

Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments - A review of the literature ^[1]

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- Full paper in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from summary

As states and communities work toward developing high-quality preschool programs for three and four year olds, they face several intertwined issues related to staffing these programs. The first involves deciding on optimal teacher qualifications. A second set of questions involves what we know about creating effective teachers, including alternative pathways to the four-year degree. A final set of questions involves the feasibility of achieving the new standards, including the capacity of the higher education system to meet a growing demand for teachers with four-year degrees, and whether there will be adequate compensation to recruit and retain such an educated workforce.

The evidence to date suggests that optimal teacher behavior in center-based settings, and the skill and knowledge upon which it rests, are best achieved through a four-year college degree, which includes, in most instances, some specialized content in early childhood education or child development. Still, this body of research raises many questions that require further investigation, particularly with regard to: thresholds of education and training; the content, format and quality of specialized early childhood training; variations in strategies for teachers with varying characteristics and needs; and the aspects of the adult work environment that scaffold teachers' knowledge, enabling them to engage in effective strategies with children.

If we do indeed agree that early learning environments are critically important to children's later success, then our goal must be to ensure that preschool programs can live up to the expectations placed on them. This is largely a question of resources and public will. We can set preschool teacher standards at the BA level, but we need put together the resources to make educational opportunities available to current and prospective teachers, clarify what are the optimal characteristics of preschool teacher training, and compensate teachers sufficiently to retain them in the field.

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[7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/pre-school> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/curricula-and-pedagogy>