

# Early Education Commission

*A community leadership collaborative supporting the United Way's goal of ensuring children are ready for school*



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## Research Abstract

**Title:** “Global Early Care and Education: Challenges, Responses and Lessons: Countries through the World Are Committed to Improving Their Systems of Early Care and Education,” Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 87, Issue 3

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### Abstract

The author identifies three challenges that most countries face, describes the strategies that various countries have adopted and suggests which approaches might be helpful in the U.S. She developed her theories from a review which was done by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) of early childhood education in 20 advanced industrialized nations.

The international thrust for expanding early childhood programs began in 1989 with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following year, in Jomtien, Thailand, the World Declaration on Education for All was adopted and was subsequently reaffirmed at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar. (These events are referred to in most of the literature of early education as “Jomtien” and “Dakar.”)

Challenge 1: Governance and coordination – Generally, there are two main national approaches to governance of early education, *divided* and *integrated*. In most countries, public responsibility for early education is divided between “care” for children under age three and “education” for preschoolers. Different ministries or departments govern the two divisions and some have overlapping responsibilities. In the U.S., for example, the author cites 69 federal programs under nine federal agencies and departments that provide or support education and care for children under age five. Needless to say, countries whose systems are “divided” can have conflicting policies of funding, regulation, staff training and compensation, curriculum, etc.

In countries where early education is “integrated,” systems are developed under one ministry or administration. With unified administration, all of the issues of funding, regulation, etc. are coordinated and often allow children to stay in the same settings during their early years and provide more consistent services for them up to age six.

Regardless of the administrative structure, there is a need for coordination across the many agencies involved in making decisions about services for young children.

Challenge 2: Transition and school readiness – Easing transition of children from home to preschool to primary school is a shared concern around the world. It is hindered by many issues, including training for teachers – which tends to be organized by subject for elementary school teachers, but by development and learning for preschool teachers.

In some countries, all early childhood services are integrated from birth, making early childhood an important part of the educational system and synergizing the cultures of preschool and primary school. Some experts express concern about this approach, however, in that downward pressure from school-based models can create a narrow set of academic concerns that would dilute early education traditions and practices.

The author suggests that initiatives which allow early childhood and primary teachers to work together are the best approach, and that each should be equally respected as members of the team for young children.

Challenge 3: Accessibility – Most countries struggle with how to improve access to early education for vulnerable populations. Even in nations with nearly universal coverage, there is concern for those with diverse linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as those with special needs or disabilities.

The author cites promising approaches such as hiring teachers and support members who speak the home languages of immigrant children, working with parents to bring their diverse perspectives and traditions into early childhood settings, and translating curriculum into multiple languages.

Lessons for the United States – The author suggests these “lessons” for the U.S.: interagency coordination (appointing a single key steering agency at state and national levels); alignment of curriculum standards across early childhood and primary education; and adopting a rights-based approach to expanding access.