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Diversity and Stratification in California's Early Care and Education Workforce



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Introduction

California's early childhood educators are strikingly diverse in professional preparation, workplace setting, ethnicity, language, and age. Their preparation ranges from minimal training or education to advanced college degrees; they work in a variety of center-based programs, or in their own homes; they represent a wide range of ethnicities, with White, non-Hispanic educators in the minority; and they encompass many language groups, chiefly English and Spanish, but also Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Russian, and many others. In its one area of homogeneity, this workforce remains overwhelmingly female, as it does throughout the United States. While center-based teaching staff are slightly younger, and licensed family child care providers are slightly older, on average, than the state's overall adult female population, they range in age from 20 years or younger to well past age 55. And while they do not quite equal the ethnic and linguistic diversity of California's child population, early childhood educators match it much more closely than does the teaching workforce in Grades K through 12.

But while this diversity is rightly a source of pride, the state's early care and education (ECE) workforce is also significantly "stratified" by educational level and job title—that is, its ethnic and linguistic diversity is disproportionately concentrated in some areas of the field more than others. In both family child care homes and child care centers, diversity is stratified by educational level: the higher the educational level of a given group, the less ethnically and linguistically diverse it is. In child care centers, diversity is also stratified by job role, which is, in part, a reflection of one's level of education. These variations carry major implications for workforce development, higher education programming and student support, and the ability of ECE programs to address the needs of California's diverse population of young children and families.

This research brief examines recent data on California's ECE workforce for evidence of such stratification, particularly in terms of ethnicity and language. The data are drawn from the California Early Care and Education Workforce Study (Whitebook et al., 2006), a statewide and regional study of California's ECE workforce in licensed child care centers and licensed family child care homes, commissioned by First 5 California and conducted by the Center for the Study of Child Care

Employment and the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

We focus here on ethnic and linguistic diversity because of the dramatic way in which our entire society, particularly in California, has shifted in recent years along these dimensions. With rising diversity has come rising interest among educators, advocates and parents in assuring a diverse ECE workforce that is well prepared to work with children of many ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Consensus has emerged in the field that ECE programs ideally have staff who not only can communicate with children and families in their home language, but who also demonstrate "cultural competence"—an informed and sensitive appreciation and understanding of differing cultural practices and norms—with whatever population they serve (Hyson, 2003; NAEYC, 1996). It is also important for children to see a diverse corps of adults filling leadership roles in ECE programs.

While language matches between educators and children are not always possible in every classroom or setting, and a cultural match is not the same as cultural competence—i.e., an educator who shares a child's cultural background is not necessarily the only or best teacher for that child—California's ECE workforce, at all levels of education and in all settings, ideally will reflect the diversity of the state's young children and families as closely as possible. And as calls increase for early childhood educators to meet higher standards of education and training, preserving and enhancing such diversity becomes ever more important. This concern becomes even more paramount in view of well-documented school readiness and achievement gaps between children of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Data Sources

The California Early Care and Education Workforce Study's survey population included the 37,366 active licensed homes and 8,740 active licensed centers, serving children from birth to age five, that were listed as of January 2004 with state-funded child care resource and referral agencies. The Field Research Corporation, Inc., collected data from a statewide random sample of 1,800 licensed family child care homes and 1,921 centers, using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system. Family child care interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, and center interviews were conducted with the director in English.

The study divided the state's 58 counties into four regions: Northern, Central, and Southern California, and the Bay Area. In both the licensed center and licensed family child care studies, sampling plans were developed to ensure enough completed interviews in each of the state's four regions to provide a reliable profile of each area, and to compare data across regions. Data were weighted by the proportion of centers and family child care homes in each region; all results are based on weighted data.

Nine counties (Alameda, Los Angeles, Marin, Merced, Mono, Sacramento, San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Santa Clara) also contracted with the study agencies for county-specific ECE workforce studies. Full reports on the center-based and family child care workforce studies, the nine county reports, and a 12-page summary of Statewide Highlights, are all available at http://www.irl.berkeley.edu/cscce/workforce_study.html.

Workforce Study Data on Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

The study found that the greatest diversity in the ECE workforce was associated with the job titles that are subject to the lowest educational qualifications and other requirements. As shown in Table 1, licensed family child care providers (58 percent) and center-based assistant teachers (63 percent) were considerably more likely to be women of color—i.e., other than “White, non-Hispanic”—than were center-based teachers (47

percent) or center directors (38 percent). Directors, who must meet the highest qualifications in the ECE workforce, were not substantially more diverse than teachers in Grades K-12. In every ECE job category, Latinas were the largest group of educators of color. According to the California Department of Finance (2004), however, the diversity of California's young children is even more striking, with 70 percent of children from birth to five being other than White, non-Hispanic, and 50 percent being Latino/Hispanic.

Linguistic Background, by Job Title

Licensed family child care providers were asked whether they could speak fluently with children and families in a language other than English; center directors were asked whether they or any of their teachers or assistant teachers could do so. Our description of language ability is based on these reports. Further, directors' reports did not permit us to assess whether staff members who spoke a language other than English also spoke English fluently. (See Figure 1.)

Licensed family child care providers, and assistant teachers in centers, were more linguistically diverse than the California adult population, 64 percent of whom speak English only (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Providers (43 percent) and assistant teachers (49 percent) were the most likely, and teachers (37 percent) and directors (25 percent) were less likely, to be able to communicate fluently with children and families in

Table 1. Ethnicity of California ECE Workforce, K-12 Teachers and Children Birth to Five

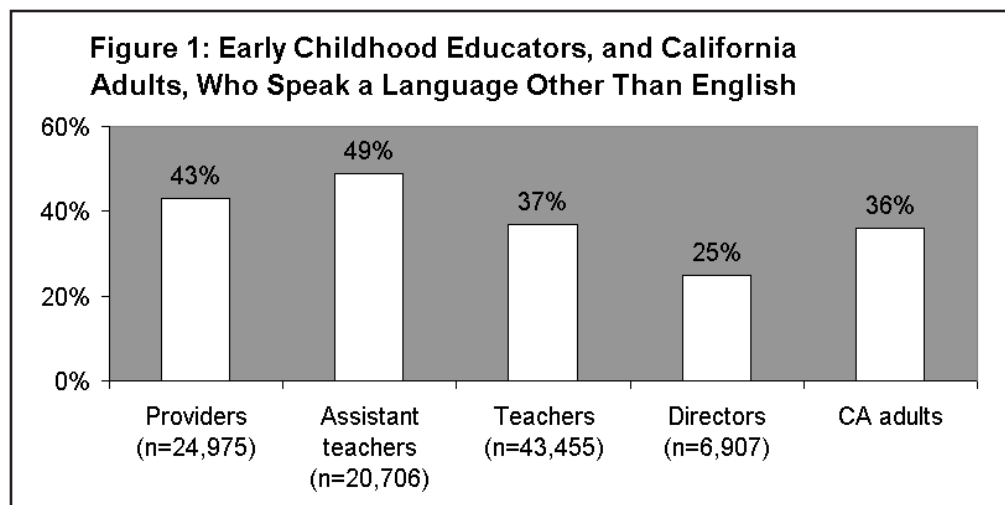
| | Family Child Care Providers | Center Teachers | Assistant Teachers | Directors | K-12 Teachers | CA Children 0-5 Years |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------|--------------------------|
| White, Non-Hispanic | 42% | 53% | 37% | 63% | 74% | 30% |
| Latina | 35% | 27% | 42% | 16% | 14% | 50% |
| African American | 15% | 7% | 8% | 9% | 5% | 6% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5% | 5% | 8% | 6% | 6% | 10% |
| Other | 3% | 8% | 5% | 7% | 1% | 4% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | n=24,924 | n=43,290 | n=20,833 | n=6,852 | | |

Note. Center staff: Based on a sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Note. Family child care homes: Based on a sample of 1,800 providers, weighted to represent the population of licensed family child care providers.

Source: K-12 Teachers: California Department of Education (2004)

Source: Children 0-5 Years: California Department of Finance (2004)



Note: Center staff: Based on a sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Note: Family child care homes: Based on a sample of 1,800 providers, who spoke either English or Spanish, weighted to represent the population of licensed family child care providers.

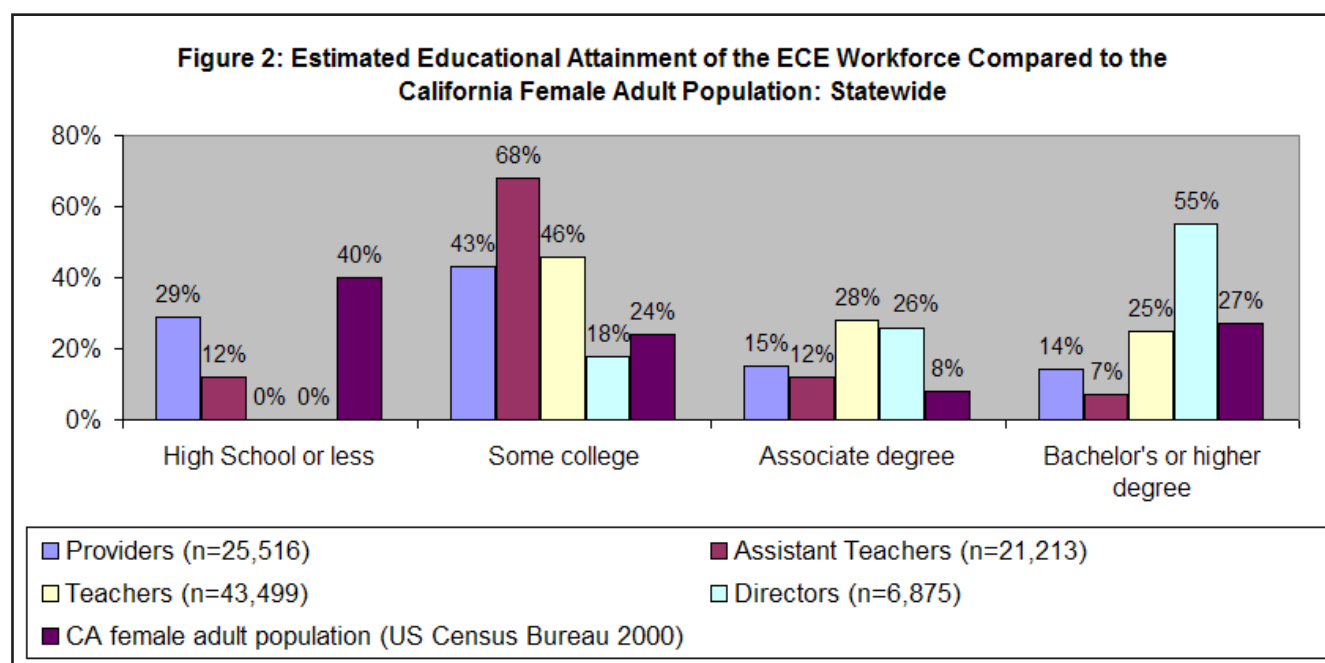
a language other than English. After English, Spanish was by far the second language most commonly spoken. Because interviews with licensed providers were conducted only in Spanish or English, however, it is likely that Asian American providers were under-represented in this study, due to language barriers.

Educational Attainment, By Ethnicity

When we examined the overall educational attainment of California's ECE workforce, we found that center-based staff had generally attained higher levels of edu-

cation than licensed family child care providers, but that both center staff and licensed providers had exceeded state requirements. Compared to California's overall adult female population, center teachers were equally likely and center directors more likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, and licensed providers and center-based assistant teachers were more likely to have attended college and/or completed an associate degree. (See Figure 2.)

When we looked at education by ethnicity, however,



Note: Center staff: Based on a sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Note: Family child care homes: Based on sample of 1,800 providers, weighted to represent the population of licensed family child care providers.

Table 2. Percentages of Providers and Teachers with a BA or Higher Degree, By Ethnicity, Compared to the Total Population of Providers and Teachers

| | All licensed family child care providers | Licensed family child care providers with BA degree or higher | All center teachers | Center teachers with BA degree or higher |
|-------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| White, Non-Hispanic | 42% | 47% | 53% | 59% |
| Latina | 35% | 15% | 27% | 13% |
| African American | 15% | 17% | 7% | 6% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 5% | 16% | 8% | 15% |
| Other | 3% | 5% | 5% | 7% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | n=24,906 | n=3,412 | n=43,289 | n=10,999 |

Note. Center teachers: Based on a sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

Note. Family child care homes: Based on a sample of 1,800 providers, weighted to represent the population of licensed family child care providers.

we found that those who had attained the highest level of education—for example, center-based teachers with bachelor's degrees—were significantly less diverse than other groups. (See Table 2.)

Compared to the ethnic distribution of the licensed family child care provider population as a whole, White, Non-Hispanic, African American and Asian/Pacific Islander providers had attained a BA degree or more at a higher rate, and Latina providers at a lower rate. Compared to the ethnic distribution of the center teacher population as a whole, White, Non-Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander teachers had attained a BA or more at a higher rate, African Americans at a proportionate rate, and Latinas at a lower rate.

Compared to California adults of their ethnicity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), licensed family child care providers of color had attained a BA or higher degree at a proportionate rate, and center-based teachers of color had attained such degrees at a higher rate, while White, Non-Hispanic providers and teachers had attained such degrees at a lower rate:

- Among African Americans: 16 percent of licensed family child care providers, 22 percent of teachers, and 17 percent of California adults held a BA or higher degree.
- Among Asian/Pacific Islanders: 41 percent of li-

censed providers, 48 percent of teachers, and 41 percent of California adults had a BA or higher degree.

- Among Latinas/Latinos: 6 percent of licensed providers, 13 percent of teachers, and 6 percent of California adults had a BA or higher degree.
- Among White, Non-Hispanics: 15 percent of licensed providers, 28 percent of teachers, and 34 percent of California adults had a BA or higher degree.

Further, we found that the sectors of the early care and education field that have set the highest standards for teachers—namely, Head Start programs and state-contracted child care centers—were also the least stratified. As shown in Table 3, for example, teaching staff and directors in Head Start and in contracted centers were less likely to be White, non-Hispanic than were their counterparts in centers receiving public subsidy through vouchers or those receiving no public dollars. We also found that Head Start programs and contracted centers employed a higher mean percentage of staff with the ability to communicate with children in families in a language other than English: 69 percent of teachers in Head Start or contracted centers, for example, versus 46 percent in centers receiving public subsidy through vouchers and 49 percent in centers receiving no public dollars.

Table 3. Estimated Ethnicity of Teachers, Assistant Teachers and Directors, By Centers' Relationship to Public Subsidy

| | | Head Start/ CDE contract | Vouchers/No contract | No vouchers/No contract |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Teachers | White, Non-Hispanic | 34% | 54% | 66% |
| | Latina | 40% | 26% | 17% |
| | African American | 11% | 8% | 3% |
| | Asian/Pacific Islander | 10% | 7% | 7% |
| | Other | 4% | 5% | 6% |
| | Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | Number of teachers | 10,028 | 20,990 | 12,272 |
| Assistant Teachers | White, Non-Hispanic | 24% | 48% | 53% |
| | Latina | 54% | 30% | 28% |
| | African American | 10% | 7% | 4% |
| | Asian/Pacific Islander | 8% | 8% | 9% |
| | Other | 4% | 7% | 5% |
| | Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| | Number of assistant teachers | 10,613 | 6,132 | 4,088 |
| Directors | White, Non-Hispanic | 48% | 64% | 75% |
| | Latina | 26% | 15% | 9% |
| | African American | 14% | 9% | 3% |
| | Asian/Pacific Islander | 7% | 5% | 7% |
| | Other | 6% | 8% | 6% |
| | Total | 101%* | 100% | 100% |
| | Number of directors | 1,820 | 3,141 | 1,891 |

Note: Based on a sample of 1,921 centers, weighted to represent the population of licensed centers.

* Percentages add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

It is possible that this wider staff diversity in Head Start and in state-contracted centers is the result of higher requirements, in combination with greater availability of professional development opportunities for staff at all job levels in these centers. This is an area worthy of further study.

Policy Implications

California's ECE workforce is much more ethnically and linguistically diverse than its K-12 public school teachers. But while this diversity is a promising foundation on which to revamp and expand services for young children, the comparison with K-12 teachers can also obscure the stratification by ethnicity that does exist in the ECE workforce. Our data reveal substantial

divisions by ethnicity and language that require attention: for example, we found that most child care center directors were White, non-Hispanic, whereas most assistant teachers were women of color. Similarly, about one-half of assistant teachers and home-based providers could communicate with children in a language other than English, whereas this was true for only one-third of teachers and one-quarter of directors.

Granted, this problem of stratification in the ECE workforce is not dissimilar from the ethnic stratification in educational attainment and economic well being that is found in the U.S. workforce and American society as a whole. But if California's goal is a well-educated and linguistically and culturally diverse ECE workforce,

that is not stratified and that has the ability to meet the needs of diverse children and families, then substantial changes in workforce development are essential.

Many related workforce policy challenges come into play here—not least of which are the generally low qualifications that California sets for early childhood educators, combined with very low compensation in ECE jobs, that together offer little incentive for members of this workforce to further their education. Nevertheless, California policy makers and advocates are beginning to rethink the state's ECE professional development system, in ways that can help address this workforce stratification. As has been done in nearly 30 other states, the California Department of Education is now developing a set of early childhood educator competencies (namely, definitions of what a skilled educator should know and be able to do), a process that could potentially lead to a rethinking of credentialing and certification for the ECE field, a revamping and expansion of higher education opportunities related to ECE, and initiatives to secure professional levels of compensation for a skilled and stable ECE workforce.

Therefore, as California begins to revamp its ECE professional development system, the findings outlined in this brief offer an important “policy lens” through which to view these and other ECE workforce efforts: Will they work effectively for the entire spectrum of current and potential early childhood educators?

Concerns are often expressed that if educational requirements are raised in the ECE field, the ethnic and linguistic stratification that currently exists will be solidified, and potentially worsened, because we will lose the members of the workforce who have the least access to higher education and professional development. To avoid such a situation, it is essential that policy and planning efforts actively ensure that all professional development opportunities are accessible to a diverse workforce. In addition, significant ongoing resources will need to be targeted to institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities recognize clearly that they cannot build or expand new program initiatives without such help, and ECE programs within colleges and universities are especially challenged and underfunded (Whitebook, Bellm, Lee, & Sakai, 2005).

We make the following recommendations to highlight this ongoing need to attend to workforce diversity, in terms of ethnicity and language, at all job levels in early care and education:

1. *Create targeted opportunities for professional development and education.* Workforce initiatives must ensure that a diverse group of early childhood educators has access to education and advancement—in particular, ethnic and linguistic minority members of the workforce, who have historically had less access to college education as well as lower graduation rates. College-based, credit-bearing education, and not just informal training, should be available at all ECE job levels. Such efforts must particularly take into account that most members of the ECE workforce are working full-time.
2. *Develop support services to promote student success.* Various kinds of support, based on identified student needs, have been shown to make a critical difference in college success. Many efforts that have been piloted at California colleges and universities are worthy of wider replication (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). These include: student cohorts or learning communities (see #3, below); academic counseling to ensure that students embark and remain on coherent educational pathways; financial assistance; academic and technological tutoring; and access-based support (for example, classes held at nontraditional hours and in accessible locations).
3. *Recruit and invest in a diverse ECE leadership.* As our data indicate, most senior positions in ECE need to be diversified in terms of ethnicity and language. B.A. completion programs for working ECE students are a promising practice, now underway at various California colleges and universities, for diversifying the field's leaders—often employing a cohort model, in which a targeted student body completes a course of study together, in some cases focusing on the needs of English language learners or bilingual educators (Whitebook et al., 2008). Further, California urgently needs to build a pipeline for preparing diverse new leadership at the master's and doctoral degree levels—including faculty members in college and university ECE teacher preparation programs (Whitebook et al., 2005).
4. *Devote renewed attention to ECE workforce com-*

pensation. Until early care and education can offer professional-level rewards for professional development, all the above efforts are likely to fall short, and personnel will continue to leave the field in search of better-paying opportunities elsewhere. A number of state preschool systems, however, have set—and, in some cases, met—such ambitious goals as reaching parity with the compensation offered by public school districts to teachers in Grades K-12 (Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2008).

skills of this workforce—in particular, proposals to increase educational standards for teachers in publicly funded preschools. This can only be done by investing in a range of appropriate supports that will truly allow people from a wide spectrum of cultural, educational and financial backgrounds to access professional development opportunities. A proactive strategy will be essential, including scholarships, tutoring, conveniently scheduled and located classes, support for students learning English as a second language, and financial resources to help colleges and universities revamp and expand their offerings in early care and education. The goal must extend beyond building a diverse workforce to ensuring that such diversity is well distributed across all positions and all types of early care and education programs.

Conclusion

California's challenge will be to intentionally maintain and expand its ECE workforce diversity, hand in hand with continuing efforts to upgrade the knowledge and

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