Showing that Early Childhood Education Works: Lessons from Italy, China, and the USA

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Showing That Early Childhood Education Works

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Lessons from around the world

Student Research Conference

Creativity

What does it matter about early childhood education?

• ECE matters, if you are a young child (birth to age 8)
• Or if you are an educator at the elementary or secondary level
• Or if you are a parent
• Or if you want your community and state to progress

Why the controversy about public support for early childhood education?

• Changing society, changing families
• Competing needs – limited funds
• Profusion of choices: family day care homes, center-based programs, for-profit, non-profit, part-day, full-day, many curricula (High/Scope, Creative Curriculum, Montessori, Reggio Emilia)
• How do we decide what works in early education?

What process or system should be used to determine what works in early education? Can the same process be used to improve services?

What is the role of government?

1. Consumers in a free market should determine ...
2. Objective science should determine ...
3. Any other ideas? (Lessons from other countries)

Let’s examine these alternatives

• See the pros and cons of each
• They aren’t mutually exclusive – they can exist side by side
• Consider some examples of research related to each. You will learn about research that goes on in the early childhood field and that you students participate in at UNL

1. Consumers should determine...
(What happens when private choices drive the market for early childhood services?)

Midwest Child Care Research Consortium was initiated in 2000 by researchers and state program partners in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska (UNL researchers are: Helen Raikes, Julia Torquati, Brian Wiltse, students, & me)

Record Data: State files of licensed child care and subsidy-supported child care (N = 40,000+)
Survey Data: 12.5 minute phone calls by Gallup Organization; randomized, stratified sample of N = 2022 in 4 states, good response
Observation Data: State of the art environmental rating instruments used by teams of trained observers; random selection of 365 providers for 2-3 hour observations
Parent Survey Data: Follow-up interviews of 1325 parents in the 365 programs that had been observed

Observed quality of care in four Midwestern states

- Good Quality
- Minimal Quality
- Poor Quality
2. Benchmark for program improvement

Parent data: “All things considered, how would you grade the quality of the care your child is receiving from his/her current caregiver?”

Therefore

Findings indicate that the preponderance of care in the marketplace is of minimal quality, but that parents rate it highly. They don’t want to believe their child is not in an optimal situation; the costs seem high to them; they don’t know what to look for.

Midwest study show the drawbacks of the free market as the road to good services for children.

Role of government

- State government enacts licensing standards and inspections to enforce basic standards of health and safety (Minimal quality).
- New proposal: state governments should support voluntary accreditation or rating systems to alert consumers to levels of quality.

What is a Quality Rating System?

The National Child Care Information Center defines it as a strategy to improve the quality of early education and care by providing “star ratings” like those for hotels and restaurants. The star ratings serve as:

1. Consumer guide
2. Benchmark for program improvement

Ten states have implemented statewide systems (e.g., Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma, North Carolina)

Focus on dimensions of learning environment, teacher education/training, salaries and benefits, parent involvement, and administration.

Midwest CCRC is working with policy makers and practitioners to pilot test 5-star ratings that fit the needs and policy contexts of states.

Poster, “Quality Rating System,” by Belle A. Howell & Brian Sylvestad

Findings

We are still seeking answers to whether Nebraska and other states would benefit from Quality Rating Systems to:

- Increase the prices that parents are willing to pay for high-quality services
- Help providers improve their quality

2. Objective science should determine...

- Assumption: Empirical research provides valid information about what systems, programs, and/or curricula have highest efficacy in achieving outcomes.
- What is required: Longitudinal research, valid measures of inputs & outputs
- Role of government: Fund research, then find ways to increase the desired inputs and measure child outcomes

Getting Ready Project

- A partnership of UNL researchers and community agencies
- Goal is to improve school readiness of low income children by strengthening parent confidence and competence

Long Term Effects of Lincoln’s Head Start Programs

Poster, “Long Term Effects of Lincoln’s Head Start Programs,” by Dr. Carolyn Edwards (UNL) and Dr. Deila Steiner (LPS)

Katie Taylor and Kendra Woodburn

Methods: Sample

Parental participation was low, so we relied on secondary data. The attendance, school mobility, and Reading Recovery records were examined for children who started Head Start in 1992 and 1993. The sample included a total of 462 students. Secondary data were used in this analysis. The attendance, school mobility, and Reading Recovery records were examined for children who started Head Start in 1992 and 1993. The sample included a total of 462 students.

The sample was stratified by race, gender, family income, and special education status. The sample also included those who dropped out, those who were assessed, and those who attended the full grade.

Findings: Reading Recovery

Findings: Dropout Rates

- The Head Start students were more likely than the general LPS population to drop out of high school.
- However, the majority of them did graduate, compared to the general LPS population. However, the majority of them did graduate, compared to the LPS population.
- The system for high school showed higher dropout rates for former Head Start students.
- Notice how in 1997-1998, the figures for Former Head Start were first offered, and so had a greater opportunity for subsequent schooling. A majority attended more than one elementary and more than one middle school.
- LPS High School Students 1998-2002

Conclusions

- The Head Start programs to be effective in producing short- and long-term intellectual and social gains for children in poverty, including higher self-esteem, higher achievement, and lower mobility rates during the elementary and high school years.
- What about their school mobility rates during the elementary and high school years?
- Relevant Background

Introduction

Questions
Firm findings from empirical research

- On average, low-income and vulnerable children are about 10-15 points behind average children at school entry. Many of these differences are seen at age 2.
- Good quality early education and care promote human capital — "7 to 1 return."
- Good quality early education and care enhance school readiness (language and cognitive development). Poor quality harms them. Effect sizes are largest for low-income children.

Therefore

- Systematic research works well as a system to deal with efficacy questions and helps resolve thorny issues like bilingual education, teaching of reading, optimal class size
- Drawbacks: Research is expensive and consumes time and resources. It may be difficult to draw conclusions because of the complexity of findings. There is no guarantee that policymakers will respond to findings.

3. Something else is needed ...

- We have seen the two major models for making decisions and determining what works in the United States
- What do other countries do?

“The best preschool systems in the world” depend on a continuous improvement process that is not based on quantitative data about child outcomes. Instead, improvement relies on reflective practice supported over time. Educators, parents, and citizens have time and resources to observe and respond to observations and records about what happens inside the daily life of the schools. Government provides funding for reflective practice.

This creates a culture of professional development inside schools and a culture of advocacy in the community:
- Teacher reflection (action research, co-study) is a dynamic part of teaching and learning
- Social climate and quality of group experience are emphasized. American observers are surprised by levels of child collaboration, self-control, and prosocial behavior.
- Children’s readiness for primary school isn’t assessed (why not an issue?).

Finding New Worlds: Students and Faculty Exploring Italy Together

Students and faculty shared what we made discover, finding our deeper meaning and ‘put the story’ into it?

- How can I understand the deeper meaning of what I see?
- How can I become a better teacher?
- How can I enrich documentation of what I will see?
- How can I find ways to increase parent involvement?
- How can I become a better teacher?
- Will this trip give me a better understanding of my student teaching?
- How will we all change ourselves these schools we have read about?
- How do the schools build so much community involvement?
- How can I become a better teacher?
- How are the city and educational space.
- How will we all change?
- What will it be like to see for the first time?
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Some differences between Italian and American models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italian: The “now child”</th>
<th>US: The “investment child”</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child well-being and quality of life now</td>
<td>Gains in developmental and learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory quality, design, organization</td>
<td>Inventory of toys, books, materials, equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human relationships and continuity over time</td>
<td>Language input and adult attention here and now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional dignity &amp; working conditions</td>
<td>Controlling costs and maximizing private choice</td>
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</tbody>
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www.halfthesky.org

Child-centered education

But retaining traditional Chinese emphasis on training in the fine arts and the skills of creativity

Therefore

Cross-cultural research opens the window to new ways of understanding early education and care quality.

- Improving quality is not simply a technical problem of setting up objective, measurable standards and controlling a product.
- Instead, it is also a creative, dynamic process where educators, parents, and the public engage in critical reflection about what is happening as children learn and play.

Teacher action research (and documentation) from a Reggio-inspired preschool in South Korea by Misuk Kim

Children played with small rocks and made flowers, crab, etc.

Child: Let’s collect small rocks and make a mountain with those.
Child: I have seen this kind of thing at Gumho mountain.

Child: We can pile them up higher if we collaborate.
Child: God, please help us to pile them up higher!

The children planned to construct a tower out of rocks. First, they piled up rocks in a triangle and drew to reflect on what they had made.
The children went to Gumho mountain, where there are different shapes of towers. They explored the size, shape, and density of one of the towers. Back in the classroom, the children represented the rock tower, using straws and string.

The children drew a diagram to reflect on representing the tower with straws and string. Outside, the children measured the base area for constructing their tower, using ruler and rocks. Children came back to the classroom and re-represented what they had measured outdoors.

Outside again, the children collaborated to pile up rocks in the pyramid frame they made. Teacher Action Research at the Ruth Staples CDL

- Weekly Reflection Meetings
- Observations
- Portfolio pages
- Project books

Can we now answer our opening questions?

- What process or system should be used to determine what is best for young children?
- Can the same process be used to improve the quality of services?
Conclusions
The free market does not work well to determine quality in early education and care
• Licensing, accreditation, and quality rating systems can help improve the market
• Empirical research is useful for measuring what works
• Teacher action research (reflective practice) is necessary for fostering continuous quality improvement

The tower of quality

- Private choices
- Consumer driven market
- State standards
- State standards, voluntary quality ratings
- Objective science
- Reflective practice