Early Childhood and Pre-Tertiary Education: United States, Ghana and the EFA goals

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Abstract
This paper compares legislation between the United States and in Ghana in relation to formalized teacher preparation programs for teachers of young children between the years of 0-8. The paper examines the basis for which formalized care in each country is needed; defines quality child care, and why pre-tertiary teachers’ specializing in early childhood education is essential. The paper also determines what is necessary to establish universal child care. The paper also shows that there are differences between the United States and Ghana in the current provision of early care and education for very young children; however, the findings suggest that Ghana is following a progression similar to that of the United States for pre-tertiary education. Offering early childhood bachelor degrees that include philosophical and sociological constructs, specialized content information, developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment, as well as student teaching experiences, would help early childhood education graduates become effective teachers for young children 0 – 8 years of age. Full governmental funding for universal child care and pre-tertiary education is needed in both countries.

Introduction
There have been numerous inquiries into the need for formalized early care and education in order to determine what entity should be responsible for it, and where formalized early care should be given. A result of these inquiries is that the issues surrounding the need for teacher education and professional development in the field of early childhood education have come to the forefront (Kagan & Reid, 2008). Generally, contentious issues are raised by individuals who do not have an understanding of early
Moreover, dissenters fail to see the importance of a formal educational system designed for early years. For many, the term *early childhood* correlates with the childhood years associated with tertiary (primary) education; the years from 5 – 12, starting with primary or elementary school. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration for Education for All (EFA) suggests that “learning begins at birth.” A decade later, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action reaffirmed the importance of early childhood education. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], “Access,” 1995-2011).

According to the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit of UNESCO, early childhood is defined as “the period from birth to 8 years” (UNESCO, “Early Childhood,” 1995-2011). It was during the 2008 UNESCO meeting that the Education for All (EFA) goals was created. There were six internationally agreed upon goals which aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youths, and adults by 2015.

The first goal of the EFA is to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO, “EFA goals,” 1995-2011). This goal addresses the need for an understanding of the early years. However, before we can study current implications for early care and education, we must examine the systems that address the inclusion of early childhood education in various countries around the world. Therefore, in this paper we will examine the legislation that surrounds early care and education in the United States of America (USA) and Ghana, West Africa, and how this article relates to current practices in the field of early education between the two countries.

**The United States**

Education is compulsory for all children in the United States, but the age range during which school attendance is required varies from state to state. Compulsory education typically begins between the ages of five and eight and ends between the age of sixteen and eighteen. (“Compulsory education,” 2011).

The need for a center of learning for very young children came as a response to dramatic needs during the industrial revolution. In part, early care and education efforts began with the Infant Schools of London in the early 1800’s, and spread to the United States. Infant schools provided care for needy immigrant children whose parents worked to provide for
the sustenance of their families. As infant schools were initially designed to provide for the children of the poor, middle and upper class families eventually realized that what benefited the children of the destitute could also serve their own children. The infant schools closed due to lack of funding, and no legislation was proposed which would provide funding for the provision of early care at that time (Kagan & Reid, 2008); however, the United States’ involvement in World War II had a more sustaining influence on child care as women became involved in military war efforts.

As many women began working outside the home in support of the war effort, child care was needed which included 24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week service. The Lanham Act, legislation that supported child care services for women during World War II, was established during this time (Cohen, 1996, p. 29). After the end of World War II, the child care crisis lessened, but federal involvement continued and would support children and their families into a new era. Although additional legislation later was enacted to further support education for children, the legislation of the 1960’s was instrumental in making great strides in the educational system. The following landmark Legislative Acts for education are noted below:

1965 - The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed on April 9. Part of Lyndon Johnson’s "War on Poverty," it provided federal funds to help low-income students, which results in the initiation of educational programs such as Title I and bilingual education (Schugurensky, 2002).

1965 - The Higher Education Act (PL 89-329) was signed at Southwest Texas State College on November 8. It increased federal aid to higher education and provided for scholarships, student loans, and established a National Teachers Corps (Woodbury, n.d., p. 96).

1965 - Project Head Start, a preschool education program for children from low-income families, began as an eight-week summer program. Part of the "War on Poverty," the program continued to this day as the longest-running anti-poverty program in the U.S. It is housed in the Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, and Office of Head Start (OHS) unit. (Ziglar & Muenchow, 1992).
In 2002, the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative focused on supporting States and local community efforts to strengthen early learning for young children. A primary goal of GSGS included partnering with States to ensure that all young children enter kindergarten with the skills they need to be ready to succeed (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USHHS], “Good Start,” 2009).

In 2007, the Improving Head Start Act of 2007 passed, with teacher credentialing addressed. One of its aims is to help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed by improving program quality and expanding access to more children.

Although much discussion has surrounded universal preschool, the legislation for such has not been enacted. Indeed, there are no mandatory public prekindergarten or crèche programs in the United States. The federal government funds the Head Start preschool program for children of low-income families, but most families are responsible for finding preschool or childcare (“Education in the United States,” 2011). Although the Head Start program is free for all who qualify to receive the services, Head Start is not compulsory.

The first federal investment in child care was made in 1933, primarily to provide government-paid jobs for thousands of teachers, nurses, cooks, janitors, and carpenters rendered unemployed by the Depression. These centers closed in 1943 and the funding transferred to support the landmark legislation, the Lanham Act. The Lanham Act supported the care of children whose mothers were working as a result of the war effort (Cohen, 1996). An important legislation in the United States to support early care and education was enacted in the 1960s, when the Head Start project was introduced in 1965 in conjunction with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. (Ziglar & Muenchow, 1992). Targeting low-income children and families, Head Start was designed to support a two-generational approach to assist families in moving up-and-out of poverty. It remains a comprehensive program which provides services consisting of 4 major components: education, health, parent involvement, and social services to young children and their families (“Head start,” n.d.). The project was designed to serve as an early intervention device for children who do not have a home environment that supports the growth and development needed to prepare the children for school. Head Start was reauthorized in 2007 (“H.R. 1429,” 2007).
In addition to the most current educational legislation, there are new mandates for early childhood teacher credentialing which suggests that the quality of education will improve for young children. Although mandates for teacher credentialing vary largely state-by-state, the latest mandate for the first national early childhood laboratory in the United States, project Head Start, states:

Minimum Head Start teacher qualifications are due to be raised, effective October 2011. All Head Start classrooms will be required to have a teacher with an associate’s degree, or better, in early childhood education. By September 2013, at least 50% of Head Start teachers nationally must have a bachelors or higher in early childhood education (USHHS, “Statutory degree,” 2008).

Some states in the US require early childhood and Head Start teachers have degrees in higher education; however, not all states require the same credentials. State credential requirements range from having a high school diploma or its equivalent, to a bachelors degree (four years of study at a college or university), or above. Institutions of higher education (IHE) have responded to the call for higher degrees in early childhood, or pre-tertiary education, and numerous colleges and universities across the nation offer the mandated degrees. Early care and education, is housed in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and regulated by the Child Care Bureau (CBB).

Ghana

The Ghanaian Education Service (GES) is responsible for implementing pre-tertiary education policies formulated by the Ministry of Education. It is headed by a Director-General, and is one of the most decentralized sectors of the government. Indeed, the management of education at divisional, regional and district levels has been strengthened by the posting of highly qualified personnel to all managerial and administrative positions in the service. In 1961, the Educational Act of 1961, Ghana, West Africa, mandated that compulsory education begin with children in primary grade 1 (age 6) though primary grade 6. There are no provisions for compulsory education for children under the age of 5 in this legislation. Indeed, the Act dictates that compulsory education should begin with school age. More specifically, “Every child who has attained the school going age as determined by the Minister shall attend a course of instruction as laid down by the
Minister in a school recognized for the purpose by the Minister.” (Basic Education Division, 2004).

Thirty-five years later, in 1996, the Free Compulsory Universal Education Program, a 10-year program that ended in 2005, was designed to create the framework to achieve free compulsory education for all school-age children. A timeline which leads to pre-tertiary education is shown below:

- **Education Act of 1961** proves fundamental for primary education
- **1992** Constitution mandated that education is a basic right for all Ghanaians
- **1996** The Compulsory Universal Basic Education Program was launched
- **Children’s Act no. 560 of 1998** enjoins the District Assemblies and other decentralized departments to facilitate the establishment of daycare centers, and other early childhood care and development (ECCD) institutions (UNESCO-IBE, “World data,” 2010).

In 2007/2008, two years of kindergarten education were added to free and compulsory education (age group 4 – 14 years of age) (UNESCO-IBE, “World data,” 2010).

No data is available which addresses legislation for early childhood/crèche, or nursery schools (UNESCO-IBE, “Country profile,” 2006).

Before 2001, the focus of early child care and development (ECCD) had been on the cognitive development of the child. The Ministries of Education and Employment and Social Welfare had joint responsibilities for early childhood facilities (crèche, daycare centers, nurseries, kindergartens). While the aforementioned agencies were responsible for facilities, the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) was responsible for the welfare of all children. The responsibility for policy-making in respect to children has shifted from the GNCC in 2001 with the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWAC) (UNESCO, “World data,” 2010)
However, before 2002, pre-school education was not part of the formal system and was introduced as a result of the recommendation made by the President’s Committee on Review of Education Reforms in 2002 (Basic Education Division, 2004). “In 2007/2008, two years of kindergarten education were added to free and compulsory education (age group 4 – 14 years of age) (UNESCO, “World data,” 2010).

Today in Ghana, pre-tertiary education is being addressed as part of the Educational Act of 1961. Teacher credentialing is identified as instrumental in supporting the education of very young children; however, according to Ben Ofosu-Appiah (2008)

> The sad reality is that Ghana lacks teachers who specialized in preschool or early childhood education. None of our universities offer a course in preschool education or early childhood education and no training college in Ghana does. So in effect there are no real professionals in that area, what we have been doing over the years is just trial and error. Our universities must start offering courses in preschool or early childhood education.

**Similarities:**

Preschool or pre-tertiary education for children from 0 to 5 years of age was created as a result of working mothers who required assistance in the care of their children while they worked to help to support the family. In both countries, there is a lack of legislation or funding that supports universal early education for very young children. Typically, children who are compelled by the government into education begin school at 5 – 6 years of age in the primary grades, or in the United States kindergarten setting. The age that a child is allowed to leave the public school setting varies from state-to-state in the United States and Ghana. Ghanaian pre-tertiary facilities, as well as the crèche, are regulated by the Department of Social Welfare (UNESCO-IBE, “County profile,” 2006). In the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Bureau regulates child care services.

**Legislative actions which support preschool/nursery school education**

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### Differences

- Preschool, or pre-tertiary education was not addressed before 2002
- Preschool, or nursery school, teachers’ certification is awarded after three months
- Teacher education programs do not address early childhood/pre-tertiary/nursery classrooms

### Similarities

- Numerous colleges and universities across the United States offer early childhood teacher education degree programs
Currently no legislation nor funding to support early childhood (pre-tertiary) education | No federal legislation to support free and compulsory early childhood education

Child care regulated by Ministries of Education, Employment and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs | Early care and education is housed in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and regulated by the Child Care Bureau (CBB).

Started in response to poor, working mothers | Began in response to working mothers of indigent children

**The need for early childhood education teacher preparation**

Contrary to the historical debate regarding nature versus nurture, more recent studies find that the interplay between genes and the environment are responsible for the way a child grows and learns. Each child is a unique individual who comes into the world born to learn. In fact, it is during the first few years of life that the foundations for learning are formed (Healy, 2004). According to the Wisconsin (USA) Council on Children and Families (2002), by age 5, 85% of a child’s intellect, personality, and skills are developed (p. 1). These abilities grow in predictable, developmental, sequences across the ages and stages of a child. Developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, which include the familial context, help to support stages of development, and assist all children as they grow and learn and become ready for school. Developmentally appropriate practice utilizes the natural curiosity of the child in the way he or she learns best- through play.

Teachers who specialize in early education should plan lessons that promote optimal growth and development in young children in all domains of development. Domains of development include the content knowledge teachers must have to insure appropriate lesson-planning for young children. The domains include: Personal and Social

Though sometimes viewed as separate entities, the domains of development are interrelated, sequenced, and scaffold upon each other. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the general framework of human growth and development, utilizing the natural environment, to create lesson plans for the pre-tertiary classroom. Lessons and activities should be based-upon the sociological context of the child, and his or her family, in conjunction with research-based teaching practices.

According to the National Association of Educators of Young Children (NAEYC)

The core of effective developmentally appropriate teaching practices is centered on making sound educational decisions based on the developmental level, age and individual experiences of each child. To make such decisions, teachers consider what research tells them about learning and child development, about each child as an individual, and about how the cultural and social context in which each child lives relates to his learning.

Thus, developmentally appropriate practice is not based on what we think, but rather what is known to be true from theory and literature (National Association, n.d.)

Developmentally appropriate practice is also developed around the authentic assessment of each child. In addition,

Each lesson must be carefully planned and must build not only upon a student's prior knowledge, but on his social and cultural context as well . . . "Developmentally appropriate" ensures that experiences and goals are suited to learning and development, and that best practices are used based on actual knowledge, rather than assumptions, of how children learn, grow and develop (National Association, n.d.).

The US Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Head Start (OHS) recently developed a curriculum, the Planned Play curriculum, which includes work samplings of each child across the academic year (USHHS, “Curriculum,” 2001). The work samplings are assessed on a developmental sequence. The Planned Play curriculum links child assessment to lesson-planning (Dichtelmiller, DeLuca, & Webster, 2001). The Planned Play curriculum is a
curriculum that assumes the developmentally appropriate theoretical construct, and one, along with others, that could be considered in the international arena. Student teaching is of utmost importance when preparing teachers for work in the pre-tertiary classrooms.

Teacher candidates who plan to work in pre-tertiary classrooms would benefit from practicing under the supervision of a seasoned teacher who has worked in early childhood classrooms. Individuals who have worked with older children, or in settings that do not have the developmentally appropriate belief, may possess strategies which do not support the child-play, and teacher-facilitated strategies necessary for young children to grow and learn. The supervising teacher would be able to identify inappropriate strategies, thereby assisting the teacher candidate in putting research in practice and would also help him/her to have direct experience in planning appropriate learning environments for young children.

Conclusions:

Although there are differences between the United States and Ghana in the current provision of early care and education for very young children, it appears that Ghana is following a progression similar to that of the United States for early childhood education.

Similarities between Ghana and the United States for child care began with the need for working mothers to have care for their children; neither country has federal legislation that supports free and compulsory early childhood education for all children.


As the educational reforms in Ghana continue, the bachelor’s degree for prospective early childhood educators, a degree that will prepare young children for school, is needed. In combination with preparing young children for school, early childhood education teaching

RHEA vol.3. no.1, 17-31.
degrees in Ghana would address one of the six goals set forth by the Dakar Framework for Action, Senegal, April, 2000: Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. (World Education, 2000, no. 7). Offering early childhood degrees that include philosophical and sociological constructs, specialized content information, developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment, as well as student teaching experiences, would help early childhood education graduates become effective teachers at the early childhood education level.

References


*RHEA*, vol.3. no.1, 17-31.


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