Increasingly, infants and toddlers in the United States are being cared for outside of the home and/or by extended family (Capizzano & Adams, 2000). This social and demographic change has placed an unprecedented level of responsibility on people other than family—caregivers—to provide a nurturing, stimulating, and safe environment that will meet the essential needs of the youngest children and positively promote their development. However, only a small portion of infant/toddler care environments are of sufficient quality to adequately address and meet the needs of children from birth to 3 years. Caregiver training is a critical link in improving the quality of care.

Professional development opportunities for those caring for infants and toddlers are often random, limited in number, and do not address the needs of the whole child. Most are focused on health and safety issues. Resources are available to promote high-quality professional development for infant/toddler caregivers, and the ingredients for the development and implementation of successful professional development systems for those caring for the youngest children are well known.

(continued on page 13)
This article is a call to action to advance this knowledge and put it into practice on a larger scale. Building on research, best practices, lessons learned, and exemplary models already in place, individuals, child development programs and providers, communities, and states must collectively embrace and support the need for specialized training for caregivers of infants and toddlers.

The Need for Professional Development

Infants and toddlers are totally dependent on adults to provide the relationships and environments necessary to support the brain development that will serve as the basis for future learning, and for the development of a strong positive sense of self and relationships with others. They must feel secure, be able to explore, and develop a positive identity in order for optimal growth and development to occur.

These three needs are constant throughout the first 3 years of life, but in different stages of development, each successively takes priority while building on the foundation provided by earlier experiences. It is essential that caregivers know, understand, and meet the primary—and evolving—needs of infants and toddlers (summarized in Table 1). Each one of these primary needs builds on the others, and caregivers’ understandings and skills provide the support necessary for children to move forward successfully.

Knowledge of the unique, age-specific needs of infants and toddlers—and their critical importance to future learning and social/emotional development—is imperative for anyone who is providing care to very young children. In the past 20 years, care for infants and toddlers in the home (i.e., by family members) has dramatically shifted to care outside of the home. Today, almost half of infants are in out-of-home care for more than 30 hours each week (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000) and as many as 80% of infants are in some form of child care each week (Tran & Weinraub, 2006).

Out-of-home care for infants and toddlers has resulted in increased responsibility on the part of caregivers to meet the essential needs of the youngest children. The quality of care provided to infants and toddlers varies greatly. While the overall quality of care has improved in recent years—moving from poor to fair—few care settings meet the standards of true “high quality” (Vandell 2000). One potential explanation for this gap in quality is the availability of professional development opportunities for caregivers of infants and toddlers.

Within the field of early care and education, a wide range exists in the education and experience of child care providers, particularly those...
caring for infants and toddlers (Ackerman 2003). Some practitioners have little to no education and/or experience in the field, while others have advanced degrees with many years working with young children. Additionally, many caregivers who work with infants and toddlers do not see themselves as “professionals” in the same way as do teachers of 3- to 5-year-olds.

The early care and education profession has been slow to recognize the critical importance of the years from birth to 3 and to provide specialized training opportunities for caregivers who work with them. State licensing regulations do not consistently require specific infant/toddler training as either pre-service requirements or for ongoing professional development. Specifically, 30 states do not have pre-service licensing requirements, and only 52% of these require any ongoing training (LeMoine, Morgan, & Azer, 2003). For family child care, only 11 states have pre-service requirements, and less than 30% of states require more than 12 hours a year of ongoing training.

These factors contribute further to the problem:
- A limited number of training opportunities, such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, lead to an infant/toddler specialization.
- Training topics vary by state.
- Requirements for training are not specific to infant and toddler care.
- In most cases where infant/toddler training is available, it is not linked to standards, a professional development system, or compensation, and it is up to the caregiver to find and access this training.

### Professional Development Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers (PITC)</th>
<th>Resources Offered</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive, high-quality, multi-media training system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-module basic curriculum, with additional module on special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training videos and written support materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical assistance (PITC, 2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Professional Development Resources for Infant/Toddler Caregivers

- Web site with latest research on brain development, parenting tips
- Annual conference
- Early Head Start National Resource Center—provides training and technical assistance for Early Head Start programs
- National Infant Toddler Child Care Initiative—technical assistance and strategic planning support for Child Care Development Fund administrators (Zero to Three, n.d.)
- Practical, innovative, developmentally appropriate curriculum materials
- Lesson-planning assistance
- Education on child development and high-quality care
- Training
- Assessment tools (Dombro, Colker, & Dodge, 1999)
- Curriculum development
- Training
- Research center on latest educational programs and their effectiveness (Post & Hohmann, 2000)

Some important limitations and constraints exist with regard to these resources. Either the caregiver or center director must actively seek out information. Often materials and training are expensive. Access to many of these resources is often limited, despite the preponderance of evidence underscoring the importance of targeted, ongoing professional development, and the positive outcomes associated with provider training—benefits realized by providers, children, and families.

### Essential Components of Professional Development Systems for Infant/Toddler Caregivers

Research, best practices, and lessons learned have revealed a number of essential characteristics of successful professional development systems. To be most effective, pro-
Professional development systems must include five interlinked components (see Table 3).

### Comprehensive Content

Professional development systems for caregivers of infants and toddlers must be comprehensive. Training must address the distinct but interrelated components of the child, family, and caregiver while considering programmatic elements such as physical space, curriculum structure, and cultural and contextual surroundings. Training content in a comprehensive professional development system includes topics of health, safety, and developmental characteristics of children. It also includes information on working with parents as partners, and how to set up an appropriate learning environment.

A comprehensive professional development system also takes into account factors that influence the caregiver’s ability to provide optimal care. For example, the knowledge and skills a caregiver demonstrates are influenced by the type of programmatic support received, including the availability of professional development and career advancement opportunities. A caregiver who has adequate program support and ongoing professional development opportunities will likely contribute positively to the growth and development of infants and toddlers (Whitebook, 2003). In addition, the appropriate integration of and sensitivity to culture is a key characteristic of comprehensive professional development systems.

### Clearly Articulated Framework

Professional development is built on an articulated framework and body of knowledge. As in other professions, the early childhood field requires a set of knowledge and skills that are specific to the work, in this case infants, toddlers, and their families (Feeney & Freeman, 2000). NAEYC’s Standards for Initial Licensure identify five standards of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that an early childhood professional must have:

- promotion of child development and learning
- building family and community relationships
- observation, documentation, and assessment practices
- teaching and learning abilities
- commitment to becoming a professional (Hyson & Biggar, 2006)

Collectively, these standards emphasize a multidisciplinary approach, the importance of assessment, and demonstration of outcomes.

### Tied to a System of Licensure, Credentialing, or Certification

A third essential element of a professional development system is that it be tied to a system of licensure, credentialing, or certification. Although these terms are not always clearly defined, and in many instances are used interchangeably, they connote a status and an affirmation to the public at large that the caregiver in question has the necessary professional qualifications to work in the early childhood field (Maxwell, Feild, & Clifford, 2006). In addition, the licensing, credentialing, or certification system articulates the required knowledge and skills at various levels, including the entry level (such as a CDA), up to post-graduate level certification.

### Continuum of Training

A fourth important element in a professional development system is the provision of a continuum of training and follow-up incorporat-
Principles and Practice of Training for Early Childhood Development

Training and support should follow adult learning principles by taking into account that learners are self-motivated, have previous applicable experiences, and need information particularly relevant to their unique circumstances. Additionally, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and impact, training and support opportunities should be prolonged and sustained over time (Freeney & Freeman, 2000).

For example, studies on types and duration of training on infant/toddler care and development indicate that ongoing training linked with onsite consultation yields increased quality as measured by the ITERS-R (Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scales Revised) and FDCRS (Family Day Care Rating Scale) (Campbel & Milbourne, 2005).

Caregivers who participate in group training with onsite consultation receive individualized support to acquire fundamental early childhood knowledge and skills. Onsite consultation includes a reflective process of looking, listening, and learning, which in turn contributes to relationship building and modeling of the desired interactions among caregivers, infants, toddlers, families, and colleagues (Parlakian, 2001).

Additionally, the development of a professional portfolio can be incorporated into the training continuum and follow-up processes as an important learning tool (Jones & Shelton, 2006).

Comprehensive Evaluation

A fifth element of a professional development system is a comprehensive approach to evaluation. Evaluation is an integral part of a learning experience—as important at the beginning and throughout the experience as it is at the end” (Vella, Berardinelli, & Burrow, 1998). The objectives associated with the inclusion of an evaluation component in a professional development system are threefold:

- identification of clear goals, objectives, and expected outcomes
- determination of the effectiveness of the process and achievement of goals and objectives
- utilization of evaluative information to make necessary adjustments along the way as well as at the end

A professional development system without an evaluation process is similar to what the Cheshire cat said to Alice, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”
State-Based Professional Development Systems

Some states, including West Virginia, South Carolina, and Ohio, have recently addressed the challenges facing providers of care for infants and toddlers. They have implemented state-based professional development systems to better support caregivers, and in turn improve the quality of care provided to the youngest residents. Importantly, these systems incorporate the essential elements required to help achieve maximum effectiveness for their children, caregivers, parents, and communities.

West Virginia's WVIT

The West Virginia Infant Toddler (WVIT) Professional Development Program began in 2005 with a 1-year pilot conducted in two regions, a city and a rural population. The comprehensive WVIT training consists of four modules that focus on the needs of the caregiver, the family, the child, and high-quality programming, with a separate module for administrators.

Throughout the WVIT training process, participating caregivers receive training and onsite follow up. Technical Assistance for Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers (TACIT) visits link the information presented in the classroom with real-life experiences in day-to-day care in order to provide additional opportunities for knowledge extension throughout the training program.

Two methods of evaluation are used to assess both caregivers’ progress and effectiveness of the training curriculum: caregivers and administrators use the ITERS-R, and caregivers complete pre- and post-Knowledge Reviews on the learning objectives for each of the four modules. The training modules are incorporated into the West Virginia State Training and Registry System (STARS), linking it to the state’s ongoing training and professional development system.

South Carolina Infant Toddler Leadership Initiative

The South Carolina Infant Toddler Leadership Initiative is another example of a successful, comprehensive professional development system for infant/toddler caregivers. The Initiative uses the PITC curriculum to enable participating caregivers to create an individualized program, including college courses, training workshops, and conferences, as well as receiving on-site mentoring from one of 45 infant/toddler specialists (National Child Care Information Center, n.d.).

This variety allows caregivers to choose what is most important to them and therefore increases their personal investment in the program. The Initiative also is registered with the state to allow credit toward providers’ continuing education requirements for licensure, and is connected to CDA, A.A., and B.A. programs at participating universi-

| Table 4. Summary of Characteristics of State-Based Professional Development Systems for Infant/Toddler Caregivers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **West Virginia Infant/Toddler Professional Development Program** | Modules address children, caregivers, and parents. Directors participate in the training process | Developed from research-based sources | West Virginia State Training and Registry System (STARS) | Technical Assistance for Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers (TACIT) |
| **South Carolina Infant Toddler Leadership Initiative** | Manuals focus on caregivers and their relationship with children, families, and programs | Uses the PITC framework | Continuing education licensing requirement Connected to CDA, AA, BA | Individualized education plan TA specialists provide on-going coaching |
| **Ohio First STEPS** | Manuals focus on caregivers and their relationship with children, families, and programs | Uses the PITC framework | Career Pathways for Early Childhood and Afterschool Professionals. Participating programs must be regulated | Three intervention groups with varying support assessed on ITERS and FDCRS |

Comprehensive approach to evaluation
ties, all of which require ongoing evaluation of student progress.

Ohio’s First STEPS

Ohio’s First STEPS is an infant/toddler professional development system that is also based on the PITC curriculum. As in South Carolina, the curriculum provides comprehensive information from a clearly articulated framework to participants. Ohio has 12 trained infant/toddler specialists who provide varying degrees of technical assistance and assessment to programs in both center-based and home-based facilities, including monthly coaching (First STEPS, Ohio’s Infant Toddler Initiative, n.d.).

Evaluation data is collected to answer three questions:

- What is the quality of infant/toddler care?
- Are demographic variables available that influence the quality of infant/toddler care?
- What strategies yield positive changes in quality?

The First STEPS training is linked to the infant/toddler guidelines developed for the state of Ohio and to the Career Pathways for Early Childhood and Afterschool Professionals.

All three of these state programs exemplify to a large degree the essential components of a professional development system, as summarized in Table 4. West Virginia and Ohio conducted pilots with extensive evaluation to make sure goals were being met before starting the program state-wide. All of these programs represent systematic ways of providing high-quality professional development opportunities for infant/toddler caregivers.

Call to Action

While the states of West Virginia, South Carolina, and Ohio have made great strides in advancing the availability of resources to enhance the professional qualifications of providers caring for infants and toddlers, more action—on the part of individual caregivers, child care facilities, communities, and states—is needed. Professionals and stakeholders at all levels must commit to a collective goal of ensuring that caregivers of infants and toddlers have access to the specialized training needed to provide high-quality care to this most vulnerable and unique population. Early education professionals must unite to cultivate a field in which specialized training for infant and toddler caregivers is the rule, rather than the exception.

Together, early care and education specialists must survey the landscape of infant/toddler caregiver training and assess the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of professional development options and resources. These types of questions and their answers can guide conversations among individual providers, those working in child development centers, communities, and states about what is needed to fill existing gaps.

- What resources are currently available?
- How well do current resources stack up against the “essential elements” outlined here?
- How can current training programs be more closely aligned with the specific needs of those providing care to infants and toddlers?

This information in turn may be used at all levels to develop action plans to promote specialized training for infant/toddler caregivers to help improve the quality of child care. These are steps that can be taken.

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1. Caregivers of infants and toddlers must develop their own personal professional development systems. As child care professionals, providers must work to identify their personal training goals, assess resources available to meet them, and document their accomplishments (e.g., in a professional portfolio). The continuing process of assessing, reflecting on, acting on, and documenting professional development activities will help individual providers—over time—improve the quality of care provided to infants and toddlers, and advance professionalism. Parents, in turn, should be educated to seek caregivers for their infants and toddlers who have achieved these milestones.

2. Professionals must band together to create an environment in which the specific training needs of those caring for the youngest children are met. Infant and toddler caregivers working together in the same child development center, groups of individuals providing in-home care, and administrators must all be part of the process. Questions they might ask include: How can current training programs be modified to better meet the needs of those providing care to infants and toddlers? How are providers assessed (e.g., performance appraisals and ratings) on their abilities to meet the needs of children from birth to 3 years? Through use of existing resources and group training, front-line professionals must take what they collectively have to a higher level and ensure that training resources are targeted and focused on meeting the needs of those providing care to infants and toddlers.

3. Local organizations and child care communities must make specialized training for infant and toddler caregivers a common priority. By developing partnerships and networks, drawing upon the strengths of professional organizations, engaging broader community resources (e.g., the media), and developing information repositories complete with tracking mechanisms, communities can more easily identify gaps in infant/toddler caregiver training opportunities, and then work together to expand their capacity to fill these gaps.

4. Child care professionals working at the state level have an important role in promoting specialized training for infant/toddler caregivers. This in turn will improve the quality of care provided. Recognizing infant/toddler caregivers as specialized professionals—through licensing regulations, pre-service requirements, and/or obligatory on-going training—is a critical first step. By linking infant/toddler caregiver training to licensing, certifications, and registries, states will necessitate an increase in the availability and quality of professional development opportunities for caregivers of infants and toddlers.

While establishing comprehensive professional development systems like those found in West Virginia, South Carolina, and Ohio is the ideal, states can also help ensure positive outcomes for caregivers, the children in their care, families, and communities by establishing and enforcing standards for professional development and performance for this specialized group of child care professionals.

In summary, individual caregivers, provider networks, community partnerships, and state-level professionals all have an important role to play in raising the bar for the quality of care provided to infants and toddlers. Through an increased emphasis on specialized training for infant/toddler caregivers, child care professionals at all levels can work together to ensure that providers are well-equipped to meet the needs of the youngest children.

Providers with specialized training in the care of infants and toddlers not only provide higher quality care—directly benefiting the children and families they serve—but also exhibit a higher degree of professionalism and commitment to the field. This enhanced professionalism and commitment will help ensure that the increasing numbers of infants and toddlers cared for outside of the home will more likely be in environments that are nurturing, stimulating, and safe.

Furthermore, if specialized training in the care of infants and toddlers is formally linked to professional recognition and rates of compensation, society can ensure that the best infant/toddler caregivers are retained in the field and continue to positively set the stage for lifelong learning among the youngest children.

References

Ackerman, D.J. (2003). States’ efforts in improving the qualifications of early care and education teachers. Educational Policy, 18(2), 311-337.


The Fall 2009 issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood will be a theme issue. Members and friends of the Southern Early Childhood Association are encouraged to submit proposals for manuscripts to be published in this issue. The topic is:

Opening Doors: First Steps to Leadership

The importance of empowering advocates for young children and early childhood professionals will be addressed in this theme issue. The SECA Editorial Committee is seeking manuscripts that address the following topics for an audience of professionals who work with infants through 3rd grade:

- beginning leadership roles
- collaboration
- grass-roots projects
- confidentiality
- professional roles
- intergenerational efforts

Authors are asked to interpret current research findings and theories for use in a practical manner for early childhood educators in the field. Each author will be expected to develop a 1-page practical handout summarizing the key points and offering practical guidelines for advocacy.

The Guest Editor for this issue is Vicki Folds. Please submit questions and proposals by email to vfolds@msn.com

Proposals must include:
- 2-page detailed outline
- 200- to 400-word summary
- list of pertinent sample references
- indication of the author’s expertise

All proposals must be submitted by April 1, 2008. If accepted for the theme issue, final manuscripts (4 to 8 pages) will be due by December 1, 2008. To review author guidelines for publication in Dimensions, please go to www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org.
Put These Ideas Into Practice!

Professional Development Programs for Infant/Toddler Caregivers: Setting the Stage for Lifelong Learning

Melissa D. Zwaar, Caroline F. Davis, Jill Aviles, Kristen H. Buss, and Helen Stine

Responsibilities of individual providers of infant/toddler care

- Identify professional development needs.
- Research available opportunities.
- Be a voice for training caregivers of infants and toddlers. Join with others.
- Create a professional portfolio to document individual training needs and goals and accomplishments.

Roles for local organizations

- Identify training in providing care for infants and toddlers as a specific priority.
- Assess availability and content of specific infant/toddler training within the community.
- Ask “How well does available training meet the identified needs of the caregivers?”
- Coordinate resources within the community to fill gaps in training opportunities.
- Create plans for expanding opportunities.
- Develop a community training calendar to coordinate training efforts for infant/toddler caregivers. Provide caregivers with a comprehensive listing of available opportunities and resources.

Statewide initiatives

- Reflect the need for specific infant/toddler caregiver training in licensing regulations, pre-service requirements, and ongoing professional development.
- Recognize the infant/toddler caregiver as a “specialized” professional by establishing a certification or registry of qualified providers.
- Begin, or continue the journey toward establishing a comprehensive professional development system with standards for training and performance for infant/toddler caregivers.

Note: Dimensions of Early Childhood readers are encouraged to copy this material for early childhood students as well as teachers of young children as a professional development tool.