CHAPTER 15

Back to Basics: Building an Early Care and Education System

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Just why concentrate on this second set of basics, and why are they so important? This chapter suggests that these "hidden basics" are the infrastructure and the core competencies of early care and education. As the core of every critically important policy framework for policymakers and advocates, these basics lay the foundation for attention to the following questions: How should quality services be "assured," if not? How can we best support the workforce engaged in early care and education? Who should take the lead in "institutionalizing" early care and education efforts? How do we know that enrollment is growing, and for what populations do services work best? What will it all cost?

No guarantees, certainly, or well-trodden roads, pathways, and outcomes are often assumed in important dimensions of early childhood policy. They are expected to work, and are desired to work, because the reality is that they power our children. Little could be farther from the truth. Parental care about quality early care and education for their children and infrastructure is the core of some of that quality is the essential ingredient that provides expansion and excellence. Systems are also important to parents and policymakers. Systems make the pieces functioning they see what quality means, and what consequences do different arrangements have on the cost of quality outcomes. Systems demonstrate the strength of the infrastructure and the core competencies of early care and education. At the core of every critically important policy framework for policymakers and advocates, these basics lay the foundation for attention to the following questions: How should quality services be "assured," if not? How can we best support the workforce engaged in early care and education? Who should take the lead in "institutionalizing" early care and education efforts? How do we know that enrollment is growing, and for what populations do services work best? What will it all cost?

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added substantial numbers of hours of ongoing staff training, but preparatory qualifications have not improved greatly (Holmgren, in press). Although we have known that wage enhancements are directly related to increased quality in programs (Bell, Burton, Kaul, & Whiteman, 1997), increases in wages have eroded the purse of special (paid world-wide) projects rather than a prevailing characteristic of all early care and education programs. Similarly, although research has found that programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) pay higher wages to staff, lesser hourly income differences, and have sustained ratios of staff to children over the past decade as compared with non-accredited programs (Whiteman, Hoew, & Phillips, 1995), few states provide incentives for settings to upgrade this quality improvement process. Just 15 states pay a higher per-child rate to accredited programs (Alabama, in press), and only 3 states require state prekindergarten programs to be accredited (Michigan, Kansas, & Chaska, 1996). Finally, although we understand that quality curricula and quality pedagogy are essential to quality early care and education, only very recently have we linked these interrelating domains to robust child care workforce resources (Sowers, Donze, & Does, 2001). Kasage & Cohen, 1997.

The disarray among research, policy, and practice clearly limits the effectiveness of early care and education. It is particularly problematic in early care and education now, because we have an opportunity to reduce a portion of the significant inequities that are being made, indeed, rather than focusing on all new fellows on direct service and dismantling policies to improve affordability, quality enhancements would mean the same difference if some portion of the interventions were devoted to supporting the infrastructure and building a durable coordinated system of early care and education (European Commission Children Network, 1994; Kagan & Cohen, 1997; Gallaher & Clifford, 2005; OECD, 2005). To that end, Kagan & Cohen (1997) recommended that 10% of early care and education funds be invested directly in the infrastructure. This framework would still allow states to have the ability to determine how to allocate the rest as to meet local needs. In other countries, such as Germany and Sweden, the high quality of early care and education programs has been attributed to strong infrastructure (Trost, Gunzer, Pahlke, & Wendt, 1994). Not surprisingly, the European Commission Children Network (1994) recommended that countries should devote at least 5% of early childhood funds to develop the infrastructure. In America, however, a major part of the challenge is that we are unable to see what we mean by a system and what we mean by infrastructure.

HOW HAVE SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE BEEN DEPICTED IN THE PAST?

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines a system as “a set or arrangement of things so related or connected as a form of unity or capacity whole (e.g., a solar system, school systems, systems of highways)” (Webster-Webster, 1970, p. 1461). More precisely, the unmet “systems” “school systems” to us connotat that Webster’s use is so tautole. The popular¬ity of “school systems” hints at the notion that the concept of an “early care and education system” was not only Webster’s term but also his reality. To think of schools as functioning within the context of a system is somewhat different from the context of a system or even during an era when so many parallel is
Box 15.1 The Eight Components of an Early Developmental Care and Education System

1. Quality Provisions: At the core of any system must be a set of direct services to children and families that are of high quality and that are readily accessible.
   - Create learning environments and opportunities: Foster the effective use of materials, curricula, and pedagogy, including - high-quality, teacher-directed activities that are engaging and developmentally appropriate - an emphasis on child-centered and learner-centered activities - an appropriate balance between academic and play activities - research-based effective curricula of assessments that are engaging and that are used to improve instruction.
   - Advance children's health and development: Foster concern and attention to children's physical and mental health by either providing or accessing appropriate assessments, immunizations, and services.
   - Foster acculturation: Provide incentives to encourage early care and education systems to participate in acculturation and other quality enhancement efforts.
   - Develop and maintain links with community resources: Foster ongoing links with schools, parents and referral agencies, and other community services. This component strengthens support for these goals.

2. Child-Based, Results-Driven System (accountability)

   Define appropriate results: This includes the establishment of a state- and community-wide system of results across all domains of development, with appropriate benchmarks. Parents and professionals must be included in the development of such results.
   - Establish mechanisms to facilitate results appropriately: This includes the development of data collection strategies that take the ages and abilities of young children into consideration.
   - Ensure that results are used appropriately: This includes the establishment of appropriate safeguards so that data collected will not be used to label, track, or segregate young children and that data will be used to performance as they plan increased services for young children and their families.

3. Family, Family, Community; and Public Engagement
   - Support parents as consumers: Ensure that parents have options so they can use early care and education services.
   - Increase workplace commitments to families and business and community involvement in early care and education. Ensure that incentives are provided for business leaders to be family-friendly in their policies and practices and to be involved in advancing legislative and community supports for early care and education.

...
Develop a long-term financing plan. Engage civic leaders, stakeholders, and academy in the development of a comprehensive 15-year financing plan that considers the costs of creating an early care and education system, with adequate funding to support the infrastructure. Create a time line for its implementation.

Governance, Planning, and Program Accountability

Establish governance mechanisms at the state level. Such mechanisms should strongly provide for the oversight of the early care and education field. Such mechanisms might be boards, advisory councils, or other structures, but they must be durable and take responsibility for planning, resources, distribution of resources, and agenda setting.

Establish governance mechanisms at the local level. Create mechanisms at the local level that will coordinate the delivery of services, manage the effective use of funds, provide for the infrastructure, and coordinate efforts with the state governance mechanisms.
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On the other hand, the lack of a systematic understanding of what is meant by a system of early care and education makes policy makers and practitioners somewhat uncertain about what to do. Lack of direction, policy initiatives often focus on one element of the system and do not address the entire system. Furthermore, without a clearly defined vision of what a system is, there is no organized way to assess whether all elements of a system are being addressed. Another risk is that initiatives develop haphazardly in parts of the country with some very active states and others much less so, thus creating a system building across many states.

But a different system might not work at the United States and shows that the many kinds of early childhood development of early childhood programs is now documenting the development of early childhood systems. Instead, the international OECD review team that reviewed U.S. early care and education found in 1997 the following:

We witnessed an abundance of collaborations between different stakeholders, particularly at the local level, a remarkable level of sampling from every level of improving the overall situation of young children and their families. (p. 5)

But how coordinated and how comprehensive are these services? On the positive side, many states, in addition to funding direct programs and services, are funding components of the infrastructure. We note the term "infrastructure" to include efforts that typically provide direct services to children and families plus one or two other components of the infrastructure. In some cases, there are already other services (p. 13)

The current states of system development

State efforts to build a system are so prevalent today that the current state of affairs and trend studies (Crandall et al., 2000) a report that profiles and analyzes state policies and initiatives for young children and families, has a special category titled "Early Childhood Systems Development." The report found that some states have a system of early childhood systems and maintain the impact of program investments are increasing, but they remain uneven across the country. The authors state that 20 states report some level of early childhood systems-building efforts. Although not all of these efforts are exclusively early childhood, they nevertheless represent a substantial increase over the 15 states that reported such activities in 1997. On the other hand, only 11 states mandate state funds for systems development efforts, and none of these funds support programs and services. The authors measured up the situation as follows:

Recognizing that developing such programs and services is one thing, it is another matter to get the system to work and the whole workforce to come together. The authors identified three general ways in which early childhood systems can develop:

1. Early education providers who build new facilities are responsible for paying back over a period of one to two years, which states for services, and for regulations and policy development. For example, Hawaii has established a Good Beginnings Alliance, a statewide partnership that includes in-home and center-based programs for young children. Similarly, it is building successful early education programs in other states and regions and some services to disseminate information to policymakers. South Carolina's First Step to School Readiness has established partnerships between early intervention and other state and local organizations to develop training and support services.

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The advent of policies that provided a nationalized system for the development of early care and education, largely in the form of the National Child Development Study (NCDS), has focused attention on the importance of early childhood development. This study, conducted in the 1950s, was one of the first large-scale, longitudinal studies to examine the impact of early care and education on later life outcomes. The results of the NCDS study showed that children who received high-quality early care and education were more likely to have higher academic achievement, better health outcomes, and greater social and emotional well-being than those who did not.

The NCDS study, however, was limited in its scope and did not provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of early care and education on children's development. As a result, policymakers and researchers have sought to expand the NCDS study by examining the effects of early care and education on a wider range of outcomes. One example is the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network (ECCRN), which was established in the mid-1990s to conduct a series of studies examining the effects of early care and education on children's development.

The ECCRN has conducted several large-scale studies, including the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) and the Early Child Care Research Network. These studies have provided a wealth of information on the effects of early care and education on children's development, including cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes. The results of these studies have been used to inform policy decisions and to guide the development of evidence-based early care and education programs.

Another example of the impact of early care and education is the Head Start program, which was established in the United States in 1965 to provide high-quality early care and education to low-income children. The Head Start program has been shown to have a significant impact on children's development, including improved academic outcomes, better health outcomes, and greater social and emotional well-being.

In conclusion, the impact of early care and education on children's development is well documented, and the evidence is clear that high-quality early care and education is essential for children's long-term success. As policymakers and researchers continue to examine the effects of early care and education, it is important to remember that the development of high-quality early care and education programs requires a commitment to evidence-based practices and a focus on the needs of individual children.
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...program for local staff who work with young children will ensure that early childhood education-child care, and primary school readiness share a common core of knowledge and expectations. Similar joint working conditions already exist across the nation (Moorewooven,Mende Levin, & Normanstein, 1995).

Early care and education programs must be based on reliable scientific evidence. Early care and education programs that are based on research have a greater likelihood of success. Early care and education programs that are based on practice have a lower likelihood of success. Early care and education programs that are based on both research and practice have a higher likelihood of success.

In order to achieve the vision of a society that values early care and education, it is important to develop a plan for ensuring that early care and education programs are based on research and practice. This plan should include the following steps:

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- Early and intensive care and education interventions can have long-term benefits for children.
- Programs that provide high-quality early care and education can lead to improvements in cognitive, social, and emotional development.
- Policies and programs should focus on a comprehensive approach to early care and education.
- Early care and education should be integrated into the overall education system.
- The benefits of early care and education are well documented.

References:


