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Professional Development Needs of Early Childhood Providers: A Focus Group Study

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Professional Development Needs of Early Childhood Providers:

A Focus Group Study

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Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Research indicates that the quality of early childhood (EC) education and care influence child development. While the developmental and educational needs of young children are clear, the characteristics of quality programs are known, and school readiness goals are well articulated, the field lacks a coherent, coordinated approach to preservice training; additionally, the ongoing professional development (PD) needs and priorities of providers are not known. This occurs amidst significant changes in the structure, funding, teacher preparation, and program objectives for CT EC programs. This study employed focus groups to explore the extent to which EC providers feel prepared to address the needs of young children (and, for program leaders, the extent to which they view providers as prepared and capable), desired professional development topics and approaches, the methods by which PD can be most conveniently and effectively held, and what EC providers view as the most significant training, PD, and support needs for the field. Eleven EC providers participated in focus group sessions that were analyzed for thematic content using NVivo version 9. This report describes 3 themes: (1) preparation for teaching, (2) professional development opportunities are often inadequate, and (3) needs for professional development. The information collected serves as a pilot for the complete project to follow.

Introduction

Most American children start kindergarten with some prior experience in child care or preschool. According to the United States Census Bureau (Childstats.gov, 2010), 48 percent of children ages birth to four with employed mothers were primarily cared for by a relative. Fourteen percent were cared for by a nonrelative in a home-based environment, such as a family day care provider, nanny, babysitter, or au pair. In 2005, 43 percent of 3-year-olds and 69 percent of four-and-five-year-olds were enrolled in center-based early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). As of 2011, nationally, nearly 40 percent of 4-year olds were enrolled in publicly funded early education programs (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). In 2008, 80 percent of Connecticut 4 year-olds enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). In spite of this, CT has the dubious distinction of having the highest achievement gap (difference in educational outcomes by race and income) in the nation (CT Commission on Educational Achievement, 2011). One way to address the gap is high quality early education and care, which also serves to meet the needs of working families. It is critical for teachers to be prepared and qualified to provide quality education and care in order to promote school readiness.

Without proper preservice preparation and ongoing professional development (PD), educators cannot reasonably be expected to provide the quality education and care that is needed to address the achievement gap and create pathways to success for children. In addition to education required for certification, properly utilized professional development can make an influential difference for educators. Professional development in early childhood education is defined as programming that can provide education and assistance for professionals that will benefit both students and their families, as well as enhancing their skills and knowledge in order

to improve as instructors (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC] and National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, 2011). Professional development can be conducting in a variety of ways, from a variety of sources. Training can be provided by school districts, universities/colleges, business/professional/community organizations, national/state/local associations, and private vendors (National Education Association, 2002).

While many early childhood providers are obligated to participate in education and professional development as employment prerequisites or requirements, their mere participation in these activities does not ensure benefit. Young children may not experience improved educational experiences as a consequence of their teacher's attendance at or completion of professional development programs. Ample research (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005; Rodriguez, 1998) has identified the educational and developmental needs of young children (ages 0-5; prior to kindergarten [K]). National investment in publicly-funded pre-K programs has grown considerably (Azzi-Lessing, 2009) and Connecticut is no exception. As part of the school reform movement, many states have developed school readiness goals that align with school age objectives, thus aiming to prepare young children for kindergarten and beyond (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (2011). School readiness can be understood as how prepared a child is to begin kindergarten, which is influenced by their interactions with their family and their environment, all of which affect their development (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). It is the viewpoint of the National Association for the Education of Young Children that school readiness can be improved by having teachers who both possess the knowledge and have the resources to educate young children and foster their positive development (2009). The

implication is that EC providers need to have increased focus on school readiness and they are increasingly held accountable in this regard.

Among 52 state-funded pre-K programs, 49 (including Connecticut) had comprehensive early learning standards by 2010 (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010). In 2010, Connecticut adopted the Common Core, a set of national standards that articulate specific skills expected of students at each grade level (K-8). The Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF) and Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF) and their infant-toddler correlates (Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning) include skills and behaviors across four developmental domains (personal and social, physical, cognitive and creative expression/aesthetic); there are content standards within each domain (CT SDE, 2011). The PAF lists skills (benchmarks) for 2 1⁄2 to 6 years for each performance standard. According to the CT SDE, "Together these frameworks provide a system for teachers to plan and implement curriculum to address specific learning standards and to observe and assess children's progress in achieving those standards" (Connecticut Standards for Early Learning, p. 1). In addition to requiring adherence to preschool frameworks, Connecticut recently adopted legislation requiring 50% of classroom teachers to have the Bachelor's degree by 2015. Presently, teachers can have just an associate's degree, depending on the circumstances and the program they are a part of (National Association for the Education of Young Children).

Several factors motivate states to engage in activities that improve early childhood education, including the adoption of early learning standards and efforts to professionalize the workforce (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002; Gallagher & Clifford, 2000; Scott-Little, Kagan, Stebbins, & Frelow, 2003). First, the accumulation of research indicates that young children are capable learners, and that early education experiences may not fully capitalize on this. Second,

universal standards can contribute to improved quality among EC programs. Third, the rigorous

implementation of standards is associated with improved child outcomes. That is, when

educators have specific curricular and developmental benchmarks, they are more likely to attain

targeted outcomes. Fourth, high quality early education has the potential to narrow the

achievement gap which is in evidence early into schooling and persists. Finally, sustained

improvements in early education and care have the potential to improve the quality of the current

and future workforce. The role that professional development can play in such a revolution has

not been adequately discussed within the field, though the idea has been introduced in recent

years. At the 2007 Wingspread Conference in Wisconsin, the goal was to "develop a set of

action-oriented recommendations that would advance the field of early childhood and improve

outcomes for young children, especially children living in the most vulnerable of circumstances"

(NAEYC, 2008, p. 591). Specifically, the conference committee developed a plan to improve the

early childhood education system, which included the use of new professional development to

increase positive child outcomes by using evidence-based practices and principles to create more

quality, diverse educators.

In the policy arena, there is an attempt to professionalize the early childhood workforce.

During a time when there are substantial policy changes occurring in the field, and when

research demonstrates that quality early childhood education affects child's later academic

achievement (Schweinhart, 2003), attention to the quality of education is critical. Because every

state has unique licensing requirements for early childhood education and care (combinations of

high school diploma, national credentials in child care, courses taken or college degree),

providers are entering their positions with varying knowledge (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S.

Department of Labor, 2009). With such varying levels of education and training among EC

teachers, it is challenging to assess the most effective ways for professional development to make a significant impact on school readiness. To date, teachers experience limited benefit from PD and report that the material learned is not directly applicable to their daily classroom teaching needs (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2009). Other concerns include the means of obtaining the PD, time commitments, and convenience of access and use (Diamond & Powell, 2011). Not enough research has been conducted to find universally appealing and operative components of PD programs that can maximize the confidence, competence, and skill of early childhood providers. It is not surprising that stakeholders are challenged to define and deliver PD programs that "work" for EC teachers.

Due to the variety of educational and preservice preparation that potential providers attend, there may be topics that were not sufficiently emphasized during education and training, such as issues of diversity, working with low-income students, working with students with disabilities, or students with limited English language proficiency (Lee & Hemer-Patnode, 2010; Early & Winton, 2001). Instead, most PD programs in public schools focus on meeting state/district standards, education technology, specific subject areas, and student assessments, and may overlook or simply have insufficient time to cover topics as those previously mentioned in addition to parent/community involvement and discipline (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). These results also found that only 61% of teachers felt very prepared for their teaching assignments, and did not feel entirely comfortable applying curriculum and new methods of teaching.

Despite awareness of the importance of a quality early childhood education, and existing PD initiatives, further research is necessary to determine what providers themselves need in order to improve their skills and support the school readiness of their students. For teachers to

most benefit from professional development, the field must determine what topics and issues to be addressed, as well as the most effective way to conduct such training. Thus, this study will focus on the professional development needs from the perspectives of early childhood educators and early childhood education program supervisors in the Fairfield County, Connecticut area.

Literature Review

Practice in the field of early childhood education needs to reflect the current knowledge base about child development. As such, quality early childhood programs incorporate what is known about social, developmental, and ecological influences on child functioning. Based upon scholarly findings, it has become clear that children's development is influenced by the quality of education and care that they receive prior to entering kindergarten. To have children achieve optimal school readiness, teachers must be versed in such knowledge in order to create quality classrooms. That being said, there is insufficient research on the universal components of effective professional development programs for early childhood educators. The professional literature on preservice preparation and ongoing training can inform future professional development programs and lead to positive change.

Effective PD needs to be comprehensive and well-integrated to classroom occurrences (Landry, Anthony, Swank & Monseque-Bailey, 2009). Whereas national teacher training accreditation standards exist, and they reflect both the scholarly literature on child development as well as policy priorities with respect to education, little attention has been paid to the integration of these standards with the diverse realities of the EC workforce. Training methods that are most suitable for the lifestyle and preferences of educators are most likely to result in teacher engagement and positive outcomes. Research demonstrates that high quality pre-kindergarten programs have positive outcomes on children's academic and social performance in

the following year (Burchinal et al., 2008). Therefore, it is of high priority to determine a way to provide that benefit to as many students as possible by improving the quality of educators via professional development.

Sequence of Preparation and Training for Early Childhood Teachers

As previously stated, there are varied and changing requirements for becoming an early childhood educator. Each state has individual requirements to obtain early childhood educator licensure (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). There are also specific requirements for different programs, such as for different age groups or purposes. For example, Head Start program teachers now must have an associate's degree as a minimum and must meet federal standards. EC programs may choose to have higher standards for their employees, such as requiring specific degrees, courses taken, and/or work experience. Additionally, individuals may obtain a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential if they hold a high school diploma and have certain employment experiences, and this can be used to obtain an early childhood teaching position as well (Council for Professional Recognition, 2011).

In addition to individual requirements, the NAEYC serves to accredit programs upon meeting specific qualifications. According to NAEYC candidacy requirements, in order to a program to be approved, certain criteria must be met by program staff, specific to a supervisor, teachers, and teacher aides. The required educational qualifications for teachers state that 75% must be either: CDA certified, be working on an associate's or higher degree in a related field with a concentration in early childhood education, have an associate's degree or higher in any subject but three years work experience in an NAEYC-accredited program, or have an associate's degree or higher in any subject with three years work experience in a non-NAEYC-accredited program with 30 contract hours of relevant training in the past three years. By these

standards, teaching within a NAEYC-accredited program requires fairly minimal training; recently, the state of Connecticut has moved to enhance these standards for early childhood educators.

Connecticut is in the process of reforming its early childhood education system by creating a plan to improve standards beginning in stages from Summer 2011 through 2020 and beyond (Public Act No. 11-54, 2011). From now until July 2015, state standards require that at an early childcare classroom, there is a sole provider who has at least: an associate credential in childhood development or equivalent from an approved institution with 12 credits in early childhood education or child development, an associate's degree from an approved institution with 12 credits in early childhood education or child development, a bachelor's degree with 12 credits in early childhood education or child development from an approved institution, or proper certification with an endorsement in early childhood education or special education.

The next phase is from 2015-2020, where stricter requirements have been set. For this period, staff for programs that are accepting state funds (including school readiness, childcare, or funds from the Department of Social Services), must have at least 50% of main teachers holding either appropriate certification with an endorsement in early childhood education or early childhood special education, a bachelor's degree in topics such as early childhood education, child study, child development or human growth and development from an approved and accredited institution, and the remaining staff must hold an associate degree with a focus in early childhood education from an approved and accredited institution. From July 2020 and into the future, for every program receiving the previously specified state funding, *all* head teachers must have the previously specified guidelines for 2015-2020 (Public Act No. 11-54, 2011). Such a progressive and positive plan has real potential to alter the quality of teacher preparation and, as

a consequence, the quality of early education in Connecticut. But, while the process occurs, professional development can be a means to creating quality classrooms now. Professional development can supplement prior education in order to "level the playing field" with respect to the knowledge base and competencies of EC teachers; beyond that, it has to potential to improve the skills of all educators, despite their various backgrounds.

Gaps in Preservice Education

Given the wide range of topics that teacher preparation must address, it is logical that not all can be delivered – or delivered with depth. Lee and Hemer-Patnode (2010) assert that many teachers believe that education and training need to be better connected to actual classroom situations, in particular when working with diverse populations of students. Specifically, the early and middle childhood teachers in their study would have liked to have had more assignments regarding issues such as poverty, as well as research supported techniques for dealing with students who face poverty. Additionally, the teachers wanted more guidance regarding the needs of diverse students, how to prevent the development of their own stereotypes, and more fieldwork experiences in settings that could provide this experience. While this was only one study, it can be assumed that many teachers may not feel adequately prepared to teach in all settings, even when they have received their degree. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1999) reported that the majority of teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared to work with students who have more diverse cultural background, have minimal English proficiency, or have disabilities, based on their previous education. Commonalities among such issues that were not presented adequately during education or training preparation can be used to compose useful professional development programs.

Another challenge in the field is the inconsistency that may exist between what area programs state they train educators in and what students actually learn. Many programs suggest in their mission statements that their teachers will be prepared to work with students with disabilities, as well as have full preparation to work with infants and toddlers (Early & Winton, 2001). In reality, some programs do not require courses on these subjects or supply ample field experience with young children. Teachers recruited to teach in EC programs may be less qualified than their degrees might otherwise imply. Professional development can be a way to reduce that gap by ensuring that educators have the necessary knowledge to provide quality childcare and education.

In addition to what would be considered to be basic topic areas of preservice education, new avenues of learning may not be increasingly incorporated into curriculum. For example, technology is progressively being incorporated into learning, as schools are providing resources for teachers and classrooms. Due to the rapid pace of changing technology, instruction on how to use technology in the classroom may have to be an ongoing process. Having a class on how to use technology in the early childhood education setting during preservice education may not be sufficient, and instead a more integrated approach may be more useful for educators (Parette, Quesenberry & Blum, 2010). By using technology in other classes and having more exposure to how it can be applied to different aspects of education, teachers will likely be more comfortable using it to facilitate developmentally appropriate technology usage. Additionally, in-service professional development can be used to introduce new technology and further the teacher's competence.

Models of Professional Development

One of the problems that becomes visible from a review of the literature is that each individual program has its own method of professional development. There are also differing opinions in the field regarding what should be included and/or focused on during programs. It seems unlikely that a "one size fits all" approach to PD would bring optimal results. Therefore, it is important to examine the research findings to determine which technique might superior under what circumstances.

While most providers participate in some kind of professional development, it is unfortunate that they may be receiving it in a way that is not impacting their abilities. Many educational systems have chosen to conduct professional development in the form of one-time workshops, where an individual is brought in to lead a one-day workshop or seminar on one or many topics (Anonymous, 2004). This method has been noted as being disjointed and lacking continuity, which of course will not bring positive change to participating teachers (Anonymous, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) was enacted with the intention of improving the education system in part by addressing PD. The law states that professional development programs should be classroom-focused and should provide educators with new knowledge that can be used towards helping children meet state standards (2002). Most importantly, NCLB states that professional development should not be in the form of single or short-term workshops or conference. Despite this, one-time workshops are still frequently used.

With this knowledge of what needs to occur in order for adults to learn and facilitate change in behavior, it is understandable to see how certain models of professional development, such as ongoing coaching, would be an effective use of such research. Yet, many schools,

districts, and states continue to choose to use methods which do not align with the research-based objectives, such as one-shot sessions, therefore leading to poor quality professional development being provided. It seems sensible that training over time would be more impactful than in a single day, yet it remains common. This one-shot training typically takes the form of a lecture, in which participating teachers are involved in a strictly passive way (Arcieri, 1998). This method is very formal, and does not necessarily align with the idea that adult learners will learn from gaining practical skills that can be used in their direct teaching environment. Instead, Arcieri (1998) suggests that more teachers would want to participate if a more integrated approach was taken, such as learning on the job from immediate peers instead of an outside source. In addition, he also suggests making professional development flexible by changing venues and formats, and encouraging suggestions from the participants in order to meet individualized needs. Ryan, Whitebrook, Kipnis and Sakai (2011) found that the early childhood education supervisors preferred basic methods of programming, such as workshops, training sessions, or seminars for professional development. This finding is contrary to the previously discussed work of Arcieri (1998). A potential reason for this response could be that many professionals are unaware of options outside of one-time trainings, because that is all that they have ever experienced. Further investigation is needed to understand what is in fact desired by the professionals, especially when various options are available.

What should be highly considered when creating professional development programming, but is likely not sufficiently included is research, is the consideration of adult learning. As opposed to children and methods used in school, there are techniques to having adults learn in an effective manner as well. Adult learners must be "involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction" (Conlan, Grabowski, & Smith, 2003, "Adult Learning", para. 5).

In addition, adult learning must be based on tangible experience, be problem-focused, and content must have direct relevance to their job (Conlan, Grabowski, & Smith, 2003). Additionally, adult learners need to know what is expected of them, be able to associate new knowledge with their past experiences, be able to at least somewhat self-direct their learning, and receive feedback on their performance (Teaching Research Institute at Western Oregon University, 2012).

By looking at the research on fostering successful education, and seeing the problems with one-shot workshops, researchers and administrators alike can change the trend towards a more productive form of professional development. For example, by changing the role of the experienced person(s) leading the group, the group dynamic can change in a positive way (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders & Goldenberg, 2009). If the leader of the group is a trained peer-facilitator, instead of an outside expert, the group can function as a team more effectively. By using the technique of having a peer lead, he/she will be having the same experiences in the classroom that can be discussed, making the group more unified. In addition, if the leader is a trained peer, then the coach or expert can be used as a resource instead of an authority, in the way that a traditional one-shot workshop is run.

The model of peer coaching and peer review as professional development can be defined as teachers promoting support and cohesion for that network of educators by consulting with each other to share their experiences and thoughts on teaching practices, as well as observing each other in the act of teaching (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2012). Coaching allows for reflection and understanding of techniques used, feedback obtainment, and collaboration (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2012). Joyce and Showers (2002) also supported this idea with their research on peer coaching. They

believe that peer coaches can be of great assistance as sources of support and guidance during a transition period of implementing new classroom practices. Coaching also allows for much conversation and interaction to occur between the professionals, leading to the creation of new ideas and the improvement of previous techniques. This research has shown that the effects of coaching are long-term, and it allows teachers to develop a deep understanding of new materials that they have learned.

If the aim of teacher PD is to improve student outcomes, it follows that there should be standards or guidelines for PD that both reflect the needs of adult learners and promote the uptake and use of new competencies inside the classroom. Authors Joyce and Showers (2002) focus on methods that can be used to train teachers in a way that will improve their abilities by the use of a complex system designed to target learning from different approaches. Their philosophy is to have four parts of any training: expansion of knowledge by exploring concepts, the demonstration of skills, the practice of such skills, and peer coaching. These areas, particularly peer coaching, are meant to foster improvements that will transfer to the classroom appropriately. They cite peer coaching as the method that most effectively led to skill transfer; after experiencing coaching, teachers applied and adapted new practices within their individual context of teaching. Evidence from the National Implementation Research Network (2008) suggests that coaching has been correlated with improvement in studies of training because the coach provides supervision, support, and feedback that leads to positive change. The authors additionally highlight that it is important that the training should match the desired outcomes, and this is something that is done on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, with knowledge of options for methodology as well as the perspectives of educators on what they want from a program, impactful professional development can be created (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Regardless of how comprehensive and beneficial a given professional development program can be for any educator, if it is not defined in a method that is convenient, desirable, or appropriate for the participants, it will not be effective. There is some literature on the different techniques used by individual programs, and which were met with positive feedback and affirmative teacher outcomes. Landry et al. (2009) found that a yearlong, online course that was followed by classroom mentoring and monitoring of progress with feedback was an effective and desirable method from the views of the educators. By integrating a few different methods, the teachers were able to improve their student outcomes and their own abilities. In contrast, Powell et al. (2010) found that teachers responded well to a semester-long program which began with a two day workshop and was followed by coaching from more experienced teachers. These inconsistent results suggest that there needs to be a fit between the individual participant's needs and the program offerings. While these studies address two of many options of duration, much more research is needed to determine the time length of choice and optimal effectiveness from the viewpoint of early childhood providers.

Many of the newer methods discussed in the literature involve more interactive strategies that seem to be more aimed at having practical knowledge and experience. Bailey (2010) found that teachers benefited from viewing pre-recorded lessons by other educators, as well as observing fellow educators teach firsthand. They enjoyed being actively involved in the creation of classroom material that they could use later in their own teaching space, and desired more conversations between groups of their peers, as well as between peers and researchers. Modeling as a form of instruction is not new to the field of education, but may not be what some teachers prefer. Keengwe and Onchwari (2010) found that educators sometimes find PD programs to be ineffective because material was not easily transferable to the classroom. In their study,

educators felt that professional development programs must be hands-on and should integrate lessons that have been used by classroom teachers previously. Training that incorporates modeling and is easily transferred also derives effectiveness from experienced mentors. Walter (2010) discussed a role reversal program, where the EC student teachers would assume the role of classroom teacher, while an experienced classroom teacher observed and critiqued. When considering this method as an alternative to the one-time professional development days that many school districts use, there is quite a difference in methodology. Most educators likely do not realize that there can be non-traditional methods to professional development, which further suggests that there is a need to inform and discuss what educators feel would be the most relevant and effective.

Instead of the idea that professional development has to be done by all participants at one set time, researchers Deardorff, Glasenapp, Schalock and Udell (2007) tested a program that used a more individualized approach. This program was unique in that it was self-directed, meaning that early childhood teachers can use the program at any time that meets their scheduling needs. It was meant to be a cost effective and accessible way that professional development can be provided to any educator in any location. The teachers can improve their knowledge and skills about early childhood education (in this study, early childhood special education) by taking an assessment of needs that identifies their personal strengths and weaknesses. This idea is novel and may be something that teachers may like because of the flexibility, although many may not even be aware of such options since it utilizes advanced technology.

A mixed methods approach (one that incorporates multiple research methods in an effort to utilize the strengths of each technique; Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Clegg Smith, 2011)

is one way in which a program evaluation can examine the individual techniques as well as the effect as a whole. Using this approach, Diamond and Powell (2011) examined the outcomes and feedback from Head Start teachers who participated in the multi-part PD program. First, they looked at how well teachers (who had little computer knowledge) were able to use hypermedia components, as well as the problems that they faced in doing so. Findings showed that when the teachers had the choice to watch either videos on effective teaching or online text resources on the topic, the teachers were more likely to read the text than view the media. Next, the teachers videotaped themselves in the classroom, and then had the videos sent to a coach who would critique it. The teachers felt that this process was not practical to their lifestyle, as it was too time consuming and effortful. Last, the teachers participated in a workshop followed by individualized coaching for four months by sending videos to the coaches for evaluation, and having visits from the coaches. Overall, the participants found the process of recording themselves and sending the videos to be challenging to fit into their schedule, and they were not willing to commit to doing the program again because of too many external factors that influenced their ability to do so (e.g., classroom activities that would interfere with recording). A positive aspect of the program was that teachers viewed the technological aspects that were incorporated to be effective, especially when combined with other methods. What can be gleaned from this study is that teachers support the use of technology in some aspects of programming, but not to be used for all aspects of the program. Also, tasks that are too interfering or are time-consuming are generally undesirable. These trends are likely to be common among other program evaluations.

Similar to a mixed method approach, creating a program that covered multiple domains, instead of one single domain, would seem ideal. This is the idea behind the "Whole Teacher"

approach, which is meant to be multi-dimensional, domain specific, integrated, and developmental, as explained by creators Chen and Chang (2006):

> In addition to knowledge and skills, the approach promotes the development of attitudes and classroom practices. All three variables play an equally important role in teacher professional development. The focus on multiple dimensions offers teachers multiple pathways to learning and success. For some teachers, attitudes will be the most important first step to progress; for example, overcoming fear of failure. For others, classroom practice will be the key; for example, being motivated by the need to teach diverse learners. The approach accommodates teachers' needs and motivations, rather than providing only one way in and out ("The Whole Teacher Approach to Early Childhood Professional Development", para.3).

The Whole Teacher is unique in that is incorporates individual differences between educators participating and accommodates them, while maintaining that all educators are learning in a comprehensive way. The program was used to teach early childhood educators about technology, and found that all three key components (attitudes, skill, and practice), were more integrated, leading to the educators being more confident in their technology usage and therefore more proficient in classroom usage. This dynamic technique is a unique conceptualization that just shows how many options are available for professional development programming, and how different ideas can be combined into more integrated programming. Because of the plethora of existing options, as well as the introduction of news ideas that could potentially be used, it is important to ask early childhood educators what they believe will be the most useful method for

them as well as what they view is the most adhering to their schedule, and therefore worth their time.

Using Professional Development to Create Quality Classrooms

It is becoming clear within the EC community that a quality EC education is necessary for children to be prepared for school and have the opportunity for continued academic success. Mashburn et al. (2008) evaluated a large sample of pre-kindergarten programs on quality in relation to child outcomes and found that the quality of teacher-child interactions in the classroom was the best predictor of positive child developmental outcomes. This implies that, to improve classroom quality, it is absolutely necessary to in place policies that target improving these relationships; in-service PD is one option for addressing this. By educating providers on how to improve the direct relations that they have with the students, program quality will improve, and most importantly, the students will benefit the most.

Although it is important to improve the skills and knowledge held by EC educators, the focus of this field of research is how to most benefit young children and their school readiness. What exists among the present research is the positive outcomes for children who have received quality early childhood education because of educator participation in effective professional development. Landry et al. (2009) found that children have better language comprehension, improved phonological awareness, a greater range of expressive vocabulary, and improved letter and print knowledge when their teachers participated in a quality professional development program. A more positive and supportive classroom environment, as well as improved knowledge of letters, writing, printing and blending skills, were found as a results of an effective intervention program, as discussed by Powell, Diamond, Burchinal and Koehler (2010). In

addition, children learned more vocabulary words as results of teaching implementing the strategies learned during a specific professional development program (Wasik, 2010).

Perhaps the reason that professional development programs for early childhood educators has not been studied sufficiently is that it is not viewed as a priority in the education community. Attending professional development and training programs was reported by early childhood teachers as being one of six themes of quality service, alongside of issues that are frequently viewed as quite important, such as have qualified staff and meaningful relationships (Logan & Sumsion, 2010). Therefore, if it is known that professional development is just as important as other requirements that are considered mandatory, it is unfortunate and perplexing to see that there is inconclusive evidence of what is universally desired and effective.

What Early Childhood Providers Need from Professional Development

There is a difference between what should be included in a quality early childhood professional development program from the viewpoint of an academic professional or researcher, and an education provider or program supervisor. Based upon the guidelines by education advocates David and Frances Hawkins (philosopher and educator/author/consultant, respectively), Ellen Hall (2010) made the following recommendation for what should comprise successful professional development:

> Be ongoing… Recognize and respect the desire of children and adults to co-construct knowledge about the physical and social world… Provide space to mess about with materials and time to engage in a sharing of ideas with other adults… Be closely connected to ongoing investigations in the school that are observed, documented, and analyzed… Utilize resources from the scientific community and from the political, economic, and cultural communities… Provide a forum through which teachers are able

to gain competency as well as the feeling of competency—the empowerment and

enthusiasm that is necessary to venture into a place of authentic inquiry with children and

other adults (Synthesis section, para, 2).

This ideology is based upon a combination of philosophical ideas and various perspectives on

those within education, yet may be difficult to operationalize for universally usable

programming. While such a conceptualization of professional development appears logical and

ideal, what is needed is an educator's interpretation of how it can be accomplished. First-hand

viewpoints of educators, while they are in the context of teaching, are what has been missing

from the field in sufficient quality, and that is what can be used to truly make quality programs

that will provide the much needed benefits to the teachers, and ultimately the students as they

prepare to enter school. Topics such as children's social and emotional development in relation

to schooling, use of technology, and utilizing available resources have been suggested by

educators as areas where professional development could be beneficial.

Children's social-emotional development. Preservice education typically focuses on

elements that are most related to student's academic achievement, but perhaps the integration of

more indirect yet important areas of development, such as caring for children's social and

emotional needs, are necessary in curriculum and PD as well. Onchwari (2010) surveyed

teachers-in-training about their views on dealing with different kinds of stressors felt by their

students. Many of the participants responded as feeling only moderately or poorly prepared to

deal with the stress of students, which is something that can certainly be viewed as alarming,

particularly when considering at-risk students who likely have many stressors affecting them. Of

the stressors that can affect the students, the teachers felt best prepared to deal with those that

related to school and least prepared to deal with stressors related to society. Therefore, it can be

inferred that what these teachers would need from professional development would be related to socio-emotional development from all perspectives, not only those relating to education.

Family-school partnership. Before PD creation and implementation occurs, it is necessary for researchers to have a clear understanding of what subject matters need to be included in training. In a study that included public, private, and family forms of early education, it was found that there needs to be a focus at the teacher, parent, and child levels (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes & Karoly, 2008). From the perspective of the participating educators, "a child needs to be emotionally (confident, motivated), physically (healthy with good motor skills), cognitively (alphabet, numbers and problem-solving skills) ready and have good social skills that will allow the child to get along with others" in order to be prepared to enter school levels (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes & Karoly, 2008, p.347). Additionally, educators felt that because it is important for parents to prepare their children for the transition to school, as well as having a consistently stimulating home environment, facilitating parent-teachers relationships can be very important. Therefore, by having professional development to inform teachers about how to handle these situations, as well as guidance on how to facilitate them, children will be in the best position to enter their years in school.

Incorporation of technology. Another idea to consider regarding professional development is how to include new skill sets that were not previously included into training programs, such as the use of technology. Saúde et al. (2005) found that kindergarten teachers wanted to learn more about how to include technology into their curriculum. Additionally, they were interested to learn how programs such as Microsoft Office and certain new educational games and programs can be effectively used to teach, as well as knowledge of general computer skills. While this study may have been more relevant in 2005, in the present day it can be

assumed that most educators have been using technology for many years, including during their

pre-teaching education. Therefore, while the basic computer skills and programs may not need

to be included, certainly how to include technology into classroom instruction is something to

consider and would likely be desired by many, especially by those who are older and perhaps

less conversant.

Available resources. While many professional development programs focus on the core

subjects, other subject areas should be considered as well, in order for providers to offer a

diverse and stimulating education. Bagiati, Yoon, Evangelou and Ngambeki (2010) evaluated

the availability of resources for early childhood educators in the field of engineering. Findings

showed that compared to the information available for older students, there was little material

available on the internet for early childhood providers, and minimal guidance of how it can

applied to content area standards. Therefore, because teachers do not have the resources

available to learn about more abstract skills sets, such as early engineering, children may not

have the opportunity to explore the subject. What teachers need is a variety of resources

assessable and appropriate for their classroom teaching in order to create classroom change.

Regardless of what specific content areas early childhood educators feel that they need

instruction on, the collective view would be that they want a program that is useful to them.

Whitaker, Kinzie, Kraft-Sayre, Mashburn, and Pianta (2007) found that teachers reported their

willingness to participate in programs that they felt would benefit them, even when it was not

required of them. Many of these educators even were willing to purchase materials that would be

helpful to them, showing that with the correct components, teachers will be willing to put time,

effort, and even money into participating in professional development and becoming better

educators. From that, researchers can move forward with the task of finding the formula to creating professional development programing that is appeasing to the participating individuals.

Curriculum Implementation

An issue that is not found much in the literature but is necessary in providing a quality education is enforcing proper curriculum implementation. Curriculum implementation is defined as "putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects" (Chikumbu & Makamure, 2000, p.50). While every single school and childcare center has a curriculum for their teachers to base their lessons on, the role that professional development plays in how teachers learn and incorporate the standards is fairly unknown. In a study done to look at how science teachers were able to implement a new program as a part of their curriculum, positive change occurred when educators participated in planning a way to incorporate the new material into their classroom during the training session (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007). Burgess, Robertson, and Patterson (2010) surveyed early childhood teachers about PD initiatives on curriculum standards. Findings showed that that the teachers had mixed views about the program, and that since it was not mandatory, many teachers did not participate. They reported that the training and support structures provided were not sufficient to their full understanding, and that the timing and context of the training was also a factor in their participation. Therefore, it is pivotal for research to examine the knowledge that early child education providers have on the curriculum that they are required to follow, as well as what they feel they need further training on, and in what way.

Professional Development in Relation to Program Supervisors

The perspectives of those who supervise programs and/or centers for early childhood education is another to consider when discussing the needs of early childhood providers. When

considering professional development needs, the viewpoint of what program supervisors feel is needed for their staff has not been adequately investigated. The existence of alignment between their personal thoughts and their employees' opinions is something that would be interesting idea to contribute to the field. It is possible that supervisors are able to recognize an issue that is difficult to identify for the teachers themselves, therefore making them an important part of investigating professional development needs. Because the supervisor has the opportunity to greatly impact the center, the staff, and the students, their opinion should be considered regarding the professional development of the staff that oversee. It also may be important to note that supervisors could benefit from their own professional development to improve deficiencies, because these deficiencies can have a negative impact on the center, the educators, and therefore the students, though this was not examined in our study.

At a child care center, it is necessary for supervisors and their staff to work together and communicate effectively in order to bring success to the center, and therefore the children they serve. Professional development can be used to facilitate this by inquiring about the professional development needs of providers, as compared to what their supervisors feel they need improvement on. If there is disparity between the two, then perhaps there is insufficient understanding within the hierarchy, which could affect the quality and productivity of the center. A study of music teachers and their supervisors found that the teachers desired improvement on motivating students and using teaching materials and resources, while their supervisors felt that the teachers most needed training on classroom management and subject competence (Johanson, 2008). This discontinuity suggests that the supervisors feel their staff is not sufficiently prepared in an area that the teachers feel they are competent in, as well as that teachers have needs that are not being meet by their supervisors, who are unaware of the issue. By addressing this issue via

professional development, than a clearer understanding of needs can be discovered, and improvement can occur.

Another idea to consider is the incorporation of program supervisors into professional development program for providers. As cited by Black (1998), a quality staff development program should have four stages: training on a topic, in depth-training on the topic and sharing of experiences, training for administrators and teachers together, and training for supervisors to learn to support their staff. Perhaps supervisors may want to be involved in the process of professional development with their staff, for both their self-betterment and the collective improvement of their program. Working together and sharing experiences could be a useful tool that teacher could potentially gain from.

Since the qualifications for such roles may vary, professional development can be a method to improve the way in which a supervisor leads and supports his/her staff, which can lead to a better center that will ultimately support better child development. In a phone-interview study conducted by Ryan, Whitebrook, Kipnis and Sakai (2011), child care center supervisors expressed that they had at least one area of their job that they were not entirely confident in, and could use the aid of learning new skills or knowledge regarding such deficiencies. Many directors stated that areas such as program administration, management, managing finances, and early childhood education were of primary concern. Others cited that working with families, issues relating to technology, or managing the facility were areas that could be improved upon. Most of the directors also replied that to manage such deficits, they had been relying on other employees who had more knowledge in such areas. In these cases, the actual teachers may be helping supervisors with such tasks, which could have a negative impact on their teaching abilities and/or focus on their primary job of educating students. Therefore, it is important to

consider the knowledge and abilities held by supervisors and directors, and while it may be overlooked, professional development may be useful for them as well in order to benefit the early childhood center/program as a whole.

Program supervisors are in a unique position of viewing their staff and hopefully have insights into what they need improvement on. Yet, this can only be of value of the staff is willing to participate. A study of early childhood program leaders suggested that what was needed most by the participants was support for professional development, including time and means to conduct programs for their faculty (Hyson, Tomlinson & Morris, 2009). If this is a commonality among program supervisors outside of the study, then many education providers are unfortunately not receiving the professional development needed. Perhaps professional development therefore needs to be included into policy at higher levels of the education system in order for supervisors to be able to implement it.

Early Childhood Education Provider Outcomes of Professional Development

The ultimate goal of creating professional development programs is to allow the students to receive the best quality education possible. This can only be done if the early childhood education providers participate in professional development programs that meet their needs and enhance their teaching abilities. The literature on PD addresses various programs, including the different productive outcomes that the teachers experienced. Many of the outcomes are associated with the specific method of the program, so it should be examined in the future what universal outcomes should be achieved from professional development programs for early childhood education providers. Since it is known that teachers do not benefit from programs that do not directly apply to their classroom teaching (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2009), it is important

for future research to expand upon the existing findings and find ways to achieve the highest possible level of teacher gain, in order to most benefit the children.

Because program objectives and characteristics are diverse and unique, it follows that desired outcomes vary as well. When educators were taught early childhood education competencies through a mixed methods format, they had increased levels of knowledge and newly acquired skills relating to the topics (Deardorff et al, 2007). On a most basic level, this would represent achievement of a typical objective of a professional development program. Wasik (2010) found that improved classroom quality was found after the completion of the PD training in early language and literacy. While these outcomes are positive, they are very general and may not be the same as the outcomes of programs that have more specific initiatives.

For professional development programs that focus on more specific issues, the ideal goal should be to have the early childhood educators improve their skills in that specific area, but also to use that knowledge to have an overall positive effect on how they are able to educate. Keengwe & Onchwari (2009)'s study of a program based on using technology allowed teachers to learn how to use various technological tools and applications that can be utilized in the classroom, as well as how to manage classroom technology with students, the role that technology now has in the education system, and what barriers technology presents to classroom learning. They were also advised on issues such as the easy accessibility of plagiarism due to new technology, as well as identifying what barriers technology presents. This is an example of how programs can provide a comprehensive view on a specific topic with a focus on what can be used in the classroom.

A unique approach to professional development is focused on having the early childhood educators reflect on their own teaching practices. The journal writing exercise used in Isikoglu's

study (2007) allowed the participants to be able to look back upon what they had written during the course of the program. This technique promoted the educators to learn from their past experiences, examine how they handled different situations, and gain awareness of their role in the classroom. Researchers measured outcomes based upon the individual's level of reflection; "At the critical reflection level, the pre-service teachers focused on analyzing their educational practices considering multiple perspectives and the moral and social implications of classroom practice. The professional development and change occurred at this level" (Isikoglu, 2007, p. 822). Another unique approach looked both at how teachers could use appropriate teaching materials, but then also how to create ones of their own (Bailey, 2010). The results of the study found that after participating in the program, educators did not improve their ability to find and use materials appropriate for the students, but they did improve in their ability to design their own instructional materials, assignments, and assessments for the students. This approach emphasizes the point that professional development programs that teach existing knowledge are not of use to those participating, but it is the programs that provide novel methods and concepts that allow for the most growth for the early childhood educators.

As previously discussed, one of the salient limitations facing professional development programs is the frequent lack of transferability. Joyce and Showers (2002) discuss that when learning new skills, it is difficult to master them to a level in which they can be utilized appropriately in the classroom. It takes considerable practice for a provider to adapt a new skill into their previous classroom regime. Joyce and Showers suggest that it is the teachers who are aware of this challenge and take the necessary steps in order to accomplish proper classroom transfer, as opposed to the many who underestimate the task, who will see tangible changes and success. So in order for any positive outcome to occur for the providers, being aware of the

challenge of transferring new skills can be considered necessary to successful professional development.

Conclusions

   While there have been many studies that discuss and evaluate professional development programs for early childhood education providers, further research must be done in order to determine the needs of the educators in terms of what they want to learn and gain from the programs, and in what method would be most appealing to their learning as well as accommodating to their lifestyles. Burchinal et al. (2008) address this issue by encouraging that investigation is needed to recognize programs that are able to both improve the way that educators teach and also have the best outcomes of the children. Educators need to be asked about what subject areas they desire improvement on, and in turn what area they feel sufficiently competent. They also need to be asked about how they have felt about previous professional development programs, and which methods they feel most be the most effective for their learning and therefore child outcomes.

   Recent research has identified the importance of a quality early childhood education in order for students to achieve the necessary school readiness that can lead to future academic success. Unfortunately, not all students are being given access to optimal education because of the variety of requirements and standards set for early child educators. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2009) found that only 15% of early childhood education classrooms were rated as having high levels of emotional and instructional support for the students, which is needed for students to achieve highly as they enter school following pre-kindergarten. This alarming fact represents the need to investigate the components of successful professional development from the perspective of the educators who are participating. Therefore, the following can be used as research

questions to explore this under-investigated field of study: (1) To what extent do EC providers feel prepared to address the needs of young children? (and, for program leaders, the extent to which they view providers as prepared and capable); (2) What topics and approaches do teachers and supervisors wish to be addressed in education and PD programming?; (3) What are the methods by which PD can be most conveniently and effectively held?; and (4) What do EC providers view as the most significant training, PD, and support needs for the field?. We hope to summarize this information into a cohesive report that enables the EC community to develop a coherent plan to address the PD needs and priorities of EC providers. By finding the answers to these questions by the means of surveying early childhood education providers, policy and programming can be implemented that can improve the level of quality in the educators, which can then facilitate the ultimate goal of the academic and overall success of the students.

Method

Design

The study utilized a qualitative method, specifically focus groups, to investigate professional development needs of early childhood providers. The investigator organized and monitored two focus groups, each with 5-6 participants, using an interview guide developed for use in this study, with the support of the Stamford School Readiness Council.

Participants

Participants were early childhood providers and program supervisors from the Fairfield County, CT area. More specifically, adult (18+) individuals employed as a teachers, assistant teachers, home/family child care providers, instructional coordinators, and/or program supervisor in early childhood education schools, programs, and facilities, either public or privately funded, were recruited for the study. The field employs predominantly women, however, men were not excluded. Due to the diversity of the workforce, differing levels of education were expected, with most having some form of EC education, credential, or certification from the state of Connecticut, which generally held true. There were no restrictions based on gender, ethnicity, age range (adults only), or income. Since early childhood teachers are expected to have conversational fluency in English, we conducted focus groups in English and this was not a barrier to participation. Table 1 lists ethnicity reported for early childhood educators and individuals from Fairfield County, CT, in comparison to our participants (Saluja, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau: State and County Quickfacts, 2009). Table 2 lists qualifications of early childhood educators in relation to our participants (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Nearly 99% of early childhood teachers are female, and the average age is 39 years. In our study, all participants were female, and all were at least 40 years of age, with most being at least 45 years

of age. Occupational employment statistics show that the average annual salary for preschool teachers in Connecticut is $30,080 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In the current study the majority of participants had an annual family income of $75,000-$125,000. Table 3 lists other characteristics of participants. Other participant descriptives are listed in Appendix A.

Table 1

Ethnicity

Early Childhood Educators	Population in Fairfield County, CT	Our Participants
78.4% White	74.8% White	63.6% White
10.2% African American	16.9% Hispanic/Latino	27.1% Black/African American
5.7% Hispanic or Latino	10.8% Black	9.1% Hispanic or Latino

Table 2

Educational Qualifications

Early Childhood Educators	Our Participants
49.9% Bachelor's Degree or Higher	54.5% Bachelor's Degree or Higher
26.8% Vocational/Other Training	27.3% Some College/High School Diploma
14.7% Associate's Degree	9.1% Associate's Degree

Table 3

Work in the Field of Early Childhood

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Years worked in early childhood	19.4	22	7
Years spent in classroom with children	19.2	22	7
Hours per week worked in current position	38.3	40.75	12.9

Materials

Materials used for this study were the Participant Questionnaire (Appendix A) and the Qualitative *Focus Group Questions and Follow-Up Prompts* in two versions; the provider version and the program leader version (Appendices B and C, respectively).

The participant questionnaire consisted of questions such as age, job title, experience, zip code/town, education and training, ethnicity, etc. The questions were multiple choice and fill in the blank. The questionnaire was administered before beginning of each focus group session and was completed by all participants

There were two versions of the *Focus Group Questions and Follow-Up Prompts*. One version was for the early childhood providers (teachers, aides, instructional coordinators, etc.) and one was for the early childhood program leaders (program and agency directors). The two sets of questions share a single framework but are tailored to suit the work of the participant groups (e.g., questions asked of the supervisors inquired mostly about the PD needs of their staff and questions asked of providers inquired about their own PD needs and preferences, with a few queries about the perceived needs and preferences of their co-workers). Both versions of the focus group questions consisted of approximately 11 general topics with several possible probes

within them (bulleted items). Topics included participant roles in the education system, main goals of their work, what experience has prepared them for their work, how well prepared they feel for their work, their familiarity with state curriculum guidelines, past professional development experiences, and the nature of the early childhood field. Participants had the option to refuse answering any questions. The focus groups were audiotaped for accuracy and convenience.

Procedures

The Stamford School Readiness Council provided voluntary support for the study through its various affiliations within the Stamford community, including EC providers (teachers, aides, instructional coordinators) and supervisors (program directors, supervisors, etc.). With the support and assistance of Council members, EC personnel were recruited for the study. Specifically, the investigators developed solicitations (Appendices D and E) that were emailed to all professionals as well as recruiting flyers which were emailed to known contacts. The two emails, intended for program directors/leaders and providers, provided general information about the study, indicated the anticipated time commitment, assured confidentiality, explained the context of the study, and stated how to contact investigators. Flyers and consent forms (Appendix F) and were attached, and recipients were encouraged to forward the email to other potential participants. The investigators coordinated times and locations for the focus group sessions to achieve the greatest convenience of the participants.

The focus group sessions were conducted at places of convenience for the participants and lasted approximately 75 minutes. Each focus group had five or six participants. Before the start of the sessions, the researchers obtained consent. Participants had advance access to the consent form, and thus a description of the procedures prior to arriving at the focus group

location. In all cases, the consent forms were available on site and the consent process was

completed on site.

When participants arrived at the focus group site, the consent process occurred first.

Then, participants were asked to complete the attached participant questionnaire before

beginning the focus group (See Appendix A). Trained moderators led the focus groups. The

Principal Investigator and a master moderator collaborated to train all moderators, who were

community leaders and members with experience in this area, in advance. The master moderator

was Sonja Ahuja (Project Development Advisory Partner at Co-creating Effective and Inclusive

Organizations; Discovery Community Liaison at Graustein Memorial Fund). Ms. Ahuja is an

experienced moderator and has previously trained new moderators. Moderator training occurred

at one 2-3 hour session provided at times, dates, and locations that were convenient to

moderators. Ms. Ahuja and all moderators completed CITI training prior to the onset of the

study.

The focus group sessions were audio recorded and hand recorded (notes) for accuracy

and convenience. At the completion of the focus group, the moderator and investigator thanked

the participants for their time and reminded them that the study results will be made available via

the Stamford School Readiness Council and directly to them via email. Following the data

collection, the recordings were destroyed. Notes and transcripts were free of identifying personal

information.

Data Analysis

Following transcription, data (text of participant responses) was entered into coding

software for analysis of themes. Data were coded using NVivo Version 9 (2011), a commercial

software package for qualitative data analysis. Coding of participant responses was done at the

phrase, sentence, and passage level. Next, the student investigator and Chelsea Bourn, one of the

key personnel, independently and then collaboratively recognized patterns and conceptualized

the emergent themes. To confirm the validity of these themes, we reassessed the data with these

themes and patterns in mind, conferring on inconsistencies until we reached consensus. Some

responses related to single themes, while others reflected multiple. The strength of themes was

evaluated through a frequency count of how many times a theme occurred across all responses.

Trustworthiness of themes was assured by obtaining consensus across researchers' judgments of

(a) the confirmabilitiy of data (agreement that grouped codes belonged together) and (b) the

development of themes from aggregated codes. Through this process, we achieved full (100%)

consensus with respect to the three main themes, as well as several subthemes.

Findings

This section presents the study findings according to theme and includes quotes that illustrate each. Three themes emerged: (1) preparation for teaching; (2) professional development opportunities are often inadequate; and (3) needs for professional development. Several subthemes appear as well. This section presents the study findings organized by theme. The numbers for each subtheme represent the number of times a comment was coded for that subtheme. Percentages were calculated by using the number of subtheme codes dived by the sum total amount of the subtheme codes for that theme. Tables 4 through 6, which follow the delineation of themes, include illustrative quotes for the main themes and subthemes identified.

Theme 1: Preparation for Teaching

Participants in both focus groups provided ample input regarding their perspective on good preparation for teaching and caring for young children. They discussed three main areas of preparation: 41 comments (55.4%) addressed collaboration, 12 (16.2%) addressed education, and 21 (28.4%) addressed personal experience. Within the theme of collaboration, comments fell into working with peers, supervisors, and consultants. Participant comments regarding education included obtaining relevant degrees as well as additional certifications and trainings. Personal experiences discussed by participants included relevant life experiences as well as experience working with children (Note that number of subtheme responses within this theme exceeds the number responses included in the theme because many comments in this category frequently overlapped, e.g. were applicable to more than one subtheme).

Table 4

Theme 1: Good Preparation for Teaching

- Collaboration with peers, consultants, and/or supervisors

  - [of learning from peers] "I'm always in the process…of looking and learning and seeing, to bring back, to share, or even other teachers, like well, what did you do? How did you do that? I might try that. Will that maybe work with my class? My class might try that. We're good like that."

- Learning from educational experiences

  - [on the benefit of education in EC] "I liked the content and all the learning… I think you get a lot from it. And I wish I'd had that knowledge when I was raising my own children."

- Personal experience provides relevant knowledge

  - "The best training (that) I had was (my past) experience. From different nationalities with different kinds of people you learn, you see, you watch and then you take out what you think that is best for the child and I think that helps you to prepare… – not go to the book."

Theme 2: Professional Development Opportunities are Often Inadequate

Participant responses indicated while professional development programming is available, it is offered in ways that are unfavorable and ineffective. The three subthemes that emerged were cost, convenience and non-applicability. Cost was discussed 9 times (30% of responses), convenience was discussed 13 times (43.3% of responses), and non-applicability was discussed 8 times (26.7% of responses). Participants reflected on the "cost" of training both literally (amount of money spent) as well as the relative value in taking time to attend. Participants also mentioned the inconvenient locations, times, and scheduling of existing PD

programs, in addition to feelings that many PD programs are not providing relevant or useful information.

Table 5

Theme 2: Professional Development Opportunities are Often Inadequate

• PD opportunities are costly
• "And people who work in early childhood usually have very full days already, so to say, okay, you've been doing this for this many years, now you've got to go to school, too, is not realistic, especially because they're not making much money to pay for that class, unless there's real funding to institute that."
• PD opportunities are not convenient
• "A lot of them start at 6 (pm) and if… our last child leaves at 6, we don't want to be an hour and a half late."
• PD programming is not applicable to classroom needs
• "And all these people that run these workshops have classrooms that must be the size of like our whole school because they're always (saying)…, "and you'll have this giant center over here and this over here". And we're (thinking)…, whose classroom is that size? It doesn't even work to… (our classroom) scale."

Theme 3: Needs for Professional Development

Desired PD characteristics and topic areas were the more prevalent topic among the responses. PD preferences fell into three main subthemes: desired skills and topics (72 mentions, 87.8% of theme responses), positive atmosphere (5 mentions, 6.1% of theme responses), and diverse range of PD topics (5 mentions, 6.1% of theme responses). Desired skills and topics

comprises of areas that the providers recognize as needed in future PD. Positive atmosphere was discussed as an environment that is suitable for active learning, with the promotion of encouragement and support for each other. Diverse range of PD topics was discussed in terms of having a variety of options the topics covered during PD, as opposed to the presentation of the same subjects repeatedly in PD programs.

Providers' discussion of desired skills and topics fell into several subcategories: How to support children with disabilities or special needs (21.6%), working with parents (25.7%), better curriculum understanding and implementation (9.5%), how to achieve classroom goals (40.5%), and working with infants (2.7%). Supporting children with special needs was further distinguished. Participants voiced a desire to be able to better bridge language and cultural barriers (e.g. a large percentage of Stamford preschoolers are from immigrant families), as well as working with students with autism spectrum disorders (e.g., how to address the specific needs of such students while still attending to the other children and the class as a whole), and behavioral problems. Providers recognize the increase in students with special needs within their programs, and desired to be more prepared to facilitate their appropriate development. Achieving classroom goals was further distinguished. While certain programs and providers had the primary goal of school readiness and academic achievement, other programs and providers wanted their children to learn to socialize, cooperate while learning through play.

Table *6*

Theme 3: Needs for Professional Development

- Desired Skills and Topics: How to support students with special needs (including language and cultural barriers, autism spectrum disorders, and behavioral problems)

  - "Every time I go to any kind of workshop on special needs, they want to teach us

how to recognize them, but they don't want to teach us how to have them in our

classroom. And it's really not helpful to me, to just be able to label it, if there's

not gonna be any services anyhow. I want to know what to do with her when

she's in my classroom, and there's no one else but me and my assistant teacher."

- Desired Skills and Topics: Working with parents

  - [on difficulty communicating with parents] "I don't know if I should say that or

    should I mention that…You don't know – I mean I know how personal I am if

    someone says something about my kid…so you want to give them the same

    respect, but acknowledge their issues and how they feel, yet try to maintain it in

    the classroom and not tell them things every day there's an issue or problem."

- Desired Skills and Topics: Better curriculum understanding and implementation

  - [of curriculum understanding following explanatory workshop] "Personally, I'm

    not comfortable with it and that was the first time I attended that one, I think I

    would need it again."

- Desired Skills and Topics: How to achieve classroom goals (school readiness;

  socialization, cooperation, and learning through play

  - "And the other goal, I would say, is to have a well rounded child by the time

    they're ready to enter school… And it's a challenge because right now I feel like

    we're not where I want to be for this year because… (there are) at least about 8

    children leaving and they had no (prior) childcare or preschool experience."

- Desired Skills and Topics: Working with infants

  - [of existing infant care guidelines] "It guides me as to where the child should be

per se, but it doesn't direct you into any area or activities that you could actually

do because what it goes through is basically what we do."

- Positive atmosphere for PD

  - [of previous positive PD experience] "There was a mutual respect there. I think

    she felt like we were as much professionals (as she was) and understood what we

    were doing, and was there to support and to enhance and maybe give us a

    different suggestion, but..(it) wasn't coming in as judgment."

- Diverse range of PD topics

  - "Sometimes, I find that the longer we've been doing this, the less new workshops

    there are out there."

Discussion

Three Themes of Professional Development

The previous section detailed the three themes found through data analysis of participant responses. This section further discusses those themes, compares them with the existing literature, and makes suggestions for research, practice, and policy so the existing notions of PD can be changed in order to better meet the needs of EC providers.

Theme one related to participant perceptions of the experiences that prepared them for their work as EC providers. The most frequently mentioned form of preparation was collaboration, including with consultants, supervisors, and peers. Respondents had extremely positive comments regarding the opportunity to work with consultants, who offered advice and new perspectives on challenging situations with students. Additionally, the respondents all appeared to value learning from each other, either in the form of working at a child care center together, or as a part of an organization of EC professionals where they could share and compare their practices. Also mentioned was the value of relevant education in the form of degrees and certifications, where providers recognized as important preparation for working in EC. Moreover, some providers felt that the personal experiences, such as raising their own children, served as one of the best forms of preparation.

The second theme recognized that professional development opportunities are often inadequate, has been documented in the existing literature (Diamond & Powell, 2011). Participants recognized issues of cost, non-applicability, and most salient, convenience. In terms of cost, providers recognized the price of seeking PD on their own, particularly since the providers are member of a profession that is notably underpaid. Providers also mentioned the dilemma of having to find and incur the cost of substitute caretaker in order for them to attend

PD that is during working hours. Additionally, the providers felt that their time attending is costly due to their already hectic schedules. Within the subtheme of non-applicability, the providers commented on workshops not providing them information that was not transferable to the tasks they face in their daily work, an idea that is also seen in the research (Keengwe & Onchwari, 2009). The topic of convenience, which included primarily time and location, was discussed by many providers. Respondents recognized that traveling to larger cities is frequently involved and therefore having PD on week days/nights is typically not feasible. A subset mentioned weekends as more appealing.

In both focus groups, the majority of the responses reflected the theme of provider needs from PD. This wealth of material was separated into positive atmosphere, diverse range of PD topics, and most importantly, things to learn. Positive atmosphere was expressed in the sense that respondents would like to be leaning in a setting where they feel comfortable by being supported and respected by their peers. Providers voiced a need for a variety of different topics to be covered among PD programs. These responses implied that the same programs are continuously offered and therefore no new information is being presented, which is not suitable to the changing needs and circumstances facing providers. This is an idea that was not discussed in the literature, but is presumably a common feeling among providers in similar situations.

The subtheme of desired skills and topics provides a broad range of concepts and goals for future PD programs to include. Very salient among one of the two focus groups was the need to learn how to work with students with special needs. Specifically, respondents shared their lack of knowledge on how to include such students in classroom activities and promote their appropriate development, especially since they are not being provided any service at the preschool age. Specifically, working with students with autism spectrum disorders and

behavioral problems were discussed as being an increasingly common in the classrooms and therefore increasingly necessary in PD. Another issue that providers are not prepared for was the frequency of students who did not speak English as their first language, therefore requiring the providers to work with them in a different way. As of 2000, in the metro Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk area, 23.9 percent of the population spoke a language other than English at home, making this a significant issue in the area (Diversitydata.org and Harvard School of Public Health, 2012). Providers found that this language barrier was also limiting these students' social interaction with the other students, and therefore making their classroom goals more difficult to achieve. The need to include topics regarding students with special needs is frequently mentioned in the literature (Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

Working with parents is another subtopic of diverse skills and topics that, while not prominent in the literature, was a concern that many respondents would like to be more prepared to deal with. One common issue was a difference of opinion in the expectations for children entering pre-school between parents and providers, which has been changed in recent years as a result of higher standards of education being enforced starting in kindergarten. Providers felt pressured by parents to meet such high academically-orientated expectations, which they view as frequently infringing on program's and provider's style of teaching and/or caregiving. The following additional issues were also discussed: discontinuity in children's behavior when they are with their parents vs. when they are with the providers, lack of respect towards the field of early childcare/education from parents, and struggling to communicate with parents effectively.

Two subject areas of learning that the providers mentioned were in regard to knowledge of the *State of Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework, State of Connecticut Preschool*

Assessment Framework, and *Connecticut's Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning*, in addition to infant care. With respect to the guidelines, providers did not feel they had a complete understanding of early childhood and infant/toddler frameworks, and were in need of additional training to both learn how to use them, as well as how to effectively use it to discuss student progress with parents. Additionally, infant care was mentioned as being one area where there are insufficient materials and information about caretaking. While there is information available on what to expect and how to respond, the providers mentioned the lack of appropriate activities for caretakers to do with infants. This may be a section of EC that is insufficiently recognized among education programs as well as PD.

The last aspect of the desired skills and topics theme is the concept of how to meet goals, regarding both personal goals and institutional goals. All respondents expressed clear goals that they have for the children in their care. Many providers had the goal of school readiness, including having their children be academically ready to enter kindergarten with success, as well as acting in a way that was behaviorally acceptable for the setting. Other respondents expressed as a primary concern of having the children learn to socialize, cooperate, and learn through play. If the children in their classrooms effectively learn to socialize and play with each other by the end of the year, they would consider that a success. In both cases, the respondents discussed previously mentioned barriers to achieving their goals (i.e., language barriers preventing socialization; special needs students not progressing academically at the same rate), which should be addressed in specific PD.

Implications and Recommendations

This study suggests that the professional development needs of early childhood providers must be examined as a unique population, worthy of further study specifically related to how

effective PD can be used to improve the school readiness of their students. Though limited in size and generalizability, this study highlights a subject that has been not thoroughly investigated. Findings underscore the need for policy makers and leaders in the EC field to make PD programs that match the needs of the providers they are serving. This must include logistical aspects of PD, such as time and location, in addition to the critical needs of topic areas covered and methods of instruction. The respondents made clear that some of the topics areas being covered were too general, and they needed a practical basis regarding how to actually handle situations. Also mentioned was the importance of personal experience, which is an idea that would be novel to PD. Perhaps if PD programs could integrate and harness such valuable experiences via observational and hands-on learning, more providers could benefit from the experiences that were so valuable to other who had experienced it.

The current study also reflected how strongly program/personal goals for the young children were of high importance to providers. Therefore, all PD needs to fit into helping providers meet those goals. If individual leaders of the field would take into account that different populations of providers needed via PD in order to reach various goals (i.e. academic achievement vs. socialization), then providers would be able to obtain the skills needed. Similarly, program directors and administrators who arrange for PD to work with their staff should keep in mind their overall goals. This would take much time and effort on the part of administration and would have to be examined further.

The major implication of this study is that policymakers and leaders in the education field need to consider the provider perspectives when creating and implementing professional development. In order to effectively improve teachers' ability to ensure school readiness, models of professional development need to be more consistent with the existing literature of adult

learning and create programs that are more convenient, productive, and executed in a multimethod manner. By incorporating collaboration with peers and supervisors, consultation with an expert, educational classes, and experiential learning into a PD program, providers will be able effectively transfer learned skills into their teaching and caretaking, therefore providing optimal early childhood education.

In light of the current study, suggestions for future research can be made. The current study should be replicated with larger sample size, thus increasing reliability and validity. Another study should combine qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to obtain a more generalizable understanding of the needs of providers. Additional research should be done to evaluate specific methods of PD when used for early childhood provides. Further, feedback from new early childhood providers could be used to understand the needs of providers who lack the experience and training that those older have experienced and benefited from.

Comparisons to Existing Methods of Professional Development

The study results suggest that providers have many needs for professional development that are not being met by existing PD opportunities. While there are many different methods and goals to professional development existing in the field and among the literature, it is important to compare what the providers wanted with what they are receiving, as well as what the literature finds to be most effective.

The literature suggests that while one-shot trainings are notably ineffective for transferable learning, in addition to being considered unsuitable according to legislature such as NCLB, they are still frequently done (NCLB, 2002; Arcieri, 1998; Anonymous, 2004). While the provider response to one-shot workshops in both the literature and this study are not as negative and opposing as the research suggests, this may be reflective of a lack of provider knowledge of

other opportunities. In our study, the providers mentioned the value of collaboration, for example, being used in preparation and PD. Perhaps the providers are not recognizing that an ongoing consultation with an expert or having frequent meetings with colleagues in the field can be part of a PD program, since PD is typically associated with a one-time occurrence in a classroom. The research shows that mixed method approaches are effective, but because they are less frequent and less recognized as an option, the one-shot workshop continues to exist, and continue to be attended.

The research on adult learning techniques is clear and thorough, suggesting that adults learn over an ongoing process where they can have tangible learning experiences (Conlan, Grabowski, & Smith, 2003). There is also plenty of research suggesting the power of working with a coach or mentor who can provide feedback. This is reflective of what the providers in this study seemed to want from PD, since they so strongly appeared to value the views of those who have been in the field longer than they have and/or have specialized knowledge. So although the providers in our study did not refer to what they wanted as coaching or mentoring, the outcomes and benefits of what they wanted were the same.

Limitations

This study presents many limitations that should be considered among future studies on professional development for early childhood educators. The current study had a relatively small sample size due to time constraints, and used participants from only one region of Connecticut. Participants are not necessarily representative of the entire state of Connecticut or across early childhood providers. The willingness to participate in the focus groups may indicate a high level of engagement and eagerness by providers. Additional suggested study modifications are listed

in Appendix H. Despite these limitations, this study contributes important awareness and

suggestions for further scholarly research and practice.

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Appendix A: Participant Questionnaire Data - Descriptives

Zip Code: All respondents were from Stamford, CT (Fairfield County, CT)

Annual Family Income:
3 (33%) respondents selected $100,000-$125,000;
3 (33%) respondents selected $75,000-$100,000;
1 (11%) respondents selected $50,000-$75,000;
1 (11%) respondents selected $$25,000-$50,000;
1 (11%) respondents selected under $25,000

Length of time at current position:
All respondents have been at their current position for 5+ years.

Current Job Type:
4 (40%) respondents selected preschool teacher;
2 (20%) respondents selected preschool director/supervisor;
2 (20%) respondents selected infant/toddler and preschool teacher;
1 (10%) respondents selected infant/toddler teacher;
1 (10%) respondents selected other-family home daycare.

Program Type of Current Position:
3 (27.3%) respondents reported home day care
3 (27.3%) respondents reported affiliated with a religious center
2 (18.2%) respondents reported for profit/private
2 (18.2%) respondents reported private nonprofit
1 (9.1%) respondents reported independent nonprofit

Daily Hours of Program Operation:
6 (60%) of respondents selected extended day (9+ hours);
4 (40%) of respondents selected half day (5 or fewer hours).

Previous job in EC:
Only 2 (18%) respondents had previous jobs in the field of EC.
1 respondent was a director/supervisor for 5+ years at a for profit preschool.
1 respondent was a preschool teacher for 5+ years at a private nonprofit preschool.

The number of hours spent teaching/caring for children (individually, class) at current job:
Mean: 22.22
Median: 20
Range: 47
Standard Deviation: 17.18

The number of hours spent planning or preparing lessons either in school or out of the school, program, center, etc.:
Mean: 7.56
Median: 9
Range: 12
Standard Deviation: 4.1

The number of hours spent doing other:
Only 2(18%) of respondents reported spending time doing other tasks.
One respondent spends 5 hours cooking meals.
One respondent spends 29 hours doing other tasks.

For classroom teachers (7 respondents): The number of children in their class:
Mean: 10.7
Median: 12
Standard Deviation: 4.6

For program supervisors (3 respondents): The number of classrooms you supervise:
Mean: 4
Median: 4
Standard Deviation: 3

For program supervisors (3 respondents): The number of employees you supervise:
Mean: 8.3
Median: 7
Standard Deviation: 8.1

Percentages of children of each race/ethnicity in your classroom/program:

	Mean Percentage	Median Percentage	Standard Deviation
Black/African American	10.2	0	28.2
Asian or Pacific Islander	15.3	1	19.6
White	54.2	59	38.3
Hispanic or Latino	11.6	0	31.2
Mixed Race/Ethnicity	8.8	1	25.0
American Indian or Native Alaskan	.1	0	.3

Familiarity with the *State of Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework:*
4 (40%) of respondents are very familiar
3 (30%) of respondents are familiar
3 (30%) of respondents are somewhat familiar

Familiarity with the *State of Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework:*
4 (40%) of respondents are familiar
3 (30%) of respondents are somewhat familiar
2 (20%) of respondents are very familiar
1 (10%) of respondents are not very familiar

How Participants Learned of the Frameworks (Multiple Selections):
5 (35.7%) responses learned through training
4 (28.6%) responses learned through professional development
2 (14.3%) responses learned through education
2 (14.3%) responses learned through supervisors
1 (7.1%) response learned through peers/coworkers

How Prepared Participants Feel to Implement Frameworks:
5 (50%) of respondents are somewhat prepared
3 (30%) of respondents are well prepared
2 (20%) of respondents are prepared

How Confident Participants Feel to Reference/Incorporate the Framework in Activities:
3 (37.5%) of respondents are very confident
3 (37.5%) of respondents are somewhat confident
2 (25%) of respondents are confident

The Number of Times in the Past 3 Months that a Supervisor Observed:
2 respondents reported 50 times
1 respondent reported 10-15 times
1 respondent reported 0 times

The Number of Times Participating in PD in the Past 12 Months:
Mean: 3.9
Median: 3.5
Standard Deviation: 2.0

Total Hours of PD in the Last Year:
Mean: 15.3
Median: 12
Standard Deviation: 9.6

Of Those Hours; The Number of Hours that were Required by Job:
Mean: 12.3
Median: 7
Standard Deviation: 9.4

Would Participants Like More PD:
5 (55.6%) respondents Do Not
4 (44.4%) respondents Do

If they *Do* Want More PD; What Prevented Participants from Obtaining More (Multiple Selections):
33.3% of responded PD conflicted with work schedule
16.7% of responded PD was too expensive/not affordable
16.7% of responded no suitable PD offered
16.7% of responded lack of employer financial support
16.7% of responded other: time restraints

Of PD attended in past 2 years, Percentage of the Material that was Readily Applied to Provider's Work:
4 (44.4%) of respondents selected 50%-75%
3 (33.3%) of respondents selected 75%-100%
2 (22.2%) of respondents selected 25%-50%

Appendix B

Participant Questionnaire

What is your **age**? $\underline{< 20}$ 21-25   25-29   30-34   35-39   40-44   45+
☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

What is your **gender**? Male ☐   Female ☐   What is your **zip code**: ___ ____ ____ ____ ____

How many **children** do you have? _____What **ages** are your children? List: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

What is your highest level of **education**? (Please list what subjects your degrees are in)

☐ High School or GED   ☐ Masters: _____

☐ Some college   ☐ Doctorate: _____

☐ Associates (AA): _____   ☐ Early Childhood Credential: _____

☐ Bachelors: _____   ☐ Other/additional:_____

What is your **marital status**?

Single ☐ Married ☐ Cohabitating (Living together) ☐ Widowed ☐   Divorced ☐

What is your annual family **income?**

Under $25,000 $25,000-$50,000 $50,000-$75,000 $75,000-$100,000 $100,000-$125,000 $125,000-$150,000   Over $150,000
☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

How would do you describe your **ethnicity**? (Please select the best response)

☐   Hispanic or Latino (see below)

☐ *Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano*   ☐ *Puerto Rican*   ☐ *Cuban*

☐ *Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin :* _____

☐ Native American   ☐ White   ☐ Black/African American   ☐ Black/White Mix

☐ American Indian   ☐ Chinese   ☐ Filipino   ☐ Samoan
   or Alaska Native
☐ Japanese   ☐ Vietnamese   ☐ Native Hawaiian   ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro

☐ Korean   ☐ Other Pacific Islander _____   ☐ Other Asian_____

How many **years** have you worked in **early childhood**? _____

How **many years (total)** have you spent in **classrooms** with children birth to 5? _____

What is your **current or most recent job**? (Job title) _____

How many **hours per week** do you work at your **current** position? _____

Length of time at **current** position: ☐ Less than one year │ ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-4 years ☐ 5+ years

Which of the following best describes your **current job**?

Job title: Setting where you spend the most time:

☐ Teacher   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Teacher's aide   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Instructional coordinator ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Consultant   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Director or Supervisor   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

Program type of your **current** position:

☐ Head Start ☐ Public school (not Head Start) ☐ Independent nonprofit ☐ School Readiness (Before Kindergarten)
☐ For profit ☐ Affiliated with a religious center ☐ I do not know ☐ Other_____

The **daily hours of program operation** (your current position):
☐ Half day (5 or fewer hours)   ☐ School day (5-9 hours)   ☐ Extended day (9+ hours)

NOW, consider the early childhood job you held before this one. Check here if this is your first: ☐ and skip ahead.

What was your **previous job**? (Job title) _____
The number of **hours you worked per week** at your **previous** position: _____

Which of the following best describes your **previous job**?

Job title: Setting where you spend the most time:

☐ Teacher   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Teacher's aide   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Instructional coordinator ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Consultant   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

☐ Director or Supervisor   ☐ Infant/Toddler ☐ Preschool ☐ Other: _____

Length of time at **previous** position: ☐ Less than one year │ ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-4 years ☐ 5+ years

Program type of your **previous** position:

☐ Head Start ☐ Public school (not Head Start) ☐ Independent nonprofit ☐ School Readiness (Before Kindergarten)
☐ For profit ☐ Affiliated with a religious center ☐ I do not know ☐ Other_____

In a typical work week at your **current** job, estimate the **number of hours** you spend doing the following:

☐ Teaching/caring for children (individually, class) ☐ Planning or preparing lessons either in school or out of the school, program, or center.

☐ Other (please specify)_____

If you are a **classroom teacher,** how many children are in your class?

☐

If you are a **program supervisor, consultant, or coordinator**, how many classrooms do you supervise? ☐

If you are a **program supervisor, consultant, or coordinator**, how many employees do you supervise or consult with? ☐

Please estimate the approximate percentage of children of each race/ethnicity in your class (if you are a teacher) or program (if you are a supervisor or director). The boxes should add up to 100%.

☐ Black or African American ☐ White ☐ Mixed Race/Ethnicity
☐ Asian or Pacific Islander ☐ Hispanic or Latino ☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan

How familiar are you with the State of Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF)?

☐ Very Familiar ☐ Familiar ☐ Somewhat Familiar ☐ Not very familiar

How familiar are you with the State of Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF)?

☐ Very Familiar ☐ Familiar ☐ Somewhat Familiar ☐ Not very familiar

If you are familiar with either the PCF or PAF, how did you learn about one or both? (Please select all that apply)

☐ Training program ☐ Education ☐ Peers/Coworkers ☐ Supervisors ☐ Professional Development
Other (Describe)_____

How prepared do you feel to implement these frameworks?

☐ Absolutely prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Somewhat prepared ☐ Poorly/not prepared

How confident do you feel that you can reference and incorporate these frameworks into classroom activities?

☐ Absolutely confident ☐ Very confident ☐ Confident ☐ Somewhat confident ☐ Not confident

How many times in the last 3 months did your supervisor/program leader observe your work for 30 minutes or more?____

In all, how many times/occasion did you attend professional development during the last 12 months? ____

Estimate how many hours (all together) of professional development this was. ____

Of these total hours, how many were required by your job (including training that your employer mandated and that you might need to maintain a license or certification) ____

Would you like *more* professional development than you have in the last 2 years?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If YES (you would like more), which of the following reasons best explain what prevented you from obtaining more?

☐ I did not have the pre-requisites (e.g. qualifications, experience, seniority)

☐ Professional development was too expensive/I could not afford it.

☐ There was a lack of employer financial support.

☐ Professional development conflicted with my work schedule.

☐ I didn't have time because of family responsibilities.

☐ There was no suitable professional development offered.

☐ Other (please specify)_____

Of the professional development you attended in the last two years, what percent of the material was readily applied to your work (e.g., you could easily incorporate into your daily practice)?

☐ 0-25%   ☐ 25-50%   ☐ 50-75%   ☐ 75-100%

Please use the space below for any comments you have about these questions, your work, and the field of early childhood education.

Appendix C

**Focus Group Questions and Follow-Up Prompts
EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER VERSION**

Describe briefly your **role in the education and care of young children**.

- Your job title
- Type of program you work in
- Ages and other characteristics of children
- How many children in your class
- Main tasks/responsibilities of your job

Describe the **main goals** of your work - from your perspective.

- Personally, what do you view as the most important results or outcomes?
- What does the program leadership view as the most important outcomes?

What **experiences most prepared you** for your work in early childhood settings?

- Preservice education (attending courses, getting a degree in traditional classroom or online)
- Preservice training (supervised field work, student teaching, etc.)
- Inservice training – professional development (workshops and training sessions you've taken either as part of your job, e.g., your employer offers a workshop, or through other opportunities, e.g., training workshop offered by an early childhood professional organization, by the State, and so on)
- Personal experiences – specify which ones were important in preparing you to work in the field of early childhood

Please think about the work you do every day, including **how well prepared/trained** you were when you began working in the classroom, as well as your current strengths and weaknesses.
- What aspects of your work were you *best prepared for* as you began your job?
- What aspects of your work were you *least prepared for* as you began your job?
- What aspects of your work are you *best at now* (your areas of strength)?
- What aspects of your work are the *most challenging*?
- What is/are some ways to improve your knowledge and skill in areas where you'd like to grow?

How familiar are you with **CT's Preschool and Infant/Toddler Frameworks**? [Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF); Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF); Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning]

- How did you learn about PCF, PAF, and Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning ?
- How prepared are you to implement these frameworks in your work?
- How competent do you feel that you can reference and incorporate these frameworks into your ongoing classroom activities?

How familiar are you with CT's requirement that half of early childhood teachers have a Bachelor's degree by 2015?

- What is your opinion about this requirement?
- What effect will this have on your program? (not staff)
- What effect will this have on you?
- What effect will this have on other staff?

Now, please think about professional development experiences that you might have access to in the future. Professional development can be defined as activities to enhance professional career growth. This includes a range of activities that support the ability of early childhood staff to perform effectively – to meet the need of children and families, to promote kindergarten readiness across domains, and so on. Such activities may include individual development, continuing education, and inservice education, as well as mentoring, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring.

- What kinds of professional development opportunities are most likely to increase your knowledge and skill and positively affect your job performance?
- What would be the most effective way to increase your skill and competence (and why – what are the advantages and disadvantages of these strategies)?
  - In-class coaching and mentoring
  - Education – taking college courses
  - Inservice training – single or multiple session
  - Homework required as part of education, training, etc.
- What specific topics do YOU most want/need?
- Think about the program where you work. What specific topics are most needed by the average staff person?
- What specific training topics would you MOST like to participate in?
- Think about your colleagues in the EC setting where you work. What approaches to professional development would be the most effective for the majority of EC workers?
- Do you believe that 1-session workshops have been or can be of benefit to you in this regard?
  - If yes, on what topics?
  - Would you be surprised to learn that research suggests that such "one shot training" opportunities are less effective than ongoing mentoring and coaching? Why or why not?
- Please discuss the optimal logistics to meet your personal and professional needs.

- ○ Day/evening
- ○ Weekday/weekend
- ○ Homework assignments? Type, format, mode of submission
- ○ Onsite coaching (credentials of coach?)
- ○ Observation and e-coaching

Finally, what are the biggest or most important **challenges facing the EC field**, including the EC workforce? What can be done about them?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions and Follow-Up Prompts
EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPERVISORS VERSION

Describe briefly your **role in the supervision of programming for young children**.

- Your job title
- Type of program you work in
- Ages and other characteristics of children
- What are the main tasks of your job
- How many classrooms you supervise
- How many children are enrolled in the program you supervise
- How many employees you supervise

Describe the **main goals** of your work - from your perspective.
- Personally, what do you view as the most important results or outcomes?
- How do you feel that your views may differ from those of the teachers that you supervise?

What **experiences most prepared you** for your work in the supervision of programming for early childhood? (For example, you might consider your formal education, fieldwork, inservice training or professional development, and personal experiences.)
- Preservice education (attending courses, getting a degree in traditional classroom or online)
- Preservice training (supervised field work, student teaching, etc.)
- Inservice training – professional development (workshops and training sessions you've taken either as part of your job, e.g., your employer offers a workshop, or through other opportunities, e.g., training workshop offered by an early childhood professional organization, by the State, and so on)
- Personal experiences – specify which ones were important in preparing you to work in the field of early childhood

Next, let's shift to the staff in the early childhood program where you work. Please think about the teachers and other staff who work directly with children. **How well prepared/trained** are staff when they begin working in your program?
- What aspects of the work are they *best prepared for* when they began working under your supervision?
- What aspects of the work are they *least prepared for*?
- What aspects of the work are they *best at now* (their areas of strength)?
- What aspects of the work are the *most challenging* for them?

- Are there differences in skills and competencies within the staff of your program? What trends do you note with respect to this?
- What experiences most prepare individuals to work effectively with young children and their families (education, training, supervision, etc.)?
- What is/are some ways that staff can improve their knowledge and skills in areas where they experience challenge?

How familiar are you with **CT's Preschool and Infant/Toddler Frameworks**? [Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF); Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF); Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning]
- How did you learn about PCF, PAF, and Guidelines for the Development of Infant and Toddler Early Learning ?
- How prepared are you to implement these frameworks and/or supervise and support their implementation?
- How confident do you feel that you can oversee the proper implementation of the frameworks in your program?

Now, please think about how you and others in your program work to promote and assess kindergarten/**school readiness**.

- How confident are you that you help promote kindergarten readiness?
- Do you assess school readiness? In what ways? How confident are you that the assessments are valid?

How familiar are you with CT's requirement that half of early childhood teachers have a Bachelor's degree by 2015?

- What is your opinion about this requirement?
- What effect do you expect this to have on your program? (not staff)
- What effect do you expect this to have on your staff?

Now, please think about **professional development experiences** that you might have access to in the future. Professional development can be defined as activities to enhance professional career growth. This includes a range of activities that support the ability of early childhood staff to perform effectively – to meet the needs of children and families, to promote kindergarten readiness across domains, and so on. Such activities may include individual development, continuing education, and inservice education, as well as mentoring, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring.
- What kinds of education and professional development opportunities are most likely to increase knowledge and skill of the staff who work directly with children?
- What specific training topics do you think are most needed?

- What specific training topics are most desired by teachers? (Are the most needed also the most requested?)
- What kinds of professional development opportunities are most likely to change staff behavior?
- What would be the most effective way to increase staff skill and competence (and why – what are the advantages and disadvantages of these strategies)?
    - In-class coaching and mentoring
    - Education – taking college courses
    - Inservice training – single or multiple session
    - Homework required as part of education, training, etc.
- Think about your colleagues in the EC setting where you work. What approaches to professional development would be the most effective for the majority of EC workers?
- Do you believe that 1-session workshops have been or can be of benefit to your teachers in this regard?
    - If yes, on what topics?
    - What do you think of "one shot training" (single sessions)? Would you be surprised to learn that research suggests such opportunities are less effective than ongoing mentoring and coaching? Why or why not?
- Please discuss the optimal logistics to meet your staff's personal and professional needs.
    - Day/evening
    - Weekday/weekend
    - Homework assignments? Type, format, mode of submission
    - Onsite coaching (credentials of coach?)
    - Observation and e-coaching

Finally, what are the biggest or most important **challenges facing the EC field**, including the EC workforce? What can be done about them?

Appendix E
Recruitment Email (For Potential Study Participants)

Subject line: Participants sought for a research study on early childhood education

Anne Farrell, Ph.D., University of Connecticut Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies and Member of the Stamford School Readiness Council Education Committee and Cristin Caparotta, University of Connecticut Honors Student, are looking for participants for a focus group study.

You are receiving this email because of your role in the early childhood education community. Your email addressed was obtained from *(Insert name of contact).*

The goal of this study is to learn the professional development needs of early childhood providers using focus groups. Participation in this study would include attending a one-time group discussion lasting about 75 minutes and filling out a short questionnaire. Other participants will be individuals with the same or similar job titles as you. Participants in this study must be 18 or older and either an early childhood education provider or early childhood education program supervisor in the Fairfield County, CT area.

Confidentiality will be maintained during this study. Although meetings will be audio recorded, no personally identifying information will be used when the researchers examine participant responses and write reports about the results. Participation is completely voluntary and can stop at any time without consequence.

The dates and locations for the focus groups are: <add>

And other meetings will be arranged as needed.

Attached to this email is the consent form and flyer for the study. The consent form is provided here for informational purposes only. The form will be available at all focus group meetings

If you or your coworkers would be interested in participating or have questions about the study, please contact Student Investigator Cristin Caparotta (cristin.caparotta@uconn.edu; (516) 456.1561) or Primary Investigator Anne Farrell, Ph.D. (anne.farrell@uconn.edu; (203) 240.3610).

Kindly forward this email other persons who might be interested in participating. Thank you.

This study was approved by the UConn IRB, Protocol #H11-299

Anne F. Farrell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, HDFS
University of Connecticut
One University Place
Stamford, CT 06901
(203) 251.8590

Appendix F

Recruitment Email
(for Stamford School Readiness Council Members and Early Childhood Program Directors and Leaders)

Subject line: Participants sought for a research study on early childhood education

Anne Farrell, Ph.D., University of Connecticut Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies and Member of the Stamford School Readiness Council Education Committee and Cristin Caparotta, University of Connecticut Honors Student, are looking for participants for a focus group study. You are receiving this email because of your role in the early childhood education community.

The goal of this study is to learn the professional development needs of early childhood providers using focus groups. Participation in this study would include attending a one-time group discussion lasting about 75 minutes and filling out a short questionnaire. Other participants will be individuals with the same or similar job titles as you. Participants in this study must be 18 or older and either an early childhood education provider or early childhood education program supervisor in the Fairfield County, CT area.

Confidentiality will be maintained during this study. Although meetings will be audio recorded, no personally identifying information will be used when the researchers examine participant responses and write reports about the results.

Attached to this email is the consent form and flyer for the study. We would very much appreciate if you would provide the consent form and flyer to your interested staff, as well as posting the flyer around your facility. Kindly forward this email to other persons who might be interested in participating.

The dates and locations for the focus groups are: <add>

And other meetings will be arranged as needed.

If you, your employees, or coworkers are interested in participating or have questions about the study, please contact Student Investigator Cristin Caparotta at cristin.caparotta@uconn.edu or at (516)-456-1561 or Primary Investigator Anne Farrell, Ph.D. at anne.farrell@uconn.edu or at (203)-251-8590.

This study was approved by the UConn IRB, Protocol #H11-299

Anne F. Farrell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, HDFS
University of Connecticut
One University Place
Stamford, CT 06901
(203) 251.8590

Appendix G

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
University of Connecticut

Principal Investigator: Anne Farrell Ph.D.
Student Researcher: Cristin Caparotta
Study Title: Professional development needs of early childhood providers: A focus group study

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study that asks early childhood providers to share their opinions about their work. While we know that early childhood education is important, we have much to learn about how early childhood teachers do their work. You are being asked to participate because of your role as an early childhood provider or program supervisor, because of your first-hand knowledge and experiences within the field.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to determine how professional development and training can best benefit the teachers of the Fairfield County CT area and also benefit young children and their families. The results of this study can be used to improve Connecticut's early childhood education systems. The Primary Investigator, Anne Farrell, Ph.D., is a member of the Stamford School Readiness Council. The School Readiness Council is a group of community members who work together to encourage policies that promote the school readiness of children in the community.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to take part, you will complete a short questionnaire and participate in a one-time focus group. Other focus group members will include early childhood providers with jobs similar to you. The moderator who leads the group will ask questions and encourage discussion. The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes and the focus group will last approximately one hour. Your total participation will last about 75 minutes.

The focus group questions will be about your work in early childhood education, your education and training, and your opinions about the field. Please answer these questions based on your personal experiences and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Information shared in the focus group session should not be shared with anyone outside of the group.

Being audio taped is a requirement of participating in this focus group. The focus group sessions will be audio taped (with a recorder) and one person will also take notes. The reason for both methods of recording is to ensure that we can accurately remember and understand your responses without slowing the pace of the conversation. Because the discussion will be recorded,

we ask you to avoid using the names of participants. You will not be contacted further in relationship to this study after the date of the interview.

<u>What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?</u>

One risk is that other participants may not maintain confidentiality. The researchers will ask participants not to use names during the discussion and not to repeat what others say, but cannot guarantee it. Another risk is that you may not agree with or may be uncomfortable with comments of other participants. Another possible inconvenience is the time to complete the study.

<u>What are the benefits of the study?</u>

You might not directly benefit from participating. However, we will use the results of this study to guide future professional development offerings. It is possible that you will benefit from the opportunity to discuss your ideas and needs regarding early childhood education and care.

<u>Will I receive payment for participation? Are there costs to participate?</u>

There is no cost to participate. You will not be paid to participate.

<u>How will my personal information be protected?</u>

The researchers will maintain your confidentiality to the greatest extent possible. We will keep tapes and transcripts (a typed version of what is said) in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected file and destroy them after data analysis. The audio recording of the session will not be labeled, and no personal identifying information will be used during transcription or in the written reports that follow. No personal information will kept upon completion of the study, therefore your name or identifying information will not be associated with the study.

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your data. The researchers will keep all study records locked in a secure location, and they will only be viewed by the principal and student investigators. After transcription, done within two weeks, recordings will be destroyed. You, or any other participants, should not share the information said during the focus group session with anyone outside of the group. Because other participants may repeat what is said during the session, we cannot guarantee confidentiality in that regard.

Because the focus group will be audio recorded, you, or any other participants, should not use any names or identifiers, in order to maintain confidentiality. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers may publish their findings. The report may also be used by the Stamford School Readiness Council in creating professional development for teachers in Fairfield County. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations. If you want to receive a report on the results, you can provide your email address or you can self address an envelope that we provide. This information will be kept separate from other information about the study.

You should also know that the UConn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office of Research Compliance may inspect study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews will only focus on the researchers and not on your responses or involvement. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

<u>Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?</u>

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time (during the focus group, and even after the focus group is over). There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. During the focus group sessions, you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer.

The researchers may withdraw participants at any time. This would occur if someone agrees to participates and then does not attend or participate, or if they do not adhere to focus group procedures.

<u>Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?</u>

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have. If you have further questions about this study or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the principal investigator, Anne Farrell, at 203-240-3610 or the student researcher, Cristin Caparotta, at 516-456-1561. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 860-486-8802. The IRB is a group of people that reviews research studies to protect the rights and Welfare of research participants.

Documentation of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____   _____
Participant Signature: Print Name: Date:

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Person   Print Name: Date:
Obtaining Consent:

Appendix H: Suggested Study Modifications

Because this was a pilot study, the following suggestions have been discussed by the investigators in order to improve this study as it progresses.

1. Changes to participant questionnaire:
    a. Change question "How many children do you have?" to "If you are a parent, how many children do you have?"
        i. Some participants answered the question referring to the number of children they care for, therefore making the responses incomparable.
    b. Change question "What was your previous job?" to "What was your previous job *in Early Childhood?*"
        i. Some participants answered regarding a job in a different field, therefore making the responses incomparable.
    c. Add question "What is your personal annual income?"
        i. The data we have from the State and the field regards personal income, as opposed to family income.
    d. Change choices in the question "Program type of your current position": Remove "Affiliated with a religious center" and add "Private Nonprofit (including affiliated with a religious center)