016a). As many early childhood teachers are already struggling to make ends meet financially, it is not feasible to require teachers to pay for these professional development opportunities.

Program-level policies and resources available for teachers to even attend professional development programs must be examined both on a field-wide and a program-specific basis. Understanding individuals and contexts is another important step, and grappling with the range of backgrounds and contexts in which teachers teach also contributes to evolving high-quality professional development. Education and experience have been continuously shown not to be the only markers of effective teaching and high-quality experiences for young children; rather a broader range of individual competencies needs to be considered (Susan M. Sheridan et al., 2009). Thus, the intersection of personal and professional development (Gomez et al., 2015) must be purposefully interwoven in professional development. It is also possible that professional development programs may support teaching strategies that are at odds with the philosophies of the programs in which teachers return to apply their new knowledge and skills. As part of professional development, specific consideration of how teachers can implement new strategies within context will help the applicability of professional development within many settings. Although knowledge and competencies are critical to high-quality and effective teachers, professional development studies have struggled with questions regarding what works for influencing change in teacher practices for in-service teachers.

Emerging research provides some guidance, promoting the use of strategies such as individual feedback from a mentor or coach who observes teacher practices, and teacher self-assessments. Future research must, however, consider how both individual and context-specific variables may influence the efficacy of professional development. Additional innovative approaches that build from the research and consider the varying contexts and needs of the workforce will need to be developed. Change be slow, and progress can be difficult, especially when the goal is often evolving based on new research and evidence and changes are both global and specific. The report Learning Forward (2014), Zulfakar (2020), underscore the importance of commitment to improvement, in that effective professional development should be developed and implemented to meet the needs of the participants. Defining what is important in the field for children, teachers, and families is an initial step in promoting positive change. Progress has been achieved in the area of professional development, and yet, much work is needed to address the complexity of intended outcomes, state level issues, availability, and accessibility of early care and educators' professional development.

The Early Childhood Workforce Index represents an initial effort to establish a baseline description of early childhood employment conditions and policies in every state and to track progress on a state-by-state basis to improve early childhood jobs (Whitebook Marcy, McLean, & Austin, 2016b). This effort will provide professional development information on a larger scale to assist in addressing current practices and needs in early childhood education.

The first principle advised is that professional development for the early childhood workforce should use an integrated systems approach a "comprehensive system of preparation and ongoing development and support for all early childhood education professionals working with and on behalf of young children" (LeMoine, 2008:5). In order to develop and maintain state systems, states require policies that address the needs across the variety of settings in which early childhood education occurs, including community-based child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, public schools, early intervention, and special education services (i.e., sectors).

An Integrated Professional Development system, a comprehensive system that includes professional learning, compensation, and career pathways with efforts to address "increasing efficiencies and accountability" and crossing the sectors, settings, and roles providing early care and education for

children (LeMoine, 2008:10). State level policies need to be “embedded into the early care and education system with appropriate rules, regulations, and statutes in all the agencies that over-see or administer each sector” (LeMoine, 2008: 11). These policies must align with the multiple activities occurring at the state level, such as, quality rating and improvement systems, emerging data and tracking systems, and institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs. As the field of early childhood education has expanded, many related, yet isolated, components have been developed and exist within their own system.

Given the complexity of teaching and policies and practices in the field of early childhood education, these activities need to be coordinated into a comprehensive system. Although initially this alignment and these connections may increase the complexity of the professional development endeavors, the ultimate goal is a well-functioning system that addresses the multiple needs of the workforce through a variety of strategies in an efficient manner to improve the knowledge, competencies, and working conditions of teachers and the associated positive learning and development outcomes for children. Like any policy initiative, early child education investments in professional development must create visible change for the populations they serve, as well as for society as a whole. Such change must be reliably measurable and communicable to policymakers and the public alike in order to continue the advocacy and support for adequate funding. Moreover, such change must be relevant to the teachers, children, and families within early childhood programs; therefore, professional development initiatives must clearly connect to current needs and status of what is necessary for the field. One-shot, single-topic professional development seminars are unlikely to provide positive change. In order to achieve some quality assurance, the field of early childhood needs quality professional development that is evaluated and responsive to the needs of the field and reviewed as evidence-based and/or best practice for children. The field of early childhood must focus attention and empowerment on every level of change, from teachers and administrators to coaches or policymakers, in an effort to ensure professional development initiatives are maximizing every opportunity to support the workforce. Accountability in the public school sector must follow suit, developing and implementing accountability that is relevant to the early childhood education spectrum.

## ***Conclusion***

It is imperative that systems of early childhood education continue to include and support a diverse workforce of early childhood educators. Early childhood teachers should mirror the rich diversity of our children and families in this country, and professional development supports must provide opportunities for all teachers, especially in response to the existing racial stratification in the workforce. Any professional development systems enacted must fully consider the availability and accessibility of supports for all teachers, regardless of program auspice or location, and must work to dismantle systemic disadvantages for teachers and the children they serve. This includes higher education systems as well as national and local professional development initiatives; every sector offering support to early childhood educators must be purposefully inclusive of the community of the early childhood workforce.

The field of early childhood education, through targeted professional development opportunities, must support the early childhood workforce without exclusion in order to sustain an effective and responsive workforce. These changes can be achieved through community-wide efforts for professional development organizations to engage in open dialogue with their workforce, assess what professional development opportunities are most necessary and would be most helpful and inclusive, and implement strategies supportive of community need using methods that have been shown to be effective.

Many laudable recommendations have been put forth in early childhood education built from research findings and experience gained. Professional development, however, has many challenges for availability to the diverse workforce and locations in early childhood education and accessibility/affordability of high-quality and effective professional development. It is important to note

that early childhood teachers take a variety of paths to become teachers and practitioners in the workforce. Many complete 2-or 4-year degree programs and/or certificate programs, and some teachers do not complete any formal teacher preparation programs. These differing pathways have implications for professional development in terms of access and engagement in learning across teachers' tenure.

Teachers in many state-funded early childhood programs have built-in opportunities for professional learning as well as requirements for participating in professional development opportunities. Teachers in community-based programs and privately operated settings, as well as family child care providers, however, may participate in professional development on their own time, on weekends or in the evening, or they may not even be aware of opportunities for professional learning. Relevant to teachers in all settings, however, is the importance of providing teachers agency and ability to participate in professional development opportunities. Administrators and directors can help provide teachers the resources and flexibility needed to pay for, attend, and apply learning from professional development; however, system-wide policies are necessary to increase and maintain professional development funding, as this issue is not only on the backs of administrators. Of course, the challenge of limited funding for child care remains and the needed shift in priorities for funding. However, planning and developing an infrastructure for funding is a necessary immediate step, as is allows action to align with these recommendations in a positive movement Forward, connecting and aligning multiple components, building on what is known in the field and considering the varying needs of early childhood educators.

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