

International Evidence on Effective Early Childhood Care and Education Programs: A Review of Best Practices

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Abstract

In recent years, the United States has made substantial progress in the quality and availability of early childhood education (ECE), especially in the areas of special education and ECE programs for low-income families. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement in terms of access and quality. To improve access and quality in ECE, the United States can look to best practices in ECE in other countries.

A total of 49 sources were reviewed to develop an in-depth understanding of both ECE in the United States and international ECE best practices. Sources were chosen based on relevance and quality and included books, articles, and policy reports. These sources covered the ECE best practices in increasing funding, access, and quality. From developed to developing countries, this review provides an understanding of best practices in ECE throughout the world that the United States can learn from to enhance ECE for the wellbeing of children as well as society.

Keywords

Early education, best practices in ECCE, US ECCE, international ecce

Introduction

In the past decade there has been an abundance of research indicating the importance of early childhood education (ECE). An awareness of the importance of school readiness and an increase in the female work force have led to a need to expand high quality ECE in the United States (US). The US has gradually extended ECE quality and access, but in order to meet the

increasing demands and further enhance the quality of care for all children, much more progress is required. International evidence on innovative and successful ECE practices can help

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the US improve its ECE policies and practices. The objective of this literature review is to inform researchers and policymakers of international ECE policies and programs that the US can learn from to enhance access and quality.

This paper will begin with a description of the methods taken to conduct the literature review. This review will first focus on the importance of ECE and a review of the current ECE system policy in the US. This will be followed by a discussion of funding, access, and quality in the US. Special consideration to where the US has made substantial effort to enhance ECE as well as where the US needs to improve in terms of access and quality is presented. Then a brief review of how the US has already looked at international practices to enhance its ECE is described by pointing at the implementation of certain international ECE philosophies. We then present our review of effective ECE practices and policies around the world, focusing on funding, access, and quality. The review concludes with a discussion of how the US can apply effective ECE international programs and practices identified in the review and a discussion of the limitations of the review.

Method

We conducted a literature review in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of international ECE policies, practices, and philosophies. This literature review includes all studies that met a set of criteria: books, articles and policy reports were selected for the review based on relevance, quality, and empirical nature. We used electronic data bases, including ERIC, Google Scholar and JSTOR; scholar recommendations; articles from journals; and policy reports to collect the data.

Relevance of the topic was our first criterion for inclusion. We first determined whether the document provided information

regarding international evidence of innovative ECE practices, policies and/or philosophies. Although our focus was primarily on current documents that dealt with innovative ECE, we did not limit our research by year, as past evidence in innovative ECE is also important. The literature review expanded to include both developed and developing countries to get a wider perspective of ECE practices.

The quality of the sources played a large role as to whether they were included in the review. The quality of empirical studies was determined through an assessment by the researchers as to whether (1) the methods were justified (sample size, validity and reliability of the measure, and appropriate statistical approach), (2) the research design and analytic strategy were appropriate to our research questions, and (3) whether the study offered sufficient evidence to support its conclusions. We also assessed quality according to whether sources were published in peer-reviewed journals. In the case of non-peer-reviewed policy reports, quality was additionally assessed through the source used to obtain the data (that is, only well-known policy report data sources were used).

The empirical nature of the sources was the final factor that was taken into consideration to provide a comprehensive and reliable literature review. The focus on empirical work was used to highlight existing evidence relating to the importance of ECE. First, journal articles were included if they offered quantitative and/or qualitative conclusions. Second, although policy reports were not peer reviewed they were retrieved from well-known sources in the field (such as UNESCO, OECD, and NICHHD) and used for evidence regarding specific country ECE policies, practices or philosophies, as well as statistics and current data. Third, book chapters that offered empirical evidence and analysis were included. We did not include any sources

that presented only opinion or theories, without offering empirical evidence.

A variety of sources were used in order to obtain a large range of data regarding the topic. We conducted electronic database searches of ERIC, JSTOR, Education Abstracts, as well as table-of-contents searches of widely recognized education journals, including *Child Development*, *Early Childhood Research*, *Applied Developmental Science*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, and *Developmental Psychology*. We also searched publications indices of educationally relevant institutions such as the National Center for Education Statistics, UNICEF, OECD and UNESCO. We also consulted scholars for suggestions of relevant works to include in this study. Scholars were professors in the fields of early education and international comparative education. In total, we identified 46 sources that we reviewed thoroughly to identify the major themes of ECE funding, coverage, quality, children with disabilities, child health and wellbeing, immersion ECE for children with different language and cultural backgrounds, family, parental, and community role in ECE, ECE teachers, and pedagogical material. These themes will be discussed below.

Importance of ECE

Evidence on the importance of ECE is important because it can persuade US education decision makers to improve ECE policies and practices. ECE is profoundly important, as an abundance of research has found that an early start is related to better cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development (Burchinal et al., 2011; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). The quality of experiences in the first three years of life has a lifelong impact on how the brain develops (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). Furthermore, the academic trajectories of children are established in their early education

(Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Kowaleski-Jones & Duncan, 1999). For example, compared to children who did not attend high quality ECE centers, children who attended high quality ECE centers prior to primary school had better reading and math skills in kindergarten and first grade even after controlling for the child, family, neighborhood, and school characteristics (Magnuson et al., 2004). In addition, children who received a high quality early education had significantly better school achievement, social adjustment, and grade retention (Magnuson et al., 2004). A study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), demonstrated that children who spent more time in high quality child care centers in their first five years of life had higher memory and language skills, even after controlling for the quality and amount of non-maternal care the child experienced (NICHD, 2002). More specifically, children who attended a quality child care center at the age of three or four demonstrated higher cognitive development and academic skills when compared to peers of their same age (NICHD, 2003).

Evidently, high quality ECE is important for all children but it is especially beneficial for children living in low-income households (Calman, & Tarr-Whelan, 2005; Hart and Risley, 1995). Hart and Risley (1995) found that low-income three-year-old children's vocabulary was significantly less developed than their peers. Having the opportunity to enter a preschool program provides children the cognitive stimulating environment and opportunity for interactions with attentive caregivers (Bradley, Burchinal, & Casey, 2001; Hubbs-Tait et al., 2002). Unfortunately, children in low-income families are less likely to be in a high-quality center in comparison to wealthier children (Pew Research, 2015).

High quality ECE is not only important for children, but also for society as a whole (Schweinhart, Irish, Lombardi, 1993; Kagitcibasi, Sunar, Bekman, Baydar, & Cemalcilar, 1993; Heckman, 2006). The High Scope Perry Preschool Study found that children at risk of developmental delays benefited significantly from a high quality early education and these benefits lasted a lifetime and led to less government assistance. Children who took part in the program had higher monthly earnings, were more likely to own a home, and were more likely to graduate high school compared to children who did not. The study also found a total benefit/cost ratio of \$17.07 for each \$1 invested in the program by the time participants turned 40 years old (Kagitcibasi, et al., 2009). Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman (2006) has stated that ECE “promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large” (p. 2). He indicated that the return on investment in ECE exceeds investment in any other period of human development. Barnett (2000) supported these statements by noting that the government expenditure on criminal behaviors for children who received high quality ECE was reduced by \$95,000 US dollars for a 27-year-old.

Evidently, high quality ECE is important for children and society. Understanding the benefits of high quality ECE underscores the importance of increasing efforts to enhance access to high quality ECE in the United States, as we argue below.

ECE in the United States

The United States has taken gradual steps in enhancing ECE for all children but more needs to be done in terms of access and quality. The following section will provide an overview of the triumphs and challenges the United States faces in providing ECE funding, access, and quality for all children.

Funding

As the value and need for ECE increase, the need for ECE funding increases. While efforts have been made by some presidents to increase funding to ECE, more needs to be done. In 1990, President Bush established the National Education Goals Panel stating that by the year 2000 all children would start school at an earlier age. When President Obama entered office, he proposed increasing early learning for children. Although there was an increase in governmental awareness, the recession in 2008 had a great impact on federal government aid towards ECE (Barnett, et al., 2010). Total spending by the states decreased, and per child spending declined by nearly \$30 million (Barnett et al., 2010). By 2014 the economy had recovered, and funding towards early education increased by one percent (\$116 million) from 2010 (Barnett, et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the United States spends less than 0.47% of its GDP on ECE, which is less than the OECD average of 0.6% (OECD-US, 2014).

Funding ECE in the US is complex. Most ECE funding is not handled directly by the federal government, but rather by the states. Federal funding is administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (Kamerman, & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). They are responsible for federal programs that promote the economic and social wellbeing of families, children, individuals, and communities (Kamerman, & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). At the state level, ECE is administered by the state agency responsible for administering social services. The Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides funding to the states to subsidize ECE expenses of working parents whose family income is less than 85 percent of the state median income (Kamerman, & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007).

Funding levels in ECE vary from state to state (Barnett, et al., 2017). There is more funding for preschool aged children than for children three and under. As of 2015, there were 40 US states that funded preschool, with 29 of these states having an income requirement (Barnett, S., Carolan, M.E., Squires, J.H., Brown, K.C., & Horowitz, M., 2015). These 40 states fund pre-K programs for four-year-olds. Few states make significant efforts to serve children zero to three (not including special education) (Barnett, et al., 2017). As of 2000, all states funded some sort of public kindergarten (Kagan, 2005), which starts at age five and is an essential introduction to primary school in the US (NCES, 2006). In 2010 California established the Kindergarten Readiness Act (SB 1381), which stated that children entering Kindergarten had to be five (therefore their fifth birthday had to be before the first day of school). This law also stated that children whose birthday was between the first day of school and the following December would receive a year of what would be called “transitional kindergarten.” Transitional kindergarten is free and is taught by credentialed teachers. As of July 2015, teachers who are assigned to teach transitional kindergarten must have 24 units in ECE, experience in a classroom setting with preschool age children (comparable to 24 ECE units), or a child development teacher permit (California Department of Education, 2017).

Better funding for high quality ECE programs is essential for the development of the 24.2 million children under age five in the US (Forum on child and family statistics, 2016). Reaching children younger than five is essential to meeting the growing demand for ECE. Unfortunately, the US does not provide sufficient services for children zero to five years of age (Barnett, et al., 2015). Shortage of public investment and dependence on the for-profit market to provide ECE services have limited the

accessibility of ECE programs. As a result, the US as a whole performs weakly on child-well-being indices in comparison to European and other Northern countries (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010).

Access

Funding is a key component to access as more funds are needed to provide access to ECE for all children. Access to ECE in the United States has gradually increased. Prior to 1960 the US government made little effort to prioritize ECE programs, as it was uncommon for children to be cared for outside the home (Levitan & Alderman, 1975). The first Federal ECE policy emerged in the late 1960s when the War on Poverty led to the Head Start program and the Social Security Act (SSA) amendments of 1967 as a way to target ECE shortfalls (Barnett, 1993). The importance of ECE has increased substantially since the late 1960’s due to an increase in women entering the workforce as well as an awareness of the importance of school readiness that has led to a greater push to access (Howes et al., 2006). Access to all children is important, but is particularly so for children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and children with diverse language and cultural backgrounds, especially immigrant children.

Access for Low Income Children

While ECE is important for all children, it is particularly beneficial for children who live in low-income households (Burchinal et al., 2011). While the US has developed programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start to provide comprehensive education, nutrition, health, social well-being and other services for low income children and families, more needs to be done (Gonzalez-Mena, & Eyer, 2009; Love, Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013; Kline, & Walters, 2016). Low income and rural

communities have limited access to ECE as many are considered childcare deserts. Childcare deserts are defined as having an absence of an important commodity that results in limited access in the care of young children (Dobbins, Tercha, McCready, and Liu, 2017). Although the US has developed programs that provide access to low income children and their families access to ECE, not all children living in low-income households have benefited from these programs and therefore an increase in funding is needed to expand access to all children living in low-income households.

Access to ECE for Children with Disabilities

Increasing access for children with disabilities is just as important as increasing access for children from low-income households. While the US still struggles to provide access to ECE for low-income children, it outperforms others in providing access to ECE for children with disabilities. US inclusions in special education policies are noted to be the best among many countries (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 ensured maximum access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (US Department of education, 2010). As of 2014, there were 729,703 three to five-year olds served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Access for Children with Diverse Language and Cultural Backgrounds

While the US excels in their access to ECE for children with disabilities, they do poorly in providing access to children with diverse language and cultural backgrounds, especially for immigrant or displaced children. Programs like Head Start encourage diversity but there is no national guideline that encourages

multiculturalism and multilingualism. Furthermore, access for immigrant and displaced children is almost non-existent and this is particularly important considering the US receives more immigrants annually than any other country (Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M., Todorova, C., 2010). With a large immigrant population, it is increasingly important to provide ECE programs for the children of immigrant parents. Unfortunately, there is no government support for immigrant and displaced children.

When it comes to access, the government does well in providing access to children with disabilities and has made progress in providing access for some low-income children, but much more ECE access is needed specifically for children in childcare desert locations, multicultural and multilingual children, and immigrant and displaced children. It is important to note that access to ECE is not enough, as it is important that all children receive access to high quality ECE. Unfortunately, only 10 percent of national ECE facilities are identified as providing high quality care (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2007).

Quality of ECE

While greater funding is needed to enhance access for all children, increasing the quality of ECE is equally important. In the 1990's the need to enhance the quality of ECE was spreading as states gave subsidy reimbursements to accredited providers. Unfortunately, few providers were able to receive such rewards as a large gap existed between licensing and accreditation requirements. As a response states wanted to align quality guidelines and developed a systemic approach to evaluate, enhance, and communicate the quality of ECE. This systematic approach was called the Quality Rating and Improvement Scale (QRIS). Each state develops

its own QRIS system. Providers who take part in QRIS are given a rating based on the quality of their program; regardless of the rating they receive, they will be provided with continuous quality improvement support. QRIS is composed of five components, which include providing program standards, support for programs and practitioners, financial incentives, quality assurance and monitoring, and consumer education (QRIS, 2016). The QRIS is national and targets childcare centers as well as family childcare homes serving children five and under. Although the QRIS is helping many ECE facilities increase their quality, it is limited because it is a volunteer program and only 20 to 50 percent of programs participate (QRIS & ECIDS, 2014).

In addition to the QRIS, the US has recommended 10 new quality standards benchmarks for state pre-K, which include: 1. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), 2. Curriculum supports, 3. Teacher degree, 4. Teacher specialized training, 5. Assistant teacher degree, 6. Staff professional development, 7. Maximum class size (20), 8. staff-child ratio (1:10), 9. Screenings and referrals, 10. Continuous Quality Improvement System (CQIS). These benchmarks have been enhanced and slightly changed recently (Barnett et al., 2016). Current data has only been collected from previous benchmarks and data has found that only 15 states provided enough per-child funding to meet all 10 benchmarks for quality standards proposed by the National Institute for Early Education Research (Barnett et al., 2016). Furthermore, 40 percent of children nationwide were enrolled in programs that met less than half of the quality standards benchmarks (Barnett et al., 2016). Quality varies substantially across states, with Texas, California, and Florida having the lowest quality state preschool standards nationwide. Providing clear quality guidelines for all children

throughout the US is important for children's development (Barnett et al., 2016).

Teacher Quality

A key determinant of ECE quality is the quality of teachers (Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000). Providing teachers with the essential training to help children's early development is important. Few ECE teachers hold either a credential or a BA degree in the US (Phillips, 1994). Currently, only state funded ECE centers require teachers to hold a teacher permit. Research has found that teachers who hold standardized certification outperform those who are not certified in the field (NICHD, 1996). In addition to the lack of teachers who hold a credential, far fewer teachers hold a BA degree in ECE or child development (Bellm, Whitebook, Cohen, & Stevenson, 2005). Most research has found that teachers who hold a BA degree in specialized ECE training provide higher quality care than those with minimal or no special training (Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Barnett, 2002).

In order to maintain high quality teachers who are dedicated to the wellbeing of children, teachers must be compensated for their work and dedication. As of 2015, ECE teachers were paid an average of \$28,570 per year which is just a little over half of what Kindergarten teachers earn (US Department of Education, 2016). Additionally, improving ECE teachers' work environment is important to support their ability to apply their knowledge and work diligently. There is substantial evidence showing that working conditions such as high staff-child ratios, class structure, small group size, and administrative support increase teachers' performance in their teaching (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howed & Cryer, 1997). To enhance the quality of ECE, greater funding is needed to support teachers to continue their education and feel adequately compensated for their work.

The US needs to increase funding so that access to high quality ECE is provided to all children. Funding is a major obstacle as funding for ECE is complex and varies from state to state. Funding is key to increasing access and more funding is needed to provide access to all children especially for children in low income and rural communities and immigrant and displaced families. Furthermore, more funding is needed to ensure high quality ECE for all children. When it comes to quality, the US has made great effort with the QRIS and state preschool benchmarks, but more effort is needed to improve high quality ECE specifically with increasing the quality of teachers. The US can look at international laws, programs, and practices to increase access to high quality ECE for all children.

Enhancing ECE by Learning from Other Countries

While the United States serves as an exemplar country in providing access for children with special needs, they can learn from other countries as to how to enhance overall ECE access and quality for all children. Learning best ECE practices from other countries is not something unfamiliar in the US as many ECE philosophies from around the world have been implemented in the US.

Childcare Philosophies Implemented in the US

For years the US has implemented international ECE philosophies. The three major ECE international philosophies that have been implemented in the US are Reggio Emilia, Montessori, and Waldorf. These implementations have increased the quality of ECE in some centers in the US (Hewett, 2001).

Many ECE centers in the US replicated the Italian ECE philosophy Reggio Emilia due to its innovative approach focused on preschool and

infant-toddler development. This philosophy was developed by Loris Malaguzzi and the parents of the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy after World War II (New, 1993). This is a family centered approach where parents understand the value of educating children at a young age (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). This philosophy is based on the principles of responsibility, respect, and community. Teachers organize class curriculum based on the children's interest and encourage exploration and curiosity (Gandini, 1993).

Another international philosophical approach US ECE centers have implemented is the Montessori approach. The Montessori approach was first established for children with disabilities by an Italian physician and educator, Maria Montessori (Edwards, 2002). This philosophy emphasizes respect, independence, and freedom. It uses self-correcting material and mixed aged group classrooms to enhance children's learning (Montessori, 1870-1952).

The Waldorf ECE philosophy is yet another approach that has benefited young children in schools in the US. This philosophy was founded in 1919 by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian scientist and philosopher (Edwards, 2002). This ECE approach is seen as a humanistic approach to pedagogy where the goal is to develop children into morally responsible people. An emphasis on the importance of imagination and creativity is core to this philosophy where text books and grading are not necessary (Edwards, 2002).

These philosophies have been developed with the hopes of providing children with optimal care and education in their early years. While they have set positive examples, they are not implemented throughout the country, but rather are scarce and expensive. In an international study, Jalango et al. (2004) emphasize the need for countries to establish a

clear philosophy that stresses the value of communities, culture, families, and most importantly, the children. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that a country's philosophy should be "communicated to the public, reflected in daily practice, and revised periodically to reflect advances in understanding about how young children grow and learn" (p. 144). An example of a country that provides a clear philosophy that is well known and established throughout the country is Italy, with its Reggio Emilia Philosophy, which has provided many young children with access to high quality ECE.

International ECE Evidence

The US has already acquired a wealth of knowledge through international best ECE philosophies; the next step is to analyze international ECE policies and practices that can enhance funding, access, and quality of ECE in the US. With the initiative of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries throughout the world have developed and enhanced programs and policies in ECE (Shaeffer, 2016). Below we provide an overview of the most innovative and successful practices and policies of ECE that the United States can learn from to enhance ECE access and quality. First a discussion on best practices in funding ECE is presented. This is followed by best practices in increasing access to ECE. Lastly, a discussion on best practices that increase quality in ECE is presented.

ECE Funding

Funding is important in providing high quality ECE for all children. The United States can look at how other countries fund ECE to enhance funding in the US. There are different options to increase funding, which include increasing

overall GDP spending in ECE and public private partnerships (PPP).

Increase GDP in ECE

ECE funding in terms of percentage of GDP is subpar in the US compared to that of the Nordic countries and France (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010). In contrast to the United States, investment and support for ECE in France is exceptional. France spent 0.8 percent of its GDP on ECE services in 2017 (which is more than the United States or other OECD countries spent), which allows it to provide universal access and enrollment for three to five-year-olds (OECD, 2017).

In addition, Cuba is another country that provides sufficient funding to ECE as they are able to cover 99.5 percent of ECE services through their holistic approach, where children under six and their families are provided with an integrated system that supports the child's development (UNICEF Cuba, 2010).

Public-Private Partnerships

Another strategy that can help the government raise funds for ECE is public-private partnerships (PPP). There are a range of public private partnerships which include service-delivery initiatives (such as the National Board of Day Care Centers in Chile), voucher and voucher-like initiatives (such as the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in Hong Kong 55), and private management or operation of public programs (such as the Early Childhood Care and Education Centers in Trinidad and Tobago) (Araujo et al., 2013; Gustafsson-Wright, Smith, & Gardiner, 2016). According to Gustafsson-Wright et al. (2016), such PPPs allow for greater flexibility in the delivery and management of education, increase transparency and quality, and improve efficiency. Uruguay is an example of how a country can raise funds for ECE through public-private cooperation. Uruguay

created Estrategia Nacional para la Infancia y la Adolescencia (ENIA; National Strategy for Children and Adolescents) in order to establish collaboration between the government and other stakeholders to identify specific goals, define management tools, and allocate resources with the goal of protecting the rights of children and adolescents (ENIA, 2010). Its focus was to support children and families' well-being from birth to adolescence through health care and education access. A third example comes from Indonesia. Indonesia's Ministry of National Education (MONE) uses public money to fund block grants that are awarded to villages (Sardjunani, Suryadi, & Dunkelberg, 2007). The goal of these block grants has been to promote the private sector to take part in providing ECE services for vulnerable children and families. It provides subsidies to nonprofit organizations and private institutions to increase ECE services. With the help of the grant, about 738,000 children below the age of six who live in poor villages have access to ECE service (Sardjunani, Suryadi, & Dunkelberg, 2007). These countries serve as examples as to how the US can increase funding for ECE while taking into consideration the challenges it may encounter as a very large country with diverse needs.

Funding is a major issue in enhancing overall access and quality of ECE in the United States. International evidence on increasing ECE GDP and PPPs has helped several countries. The US can learn how other countries target funding issues in ECE to support and enhance ECE access and quality for all children.

Access

Some examples of how other countries are able to expand access to ECE include development of laws that enhance access to all children, access for children with disabilities, access to health and well-being, access to parent and family ECE resources, and access for children with diverse

language and cultural backgrounds including immigrants and displaced children.

Laws

Establishing laws that mandate access to ECE for all children is an idea that comes from Mexico. In 2002, Mexico became the first country in the world to establish compulsory preschool education for three to five-year olds and in doing so increased funding for ECE (Worthham, 2013). This policy allowed 3.4 million children to receive preschool education (Worthham, 2013).

Access for Children with Disabilities

Although the US provides little funding overall for ECE and does not provide a law that mandates ECE, the United States does provide laws that provide access to ECE for children with disabilities. Even though the US has an adequate inclusion policy and program for children with disabilities, it can always improve. There are several international examples of innovative ECE inclusion programs, which include family funding, legal support, and educational support.

Family Funding

Romania is an example of how a country enhances funding for family who have children with disabilities. The country developed a program for the inclusion of children with disabilities by increasing its social allowance to 100% for families who had children with disabilities (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010). Monthly payments of 400 Lei (128 USD) were given to families of children ages zero to two who had a disability (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010). Additionally, the Romanian government improved the way they disbursed the money by establishing an automatic payment system so that the families of the children could receive automatic monthly payments. The state also provides families with

personal budgets based on the degree of handicap as well as a personal assistant in the case of severe disability (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010).

Legal Support

Serbia is yet another country with a strong legal foundation for inclusive policies as they address the education needs of disabled children in their constitution, action plan for children, and primary education law (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010). Serbia's law on the Basis of Education emphasizes the importance of providing children with disabilities equal education opportunities as other children, where inclusion is the key component to integrating children (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010). In addition, the Law on Preschool Education states that young children need to be assessed in a way to place them in mainstream schools. The law promotes availability, democracy, active participation, openness, and development ((UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010).

Educational Support

Saudi Arabia is yet another example of a country that helps children who have a disability, through the Down Syndrome Charitable Association (DSCA) (UNESCO Arab States, 2010). They provide introductory educational classes for children with Down Syndrome who are between the ages of three to seven to prepare them for school (UNESCO Arab States, 2010). The purpose of these classes is to help the child become self-reliant and independent (UNESCO Arab States, 2010).

There is always room for improvement when it comes to the well-being of ECE in young children. Such inclusion examples worldwide may help the US enhance its already well-established programs and policy for children with disabilities.

Access to Children's Health and Well-Being

Similar to children with disabilities, the US does an adequate job of providing access to children's health and well-being with programs like Head Start and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Although the US has well established nationwide programs, there needs to be more, as there are about 13.1 million children living in homes with food-insecurity (Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M., Gregory, C., & Singh, A., 2016).

One of the largest programs to enhance access to children's health and well-being is India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Islands, 2010). ICDS was developed by the Indian government and aids more than 121 million children under the age of six. This program provides preschool education, health and nutrition education, medical checks, immunizations, supplementary meals, and referral services for children under the age of six as well as for nursing mothers (UNESCO Asia and Pacific Islands, 2010).

Chile's Crece Contigo is yet another example of a program that was established for the well-being of young children (ENIA, 2010). Crece Contigo is a child protection system that was established with the goal of monitoring children from birth until the age of five. The program offers services in general education, bio- psychosocial development and services for children and their families (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

Another program that targets the well-being of all children especially low-income children is the Dominican Republic's "Programa Solidaridad" (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). This program addresses nutrition, education, and health care for children zero to five years of

age. In addition, it promotes pre-school attendance for children who are five years old (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

These programs serve as an example for the US to further improve the health and well-being for all children. The key is providing funding for such programs to meet the needs of every child and family.

Access to Parents and Family ECE Resources

Many programs that provide access to a child's health and well-being also include family and community support. Although this is also an element of Head Start and WIC, there are international programs that clearly focus on providing access to resources for parents, families, and communities.

The Philippines is a prime example of a country that places parents in the forefront of ECE through their national Parenting Effectiveness Service program (Gordoncillo et al., 2009). The Parenting Effectiveness Service program was designed to help low income parents, guardians, surrogate parents, and other caregivers improve their skills, knowledge, and views in parenting so that they can enhance their children's development (Gordoncillo et al., 2009).

One of the most recognized programs comes from Cuba. Their program "Educa tu hijo" has been replicated in various countries and has national coverage (Myers, 1995; Yañez, 2009). This program helps families understand the development of their children and has increased family involvement in their children's education (Yañez, 2009). In addition, a study of 2,103 children under three years of age that were part of the program found a 97.5% achievement in language, intellectual, emotional, and motor development (Yañez, 2009).

Just like Cuba's program, Brazil's *Primeira Infância Melhor* (Better Early Childhood)

program was established to target parents and community education in ECE (Scheineder & Ramires, 2008). It places parents at the forefront of a child's wellbeing by giving families access to information about their child's development (Scheineder, & Ramires, 2008).

Another program that was developed to target family and communities for the care of young children comes from Romania (UNICEF-Romania, 2009). With the help of UNICEF, Romania established A National Parent Education Program to provide social support for Romanian parents (UNICEF-Romania, 2009). The programs provided support for first time parents, parent education, and counseling (UNICEF-Romania, 2009).

The UK government program Sure Start is another example of a program that helps incorporate parents and the community in the development of children (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010). The program emphasizes parental and community development so as to provide young children with the best start in life. Sure Start has been identified as an effective intervention program that helps young children at risk of conduct disorder by providing parents with the tools to address their children's disruptive behavior (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010).

Many other recognizable programs exist that help families and communities understand and improve the development of children. For example, Peru has two programs that help children under the age of three that are at risk of developmental delays called Family-Based Early Education Programs (PIETBAF) and "Aprendiendo en el Hogar" (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). In addition, Uruguay has established a program called "Experiencias Oportunas" in order to provide information about child development to parents of children younger than one (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Colombia has another program that

promotes family and community involvement in ECE titled Community Welfare Homes (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Other programs that help families and communities enhance the development of young children include HOGAIN Familiar in Venezuela, Guatemala's Hogares Comunitarios and Chile's Early Childhood Improvement Program (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

Access for Children with Diverse Language and Cultural Backgrounds

In addition to programs with family support, there are innovative programs that provide access to programs and resources for children of different languages and cultures within the country. The US can learn from the variety of educational approaches worldwide that value the language, culture, and diverse knowledge that derive from the multiculturalism of their countries. The US is a multicultural and multilingual country that must acknowledge and embrace its diversity by providing support for these children and their families. Countries worldwide have provided examples as to how to support and enhance multiculturalism and multilingualism through curriculum development, laws, and program development.

Curriculum

An example of a country that embraces its diverse population is New Zealand. New Zealand is recognized for developing a curriculum that accommodates children from different cultures through the government's early childhood curriculum Te Whariki, "a mat for all to stand on" (Ministry of Education, 1996). Te Whariki was established in order to increase recognition of cultural diversity and regulate ECE programs. Its curriculum highlights the important role social context plays in children's learning (Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 1996).

In addition, it values maintaining traditional languages and cultures (Shaeffer, 2016).

Laws

There are several Latin American countries that embrace their multicultural populations by providing multi-cultural inclusion education programs for children. Paraguay provides bilingual education for all children throughout their education. Its law states that ECE should be in the "official mother tongue of the pupil, and the other language shall also be taught in early education, but as a second language" (UNESCO Latin America, 2010, p. 44).

Argentina also acknowledges the importance of having children learn in their native language and has established a law that states that ECE must be intercultural and bilingual (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Uruguay is yet another example of a country that is taking an initiative to accommodate children of different cultures through their General Law of Education that states that minority and vulnerable groups will be guaranteed equal opportunities in education (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

Programs

The countries mentioned above set laws that enhance intercultural and bilingual education, but there are countries that are currently establishing programs. Paraguay developed Escuela Viva Hekokatúva, Bilingual and Intercultural Education (EBI) to enhance intercultural and bilingual education (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Another example comes from Bogotá, Colombia, which set pedagogical guidelines for indigenous ECE (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Its ethno-education program acknowledges the importance of teaching and learning in the native culture, language, and traditions (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

Although various countries incorporate children with different languages and traditions,

there are very few that explicitly refer to children from migrant families, refugees or asylum-seekers. The Mexican government does make an effort to acknowledge migrant children through the Assistance Program for Minors in Border Areas (ENIA, 2010). This program was developed in order to assist children deported by the US and guaranteeing respect for their human rights (ENIA, 2010). Mexico policy focuses on the children's psychological and physical health first and later deals with their immigration status. Although this policy has been established, the degree to how much of this process is implemented is unclear.

Quality

Access to ECE for all children is important but having high quality ECE for all children is particularly important as access to low quality care may negatively affect children's developmental outcomes (Tough, 2013). While the US has developed the QRIS and state preschool quality benchmarks to enhance ECE quality, these are merely recommendations and more needs to be done as the US measures poorly in ECE quality (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010). There are three main ways in which other countries have increased quality, which include: establishing a national policy on ECE quality, developing programs and models that target ECE quality, and enhancing teacher training and pay.

ECE Quality Policies

The US does not have a national policy that regulates quality of ECE but rather has a voluntary rating system that provides support for improving quality throughout the US. As a result of the lack of clear regulation guidelines, many centers are poorly equipped, and the quality of education is subpar (Barnett et al., 2016). A country that does provide national quality policies is Ecuador. In 2006 the

government of Ecuador established a ruling under their Code of Childhood and Adolescence in order to certify quality (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). The standards set in place regulated infrastructure, site condition, educational nutrition and health, human resources, family participation, teacher qualifications, and educational environment.

ECE Quality Programs and Models

According to UNESCO, one of the most established quality models that promote quality in ECE is Chile's Early Childhood Education Board (Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles) (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). This model hoped to measure the management quality within ECE centers and to inform these centers of how to make improvements. The model analyzed six factors: leadership, satisfaction of the school community, financial management and administration, educational management, family and community engagement, and protection and care (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

Mexico also provides an example of a nationwide program that enhances quality. The program titled, "Intersectoral Project on Early Childhood Welfare Indicators" developed indicators, which were discussed at a national level, to identify the status of ECE in Mexico (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). There was a total of 28 indicators with 13 categories that covered issues such as equipment, resources, educational agents, materials, planning, educational processes, curriculum, group environment, supervision, school administration, assessment, and direction (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

ECE Teachers

One of the biggest factors that increases quality in ECE are teachers. Providing ECE teachers with adequate training, salaries, and working

conditions is important to ensure high quality ECE. The US can learn how other countries have enhanced quality through teacher training and pay.

Teacher training enhances the quality of a center. New Zealand represents a successful model in training the ECE workers (UNESCO Europe and North America, 2010). In addition, Benin and Senegal have almost 100 percent trained staff in ECE. Also, countries like Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway train their teachers to work with children from birth to age six or older (UNESCO Europe & North America, 2010). Singapore also takes a strong initiative to improve the quality of ECE teacher training (Choo, 2009). The Singapore government has increased staff requirements for ECE teachers. Preschool teachers are required to pass five subjects in the secondary school certificate examinations in order to work (Choo, 2009).

Staff training is important to enhance the quality of ECE teachers. Three specific examples of programs that have been found to enhance staff training in ECE include Mexico's Preschool Curricular and Pedagogical Renewal Programme (PRONAE), the Dominican Republic Early Education Strengthening Program, and Brazil's Initial Education Program for ECE Educators (Proinfantil) (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Training ECE teachers provides them with the knowledge to understand the important development of young children.

Pedagogical materials for teachers provide a different avenue to increase teacher training. The pedagogical material that is used by educators in Argentina provides teachers with a guide for the classroom that seeks dialog with the children (Cuadernos para el aula) (Ministerio de Educacion y Deportes, 2017; UNESCO Latin America, 2010). In Colombia, libraries and materials to support pedagogical work have been available to teachers in rural and urban schools (UNESCO Latin America, 2010).

In Brazil, the Ministry of Education established the Referenciais Curriculares Nacionais para Educação Infantil (Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education) to help child care providers reflect on the goals of ECE and how these goals must be viewed based on the country's cultural diversity (UNESCO Latin America, 2010). Jalongo et al. (2004) posits that it is important to understand that materials are determined by the geography, economy, and culture of a country but should ultimately be used to enhance social, cognitive, emotional development while respecting family and cultural values.

Finally, in order to increase high quality access to all children there needs to be an increase of funding and this funding can then be designated to develop policies, programs, and resources that will enhance the development and support of high quality ECE for all children.

Discussion and Conclusion

The review of the US ECE policies and practices has identified several areas in which the US can strengthen ECE. These include increasing funding, access, and quality of ECE. Worldwide ECE policies and programs that have been recognized as best practices were identified as potential programs and policies the US can learn from. The major issue in the United States is ECE funding. The US has a complex funding policy for ECE with federal, state, and local components where most families end up covering the cost (Belfield, 2007). Funding determines ECE coverage, quality, and access. In order to tackle issues of funding, countries have increased GDP expenditures in ECE and developed PPP. With an increase in funding, quality and access of ECE may increase, if the funds are well allocated.

This literature review found that the US has made much progress in enhancing access to high quality ECE for children but there is still a

lot more the US needs to do to provide access to high quality ECE for all children. In terms of access, the US provides some of the best programs and resources for children with disabilities but lacks access for children in childcare deserts and for multicultural children, especially immigrant and displaced children. In terms of quality, the US has made great progress in developing the QRIS, but participation is voluntary and therefore only a few facilities obtain support to increase the quality of ECE. In particular, the US needs to increase quality of ECE by increasing teacher pay and training. International examples on quality and access are provided for the US to learn from.

Although this review discussed best practices in ECE in terms of laws, policies, and programs, it did not provide an in-depth analysis of how to establish the programs and policies. In addition, there might be programs that the US already has established in certain states that seem to work and changing a program or implementing one that might fail would waste valuable funds towards ECE. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that policies and strategies in ECE are not necessarily universal due to the cultural variation and needs of each country, as well as different degrees of implementation.

Vargas-Baron's (2016) case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Myanmar, and Rwanda found that clarity with policies as they pertain to the needs of that country is key for the success of ECE policy and statement implementation. This study found that in order to increase the well-being of children, countries must first establish an ECE policy with a participatory policy planning process and then formulate a strategic plan that includes an action plan, all while understanding the needs of the children and families of that country. One example comes from Brazil, where policy was built based on research that sought to understand children's needs and opinions

(Vargas-Baron, 2016). Bertram and Pascal (2016) also emphasized that there is no one-size fits-all approach and countries must take into consideration their needs. While countries must tailor their ECE policies and programs it is important for these countries to acknowledge and understand what other countries have done to enhance the well-being of young children through policies and programs. Bertram and Pascal's (2016) analysis of eight countries (Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Poland, Russian Federation, and the United States) found that although not one country has perfected ECE policy and implementation, they individually provide a guide as to the struggles and triumphs that can be learned from one another in ECE provision.

Greater research is not only necessary in terms of the programs that are already established throughout the world, but also research in areas where there is a lack of support for children who have not been targeted. For example, there are insufficient research, policies, and programs that are designed to help young children from migrant families, refugees, or asylum-seekers. This is particularly important when millions of children and families throughout the world are being displaced from their homes due to wars, violence, and poverty. These children are at risk of health and educational barriers that further impact their well-being. Although controversies exist due to legal issues, these children are at no fault and getting the required assistance for healthy development is important.

Overall the United States can look at other countries laws, policies, and programs to enhance young children's development. Using other countries' best practices as a basis to improve the overall ECE in the United States and building upon what already exists may benefit children, families, communities and the country as a whole. Social benefits could include

a lower crime rate, an increase in academic achievement, and increased healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, by providing a better beginning for children under the age of five, countries will have a better opportunity to compete in a world economy.

There are many programs that seem promising for the US to replicate. Unfortunately, a major obstacle for the US in implementing any program is funding. Some countries have set out examples of how this funding can be acquired, but in addition to funding, their needs to be a greater acknowledgment of the need for ECE programs. Such a push can come from research on studies regarding the importance of ECE. One goal of this paper is to influence policy makers and researchers to push for higher quality and expansion of ECE in the US.

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Thomas F. Luschei, PhD, is a Professor of Education at Claremont Graduate University. His research examines the impact and availability of educational resources—particularly high-quality teachers—among economically disadvantaged children. He is the author (with Amita Chudgar) of *Teacher Distribution in Developing Countries: Teachers of Marginalized Students in India, Mexico, and Tanzania* (2017, Palgrave Macmillan).