



**May 2013:  
What is a High-Quality Teacher?**

**Background**

Over the course of the past decade, the national debate about the necessary qualifications for early childhood education teachers has intensified. In 2007, reauthorization of the Head Start Act required that by the fall of 2013, 50% of Head Start teachers nationally must have BA degrees or higher. In fact, as the New America Foundation [reported recently](#), analysis of PIR data shows that 62% of lead teachers in 3-5 year old classrooms had BA or advanced degrees by 2012 - up from 38% only five years earlier. While that is a tremendous accomplishment, the research base on teacher degrees and child outcomes raises questions about what elements of teachers' professional development are most critical to helping children learn and grow. Research has shown that teachers' interactions with children are key to their development, but what strategies help teachers do that well? There are no definitive answers from the research, but having the debate and pursuing better knowledge will help Head Start and all early learning programs offer better support to teachers and better services to children. Consider the resources and research below as you work toward understanding these questions for yourself and within your program.

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**Resources**

**[State of Preschool 2012](#)**

Earlier this month, the National Institute for Early Education Research put out its updated resources on preschool for 2012. Follow the link above to check out your state's fact sheet - including the requirements for early childhood teachers in your state-funded programs.

**NHSA Dialog Brief: [Competencies and Credentials for Early Childhood Educators: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?](#)**

*by Margaret Burchinal, Marilou Hyson, and Marty Zaslow*

Curious about the scope of the debate on degrees for teachers? In this Dialog Brief, Drs. Margaret Burchinal, Marilou Hyson, and Marty Zaslow address the weak relationship between teacher credentials and classroom quality and provide several possible explanations for this weak linkage. They argue that a comprehensive professional development approach is needed to support all those who work with children in a center, not just the lead teacher.

**Pew Education Reform Series: [A Matter of Degrees: Preparing Teachers for the Pre-K Classroom](#)**

*by Marisa Bueno, Linda Darling-Hammond and Danielle Gonzales*

This policy report from the Pew Center on the States goes deeper into the recent research, addresses the challenges to systemic change, and lays out models from several states for deepening the education of the early childhood workforce. Finally it lays out recommendations for policy and directions for future research.

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**Research**

**[Are teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten?](#)**

*by Diane Early, Donna Bryant, Robert Pianta, Richard Clifford, Margaret Burchinal, Sharon Ritchie, Carollee Howes and Oscar Barbarin for Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

As its title suggests, this article looks at findings from a study of 237 pre-kindergarten classrooms in six states with regards to how teachers' education, majors, and credentials relate to classroom quality and children's cognitive outcomes.

For classroom quality, measured with the ECERS-R and the CLASS tool, the authors found only marginal effects: teachers with more than a BA scored higher than teachers with an AA on one area of ECERS-R; BA teachers' major did not have any significant effect on classroom quality; and state certification likewise had no significant effects beyond a marginal relation with Emotional Climate. In terms of children's outcomes, teachers with more education had students with significantly more math skills gained over a year, but no other significant effects were found. Teachers with BAs who had majored in early childhood had students who knew more colors than those with other majors. Teachers with a CDA, compared to those with a high school diploma or an AA in another subject, had children with significantly more growth in rhyming and identifying letters, numbers and colors.

The authors suggest that these findings mean a Bachelor's degree alone is not sufficient for achieving high quality. They reflect that the large study included teachers from many different teacher preparation programs over many years, and that some teacher preparation may be better than others. They also comment that mentoring and reflective supervision may make a difference in teachers' practices, raising quality for all teachers where implemented well.

**[Teachers' Education, Classroom Quality, and Young Children's Academic Skills: Results from Seven Studies of Preschool Programs](#)**

*by Diane Early, Kelly Maxwell, Margaret Burchinal, Soumya Alva, Randall Bender, Donna Bryant, Karen Cai, Richard Clifford, Caroline Ebanks, James Griffin, Gary Henry, Carollee Howes, Jeniffer Iriondo-Perez, Hyun-Joo Jeon, Andrew Mashburn, Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Robert Pianta, Nathan Vandergrift and Nicholas Zill for Child Development*

Based on the previous study and others, a group of researchers conducted a "meta-analysis," looking at data across seven large-scale studies of teacher education, quality, and child outcomes to see where there were significant patterns of effects. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project and the FACES study were among these seven.

For both quality and outcomes, the seven studies had mixed and mostly small findings about whether teacher education was significant, and three found that the significance of a degree varied by program site. Two of six studies that measured prereading found a benefit to children of BA teachers, and for math one of seven found a benefit and one found a detriment to having a BA teacher. Likewise there were small or no findings in analyses based on teachers' majors.

Yet the authors caution that these findings do not mean education for teachers is unnecessary or unimportant. Rather they suggest that teachers with any particular degree may be far too varied in terms of what coursework, preparation and support they have received: some teachers may have receiving instruction that didn't address social-emotional support or may have been educated before the era of school readiness. The authors also note that the site interaction may suggest that programs' mentoring and coaching plays a significant role in quality. Finally, they question whether market pressures influence which AA teachers and which BA teachers work in pre-K settings. The study concludes that there is a need for much deeper research about what particular curriculum and training experiences best support the development of effective, high-quality teachers.

### **Teacher education and PK outcomes: Are we asking the right questions?**

*by Kimber Bogard, Fasaha Traylor, and Ruby Takanishi for Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

This commentary, written in response to the previous two articles, advocates for the BA as an entry requirement for pre-K teachers on the grounds that professionalization of the pre-K workforce will reinforce connections to K-12 learning, reduce staff turnover, and lead to teachers with greater familiarity with research-based practice. Regarding the previous research, the authors agree that it is important to examine deeper factors of teachers' experience that relate to quality and children's outcomes and call for research on children's broader developmental outcomes than simply pre-reading and pre-math. They suggest that policymakers pursue not simply degreed teachers but teachers with a BA and a "signature pedagogy" that would include

experiential learning and mentoring to ensure effective teachers.

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### **Discussion Questions**

1. Early et al (2007) discuss their findings by saying, "A policy of requiring a certain degree or major will not substitute for the hard work of selecting high-quality teachers and supporting them in a way that will maximize their capacity." How do *you* recognize a good teacher?
2. If you've gotten a BA or advanced degree during your time working with Head Start, do you feel it changed your practices in the classroom? What has been the most valuable component of your professional development?
3. In your program, if a staff member develops an interesting practice or learns something new about child development, how could she communicate that to the rest of the staff? What systems support sharing new knowledge?

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Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin ([edropkin@nhsa.org](mailto:edropkin@nhsa.org)).