

Early Childhood Teacher Certification
A POSITION STATEMENT OF THE
Association of Teacher Educators
AND THE
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Adopted July/August 1991

Background information

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), through its Commission on Early Childhood Teacher Education (ECTE), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) jointly developed these guidelines to inform decision-makers about certification standards for teachers in programs serving children from birth through eight years of age. The purpose of this document is to ensure that all young children and their families have access to qualified early childhood teachers by guiding teacher educators and policymakers to (1) make informed decisions about early childhood teacher certification, (2) evaluate existing teacher certification standards, and (3) advocate for more appropriate early childhood teacher certification standards.

Development of the guidelines

Several hundred early childhood and teacher education professionals participated in developing these guidelines. The following individuals constituted the ATE Commission on Early Childhood Teacher Education and contributed to and guided the development of these guidelines: John M. Johnston, Chairperson; Doris Bergen; Sue Bredekamp; Jim Campbell; Michael D.

Davis; Anne Dorsey; Stacie G. Goffin; Marcy Guddemi; Beverly Gulley; Mary Jensen; Michael Kalinowski; Joyce Munro; Steven Silvern; and Bill Dixon, ATE Executive Board Liaison. The ATE/ECTE Commission drew initial drafts of the position statement and certification standards from a survey of related policy documents, early childhood teacher certification standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 1988; Tennessee State Board of Education, 1990), teacher education standards (NAEYC, 1991), and working papers prepared by members of the ATE/ECTE Commission. An initial draft of the position statement and certification standards was reviewed at an open hearing by participants at the NAEYC Annual Conference. A revised draft was then sent to a selected national sample of over 900 early childhood teacher educators, state department certification specialists, and the NAEYC Teacher Education Guidelines Panel. Two separate mailings requesting feedback were sent to selected ATE members. Feedback was also sought from 27 related professional organizations. The *Early Childhood Teacher Certification Guidelines* position statement, presented here in its entirety, was adopted by the Executive Boards of the Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children in July/August 1991.

Next steps

The September 1991 *Young Children* announced NAEYC's new initiative, the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. One of the goals of the Institute is to influence the quality and content of early childhood teacher preparation programs and to advocate for policies that promote an articulated career development system for the field. The certification position will be an important tool for the Institute and NAEYC leaders to use to influence state policies. Our goal is to achieve specialized early childhood certification in every state, which in turn will influence the content and delivery of preparation programs throughout the nation.

NAEYC continues to work with the ATE Commission on Early Childhood Teacher Education. Work is proceeding on a companion position statement on certification for early childhood special education.

If you have suggestions or requests for using the certification position statement or other initiatives relevant to early childhood professional preparation and development, please contact Sue Bredekamp, Director of Professional Development, or call or write to the Institute at NAEYC Headquarters.

Position

In recognition of the need for qualified teachers throughout a child's early education (birth through age eight), the Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommend the establishment of specialized early childhood teacher certification standards for teachers working with children from birth through age eight. This certification* should be developed exclusively for early childhood education and be distinctive from, and independent of, existing elementary and secondary certifications.

We recognize that recommending a free-standing teacher certification standard developed exclusively for teachers working with children from birth through age eight will require many states to reconsider their current practices (McCarthy, 1988). Current teacher certification standards, however, were developed prior to the extensive availability of, and demand for, early childhood education programs. Furthermore, many current state standards do not reflect the existing knowledge base about the education of children nor do they appreciate the significance of the distinctive developmental and educational characteristics of programs for children from birth through age eight.

In addition, to a large extent, existing certification patterns (K-6/K-3; K-8, 7-12) are artifacts of school building organizational structures that are rapidly becoming obsolete. Many school districts are now experimenting with early childhood units (for example, see NASBE, 1988) and middle school configurations that do not match the existing certification structure. In addition, enormous variety exists in school organization that often depends more on enrollments than on other considerations. For example, the state of Ala-

bama reports 32 different school configurations (Ward, 1990).

State departments of education, state certification boards, and other responsible state agencies exert critical leadership in setting standards for teacher preparation. They define educational expectations for public and private early childhood preparation programs. They are, therefore, in a pivotal position to influence teacher preparation programs and help ensure the qualification of those in daily interaction with young children. It is imperative that state departments of education and other state certification offices review their program standards in light of essential characteristics of early childhood education and the professional requirements of early childhood teachers.

The absence of consistent standards for specialized early childhood certification in approximately half the states has led to the lack of adequate preparation programs in early childhood education at the baccalaureate level in these states. Because institutions typically plan programs to meet state certification standards, it is impossible in some states to major in early childhood education. Other states may only provide an endorsement program that consists of two courses and a kindergarten student teaching placement (Bredekamp, 1990). As a result, there is a shortage of well-qualified early childhood teachers to meet current needs, much less anticipate future demand as programs expand.

The last decade has witnessed a dramatic growth in early childhood programs for children from birth through age eight. By 1995, 70% of children younger than age eight will be in school settings (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). This growth is evident in every sector of early childhood education: early intervention programs such as Head Start, programs for children with special needs, child care centers, private nursery schools, kindergarten education and primary programs in all 50 states, and increasingly available programs for 3- and 4-year-olds in the public schools.

In addition, there is increasing recognition and acceptance of the early primary years (grades 1 through 3) as part of the continuum of early childhood and therefore as being most appropriate when conceptualized within the framework of early childhood education (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988). Therefore, children in early childhood programs from birth through third grade need quality early childhood education (Association for Childhood Education International, 1983; Bredekamp, 1987; National Association for Elementary School Principals, 1990; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988).

The developmental characteristics of children from birth through age eight help inform decision-makers about the characteristics of appropriate education for this age group (Bredekamp, 1987; Elkind, 1986). Our recommendations encompass birth through age eight to help ensure that early childhood teachers, regardless of which age group they work with, are adequately prepared. They also recognize that all early childhood teachers need to be aware of the continuum of development from birth through age eight.

Consequently, early childhood teachers must be adequately informed about the unique developmental characteristics of young children and the implications for curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, this knowledge must embody an understanding of variations due to cultural differences and/or the presence of a handicapping condition. These are not separate aspects of a young child's life and therefore should be merged in teacher education programs.

This specialized knowledge must be reflected in standards for early childhood teacher certification established by state boards of education and other certifying agencies. This conclusion is supported by recent recommendations delivered by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1991), the Association for Childhood

*For the purposes of this document, certification refers to the mandatory, state-level process whereby an individual who meets certain minimum standards gains a permit/license to practice and/or an institution is approved by the state to grant teaching certificates.

Education International (1983), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990), the National Education Association (1990), the National Association of State Boards of Education (1988), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Wagner, 1988), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1990).

The significance of specialized knowledge in early childhood education is also confirmed by research findings that early childhood teachers with a strong background in early childhood development and education interact with children in ways that are more growth promoting (Ruopp, Travers, Coelen, & Glantz, 1979; Weikart, 1989). This conclusion is further supported by the research on teaching that showed that decision making and other thinking skills are enhanced by a well-developed and integrated knowledge base specific to the discipline being contemplated (Brand, 1990; Gardner, 1990; Shulman, 1987).

This document does not promote any single route to the acquisition of early childhood certification, but it does call for *all* teachers of young children from birth through age eight to be adequately prepared with the knowledge, skills, and understandings specific to their teaching specialization, regardless of where they are employed.

Essential characteristics of early childhood education

~~At least five characteristics are essential for an early childhood teacher preparation program:~~

~~1. Teachers must be educated in the liberal arts and knowledgeable about a variety of disciplines in order to recognize the learning embedded in children's activity. Early childhood teachers must be knowledgeable in various subject matter pedagogies to be skillful in interactive teaching strategies that advance children's developing understandings.~~

~~Early childhood curriculums are organized as an integrated whole and are informed by children's (versus adults') interests (National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Depart-~~

~~ments of Education, 1991). Subject~~

~~matter content and skill development are therefore woven into children's daily interactions with materials, peers, and adults.~~

~~2. Early childhood teachers must be well informed about developmental theories and their implications for practice.~~

~~Concern for all aspects of a child's growth and development is emphasized. Especially during the years of early childhood, sociomoral, emotional, and personality development are inseparable from cognitive/intellectual growth (Biber, 1984; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Concern for the whole child, in addition to the physical needs of very young children, significantly extends the scope of the early childhood teacher's role (Johnston, 1984).~~

~~3. Early childhood teachers must understand the significance of play to children's educational development and develop skills in facilitating enriching play in early childhood classrooms.~~

~~Play is a critical component of the early childhood classroom. It is respected as a powerful integrator and generator of knowledge. Through play, children develop sociomoral judgments, advance their social and language skills, elaborate upon their intellectual understandings, and assume personal responsibility for learning (Fein, Rubin, & Vandenberg, 1983).~~

~~4. Early childhood teachers must understand families as the primary context for children's learning and development, respect diversity in family structure and values, and develop skills in interacting with parents in ways that enhance children's educational success.~~

~~Parents are valued as educational partners. Early childhood teachers recognize that their educational objectives cannot be fully achieved without collaboration with families. Early childhood education also recognizes itself as an important component of a family's support system (Galinsky & Hooks, 1977; Goffin, 1988; Kagan & Holdeman, 1989). The ability to collaborate with families and be a support to their child-rearing efforts~~

~~demands an understanding and respect for cultural and familial diversity.~~

~~5. Early childhood teachers need to acquire the ability to supervise and coordinate their teaching with other adults. With the expansion of shared decision making in these settings, early childhood teachers also should be able to reflect on their own professional development.~~

~~Early childhood teachers often function as members of a professional team. As team members, they model adult interactions and cooperative decision making for children. In such circumstances, their coordinated efforts are also needed for the smooth functioning of their classrooms.~~

Policy considerations

The intent of this position statement is to ensure that all young children and their families have access to qualified early childhood teachers. This goal will not be achieved unless policies that influence the practice of early childhood education are also addressed. Because issues within the field of early childhood education relate to the delivery of early childhood programs, early childhood teachers must also be informed about issues of policy and strategies for influencing change (Almy, 1985; Katz & Goffin, 1990).

Specifically, the Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children recommend that state departments of education and other certifying agencies develop policies that ensure ...

- that the unique learning styles of children from birth through age eight be acknowledged as an essential knowledge base of early childhood education that requires free-standing certification distinctive from existing certifications for elementary and secondary education;
- that certification standards are age- and content-congruent across the 50 states in order for states to have truly reciprocal agreements and to ensure that all children are cared for and educated by teachers appropriately prepared as early childhood educators;
- that all early childhood preparation programs meet the standards set forth in this document;

- that all early childhood teacher preparation programs, especially in the configuration and coordination of their individual programs, recognize the inseparability of the care *and* education of children;

- that states initiate articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions within a state in order to provide a continuum of teacher preparation opportunities, promote professional development, and facilitate professional growth; and

- that states create ways to coordinate the efforts of those departments that credential teachers who teach children in child care settings and those who teach children 411 public and private school settings.

Certification Standards for Teachers of Children From Birth Through Age Eight

The Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children believe that every state should adopt certification standards for teachers of children from birth through age eight. In order for professionals to act, it is impossible to separate knowledge, abilities, dispositions, values, and attitudes, one from the other. Therefore, statements of understanding and ability necessarily incorporate dispositions, values, and attitudes. The certified early childhood teacher will demonstrate professional knowledge, abilities, dispositions, values, and attitudes regarding growth, development, and learning; family and community relations; curriculum development, content, and implementation; health, safety, and nutrition; field experiences and professional internship; and professionalism.

I. Growth, development, and learning

This group of standards includes understanding of the various domains of development of infants, toddlers, and preprimary and primary age children, and the processes by which these domains are integrated. It also includes

understanding of how learning and developmental processes interact and the influences of sociocultural and other ecological factors on learning and development. It further includes the ability to appropriately assess the development of children from birth through age eight who come from a range of sociocultural backgrounds and who may be at risk for developmental delay. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding and ability regarding the following:

A. physical development of young children, including variable growth and behavioral patterns during prenatal, perinatal, infant, toddler, preprimary, and early primary years

B. cognitive development and the relation of children's early experiences to their individual differences in cognitive development

C. receptive and expressive communication, speech, and language development in the young child

D. emotional, social, and moral development, including emergence of identity and development of self-esteem in the young child

E. integration of various developmental domains and ways in which individual differences affect development in all areas

F. the importance of play and of active involvement in sensory and motor development and their influence on later cognitive, perceptual, and language skills

G. biological and environmental factors that promote wellness and sound nutrition and that influence development of and exceptionalities in children's motor, sensory, cognitive, and psychosocial development

H. recognition of signs of emotional distress, child abuse, and neglect in young children and knowledge of responsibility and procedures for reporting known or suspected abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities

I. observation and recording of young children's behavior and conducting of accurate and meaningful assessments in order to be aware of individual differences that occur among young children

J. utility and limitations of developmental screening tests administered to

young children

II. Family and community relations

This group of standards encompasses understanding the vital role of the family and the community in the care and education of infants, toddlers, preprimary children, and primary age children. It stresses the teacher's ability to cooperate with family and community systems in an effort to build upon the child's sociocultural background and, with support staff, to work with families and children who have special needs. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding of and ability regarding the following:

A. explaining to parents the fundamentals of child growth, development, and learning; articulating the rationale for developmentally appropriate education programs for young children and the need for community support for such programs

B. articulating the concept of developmental delay and the rationale for early intervention services for children who are developmentally delayed or at risk of developmental delay

C. services that provide information and support for families and children and the role of related disciplines in supporting young children and their families

D. roles of parents as primary caregivers and informal teachers of young children, understanding the importance of parents' expectations for their children, and acknowledging the collaborative role of parents and teachers in early childhood programs

E. how young children affect and are affected by parents, siblings, extended family, and community

F. working cooperatively and supportively with families, especially those that have special educational needs, including those in which English is not the dominant language

G. including families in assessing a child's development, reporting assessment results in a clear and supportive manner to family members and other appropriate professionals, and identifying strengths and needs when setting goals

H. special education community services for the young child, including

prevention, early intervention, integration into mainstreamed environments, and referral to specialized programs

III. Curriculum development, content, and implementation

This group of standards includes understanding of planning for and facilitating learning by infants, toddlers, preprimary children, and primary age children in the content areas of language, literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and health and safety. It also includes understanding of planning for and facilitating interactions in appropriate environments. Finally, these standards emphasize the importance of assessing children's abilities and the importance of sociocultural background for the planning of environments and experiences that meet the needs of all children, regardless of cultural background or special needs. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding and ability regarding the following:

A. observing, recording, and assessing young children's behavior for the purpose of planning appropriate programs, environments, and interactions

B. using theories of development, learning, and assessment in planning appropriate programs, environments, and interactions

C. planning and implementing learning environments including the physical and psychosocial environments; management of time, space, and materials; and adjusting for children's age, cultural background, and special needs

D. physical growth and developmental approaches to large and small motor skills

E. developing and implementing an integrated curriculum that focuses on children's developmental needs and interests; incorporating culturally valued contents and children's home experiences

F. using play, themes, and projects in planning experiences that integrate all developmental domains (emotional, physical, social, and cognitive)

G. creating and managing a learning environment that emphasizes

direct experience, active manipulation of concrete materials, child choice and decision making, exploration of the environment, and interaction with others

H. using developmentally appropriate methods that may include play, open-ended questioning, group discussion, problem solving, cooperative planning, and inquiry experiences to help young children in developing intellectual curiosity, solving problems, making decisions, and becoming independent learners

I. using group and individual guidance and problem solving techniques to assist the construction of knowledge and nurture prosocial interactions among children, to encourage interpersonal problem solving, and to develop self-control and positive self-esteem

J. supporting children's actions that increase the likelihood that children will be mentally alert, curious, confident, and honest in expressing their views; encouraging them to take initiative in generating ideas, problems, questions, and relationships

K. assisting young children in developing decision making and interpersonal skills necessary to promote good health and personal safety

L. integrating multicultural/antibias themes, literature, and experiences in all curricular areas

M. participating and assisting other professionals in family centered assessments and in developing and implementing individualized service and educational plans for young children with handicaps

N. adapting curriculum content to meet the needs of all young children, including those who may be gifted, handicapped, developmentally delayed, or at risk for developmental delay

IV. Health, safety, and nutrition

This group of standards addresses understanding of managing an environment that provides for the health, safety, and nutritional well being of infants, toddlers, preprimary children, and primary age children. Teachers should be able to apply this knowledge regardless of children's sociocultural background and should be aware of the

special needs of children who may have disabilities that put them at risk. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding and ability regarding the following:

A. basic health, nutrition, and safety management procedures for infants, toddlers, and young children; also, basic health and safety management procedures regarding childhood illness and communicable diseases

B. using appropriate health appraisal procedures and recommending referral to appropriate community health and social services when necessary

C. identifying hazards, assessing risks and taking appropriate corrective steps in early childhood settings

V. Field experiences and professional internship

This group of standards includes understandings needed for implementation of a quality program for infants, toddlers, preprimary children, and primary age children, and an appreciation for differences in sociocultural backgrounds and special needs. It includes 300 clock hours of experience serving children in two of these age groups in various early childhood settings, including supervised interactions with families and children from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and varying degrees of special needs, and experience working with interdisciplinary teams of professionals, where appropriate. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding and ability regarding the following:

A. integrating theory and practice through field work in conjunction with coursework and professional consultation

B. assuming the full range of teaching duties in exemplary early childhood settings

C. accepting and reflecting upon supervision from on site as well as other clinical personnel

D. analyzing, evaluating, and discussing field experiences in seminar meetings with supervisors and colleagues

VI. Professionalism

This group of standards includes understanding of the importance of continued professional growth and of working with others in the profession and in the greater community to advocate for infants, toddlers, preprimary children, and primary-age children. It further includes an appreciation and advocacy for children and families with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and special needs. Specifically, it addresses the teacher's understanding and ability regarding the following:

A. articulating a personal philosophy of early childhood teaching and demonstrating interest and commitment to young children's development, learning, and well-being

B. how historical, philosophical, and social foundations of early childhood education affect current practices and future trends

C. current issues, trends, legislation, and other public policy affecting children, families, and programs for young children and the early childhood profession

D. value issues and the need for incorporating codes of ethics in professional practice

E. working cooperatively with colleagues to organize, supervise, and lead staff and volunteers in planning and maintaining a safe, appropriate group environment for young children's development and learning

F. participating in advocacy activities on behalf of sound programs and services for young children and their families and enhanced professional status and working conditions for early childhood educators

G. the importance of career-long growth and development activities for professional early childhood educators, e.g., active membership and participation in early childhood professional organizations and activities

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