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Research on Preschool Teachers With Degrees

Can A College Degree Help Preschoolers Learn?

Teachers who have earned four-year college degrees (BA or BS) are better equipped to provide high quality preschool education than are teachers with a two-year-degree (AA), Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate, or High School diploma (even when these teachers have had training in child development).¹ Specifically:

Teachers who have earned a bachelor's degree:

- Respond more sensitively to children's needs ²
- Are more actively engaged with the children they teach ³
- Give children more positive feedback and encouragement ⁴

Children in classrooms taught by teachers who have earned a BA or BS:

- Play more creatively and imaginatively ⁶
- Score higher on language tests ⁶

Children in classrooms taught by teachers with the skills linked to higher levels of education:

- Have higher self-confidence ⁶
- Spend more time in goal-directed activities ⁶
- Present less problem behavior in the classroom and are more sociable with their peers ⁷

Classrooms taught by teachers who have earned a BA or BS are higher in overall quality than classrooms taught by teachers with AA's or less. Children in classrooms taught by teachers who have earned a bachelor's degree in early childhood score higher on language tests than children in classrooms taught by teachers with AA's or less.⁸ Fully-qualified teachers who have bachelor's degrees have higher literacy levels than AA degreed teachers—and teacher literacy levels predict preschool quality.^{5,10}

Higher salaries are necessary to attract and retain teachers who have achieved a BA or BS. Retaining qualified teachers in early education classrooms is necessary for children's sense of stability, reassurance and safety.⁹

Research comparing preschool teachers with bachelor's and associates's degrees (especially in private programs and Head Start) tends to underestimate the impact of fully-qualified BA or BS teachers because preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree earn far less than similarly qualified K-12 teachers. The laws of supply and demand dictate that lower salaries attract and retain less qualified teachers from among those with a bachelor's degree.¹¹

Further details can be found in "Better Teachers, Better Preschool" on the NIEER website at: <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=62>



Better educated teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached.

The National Institute for Early Education Research supports early childhood education by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. The Institute seeks to provide policy makers with timely information addressing the practical problems they face.

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ENDNOTES:

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