“For the Profession and For Ourselves”: The Effect of Higher Education Requirements on the American Early Childhood Education Workforce

Caitlin Mary Dermody
Yale College, New Haven Connecticut

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“For the Profession and For Ourselves”

The Effect of Higher Education Requirements on the American Early Childhood Education Workforce

Caitlin Mary Dermody

A thesis and capstone project presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

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“You have to make the investment in early childhood education, and you do that by allowing the caretakers to grow too.”

This project is dedicated to my first and greatest teachers, my parents. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for giving me every opportunity to love, to grow, and to learn.
I love you.
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Table of Contents

Part I: Introduction ................................................................. Page 6
Part II: Scope of Research ......................................................... Page 8
Part III: Literature Review ........................................................ Page 12
Part IV: Methods ................................................................. Page 37
Part V: Results ................................................................. Page 45
Part VI: Conclusion ................................................................. Page 79
Appendix ................................................................. Page 85
Bibliography ................................................................. Page 86
Part I: Introduction

In my first year of college, inquiries about my academic interests, my extracurricular pursuits, or my career goals elicited three words from my lips: “Early Childhood Education.” After researching how systems of early implementation alleviated problems of educational inequity and promoted academic and social growth for all students (Kagan et al., 2008), it was clear to me that high quality early childhood education, educational instruction and care for children ages 3-5, was imperative for the success of students and school systems. Over the past four years, I have committed my time to examining this subject inside and outside the classroom in the realms of practice, research, and policy. Now, with the opportunity to engage in an Ed Studies Capstone and Senior Sociology Thesis, I know that early childhood education is no longer my answer, but just the beginning of my question. As I prepare to complete my Yale Undergraduate Education in the Education Studies Program, I am interested in examining early childhood education in America. As a Sociology major and a longtime volunteer classroom assistant, I seek to understand more about the people behind the systems and the workforce within the classrooms: the teachers.

As an Education Studies Scholar at Yale, I began exploring early childhood education around seminar tables and sandboxes. Volunteering in an early childhood education classroom provided an invaluable opportunity not only to contextualize my knowledge of education from my development courses in Education Studies, but also to study the culture and climate of early childhood education teachers. Despite negative national perceptions of the early childhood education workforce, research has established that the teachers are the most critical component to the success of many early childhood education policies (Barnett, 2003). It is through these teachers’ relationships with their students that the benefits of strengthened pedagogy, increased
funding, and heightened accessibility come to fruition (Kagan et al., 2008). In my past three years as a volunteer teacher’s assistant, I have observed a team of four skilled, intelligent, and caring teachers apply child-development theory to create a universal group care curricula to meet individual children’s needs. Their previous experience and group dynamic certainly aided in their skilled practice, but I wondered how their own education had shaped not only their practice, but also their decision to work in the early childhood education workforce.

I continued to ponder this question as I began a policy internship at the Brookings Institution’s Brown Center on Education Policy this past summer. As I analyzed multiple studies on the quality and effectiveness of teachers and data on various teacher policies across the fifty states, I became interested in exploring the policies governing early childhood education teachers. I was shocked to discover the great variety and variability of early childhood education policies within and across states. In concordance with my peaking interest, many policy scholars began writing on increasing higher education requirements for early childhood teachers in state programs (Kvatum, 2017). The policy world was enamored with the possibility of major shift in the professionalization of the workforce. Would new policies requiring early childhood teachers to have Bachelor’s Degrees improve the quality of early childhood education or raise the status of early childhood education in society? Soon, I, too, began to ask these questions.

Today, the early childhood workforce ranges from teachers with no high school degree to teachers with doctoral degrees. Unlike the majority of Kindergarten or Elementary School teachers, early childhood education teachers are not always required to hold a BA, much less an Associate’s degree in some circumstances (Phillips et al., 2016). Why do these differences exist in society? How does formalized education affect one’s ability to enter the workforce? How does formalized education affect the decision to remain in the workforce? How does
professionalization affect public perception? Despite examining this subject from many angles during my summer at Brookings, I found myself with more questions than when I began this research. In order to gain a better understanding of complex policy governing early childhood teachers, I have decided to ask the question: How does higher education, specifically the attainment of Bachelor’s Degrees, shape the early childhood education workforce? In a conjoined project for my Sociology Thesis and Education Studies Capstone, this analysis seeks to understand how higher education shapes the early childhood education workforce through the conceptual framework of access and agency.

**Part II: Scope of Research**

This analysis has three distinct, yet interrelated, components that attempt to understand how Bachelor’s degrees shape and professionalize the American early childhood education workforce. In this analysis, early childhood education teachers are defined as educators who teach students age 3-5. Professionalization is defined as the attempt to transform a workforce into “an occupational group with some special skill” (Abbott, 1988) that advances the cultural capital, public perception, and quality of that group within society.¹

¹ Although quality is an important component of professionalization, this analysis will include quality in its analysis but focus mainly on public perception.
Figure 1

As observable in Figure 1, the first stage of this analysis, the “trends” stage, seeks to confirm the historical and current trends within the American early childhood education workforce. Many demographic studies have been completed on a district and state level to create an accurate and holistic depiction of the early childhood education workforce (National, 2012; Saluja et al., 1997). These demographic studies detail the traditionally female, low-income, and low-education level trends within the early childhood education workforce. However, many demographic studies fail to disassociate factors like race, gender, and age from other demographics of teacher status, like levels of education. In addition, many studies call for continued investigation of the early childhood education workforce with a specific need for research on the various educational backgrounds of early childhood education teachers (Phillips et al., 2016). This analysis presents original research using the most recent American Community Survey Data Sample to address both of these gaps. Through statistical analysis, this analysis investigates if the educational differences of early childhood education teachers and other
statuses of teachers persist outside the context of race, gender, age, and state. This stage assesses whether individuals with various levels of education naturally filter into different teacher statuses.

The next stage of this analysis, the “access” stage, seeks to engage the historical and current trends by studying the formalized components of education of early childhood education teacher requirements. In this sense, “access” can be defined as the formalized educational requirements that teachers must earn in order to work in a classroom. As early childhood is not integrated into the formal public education system in the United States, there is no standardized formalized guidance for early childhood teachers in early childhood programs within or between states. However, a recent shift in policy trends toward increasing the higher education requirements for early childhood teachers (Kvatum, 2017). For this stage of the analysis, it is important to sort through the nomenclature used to describe the major components of early childhood education in America. What degrees of higher education are early childhood educators’ required to earn before entering the workforce? Is this similar across all states? Is this similar within states? This stage studies the many requirements through an analysis of the state Licensing Documents for early childhood education centers from each state and the National Institute for Early Education Research’s State of Preschool Yearbook’s state funded programs, specifically focusing on requirements of Bachelor’s degrees for lead teachers in center-based care.

The last stage of this analysis, the “agency” stage, seeks to understand how higher education shapes individual early childhood teacher’s decision to enter the workforce and the social implications of that decision for the entire workforce. In this analysis, “agency” can be defined as the motivation to work in an early childhood education center regarding higher
education experience. This portion of the analysis includes 15 qualitative interviews with current early childhood teachers to understand the “agency” of the workforce by unpacking the personal factors that stimulate motivation to work in their field. How do educational backgrounds contribute to or stimulate these teachers’ decision to work in early childhood education? How do these teachers perceive the effect of higher education on the field? How do higher education requirements professionalize the early childhood education workforce to implicitly increase public perception and quality of the field? These interviews consist of a description of the teachers’ educational histories and a discussion on “how” they became early childhood teachers in order to understand “why” they work in the field. In addition, teachers contextualize their personal agency with the lack of professionalization across the early childhood education workforce.

A thorough literature review supports all three stages of this analysis. Through a discussion of the organization of early childhood education and the lack of value for the early childhood education workforce, this analysis provides sense of the complexities within early childhood education in America. Building on this foundational information, this review explores the role of higher education in affecting the quality and public perception of the workforce. Increased levels of higher education requirements can be viewed as a tool of professionalization on the workforce of early childhood education. The review provides the reader with a firm understanding of the intricacies of early childhood education in America and the effect of higher education on the teacher workforce.
Part III: Literature Review

My analysis sits at the nexus of the education literature of early childhood education in America and the Sociological literature of professionalization. Through a detailed account of organization, structure, and public perception of early childhood education in America, this literature review details the value of early childhood education and its workforce, while revealing how both the programs and the teachers are greatly undervalued in America. In light of these opposing value systems, this analysis investigates the effect of higher education in shaping the early childhood education workforce. Exploring these issues sheds light on the way professionalization in the form of higher education requirements affects the quality and public perception of the workforce. In this section, I review literatures pertaining to the benefits of early childhood education in society, the organization of early childhood education in America, the workforce of American early childhood education, and the professionalization of the early childhood education workforce.

The Value of Early Childhood Education

In America, most children begin their formalized education at age 5 with Kindergarten. Despite being required in only fifteen states, Kindergarten is readily accessible to all students through the K-12 public and private school systems. If early childhood education, education before age 5, is neither mandatory, nor fully incorporated into the K-12 education system (Phillips et al., 2016) in America, is it important? Despite historical disagreements about the purpose of early childhood education and the lack of formalized integration into the American education system, the answer is clear: early childhood education is important. It is important for the life of child. It is important for the future of a country. It is important for the success of a family. Early childhood education is important, but not everyone knows the value of educating
children early on in their development. This lack of understanding leads parents, policymakers, and the public to undervalue early childhood education.

Anne W. Mitchell, an early childhood education scholar, offers four main arguments for understanding the value of early childhood education and its workforce:


2. The Workforce Productivity Argument that all families should have dependable high quality care while they work;

3. The Brain Research Argument that children experience a rapid period of growth in the early years and so their experiences should be enriching; &

4. The Return on Investment Argument that high quality early childhood education has a greater financial benefit to society and families that out ways the initial costs” (Mitchell, 2009).

While Mitchell’s Moral Argument is a powerful and relevant component of the importance of early childhood education, this analysis demonstrates the value of early childhood education through the Brain Research Argument, The Return on Investment Argument, and The Workforce Productivity Argument. In addition to these arguments, I assert that the Importance of the Teacher Argument is necessary to understand the value of the early childhood education workforce.

Early childhood education benefits the child. During the years of age 3-5, children are rapidly developing both behaviorally and cognitively. Due to the “dynamic” brain development occurring at this stage (Brown & Jerrigan, 2012), the neurological pathways and patterns that form during this developmental time period are long lasting. If exposed to high quality early childhood education throughout this period of growth, students can enter K-12 environments prepared with important verbal, cognitive, and social skills. These benefits are most effective for children deemed “at risk” and can help narrow the achievement gap before students become
more disadvantaged. Studies have shown that high quality early implementation of education between the ages of 3 to 5 is vital to a student’s academic, social, and emotional success not only in their entrance into school, but also throughout life (Steinhart, 2005).

Despite the need for a strong start in early childhood education, it is important to note that the challenges facing K-12 school systems do not always support the growth acquired in early childhood education. Early investments in children must be followed by further high quality education to actualize the full benefits of the investments (Heckman, 2008). While many researchers see this as a welcome call to improve all components of the education system, other researchers exploit these challenges to assert that the cognitive and academic benefits of early childhood education disappear upon entrance into academic K-12 environments. In one longitudinal study, a group of researchers completed a series of assessments to determine that children who attended Head Start, the federally funded early childhood education program, were at the same level as those children who had not attended any form of early childhood education by third grade (Puma et al., 2012). Some researchers cite this and other fade out effects as an argument for devaluing research behind early education (Whitehurst, 2016); however, a greater scope of research shows the value of providing all children with a sound educational base through early childhood education. Three major longitudinal studies clearly demonstrate that the benefits of early childhood education last longer than a child school age years.

The Perry Preschool Study, the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child Parent Project demonstrate that high quality early childhood education increases students’ graduation rates, employment rates, and life satisfaction years after preschool, high school, and beyond (Galinsky, 2006). These longitudinal studies completed in the 1960’s and 1970’s are dated, but accurately represent the benefits of high quality early childhood education for children. The value of early
childhood education lies not only in a stronger start to one’s schooling experience, but also in a stronger life course. As children are the workforce of the future, early childhood education can create strengthen the economic prospects for these students and for our entire country (Knowledge@Wharton, 2017).

Early childhood education benefits the economy and the workforce in America. Researchers assert that investing in early childhood education is an investment in the “human capital” of our country (Magnuson et al., 2016). Dr. James Heckman, has discovered that early childhood education benefits the entire US economy. Through an analysis of two preschool experiments, Heckman assessed the health, life satisfaction, crime rates, labor income, IQ, schooling, and mother’s labor income of children in the preschool programs until age 30. Famously known as the “Heckman Equation,” Heckman’s work established a 7-10% annual return of investment for early childhood education programs serving 3- to 4-year-olds in America (Garcia et al, 2016) and lifetime returns as high as16 % (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). According to a 2014 White House on Economic Advisors report, every $1 invested in early childhood education benefits $8.60 to society. Investing early in life creates the greatest rate of returns for the investor (Heckman, 2008).

Art Rolnick, a former senior VP at Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, calls early childhood “our best investment” due to its ability to advance individual and national economic profits. Investing in early childhood education increases children’s ability to enter and sustain economically profitable jobs later in life. The same investment leads to more parents, specifically mothers, being able to enter and remain in the workforce due to reliable and consistent child care (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). With more parents employed and less parents missing work, early childhood education increases economic consumption and stabilizes workforces
Early childhood education not only serves the economic experiences of children and parents, but also sustains the functioning of busy family life.

Early childhood education benefits the family. As women thrive in the workforce, early childhood education provides a place for children to grow and develop while mothers work. As women’s access to higher education has increased and historical negative perspectives on working women have decreased, more women have entered the workforce. Working mothers currently make up 40% of the American workforce and this number is growing (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). From 1975 to 2016, the percentage of mothers with children ages 3-5 in the workforce increased from 39% to 65.3% (1975-2016 Annual Social, 2016). In addition, in 2016, 68.6% of mothers and 93.6% of fathers with children ages 3-5 worked (2016 Annual Average, 2016), demonstrating the large demand for early childhood education. Early childhood education allows parents to enter the workforce, stimulates the economy, and encourages their children to grow.

It is important to note that the value and benefits of these programs, specifically the benefits of brain development and economic advancement for the child, are dependent on the quality of the program. In many of these studies, the 3-5 year olds enrolled in early childhood education only received benefits when enrolled in high quality systems (Kids Count, 2017). High quality programs demonstrate promising practices in two areas: process quality and structural quality. Process quality refers to elements that affect how children experience the early childhood education care, like their classroom environment. Structural quality refers to the regulated and organized part of early childhood education, like teacher requirements and teacher to child ratios (Helburn and Howes, 1996). As both components of quality go hand and hand, the
National Association for the Education of Young Children has created and publicized directives that help shape a high quality program, including well-trained teachers, developmentally appropriate practice, small student to teacher ratios, and important connections between families and schools. In line with this direct, increasing the amount of higher education required for teachers in a classroom would targets both structural and process quality on a grand scale. While attempting to create quality within one early childhood classroom in America is difficult, it is particularly challenging to do this within and across the many early childhood programs in America.

Quality is crucial for the success of early childhood education. Unfortunately, historical roots of caring for 3-5 year old children for working mothers did not always prioritize the quality of the care. To understand the current system and the role of higher education in preparing teachers for quality classrooms, one must understand the competing origins and complex history of early childhood education in America.

The Devaluing of Early Childhood Education

The historical roots of early childhood education grew out of two programs in the early 19th century: day nurseries and nursery schools.

As industrialization and immigration rose in America in the early 19th century, working poor mothers needed a place for their children to go during the day. Modeled after the European systems for childcare (Cahan, 1990), group care “day nurseries” were created to fill this need. Deriving from the settlement house movement, these day nurseries intended to serve the “unfortunate” families with working mothers. While some day nurseries tried to provide basic education, the group care environment was “custodial” in nature (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007), providing basic protection and minimal resources to children in an overcrowded
environment. Expanding rapidly throughout earliest 19th and 20th century, the day nurseries were a symbol and symptom of social welfare (Cahan, 1990).

Around the same time as the emergence of day nurseries, a group of well-educated and wealthy educators created a system of “nursery schools” to educate the children of wealthy and middle class members of society. Unlike day nurseries, nursery schools were viewed as a form of socialization and early education, rather than social welfare. In this case, the group care environment of nursery school was intentional and provided an opportunity for socialization for young children. The primary purpose of these schools was to supplement the education that children were already learning at home and prepare them for elementary school (Cahan, 1990). Another unique feature of the nursery schools derived from their curriculum grounded in play. Children were encouraged to engage in social and academic exploration through experiences with various materials and activities. In nursery schools, parents could be assured that their child was gaining quality education (Cahan, 1990). These schools were much less popular than day nurseries and only expanded rapidly in and around the 1960’s (Kamerman, 2007).

Despite the advancement in scientific and educational research since the 19th century, the system of early childhood education in America is still reminiscent of its dual-natured roots. Although the day nurseries and nursery schools had different purposes and practices, they both cared for young children ages 3-5. Today, spaces for children age 3-5 in America face the same challenge. Although all early childhood education centers attempt to provide a place for young children age 3-5, they can be called anything from daycares to nursery schools to preschools. As the names suggest, some spaces are more dedicated to care, others to education, and a third to a mix of both (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). The competing purposes of the early 19th century schools are most classically known today as the care versus education debate.
Should early childhood education focus on care or education? Historically, day nurseries focused on providing basic care for children, keeping them, at best, safe while their mothers were at work. In contrast, the nursery schools provided education to an already fortunate group of students. Since the growth of popularity in nursery schools, there has always been a push to integrate care and education in all spaces of early childhood education. The day nurseries tried to emulate the nursery schools at this time, but a lack of funding prohibited them from doing so (Cahan, 1990). This debate continues to affect all components of early childhood education: how a program is identified, purposes of practice, and mindsets of the parents as they decide where to send their children (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). This analysis intentionally uses the term “early childhood education” in an attempt to address and encourage the blend of care and education.

Outside of the care and education debate, early childhood education must also battle with differences of access and quality. Policy makers often debate if America should invest in improving quality or expanding access to early childhood. During 2013–15, only 3.9 million 3 and 4 year olds were in school, representing less than half (47%) of all children in that age group. The number of students not in schools increases for children of color (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). In addition, the 47% of 3 and 4 year olds in school sharply contrasts the 98% of 5 year olds students enrolled in public Kindergarten. This difference is largely due to the relatively universal access to Kindergarten in the K-12 system as opposed to the fragmented system of early childhood education (Kamerman, 2007).
Separation from Public School

Since its roots, early childhood education has always been separate from the American K-12 public school system. As all states fund universal Kindergarten linked with the public school K-12 system, the Kindergarten experience is nearly universal. (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Unfortunately, this is not the case for early childhood education. There has always been controversy as to who should educate or care for children below 5 years of age due to a variety of reasons. First, government involvement in raising children is an invasion of privacy to some people (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). In the 19th century, both nursery schools and day nurseries faced criticism for removing children from homes. Second, despite the societal benefits of both day nurseries and nursery schools, people considered the home as the place to nurture a child. In addition, families did not want outside schools imparting moral and ethical values on their students (Cahan, 1990). Finally, there was little public support for either day nurseries or nursery schools due to this belief system (Kamerman, 2007). Thus, the K-12 public school system did not originally include early childhood education.

Despite today’s pushes to include early childhood education into the K-12 system (New Report, 2015) with some state funded public school Pre-K programs, early childhood education remains mostly a separate entity from public K-12 systems on a national and state level. For example, Head Start, the federal preschool program, is run out of the US Department of Health and Human Services, rather than the U.S. Department of Education, which oversees the states’ K-12 programs. Unlike the centralized K-12 system, the structure of early childhood programing serving students age 3 to 5 is disparate, fragmented, and varied. While levels of regulation on public and private K-12 schools vary between and within states, no intricacies parallel that of the education structure for children age 3-5 in America. This is stated not to minimize the various
differences and inequalities between K-12 school systems in America, but to showcase the structural differences of early childhood education. Early childhood education faces a fragmented delivery system divided on the purpose of care and education (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Due to this organization, or lack thereof, early childhood education in America can be considered a non-system.

Organization of the Non-System of Early Childhood Education

Settings: There are many different settings for early childhood education. Although some early childcare programs are unlicensed, many programs are licensed by the state and comply with state regulations (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). These basic licensing regulations include health and safety standards, staff-child ratios, staff requirements, directions for nutrition, and inspections (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). It is important to note that these requirements vary across states. For example, in Connecticut, the teacher to child ratio must be 1:10 or below. In Mississippi, this number can grow up to 1:25. In addition, these requirements vary dependent on the category of early childhood education: family child care, home based care, center based care (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). Family child care occurs when a child is in their own home under the care of a relative or nanny. Home-based care occurs when a child attends the home of caregiver in a small group care settings. Center-based care occurs when a child travels to an early childhood school or center, like Head Start (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Each setting can gain additional accreditation due to various standards of curriculum, staff qualifications and training, physical environment, etc. (Helburn & Howes, 1996). While most home based care programs are private, center based care programs can be either public or private (McCann, 2014). This analysis focuses on center-based care teachers.
Public v. Private: Around the country, center-based care facilities can either be public or private. Public early childhood education is associated with the local, state, or federal government. Public early childhood education includes state funded Pre-K associated with K-12 systems or other organizations and federally funded Head Starts, nationally driven early childhood centers run in all 50 states. Most public early childhood education centers cater to more economically disadvantaged children, while private preschools cater more to families that can pay tuition fees (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). In this way, some public institutions, like Head Start, require families to be under the federally mandated poverty guideline for each state. This varies from state to state and from family size to family size (Poverty, 2018).

Surprisingly, most early childhood education teachers are in privately funded centers (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007), and the majority of center-based care facilities are privately run. Despite a private sector industry, there are many stakeholders in early childhood education, such as politicians, parents, and government bodies.

Overseeing Organizations: The US has no national early childhood education policy (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007), so the regulations guiding states’ systems are varied. Thus, early childhood education programs must comply with the rules and regulations of many different bodies, including the state, federally funded programs like Head Start, the State Department of Health, or certain listening/credentialing organizations, dependent on the individual programs (Kagan, 2016) (Federal, 2014). States often control the public early childhood education system through various organizations by weighing costs and benefits, accessibility, health and safety standards, and demand (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). This varying regulation makes consistency between and across programs difficult to attain (Kagan et al., 2008). Many of these organizations contribute to funding the programs they regulate.
Funding Streams: Outside of questions about regulation in early childhood education, “Who pays?” is one of the most frequently asked questions in the field. However, due to a mix of funding streams, called “blended funding,” (McCann, 2014), the answer to the question is often more complex than one might expect. Four distinctions must be made in order to begin to answer this question: Public, Private, For-Profit, Non-Profit. It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. While publicly run programs are supported by the government at a federal, state, or local level, both publicly and privately run programs can be supported through government funding (NIEER, 2016). Private funding for private schools comes from private organizations or parent tuition (McCann, 2014). Federally, programs like the Child Care and Development Fund, Preschool Development Grant, the Federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, School Readiness Dollars, and various other programs, fund early childhood education both publicly and privately (Federal, 2014). The Child Care Development Block Grant, the primary federal funding for early childhood education for children, is a five billion dollar federal block grant that subsidizes the care expenses of working parents with an income less than 85% of the state median income (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Federal dollars provide funding for public Head Start, while state dollars fund the state funded Pre-K located in 43 states. These “state funds” can be provided to traditional K-12 systems, community based organizations, or programs tied to school readiness funds (McCann, 2014).

To complicate things further, organizations can either be for-profit or non-profit centers. While non-profit centers are eligible for government funding and tax exemptions, for-profit center subsist on parent fees alone. Studies have shown that non-profit centers traditionally have higher quality (Helburn, 1995), spending more on labor and food. For profit centers are dependent on parent fees, spending more on facilities and operating expenses (Helburn &
Howes, 1996). In all circumstances, the majority of funding for early childhood education falls on the back of the parents (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007).

Parents: Early childhood education originated in contrasting initiatives to serve the childcare needs of parents or the educational needs of students (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Regardless of the need designed by the program, parents’ decision where to enroll their child for early childhood education is a key factor in shaping early childhood education trends, policy, and finances (Chanan, 1989). Parents often prioritize three factors: cost, convenience, and quality. While some parents are interested in school readiness and high quality care, most parents prioritize cost and convenience over markers of quality (Helburn & Howes, 1996). Parents paying for early childhood education are usually at the beginning of their “earning trajectory” (Rolnick, 2011), so the high cost of early childhood education can be quite burdensome. For some parents, especially those of low-income status who may have to work non-standard hours (outside the traditional 9AM-6 PM), convenience of location is also crucial. In order to keep their jobs, parents must select childcare that fits their work schedule (Chaudry et al., 2012). In many cases, lower quality programs may provide significantly longer days at a lower cost than higher quality programs (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007).

Despite these preferences, there is lack of public knowledge among parents on indicators of high quality early childhood education or various options for their children. Limited access to knowledge keeps many parents from getting the best early childhood education for their children (Pao, 2016). Parents’ choices are powerful. When parents choose solely on cost and convenience, they often reinforce negative trends of low quality early childhood education (Heckman, 2008). Parents need to be empowered in order to improve the system (Rolnick, 2011). Increasing publicly accessible information about high quality early childhood education
may improve their decision and the non-system (Kagan et al., 2008). However, many social factors challenge the improvement of the early childhood education non-system.

**Challenges Facing the Non-System**

In a recent study, researchers found that 80% of all voters stated that early childhood education is a top priority in America (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). Despite this overwhelming support, the budgets and voting lines often reveal a different value system. Many structural elements to the education system replicate and reinforce the problematic components of this non-system. First, as the highest budget item for families across all regions, most of the cost burden falls on the parents. For a single parent, early childhood education can range from 37-50% of income. For a married couple, early childhood education can range from 9-12% of income (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). Next, the American value system relies on the historical view of early childhood education as a component of welfare, garnering a negative stigma around the field. Much of America values an ideal of individualism. For example, Richard Nixon vetoed the closest attempt to a national policy on early childhood education, The 1971 Comprehensive Child Development Act, due to the impossibility of “a national government supporting communal child care rearing rather than family centered practices” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2017). The cost and public perception of early childhood education clearly affects the workforce.

**The Value of the Early Childhood Education Workforce**

Despite this non-system of early childhood education, researchers have determined that teachers are the most important components of a high-quality early childhood classroom (Kagan et al., 2008). Thus, there has been a spike of interest in understanding the centrality of the early childhood workforce in the past 20 years (National, 2012).
Teacher-child interactions are the most critical component of any classroom structure, especially in early childhood education (Kagan et al., 2008). Early childhood students learn best in an environment nurtured by close relationships with their teachers (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Research has shown that students with secure attachments to their teachers are concurrently and longitudinally more competent in social and academic matters (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). A teacher’s first step in engaging children in an early childhood classroom is to create and maintain a strong relationship with each individual student. However, teachers face the challenge of maintaining these individual relationships, while creating developmentally appropriate group care curricula for an entire class. In addition, teachers must create relationships with families, engage in continuous learning on cultural and developmental practices, and assess the physical and emotional levels of students (Kagan et al., 2008).

Who are the teachers who are making these connections in early childhood education classrooms? Again, the confusion of the non-system is encapsulated in the nomenclature. Some early childhood educators prefer to be called teachers, caregivers, or bluntly, workers, in a variety of settings. In addition, there are levels of teachers within a classroom, including head teachers, assistant teachers, aides, and volunteers. All teachers have different qualifications and responsibilities within a classroom. Regardless of title or position, social scientists have attempted to collect data on the way the early childhood workforce is shaped in a variety of ways. The 2016 Early Childhood Workforce Index found that center based care was 63% White, 17% African America, 14% Hispanic, and 5% other races. While the importance of the individual teacher is scientifically recognized, these teachers still face little economic support and devalued public perception associated with historical and current trends of workforce (Perrachione et al., 2008; Phillips et al., 2016).
The Devaluing of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

When studying the value of the early childhood education workforce, one must recognize the various social norms associated with early childhood education that often cause the public to devalue the workforce. Two of these various and interconnected components are significant to the workforce: the gender of the teachers and the age of children.

Like many roles in education, teaching in an early childhood education setting is historically gendered and low profile work. Despite greater access for women interested in entering the workforce, American society continues to devalue work traditionally associated with women (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007). Developing from a role of motherhood, the roles of early childhood teachers have been traditionally assumed by women (Chodorow, 1999). This gendered norm affects every aspect of the workforce from whom it attracts; to the compensation it provides; to how it is regulated. For many years, education was the only field accessible to women. In the 1960’s half of female undergraduates majored in education (Jacobs, 1996). For even longer, the only skill required for entrance into the early childhood education workforce was merely the female sentiment (Chodorow, 1999). Related to this trend, there is often an understanding that “anyone” could teach or take care of a small child. Due to the young age of children age 3-5, some believe that no special skills are needed to be an early childhood teacher. Unfortunately early childhood educators are not valued in society, despite the fact that their work as teachers will have prominent effects on the future social and economic lives of the children (Heckman, 2008). As Stewart Friendman, a professor of management at Wharton, states: “The closer you are to the diaper the less valued you are in the labor market” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2017).
These gendered trends have directly affected the formation and preparation of the early childhood workforce today. As the field is constrained by the problems of low-compensation and low public perception of the workforce (Bogard et al., 2008), there is a great dissonance between the public support for early childhood education and the perception of its workforce. As women gained more opportunities in the workforce, the early childhood education field continued to provide poor working conditions and low requirements for entrance. The lack of professionalization early childhood education reinforces the cycle of poor recruitment and replacement of early childhood education teachers (Kagan et al., 2008), and causes women in the workforce to shift to jobs outside of early childhood education (Helburn & Howes, 1996). The entire workforce had become equated to a system “stigmatized by poverty” (Cahan, 1989).

Due to the confluence of gendered and historical trends in the early childhood education workforce, the formal barriers to entry to early childhood teachers are relatively low and varied across programs within the non-system (Kagan et al., 2008). Historically, educationally driven early childhood education centers have been associated with higher educational requirements for teachers. For example, nursery schools employed a new generation of college-educated women, who had studied child development, to teach in their schools (Cahan, 1990). Today, the formalized educational requirements for early childhood education teachers can often be viewed as a marker of the disparate and varied components of early childhood education as a non-system. While public Kindergarten and Elementary teacher certification policy is usually consistent throughout the state and requires at least a BA, public or private early childhood education certification policy must align with the overseeing bodies. As many organizations regulate the operation of the facility, they also shape the educational qualification required for entry for early childhood educators. Early childhood educators must complete a certain set of
requirements before entering into a classroom. Some programs require varying hours of experience, while others require degrees or certifications or credentials, like the Child Development Associate credential, which outlines specific training and requirements (Culkin, 2000). Regardless of the various requirements of early childhood education centers, low salaries are consistent throughout the field.

Aligning with the low barriers to entry, the salary for early childhood educators is low. For center-based care, those with a high school degree or less are making $7.70/hr. while someone holding a BA and higher are making $15.50 an hour (Whitebook et al., 2016). Across states, the median hourly early childhood education worker in center-based care was paid $9.77 in 2016. Despite this slight correlation between degree and earnings, there is no largely motivating factor for earning a higher degree. In order to receive a substantial pay jump, early childhood educators have to enter K-12 education.

The lack of value of the American Early childhood workforce appears counterintuitive. If early childhood education teachers are some of the most important factors for the success of a child’s life or the success of the early childhood education system, why are they paid the least or required to have the least amount of education? James Heckman shows that the return of investment in early childhood education teacher is highest with the youngest children. Unfortunately, the education requirements and the salary for teachers working with the youngest children act in direct opposition to Heckman’s research. Regardless, teachers have to act in highly professional ways in order to counteract these negative social perceptions and work towards change (Kagan et al., 2008). A major question derived from this is: Would increasing early childhood education requirements increase public perception or the quality of the early childhood education workforce?
Higher Education Requirements and the Public Perception

Raising the formalized education of early childhood education teachers as a means of professionalization may raise the public perception of early childhood education. Sociological literature on the systems of professions, the value of a higher education degree as cultural capital, and the historical nature of “women’s work” provide context for this assertion.

In Andrew Abbott’s “Systems of Professions,” he states that professions control and operationalize specific types of knowledge to address or fulfill “human problems amenable to expert service.” In this sense, professions are “occupational groups with some special skill” (Abbott, 1988). When a system of knowledge, or expertise, is used to solve a problem, the workers formalize the work in society. Abbott claims that professions compete in a system to solve these problems (Mckenna, 2006). While education may legitimize the profession through public opinion and legal jurisdiction, inter-professional competition often arises as professions seek to fulfill a certain publicly recognized task. Although Abbott did not write specifically on the education workforce, his work on professions is vital to the conceptualization of the analysis (Abbott, 1988).

If early childhood education is to align with Abbott’s framework, the public must view and value early childhood education educators as solving a specific problem within society. Historically, the American public historically undervalues early childhood education as something that takes little skill or should be completed by the family unit. As the purpose and scope of early childhood education is often debated in America, the problem that early childhood education teachers solve is rarely recognized. Although there is no true competition between K-12 teachers and early childhood education teachers, inter-profession competition is a helpful framework for answering these questions and understanding early childhood education’s
placement within the American education system. The American system has framed early
childhood education as a part of social welfare system, separate from the K-12 system, rather
than as a solution to enhancing children’s development, providing child care for working parents,
or stimulating the economy. To remove this stigma, there has been a push for
“professionalization” of early childhood education in recent years (Kagan et al., 2008).
According to Abbott, the early childhood education workforce must show the public that they
engage a specialized skill to solve the human problem of educating children age 3-5 outside of
the home. Degree requirements could possibly provide this support for this argument.

If early childhood education teachers are recognized as solving a specific problem,
raising higher education requirements could raise the public perception of the early childhood
education workforce in America through an increase in cultural capital. Bourdieu views higher
education degrees as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998). Although there are many
definitions of cultural capital, Lamont and Lareua define Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital as,
“the institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences,
formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion”
(Lamont & Lareua, 1988). Individually, higher education degrees can be considered an
investment one’s skills and one’s self as one is able to receive a higher status in society. In
addition, higher education is directly related to the status of a profession within social
stratification of society. The exclusion mentioned in the definition of cultural capital represents
the ability to earn a certain job (Lamont & Lareua, 1988. By requiring their applicants to hold
higher education degrees, professions may raise their own status in the system of professions
(Posselt & Grodsky, 2017).
Following the theories of cultural capital, raising the degree requirements for early childhood education could accomplish two things: (1) raise the social status of the American early childhood education workers and (2) raise the social status of the entire early childhood education profession. First, many believe that no special skills are needed to be an early childhood teacher. Requiring a Bachelor’s degree could attempt to alter this perception and provide cultural capital to the individual. An example of this can be seen in the increase of Master’s degree in America. Today, more people earn Master’s degrees than ever before. Yet, two important trends have arisen within this pattern. First, most of those degrees have been earned in the fields of education. As previously noted, education has always been undervalued as a field in America, but the K-12 system rewards teachers who hold Master’s degrees with a higher salary (Hansen, 2017). This reward system represents a former, and successful, attempt to professionalize the K-12 system. Could this pattern work in the early childhood education field? Next, women have earned the majority of these Master’s degrees. This gendered trend has important implications for a female dominated field. Although the growth of master’s degree is often powered by a hope for “advancing or maintaining societal position” (Marginson, 2016), this may not be the case in the traditional “women’s work” of early childhood education.

Any attempt to increase professionalization by raising higher education requirements in a field predominantly comprised of women faces unique challenges. While the sociologist Celia Davies agrees that higher education acts as a promotion of social status through social and cultural capital, she argues that gender makes a difference. Due to historical and structural biases against women, women are often seen as “devalued others” in the fields of work (Davies, 1996). Women with advanced degrees may still be valued less than men with no degrees. This negative perception affects the formation and reproduction of professions mainly occupied by women.
According to Celia Davies, the professional idea was created for men, and “women are asking for inclusion in a system that is predicated on a hidden form of their inclusion” (Davies, 1996). She argues that wherever there is a profession occupied by a woman in the public world, like nursing or teaching, the implications of this gender balance must be understood before professionalization can occur. Thus, the gendered nature of this workforce must be taken into account when assessing professionalization. In order to move these questions from theory to reality, the direct effect on the teacher’s access and agency must be addressed.

**Higher Educational Requirements and Quality**

In addition to public perception, increasing the requirements of higher education as a means of professionalization in the early childhood education workforce may increase the quality of the teaching in the classroom. As mentioned in the policy and workforce information above, the notion that early childhood teachers with more education provide higher quality care for students informs much of this work (Saluja et al., 1997). Some research reveals a positive connection between teacher credentials and teacher quality in the early childhood workforce (Barnett, 2003). Specifically, higher levels of education and a CDA credential have proven to have a positive effect on an early childhood teacher’s quality (Early et al., 2006). One study found that higher formalized education levels link to higher quality programs and more positive student teacher interactions (Kagan et al., 2008).

In opposition to the studies and policies that support increasing early childhood education teacher’s educational requirements, many sources find little to no link between a teacher’s education, training, and credentialing in relation to the academic outcomes of their students (Early et al., 2006). This literature is especially pertinent when discussing the acquisition of advanced degrees. In one study of 81 early childhood teachers with doctoral degrees, no effects
of the teacher’ educational level were found in the school-readiness skills of Kindergarten-bound students (Eaden, 2013). In addition, this theory does not always lead to positive effects in policy. Research shows that policy including more credentials for state certification restricts many candidates from becoming state certified (Ackerman, 2005). A study by the National Center for Early Development and Learning noted little to no correlation between teachers’ years of education and children's achievement in 200 preschool classrooms (Kagan et al., 2008).

Despite conflicting evidence, it is important to note that these studies do not disregard the importance of early childhood teacher’s education requirements. Rather, they encourage policymakers to focus on the “minimum requirements” for early childhood teachers’ state certification (Bogard et al., 2008). Staff with more education may be better equipped to help less educated staff (Kagan et al., 2008). In addition, BA’s in early childhood or a related field may improve general knowledge of the field. While deeply assessing the effect of the BA on the quality of early childhood education is outside the scope of this research, it is important to track the role of higher education on the access and agency of the early childhood education workforce.

Access

Access in this analysis is defined as the formalized educational requirements that teachers must earn in order to enter and remain in a classroom. There are many factors that affect one’s ability to perform the demanding tasks inherent in caring for young children. Is the candidate physically able to be an early childhood education teacher? Will the candidate have the required personal skills, like patience and appreciation of young children, to be an early childhood education teacher? Is the candidate old enough and healthy enough to be an early childhood education teacher? Can the candidate pay for the required early childhood education credentials?
Can the candidate survive on low pay? Amidst these many expectations, one must also meet the educational requirements of an early childhood education center.

As should be clear at this point, the policies governing the requirements to work as an early childhood education teacher vary considerably. Although some policies require a BA for early childhood education teachers, credentialing policies are varied across programs and all 50 states (Kagan et al., 2008). Structurally, if education is to be used as a measure of professional validity (Abbott, 2008), a requirement for a BA indicates the higher professionalization of K-12 teachers than early childhood education teachers. Importantly, one must recognize that a requirement for teachers to gain an advanced degree provides a financial burden to both individuals and the early childhood education system at large.

**Agency**

“Agency” in this analysis can be defined as the motivation to work in an early childhood education space. Even if a candidate fulfills the requirements for early childhood education teacher, they must still decide to work in the field. Although increased teacher education has been “central to the movement within early childhood education to obtain professional status,” it is not always beneficial. One study found that 53% of participants said they would leave early childhood education, but remain in education, upon gaining higher credentials (Boyd, 2013). In another study of 689 early childhood teachers working in public school, Head Start, and childcare settings, more credentials encouraged candidates to leave the early childhood workforce for higher paying positions (Ryan & Ackerman, 2007). This variance is real. For teachers interested in remaining in early childhood education, Kindergarten teachers earn $53,030 per year, as compared to an annual salary of $28,912 of early childhood education center-based teachers. Why do teachers stay?
Some research has been completed on why teachers choose to become early childhood teachers, rather than other types of teachers. One study found that one of the main reasons early childhood educators chose to continue to remain in the field work with children age 3-5 or their belief in the value of this work. However, at some point, the low wages may outweigh this motivation. Regardless, this study focuses on the motivation through the lens of past educational experiences (Helburn & Howes, 1996).

When questioning motivation, one must be prepared to engage in a dialogue of both public perception and quality. By understanding a teacher’s thoughts on the public perception of their field, one can gain a sense of their motivation. In a similar vein, one must study the teachers’ perception of their own work (White, 2014). The similarities and differences between these two components may provide valuable information. Although the public perception affects how an early childhood teacher will perceive the profession, current teachers will have different perspectives due to their past experiences and future career plans (White, 2014).

Moving Forward

An analysis of higher education requirements must uniquely view early childhood education teachers as individuals and as a workforce in order to paint the clearest picture of the field (Beatty, 1997). Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, one of the leading policy analysts on the systemic, ideological, and structural challenges of the early childhood workforce, writes that special care must be given to understanding the complexities within early childhood education teacher policy. At the end of Dr. Kagan’s book, “The Early Care and Education Teaching Workforce at the Fulcrum: An Agenda for Reform,” she argues for policy recommendations seeking to improve the qualifications of teachers’ education and entry-level requirements in order to offset the systemic qualities of the profession and to improve the quality of early childhood education.
To add to this effort, this analysis seeks to explore the existence of lower levels of education among early childhood teachers, the variability of policies governing their entry to the field, and their motivation to work in the workforce through the lens of professionalization through higher education.

**Part IV: Methods**

This analysis seeks to unpack how higher education, specifically the attainment of Bachelor’s degrees, shapes the early childhood education workforce through three questions. Each component is explored through the unique methodological structure best suited for each question. This mixed-method analysis engages the three methodological structures in Yale’s Sociology and Education coursework. The combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews not only provides context for the policy research, but also advances the analysis’ trajectory from a population level to an individual level (DiTomaso et al., 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Analysis</td>
<td>1. Are individuals with less education more likely to become early childhood education teachers than another status of teachers when holding gender, race, and age constant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Scan</td>
<td>2. What role do BA’s play in the formalized barriers to entry for early childhood education teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Interviews</td>
<td>3. How does higher education shape the decision to work in the early childhood education workforce?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A: Quantitative Analysis

**Question:** Are individuals with less education more likely to become early childhood education teachers than another status of teacher when holding gender, race, age, and state constant?

While many studies have created and disseminated surveys to gather information on the demographics and education levels of early childhood teachers (Saluja et al., 1997), other social scientists have used data sets, representative samples, and case studies to accomplish the same task (Committee, 2012). These demographic studies detail the traditional female, low-income, and low-education level trends within the early childhood education workforce. However, many demographic surveys fail to disassociate these factors from each other. In addition, many studies call for continued investigation of the early childhood education workforce with a specific need for research on the various educational backgrounds of early childhood education teachers (Phillips et al., 2016). To investigate a large sample of early childhood education teachers on a national level, I chose to investigate the connection between early childhood education teachers and higher education, specifically the attainment of Bachelor’s degrees, through the American Community Survey.

Issued by the US Census Bureau, The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey that captures “social, economic, housing, and demographic information” throughout the US population (American, 2017). Through a “rolling sample,” the survey collects data on a monthly basis from 3.5 million people annually and creates 1 year, 3 year, and 5 year long datasets for public use (Committee, 2012). The ACS replaced the Long Form Census in 2010 (American, 2017).

Due to specificity with which data on school and work is collected, research institutions, like the Brookings Institution, often use the American Community Survey to learn more about
the current education workforce (Hansen et al., 2017). The American Community Survey allows researchers to study teachers in a publicly accessible way. The ACS supplies the demographics, educational statuses, and occupational factors needed to understand the teachers educating the youngest students (Committee, 2012). Specifically, the ACS provides information on demographics, years of education, degrees attained, and subject area of BA. In addition, a benefit of using the ACS is the ability to capture a complete view of the paid labor force and disassociate findings on the state level (Committee, 2012). The analysis of this data establishes educational differences between teachers who teach young children and teachers who teach older students. This portion of the analysis also explores if this difference is unique outside of the demographic factors of race, gender, or age.

While ACS captures information about the entire US population, it is by no means a perfect survey. Due the survey’s monthly rolling sampling, there is a larger margin of error than the long-form census (Spielman et al. 2014). A more specific downside to ACS for this analysis is that the survey categorizes Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers into one status of teachers (Committee, 2012). For those studying the early childhood education workforce, this lack of distinction imposes an important limitation, as Pre-K, another name for early childhood education, and Kindergarten teachers have very different policies guiding them. Despite this lack of direct distinction, the ACS is a valuable tool for understanding the education of the teachers of younger students as compared to those who teach older students. In addition, the lack of distinction between early childhood teachers and Kindergarten teachers enhances the importance of the analysis. The fact the ACS surveys these teachers together is an inherent symbol of the lack of understanding of early childhood education workforce in our country. Early childhood education teachers fall to a different set of policies and public perceptions than Kindergarten
teachers. It must be recognized that previous studies have gathered recent demographic information on the state of the early childhood education workforce compared directly to the demographics of the Elementary school workforce. Regardless this is an important first step in the analysis.

To begin this analysis, I downloaded variables from the IPUMS website for the most recent American Community Survey (2015). I created additional variables and enacted certain qualifications based on the protocol of a recent Brookings study on Teacher Salaries in the American Community Survey (Hansen, 2017). These qualifications included sampling only those who were above the age of 18 and employed, defining that these workers were “Working for Wages,” and confirming that they “Worked Last Year.” After these qualifications were created, I extracted the observations of teachers and their predefined statuses of Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers, Elementary and Middle School teachers, and High School teachers from the data set. In addition, I created an education variable defining “Less than a BA” “BA” or “Higher than a BA.” After I gathered the demographics of the teachers, I calculated the tabulations of demographic factors like education, gender, race, and age across the three teacher statuses with appropriate person weight applied. Finally, I ran multinomial logit models to assess if any educational differences could be linked to the likelihood of becoming a teacher with regards to differences in education, gender, race, age, or state.

A multinomial logit model determines if the educational differences between the statuses of teachers can be explained due to the differences in other factors in the sample. Multinomial logits are predictive measures used with unordered categories when the dependent variable has greater than two categories. In this case, the independent variable was education with the categories of “Less than a BA,” “BA,” or “BA or Higher.” The dependent variable was the status
of teachers in the sample. The model naturally selects the largest group as the reference group. In this case, the largest group is the Elementary and Middle School teachers. All significance was assessed at the 95% confidence level.

Limitations:

As mentioned previously, the joint teacher status of Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers creates variability in the analysis, as Pre-K and Kindergarten have different policies regulating staff educational requirements. However, this joint status is still useful in determining the difference between teachers of younger and older students. In addition, this analysis is not comprehensive enough to address the gender, race, and age disparities between different teacher statuses and the various social implications of these differences.

B: Policy Scan

Question: What role do BA’s play in the various formalized barriers to entry for early childhood education teachers?

After determining the education level structure within the status of teachers, the policy scan contextualizes this structure by tracing the various expectations required for entry for the early childhood education workforce. To determine what role BA’s play in the formalized barriers to entry for early childhood education teachers, I completed a policy analysis of all fifty states’ early childhood education center’s teacher policy requirements for staffing. Due to the variability of early childhood education practices in each state, the policies vary greatly. To address this tension, this analysis engages two policy databases. The first, the Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System: National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulation provides a compilation of all the state licensing for all programs. The second, the National Institute for Early Education Research’s Preschool Yearbook, provides a compilation of the education requirements for teachers in state funded programs.
Due to the staffing theory that staff with more education may be better equipped to help less educated staff (Kagan et al., 2008), the analysis focuses on the formalized educational requirements for head teachers. First, I read every state’s licensing policies for early childhood education center’s teachers with a focus on the requirements for lead teachers. Due to the high level of variation within and across every state, this analysis focused on trends and patterns across all 50 state’s licensing agreements. Next, I read each document in The Preschool Yearbook, and created a strict coding system to note the BA requirement for Early Childhood education lead teacher in each state program.

**Limitations:**

Documents outlining policies for each state are far too numerous to read for an analysis of this scale. Thus, this analysis engaged only two data sources. In addition, this policy scan only focused on the formalized educational barriers, specifically the attainment of BA’s, to initial entry for the workforce. There are many educational requirements, like continuing units of education or professional development credits, determined by center or state that mandate training hours each year to advance knowledge of early childhood education. Finally, these policies are the minimum requirements and do not represent the specific requirements in all early childhood education centers in every state.

**C: Qualitative Interviews**

**Question:** How does higher education shape the decision to work in the early childhood education workforce?

Higher education of early childhood teachers must inform some part of their decision to enter the teacher workforce (Ryan & Graue, 2016). In addition, it is clear that the degree attainment of teachers may be related to the public perception of the profession. This component
of the analysis intends to illuminate the motivation and perspectives of current early childhood teachers and the implications of that decision for the workforce and society (White, 2014).

Subjectivity of the research population must be accepted when investigating personal motivation. While many studies examine pre-service teachers to decrease this subjectivity, it has been proven that characteristics and perceptions vary between veteran teachers and pre-service early childhood teachers (McMullen, 1997). Although the teachers’ work in the classroom affects their understanding of their agency (Wellenreiter et al., 2010), they have authentic perspective on the public perception of early childhood education. In a recent study by the First Five Year’s Fund, researchers found that 80% of all voters stated that early childhood education is a top priority in America (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). However, national value systems show that this value does not translate into structural support, as teachers must deal with little respect and low pay every day. To get the most authentic understanding of the perception of the general public, I spoke with the teachers themselves rather than the general public. Research on this topic supports the study of crafting and coding interviews to understand larger themes about more abstract concepts for early childhood educators, like agency and motivation (Boyd, 2013).

Acquired through snowball sampling, this analysis uses a sample of 15 female teachers with a variety of different races and ages. Each teacher is currently employed at a public or private early childhood education center in Connecticut. All of the centers were non-profit. I engaged in open-ended semi-structured interviews with all sample members. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes and took place over the phone or at the early childhood education teacher’s place of employment. All names and identifiable factors of employers and interviewees have been changed. After transcription, I analyzed and coded each interview.
### Interview Sample

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Degree</th>
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<td>Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
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<td>MA</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>MA</td>
<td>Urban Education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Limitations:

Policymakers often debate if creating too many advanced degree requirements will limit some from entering the childhood workforce or, in opposition, encourage others to leave the workforce. This analysis only spoke to early childhood education teachers, so it cannot fully enter this debate. In addition, due to the small sample size, I must note that each of these interviews provide unique observations, rather than generalizable trends for my analysis. Finally, snowball sampling resulted in opportunities to speak solely with female teachers, so my sample...
Part V: Results

In my results section, I first review the quantitative analysis of the low levels of education for early childhood education teachers to map the terrain of the workforce’s placement within the American education system. Then, I review the contents of states’ early childhood education staffing requirement policies to contextualize the low level of education in the early childhood education workforce and unpack the access into the field. Finally, I analyze the qualitative interviews with Connecticut early childhood education teachers to investigate their agency to work in the field with regards to higher education and the professionalization of the workforce.

A: Quantitative Analysis

Question: Are individuals with less education more likely to become early childhood education teachers than another status of teacher when holding gender, race, age, and state constant?

Previous quantitative studies reveal that the teachers of the American Early Childhood Education workforce are less educated than other statuses of teachers, including Elementary and Middle School teachers, and High School teachers. The three categories of teachers from the American Community Survey (1) Pre-K and Kindergarten Teachers, (2) Elementary and Middle School Teachers, and (3) High School Teachers represent the different statuses of teachers that educate younger and older students. This analysis determines if less educated people in America are more likely to become teachers of young children rather older children when holding gender, race, age, and state of residence constant.

This analysis describes the American teacher workforce as a whole before breaking the workforce demographics down into the three statuses of teachers. Following this demographic
study, the analysis studies the education differences in the American teacher workforce while accounting for demographic differences, like gender, race, age and state.

**Table 1.1a: Demographics of Teacher Sample:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (N= 3,559,051)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten Teachers</td>
<td>9.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School Teachers</td>
<td>73.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>17.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Races</td>
<td>4.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School or GED</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College Credit</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>2.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>43.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA or Higher</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Related</td>
<td>52.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (18-94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

*Table 1.1a* represents the demographic elements of the sample.

The total number of teachers across these three statuses is 3,559,051. As observable in *Table 1.1a*, the teachers are divided into three teacher statuses, (1) Pre-K and Kindergarten Teachers, (2) Elementary and Middle School Teachers, and (3) High School Teachers. While the majority of the sample is comprised of Elementary and Middle School teachers (73.45%), there
are 321,712 Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers in the sample. All 50 states are represented in the sample.

Unsurprisingly, these descriptive findings reveal a mostly female and mostly white American teacher workforce. In addition, the teachers in the workforce are highly educated with over 92% having a bachelor’s degree or higher. Roughly half of all teachers have a degree in something related to education. These demographics change when the sample is separated into statuses defined by age of students. The following section outlines Table 1.1b below into unique parts and explains the implications of the variations between teachers’ statuses.

Table 1.1b: Demographics of Teacher Sample by Teacher Status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-K and K</th>
<th>Elem and Middle</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=321,712</td>
<td>N=2,614,099</td>
<td>N=623,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School or GED</td>
<td>12.62%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College Credit</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>16.08%</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
<td>45.23%</td>
<td>42.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA or Higher</td>
<td>14.19%</td>
<td>51.39%</td>
<td>54.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>21.93%</td>
<td>43.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>97.14%</td>
<td>78.07%</td>
<td>56.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>62.51%</td>
<td>78.99%</td>
<td>78.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
<td>8.11%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>15.17%</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
<td>8.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.02%</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
<td>4.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

*Table 1.1b* breaks down the educational, gender, race, and age differences of the American teacher workforce by the three teacher statuses.
Figure 2: Education

Figure 2 shows that the amount of teachers with “Less than a BA” is much higher in the Pre-K and Kindergarten Teacher Status than the Elementary and Middle School Teacher, or High School Teacher statuses.

When broken down into the three teacher statuses of Pre-K and Kindergarten, Elementary and Middle School, and High School, education levels of all three statuses of teachers vary across the teacher sample. As seen in Figure 2, only 47% of Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers have a BA or higher, while about 97% of Elementary, Middle, and High School teachers hold a BA or higher. As observable in Table 1.2, the information provided on level of education reveals the amount of education each teacher has completed, ranging from “no schooling completed” to a doctoral degree. By considering, the highest level of education received by the teachers in each of the statuses, it is clear that Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers are significantly less likely to have BA or higher degree than Elementary, Middle, and High School Teachers.

Source: American Community Survey 2015
Table 1.2: Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>High School or GED</th>
<th>Some College Credit</th>
<th>Associates</th>
<th>BA</th>
<th>MA or Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten</td>
<td>12.62%</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
<td>16.08%</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
<td>14.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
<td>45.23%</td>
<td>51.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
<td>42.75%</td>
<td>54.08%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

Table 1.2: Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers have the lowest amount of education across all teacher statuses.

Table 1.3: Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers with Education Related Major by Teacher Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten (N= 101,971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School (N=1,182,302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (N= 266,448)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

Table 1.3: Of the teachers in each status who have BA’s, Pre-K and Kindergarten have the lowest percentage of BA’s focused on Education.

Table 1.3 demonstrates that the percentage of Pre-K and Kindergarten with a BA’s degree in an education related majors\(^2\) is also much smaller than Elementary, Middle School, and High School teachers. Throughout the sample, the most popular degree was general education, followed by a status of other smaller representatives of education. Psychology was the second

\(^2\) Majors relating to education from the ACS include: general education, educational administration and supervision, school student counseling, elementary education, mathematics teacher education, physical and health education teaching, early childhood education, science and computer teacher education, secondary teacher education, special needs education, social science or history teacher education, teacher education: multiple levels, language and drama education, art and music education, and miscellaneous education
most popular major across all statuses. This means that only $\frac{1}{4}$ of early childhood education teachers who have BA’s study something related to education.

Despite what appears to be a clear association between age of student and education level, an analysis of gender, race, and age proves that there are other differences besides education for Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers, Elementary and Middle School teachers, and High School teachers. The lack of education and the lack of BA’s focused in an education related field in the Pre-K and Kindergarten Teacher status may be related to the policies governing the statuses of teachers, but other factors could account for this difference between the three statuses of teachers.

Table 1.4: Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>97.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>21.93%</td>
<td>78.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>43.01%</td>
<td>56.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

*Table 1.4:* Although the majority of teachers are female, the amount of male in each teaching status increases dramatically from Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers to High School teachers.

The gender breakdown for each teacher status is observable in *Table 1.4*. Corresponding with the age of the students, there is a steep increase in male teachers in the workforce from Pre-K and Kindergarten to High School, as the students get older. While male teachers make up almost 1/2 of the High School workforce, male teachers make up less than 1/5 of Elementary and Middle School workforce. Most surprisingly, there are less than 3% male Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers. This dominance of female teachers in the Pre-K and Kindergarten status represents the historically female dominated field those who teach young children.
Table 1.5: Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten</td>
<td>62.51%</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
<td>15.17%</td>
<td>5.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>78.99%</td>
<td>8.11%</td>
<td>8.86%</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>78.60%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
<td>8.35%</td>
<td>4.96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

Table 1.5: While the majority of the teacher workforce is white, Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers are the most diverse status of teachers.

In addition to gender diversity, the diversity of the races of the teachers also varies between statuses of teachers, growing less diverse as students get older. The races used in Table 1.5 are taken from the previously mentioned Brookings report on teachers using the American Community Survey (Hansen et al., 2017). Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers are the most diverse status of teachers.\(^3\)

Table 1.6: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K and Kindergarten</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary and Middle School</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey 2015

Table 1.6: Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers are usually younger than other statuses of teachers.

Finally, Table 1.6 demonstrates that the age of the teachers is slightly affected by the age of the students. In this sample, the average age for Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers was 38,

\(^3\) This may relate to the lower access to higher education for minorities. Unfortunately, that investigation is outside the scope of this analysis.
while the average age of Elementary, Middle School, and High School teachers was about 42. Just as in the case of gender and race, the statistically significant differences in ages between teacher statuses may explain some level of educational difference.

**Multinomial Logit Models: Education, Gender, Race, Age, and State**

A multinomial logit analysis suggests that there is predictive relationship between levels of higher education and teacher status. Regardless of gender, race, age, or state, those with less education are more likely to teach young children as a Pre-K or Kindergarten teacher than any other status of teacher.

A multinomial logit model controlling for education levels alone reveals those with less education are more likely to become Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers than any other status of teachers. If someone were to increase their educational level by gaining a higher degree, the multinomial logit odds of being a Pre-K and Kindergarten teacher decreases by 2.321261 a unit. This difference is statistically significant. However, this difference could be explained away by the social factors of gender, race, or age.

A multinomial logit model controlling for race, gender, and age reveals that the statistically significant differences between the likelihood of an individual with low education becoming an early childhood teacher compared to all other teacher statuses remains. After running the multinomial logit controlling for gender, race, and age, it is clear that the effect of education on teacher status diminishes slightly but persists. Thus, lower levels of education significantly predict that one will be a Pre-K and Kindergarten teacher, as opposed to another teacher status, regardless of their race, age, or gender. However, the literature also suggests that there is great variability between the early childhood education teacher policies in all states. Thus, this analysis must consider the effects of state policy on these demographics. Does the
state of residence affect the likelihood that individuals with lower levels of education will become a Pre-K and Kindergarten teacher, rather than any other status of teacher?

A third multinomial logit model accounting for gender, race, age, and state determined that the state of residence does not significantly explain away the finding that those with lower education levels are more likely to become Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers than Elementary, Middle School, or High School Teachers. In this case, if someone were to increase their educational level by gaining a higher degree, the multinomial logit odds of being a Pre-K and Kindergarten teacher decreases by 2.231107 a unit. These findings support the literature that all states set relatively low barriers to entry for teachers of young children, as compared to other statuses of teachers.

It is important to note that this finding does not minimize or decrease the value of the effects of gender or race on the workforce, rather it confirms that education level is a factor that structures the early childhood education workforce. The quantitative component of this analysis supports that higher education itself is an important social factor to explore when researching the early childhood education teacher workforce. The following policy scan will contextualize these findings and reveal the “access” for entrance into the field for teachers across all states.

**B: Policy Scan**

**Question:** What role do BA’s play in the various formalized barriers to entry for early childhood education teachers?

As shown in the quantitative study, individuals with less education are more likely to become teachers of young children than another status of teacher, regardless of gender, race, age, or state. One established explanation for this consistent trend is found in the “access” to the early childhood education workforce. In general, early childhood education centers have a lower level
of degree requirements for their teachers than most Elementary, Middle, or High schools in state’s K-12 system (Chandler, 2017). Outside of the objective differences between requirements for early childhood education teachers and other statuses of teachers, higher education plays a unique role in shaping the access to the early childhood education profession. As the quantitative analysis revealed, the state of residence of an individual is not an important factor in the likelihood of an individual with low levels of early childhood education to become an early childhood education teachers. Thus, this policy scan will intend to paint a national picture of the formalized educational requirements for early childhood education teachers using individual observations from a state-by-state analysis.

This policy scan intends to provide context for the important limitation of the American Community Survey linking Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers into the same teacher status. Previous policy scans show that Pre-K teachers are far less likely to need a BA to enter the classroom than Kindergarten teachers (Chandler, 2017). This difference beckons for further analysis to explore the specific policies governing early childhood education centers’ requirements for teachers, rather than Kindergarten teacher policies. This policy scan determines what role Bachelor’s degrees play in the formal requirements for a teacher’s initial entrance into an early childhood education classroom as a lead teacher. A lead teacher is the primary teacher in the early childhood education classroom. Before sharing the result of the analysis, it is important to note that these requirements vary in form and content for each state.

Documentation for staff policies use multiple names to describe similar elements of the early childhood education “non-system.” For example, some of the names of the documents refer to “early childhood,” while others refer to “day care” or even “preschool.” In most cases, the term “credential,” refers to one set of requirements that is necessary to complete before
becoming an early childhood education teacher (Whitebook et al., 2016). However, these credentials can include things like licenses, certifications, and endorsements (Gillentine, 2010; Schachter, 2015). When attempting to find cohesive trends in early childhood education policy documents, one must be intentional in deciphering the content of requirements, rather than the name. Licenses include the completion of a set of requirements, which usually include a background check, a complete immunization record, a certain level of training, and a certain amount of work in the classroom. These licenses are usually issued by the state (Kagan et al., 2008). Certifications are the completion of a set of requirements, which include coursework, fieldwork, exams, and observations. The most common certification is the Child Development Associates credential, which requires 120 hours of professional education in six core competencies and 480 hours of teaching hours in a classroom and includes observation, family questionnaires, and a national exam (Barnett, 2016). Endorsements are specializations in one specific area that can be added to a teaching license if enough coursework has been completed in that area. This analysis only focuses on the listed requirements of formalized education for initial entrance into the classroom.

This section analyzes the requirements for Bachelor degrees in the state licensing documents from the Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance database for early childhood education centers and the staffing requirements of state funded early childhood education programs from the NIEER’s State of Preschool Yearbook. After using a state-by state to gain a national understanding, this analysis surveys the changing requirements in the District of Columbia and Connecticut.
State Licensing Documents for Early Childhood Education Centers

Without a national system of early childhood education, state licensing is the most basic regulation for early childhood education centers in each state. Despite the unique framing and contents of every state’s licensing documents, the regulations arise from the common historical beginnings of early childhood education in America. As can be expected, the state licensing bodies must provide detailed documentation to regulate the many elements of the early childhood education non-system. For example, each state licensing body outlines the requirements for different settings like “Group Centers” and “Home Centers” in separate documentation. In addition, each document provides different entry requirements for the different role employed at the center, i.e. directors, lead teachers, assistant teachers, volunteers, and student workers. This scan focuses on the “lead teacher” requirements in the State Licensing Documents for Group Child Care Centers. It is important to note that this scan does not account for the individual decisions of each center, which may set higher standards. This scan simply represents a baseline of the minimum requirements.

In every state, lead early childhood teachers must meet a multitude of requirements before their entrance into the classroom. First and foremost, teachers must be of age to teach in an early childhood education classroom. Age requirements for teachers in the US range from 18-21 years old. Outside of age, lead teacher requirements include objective records, like status of health, criminal records, and educational requirements, and subjective qualities, like good character or love for the work. The hiring agents of the early childhood education centers are entrusted to assess the subjective candidate requirements. For example, Montana requires that teachers “have sufficient language skills to communicate with children and adults” and Nebraska requires that teachers have a “good moral character.” The initial requirements are difficult to
judge outside the basis of an interview. In addition to subjective requirements, most licensing
documents require that teachers produce documentation to support their fulfillment of objective
requirements, like negative results from a TB test or clear criminal records. The necessary
education and training of teachers is the most diverse objective requirement across the 50 states.
Although one might imagine that the barriers to entry are low, there are many ways to fulfill
these requirements.

As illustrated in the quantitative component of this research, states do not account for
much of the difference in early childhood education teacher’s education levels. For the most part,
there is the same low-level of educational training required for early childhood teachers across
all 50 states. In the current state licensing documents, no state requires that all lead teachers hold
a Bachelor’s degree. Thus, the variability in these requirements remains mostly in the way that
they can be fulfilled in every state. For example, in Washington state, the only requirement that a
teacher must complete is “a high school education or the equivalent; and documented child
development education or work experience.” However, most state licensing documents provide
multiple options to fulfill the educational requirements. These options may include a high school
degree or GED and a certain number of training courses, an Associate’s degree, or a Bachelor’s
degree. Most licensing documents use phrases like, “teachers must have one or more of the
following credentials,” in order to describe the options for entrance into the field. The extensive
mix and match of certifications, degrees, and course hours for Rhode Island teachers can be seen
below:
“A person who meets all the qualifications in one of the following options may assume the role of Teacher:

- **Option 1**: The individual holds a high school diploma with a vocational concentration in child care, and has two years supervised experience in a licensed/approved early childhood program.
- **Option 2**: The individual holds a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) certificate, and has three years supervised experience in a licensed/approved early childhood program.
- **Option 3**: The individual holds a CDA, and has one year supervised experience in a licensed/approved early childhood program.
- **Option 4**: The individual has completed 12 credits in early childhood education or field related to early childhood education from an accredited institution of higher education, and has at least three months supervised experience in a licensed/approved early childhood program.
- **Option 5**: The individual holds an associate's degree or higher in a field related to early childhood education, child development, human services or recreation from an accredited institution of higher education.”

Although no current state licensing document requires a BA for lead early childhood education teachers, it appears that this will not be the case for long. The District of Columbia recently increased their education requirements for all lead teachers (Chandler, 2017). In a policy produced by the DC’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the District mandated that all head teachers have at least an Associate’s degree in early childhood education or a related field or an Associate’s degree in an unrelated field with specialized credits in early childhood education by 2020 (Kvatum, 2017). This widespread policy may incite a shift in policy in other states. Although Bachelor’s degrees do not play a prominent role in the requirement for entry into a licensed early childhood education center at this time, the policy trends are shifting to require more education for teachers. This shift mirrors the actions being taken by states in their state funded programs.
State Funded Early Childhood Education Programs

The growth and development of state funded early childhood education programs represents a slight increase in the value of early childhood education in the states. Currently 43 states and the District of Columbia have devoted state funds to create early childhood education programs. Although these state programs must follow the minimum requirements of the state licensing documents, the states can also create additional requirements. Due to their provision of funds, these states set their own formalized education requirements for the lead teachers. In recent years these requirement for BA’s have increased. In 2008, 27 states programs required BA’s in “at least some of their state funded programs.” In 2014, this number rose to 33 states (Schilder, 2016). This analysis found that 34 states and the District of Columbia currently require a BA for at least some of their state funded programs. However, it is important to note that 5 states have this requirement only for their public programs and not their private programs, mirroring the policies that require public, but not private, K-12 teachers to have BA’s in most states.

In this scan, 27 of the BA-requiring states require that the lead teachers have specialized training in early childhood along with their degree program. The NAEYC recommends that teachers have a BA in/related to early childhood education to ensure quality (Schilder, 2016). It is outside the scope of this research project to consider the content and quality of the BA training that teachers receive; however, the practicums that a student experiences in an early childhood education related degree program usually encourages quality practice (Kagan et al., 2008). While education cannot be relied on to predict the quality of a program (Barnett, 2016), it especially important to be cognizant of the debate related to quality and BA’s when debating policy options.
Figure 3: BA Requirements in State Funded Early Childhood Education in America

Although it is important to note that every state is engaging these issues in their own policy sphere, Connecticut can be used as a case study as one of the states increasing early childhood education teachers’ higher education requirements.

The Case of Connecticut

Although not all of Connecticut’s current state funded early childhood education programs require a BA for lead teachers, the state is progressive in its policy initiatives for increasing higher education requirements. An initial policy change in the state required that all state funded early childhood teachers have a BA by 2015. However, when this requirement
became clearly unattainable due to teacher’s lack of time or money, the state pushed back the policy requirement to 2020. The final documentation states the following:

“On and after July 1, 2020, “staff qualifications” means that for each early childhood education program accepting state funds for infant, toddler and preschool spaces associated with such program’s child day care program or school readiness program, (i) **one hundred per cent of those individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children hold** (I) certification pursuant to section 10-145b with an endorsement in early childhood education or early childhood special education, or (II) **a bachelor’s degree with a concentration in early childhood education, child study, child development or human growth and development, from an institution of higher education** (1) accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or State Board of Education, and (2) regionally accredited, provided such bachelor’s degree program is approved by the Board or Regents for Higher Education and the Department of Education.”

-Excerpt from Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Administered State-Funded Program General Policy

Connecticut’s new policy emphasizes that teachers must not only have a BA, but also that a teacher’s BA must be related directly to early childhood. As seen in Table 1.3 in the quantitative analysis, most early childhood education teachers with BA’s do not have their degree in something related to education. This component of Connecticut’s policy aligns with the NAEYC recommendation for higher education requirements to focus on early childhood education related subjects.

As the higher education requirements of state funded early childhood education programs begin to mirror those of K-12 system, states may progress towards more degree requirements for licensed programs, as seen in the case of the District of Columbia. According to Posslet and Grodskey, this trend of increasing educational requirement for entrance into a profession can “serve as a manifest function of controlling professional quality.” This attempt at professionalization intends to improve the quality and public perception of the state’s early childhood education workforce. By speaking to teachers in Connecticut, I intended to learn more
about how the professionalization created by the BA degree requirements affects their “agency” to work in early childhood education in relation to the public perception of the profession.

C: Qualitative Interviews

To study the effects of higher education requirements on the American early childhood education workforce, one must consider the individuals comprising the workforce. As Connecticut has a progressive agendas for increasing the higher education requirements for early childhood educators, speaking with Connecticut early childhood education teachers is vital to understanding higher educations’ effects on the individual circumstances of agency. Initially, I set out with the intention to speak with 15 early childhood teachers solely about their experiences of higher education. However, each conversation ultimately led to a discussion contextualized by the public perception of early childhood education in America. It eventually became clear that it is impossible to discuss higher education’s effect on the early childhood education workforce without discussing the public perception of their workforce. Through the lenses of education policy and the sociological theory on professionalization, this analysis discusses teachers’ struggle to earn a Bachelor’s degree and the effects of the Bachelor’s degree on the public perception of the early childhood education workforce, quality of the workforce, and teacher’s agency to work in the field.

Sample

Of the fifteen teachers that I interviewed (see Table 2) two teachers had their Associate’s Degrees, six had their Bachelor’s Degrees, and seven had their Master’s Degrees. All teachers interviewed had their degree in education or a field related to early childhood education. Although only two teachers currently hold an Associate’s degree as their highest degree, eleven of these teachers began their higher education with this two-year degree. Within this sample,
most teachers experienced some form of lateral movement in degree attainment due to personal employment marketability or personal motivation. All of the movement from Associate’s degrees to Bachelor’s degrees can be attributed to the degree requirements of a current or future employer. These requirements may have been set by their place of employment or incited by the initial wave of Connecticut’s policy to increase the higher education requirements for state-funded programs. As viewed in our policy scan, the prominence of raising requirements at the state, rather than center, level is growing, but many centers set their own minimum requirements.

Table 2: Interview Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race as Described on a Census Form</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rose</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Child Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Samantha</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gwen</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Simone</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Teaching Art Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Stacy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Justina</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ellen</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Human development and early childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Grace</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Christina</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>General Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Aly</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Margaret</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Elementary Science, Elementary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Elena</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Bridget</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Elinor</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Urban Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AA= Associate’s  BA= Bachelor’s  MA=Master’s

What Bachelor’s Degrees Take

Requirements for higher forms of degrees inspired all lateral movement from Associate’s degree to a Bachelor’s degree for the teachers in the sample, but individual experiences surrounding these policies varied significantly, ranging from supportive to demanding. For
example, Samantha became employed at a new school with only an Associate’s degree under the contract that she would earn her Bachelor’s degree while she worked there. “When I took the position there, they said, we’ll take you with an Associate's, but you have to go back to school. So I went on and got my Bachelor's.” Unfortunately, this contract stipulated that she would not receive her full teacher salary until she earned her degree. “In that situation, I only got like a thousand dollar stipend…” Rose had a more severe introduction to a heightened degree requirement at a former place of employment. “If I wanted to keep my job, I needed to get my Bachelor's. That's what I was told.” Although she had earned various credits and credentials to keep her job at other programs like the YMCA, she had to go back to school to earn her BA in order to stay employed at this center. For others, like Grace, the higher education policies at their respective schools governed lateral growth as opposed to employment prospects. Although Grace has her Master’s today, she went back to school during her early years of employment to get her Bachelor’s, so that she could become a head teacher. Despite the variation of experiences, the need to earn a Bachelor’s degree was not an easy task for any of the teachers.

When policies requiring greater levels of higher education are enacted, teachers must carry the extra social and financial burden of gaining advanced degrees in order to stay employed. Given the fact that low pay, unreliable benefits, and job insecurity run rampant throughout the non-system of early childhood education, all teachers agreed that gaining a Bachelor’s degree was not an easy process. As Elinor stated, you still have to “have the resources to work in this field,” regardless if you are accruing extra costs from going back to school. As the teachers struggled to complete their degrees to keep their jobs, they continued raising families.

4 The responses to qualitative interview questions did not differ between demographic factors or school categories of teachers. Thus, they will not be referenced throughout the paper. For more information on their demographics, see Table 2.
and working second jobs. According to Margaret, they had to become masters of time management. “When the baby was sleeping, I was able to do my reading, do all my school work. And at night too, when she was sleeping, I was able to do that.” For many, like Jen, the loss of time with family was even harder without a partner to share the burden. “You’re putting food on the table. You’re getting yourself to and back from work. It becomes a struggle.” Rose agreed:

“I’m a single mom, so yeah, I had to do everything at night. Listen, it was really hard.”

-Rose

In addition, these teachers had to find extra sources of income to support their family and support their degree program tuition. For Samantha, the salary for her early childhood education teaching job was too little to subsist on, much less pay tuition for a Bachelor’s degree program. In order to earn her degree, Samantha worked a second job as a waitress for eleven years. Grace shared that she had to work at “Olympus Bagel” in order to put herself through school before figuring out a payment plan for her Bachelor’s degree program. The struggle to pay for a BA was nearly universal, as receiving funding for one’s degree is difficult, especially as a returning student. Two teachers, Bridget and Gwen, had the opportunity to have their degrees financed by outside sources, but they recognized the rarity of this experience. Gwen shared, “I was very lucky at that time.” For all other teachers, the financial burden to earn these degrees left them in debt.

Although most teachers had already earned their BA’s, two teachers in the sample, Aly and Elena, were currently working on earning their Bachelor’s degrees. Both Aly and Elena had earned their Associate’s degree as their highest level of education, but recognized the value of the policy in earning a Bachelor’s degree. Elena shared, “I think it's important to keep learning because there's so many new things developing and new things that we can bring into the
classrooms, so I think that is very important.” However, as both teachers worked in a state-funded program, the teachers expressed concerns about the deadline to earn their degrees by 2020 in order to keep their jobs. Despite Aly’s initial support of the policy, she expressed frustration with the raising requirements when it came down to a personal level, saying frankly, “I don’t have the time or the money.” She also expressed doubts that the state would hold true to its promise. “They say you need a Bachelor’s degree, but I don’t think they’ll kick me out. They know I’m working for it.” She had good reason to support this idea. The initial date for this requirement was pushed back 5 years from 2015 to 2020, and many teachers were even confused by the policy. Samantha expressed confusion about the changing policies when describing her own career trajectory:

“I took a position because of the Connecticut requirement of the 2020 ... Or was it 2015... I think ... You know, they change it so many times. And many people didn’t ... It is a huge debate because many people didn't go on to do it.

-Samantha

The 14 teachers with BA’s or higher would not be affected by Connecticut’s requirement for all teachers to earn BA’s by 2020, regardless of their place of employment, but they expressed uncertainty of the effect of this policy on their peers. Jen shared that so many of these policies depend on the center where the teacher works and its connection to the state. “It depends on where you are working and what their constraint is. If you are within the state, they’ve got constraints that we have to follow.” Jen’s choice of the word constraint revealed a common underlying belief. Among the workforce, Bachelor’s degree requirements are often viewed as limiting factors, rather than advancements for the field. It was clear that while this policy appeared to be a good idea for the workforce, it was difficult to achieve on the individual level.

Unfortunately, the teacher’s experiences and stories did not support the narrative in which degrees of higher education increase one’s status in society (Posslet & Grodsky, 1988;
Rather than earning cultural capital, and its social and financial benefits, teachers merely got to keep their job or earn an insignificant bump in pay after graduating with a BA. In this sense, the teachers do not gain individual the societal benefits of their Bachelor’s degrees, as another individual might gain in another field. The unique circumstances of the early childhood education field may be explained by the lack of public value of early childhood education in America. The negative public perception of the workforce may discount any opportunity for an increase in cultural capital for the individual teacher. Bridget elaborated on this further. “I completed the program, which was horrible. It was terrible, terrible, terrible with working full-time, and having two kids, and it being online, and eight-week modules, but I did it. And it's done.” Thus, many teachers, like Bridget, view Bachelor’s degrees as something they just have to get done in order to remain employed.

*What Bachelor’s Degrees Change*

Comments on the public perception of early childhood education workforce implicitly and explicitly contextualized the teachers’ relationships to higher education. When discussing the struggles connected to earning a BA, most teachers shared that the low value for the early childhood education profession in America added to their hardship. Raising higher education requirements can be viewed as a method for increasing the professionalization of the early childhood education workforce. Currently low-pay, low education requirements, and inconsistent regulations represent the lack of professionalization within the field. The lack of respect for early childhood education by the public is both a symptom and signifier of this absence of professionalization.

When prompted to think about how others, including parents or policymakers, perceived the work of early childhood educators, every teacher responded with one word, “Babysitting.”
Aly continued the statement, “Yes. I'm sure you're hearing that from everybody.” As Rose said, “I don't think there's a lot of appreciation anymore. It's changing. A lot of my colleagues are seeing this too. This year, honestly, I have to say I really feel like I'm a babysitter.” According to Stacy, “it's rare when you come across people who appreciate the quality of early childhood education,” whether it’s a parent or policymaker. The teachers recognize that this lack of value is not exclusive to early childhood education, but feel that the lack professionalization of the early childhood education field is greater than other teacher statuses. One teacher shared her frustrations with policymakers’ lack of ability to categorize early childhood teachers in an education system. “They don't really know what to do with [early childhood] teachers. They don't know how to qualify them. What group do you put them in? Do you put them with the janitors?”

The lack of professionalization of the early childhood education workforce has incited many teachers’ closest supporters to negatively perceive the field. As Gwen said, “My dad said, "There's no money in that, what are you doing that for?" Cause he was an accountant.” When immersed in this negative environment, self-doubt often comes into play. One teacher shared that despite a previous love for early childhood education, she doubted her own value at the beginning of her entrance into the profession. “When I first started teaching here, I found myself being like, "Yeah, I work in an early childhood department ... ", but I muffled that part of what I do. I, myself, I think wasn't confident enough to say it.” Another teacher shared that she hoped that her own daughter would not enter into the field of early childhood education, saying “its thankless.”

With matter of fact stares and shrugging shoulders, each teacher expressed their experiences of the low public perception of the workforce. Grace shared, “I mean, here from the
government and the policymakers, and even from the top it's not that valued. I mean, they're beginning to put some kind of value in terms of training teachers, but….” Her voice trailed off. Despite the current lack of professionalization in the field, would increasing the degree requirements raise the public perception of the early childhood education workforce?

Value through Validation

Sociological literature reveals that raising degree requirements can aid in professionalization of a workforce, which in turn can raise the public perception of that workforce. When posed with a question of higher degree requirements’ direct effect on public perception, some teachers cited this literature, claiming degrees would move the early childhood education workforce up in the “hierarchy of teaching” statuses. However, the teachers who agreed with this statement seemed to rely more on hope than true belief. “I think it would help. Yeah,” said Justina. Stacy replied similarly, “I think so. I mean, you would hope. Sorry.” For Justina, the “yeah” at the end of her declaration wavered like an attempt to convince herself of her own statement. For Stacy, the “sorry” at the end of her answer echoed with her own disappointment. Logically, as the literature claims, heightening degree requirements should professionalize the workforce and thus raise the public perception. However, her “sorry” indicated that the facts seemed to discount this narrative. Stacy wanted to say that degree requirements would be enough to change the historical negative opinion of early childhood education, but all she could say was “sorry.”

Other teachers explicitly echoed the lack of belief in the ability of higher education to professionalize the workforce. Gwen stated, “I still think most people … it wouldn't make a difference. I wouldn't say most people … a majority of people, it wouldn't make a difference.” She shared an anecdote of a principal of a school calling her “the daycare lady” even after
getting her BA, “Now [she was] an educated person, who had a doctorate in education, and I was the “daycare lady.” Rose agreed:

“I think it's gonna take a long time before you're gonna improve the way that people are looking at professionals in early childhood. It's gonna take a long time. I don't know if it's ever gonna get done. I don't think very many realize that this is the start. You have to give them a fair chance, like a running chance, and this is the start. It's all hands on deck because they're so young.”

-Rose

To counter act these negative perceptions, the teachers all shared that they must act “as professional as they can be" at all times. Thus, teachers must act in highly professional ways (Kagan et al., 2008) without consistently receiving professional respect. Often, this results in explaining the value of their work to teachers. Ellen shared that one of her biggest mentors reminded her to be professional. She went on to say that part of doing this was to “proving what we do.” Rose explained how she often has to explain the value of her work to parents.

“I mean like I've had to explain to parents the importance of their child's playing in blocks, because they thought it was stupid, and said it out loud in my classroom, so then I had to go into my spiel about how it teaches number concepts, and math concepts, and these are unit blocks and they're gonna learn how many of these smaller single blocks make a quadruple. We're doing fractions and stuff over here, it's not stupid. They're learning balance and stability while they're stacking blocks on top of one another. That's problem solving and higher order thinking.”

-Rose

To improve public perception, teachers spoke more frequently about raising the public’s understanding of the value of their work, than raising their peer’s higher education degree requirements. Many teachers cited the lack of knowledge about the importance of early childhood education as one reason behind the low public perception of the field. The teachers insisted that both parents and policymakers must close their gaps in knowledge in order to see any real change. Rose said, “I know parents have work schedules, and they have to be places and
this and that, but they also have to understand that this is where their kids are getting the basics
and the concepts that they need to go on.” In some cases, the lack of knowledge among the
public included an ill-informed administration. Gwen shared that a former administrator told her,
"well, preschool isn't necessary,” throughout her time of employment. Yet, Simone shared that
when a new principal in her school learned about the importance of the work, she began to value
the early childhood education teachers more.

“She was just like, "You know, I really did not ... I really admit that I thought it was
going to be easier dealing with the little kids. This is hard work." I think a lot of people still view
it as just cutting and pasting, just playing. We play, we have a great time, but we're doing a lot of
serious work.”

-Simone

According to Abbott, an understanding of the importance of a workforces’ work is crucial
to the professionalization of that field. The lack of knowledge of the importance of early
childhood education may explain the lack of professionalization, and resulting low public
perception, of early childhood education in America. In “Systems of Professions”, Abbott writes
that professions operationalize specific types of knowledge to address or fulfill “human problems
amenable to expert service” (Abbott, 1988). Therefore, a profession must work to fulfill a
publicly recognized “human need.” Unfortunately, most people in the American public do not
actively value the importance of early learning. As the public does not perceive early childhood
education as fulfilling a key issue in America, the subsequent low levels of education required
for early childhood education teachers are a symptom of the lack of professionalization of the
field. Although the American public does not appear to fully understand the “human problem”
fulfilled by early childhood education, the teachers do.

Regardless if others’ recognition of the importance of early childhood education
increases public perception, the teachers’ recognition of their own work is vital to the
functioning of the workforce. After depicting comments of a negative public perception, most teachers began speaking about the value of their work. Gwen says, “When I first began, people really didn't think it was very important, there wasn't as much research as there is now, and now I've kind of become an advocate for the importance for quality education.” Samantha echoed this sentiment:

*I think when I first started doing it...people would always look at it as babysitting, and I would get frustrated. But I thought, when they're little, we are doing so many things. We are the first people that teach them how to hold a pencil, teach them how to use scissors, or ... And if we don't do it properly, it affects them later on, because they develop bad habits. So I think being the first to kind of teach kids and help them ... And develop their self-regulatory skills that are necessary for them as they move on into that elementary part of their life, it's really important.*

-Samantha

Christina reminds herself of the importance of her work every day. “You're making differences in so many people's lives. It could be a family. It could be the child. It's just the little things that'll be rewarding.”

**Quality through Experience**

Heightened degree requirements as a tool of professionalization may also increase the quality of the workforce. When asked if early childhood education could improve teacher quality, some teachers cited the studies showing that greater levels of higher education of the teacher can improve the quality of the entire classroom. While every teacher agreed that every teacher needed a strong base of theory and knowledge, a few teachers specifically noted that higher education requirements ought to be focused on education related topics in order to truly have an effect. Justina said, “Yeah. I think it's important for people to study education if they're going to go into education.” Despite this generally positive response, most teachers immediately talked about their observation experience from the degree program. As Elinor shared “experience goes hand and hand with degrees.”
For the most part, teachers shared that their experience in a classroom raised the quality of their work. Whether as a part of their degree program or another job, experience made them feel most prepared to provide high quality care in a classroom. For many teachers, they needed experience to realize they actually loved the work. Gwen shared that her love for young children was cemented by her observations during her BA degree program.

“When I would go into classrooms and have to do field work, the teachers said, "You're doing such a good job," and, "I never thought of this, I like the way you're talking to them," and it was before I really had any training in it. It seemed to come very natural to me. And that kind of just snowballed for me.”

-Gwen

Justina said being in a classroom allowed her to put her studied knowledge into practice. Thus, experience is one of the most important factors for improving quality because it “makes you feel more capable.” Bridget agreed, “They can teach us all of the theories and all of the stuff that backs why we do what we do, and why we follow what we follow, but until you're in a classroom, and you're actually doing it, you can't really even begin to understand it.” Aly, who had expressed approval for most teachers earning BA’s in early childhood education and disapproval for the mandate to earn her own Bachelor’s degree, believed her experience was the exact reason why she did not need a degree. Although she only has her Associates, she stated, “I don’t think that I need a BA to do what I’m doing right now. I have had all this experience.”

Despite the low barriers to entry for early childhood educators, the system has clearly valued higher education degrees more than experience for quite some time. When Elinor was just out of college, she worked as an assistant teacher with someone who was many years her senior in experience. When the lead teacher retired, Elinor earned the promotion to lead teacher, despite the more senior assistant teacher also applying for the job. In this case, Elinor had the necessary degree requirements to assume the role, while the other assistant teacher did not. “There was
something unsettling about it,” shared Elinor after telling me about the instance. “It’s just so clear that you don’t have to have a degree to be a great [early childhood] teacher.”

*What Bachelor’s Degrees Give*

Despite the inability of Bachelor’s degrees to affect the public perception of early childhood education, Bachelor’s degrees programs enhanced teachers’ dedication to the field. Two patterns about the experience of earning a Bachelor’s degree arose in every interview: (1) a pre-existing internal value for early childhood education before entering the field or higher education and (2) a strong presence of mentorship during their higher education program.

Every teacher valued early childhood education as a profession prior to joining the workforce. This is unique to early childhood education. Outside of fulfilling the requirements to be in a classroom, Jen shared that there must be something else within a teacher that keeps them in the system. “Early childhood education is not for everybody. If you don’t have it in you, then you shouldn’t be here. If you can’t motivate yourself, you shouldn’t be here.” The teachers’ value systems for early childhood education developed in a variety of ways, including family experiences, personal growth, or poignant moments. One of the most popular reasons for finding value in early childhood education was a family member’s involvement in the field. Rose discussed her mom being an early childhood teacher and going through the process of earning higher education degrees. “Education is really important in my family. She was working on her masters when my brother was two, so I can remember, I’m only two years older than my brother, but I can remember having to go to my grandmother's house because my mom had class.” For Samantha, her mother’s lack of ability to enter the workforce sparked her interest in the field. She spoke of watching her mother have to stay home with her siblings to take care of them, rather than entering into the workforce.
“Moms need to be able to go to work, and they need to be able to leave their children. And that's really kind of why I went in the field. I really felt that I wanted to help working moms be able to leave their children and have peace of mind that they were gonna be in a safe place.”

-Samantha

Many teachers also shared fond memories of being around small children throughout their lives. “I'm the oldest in my family, I'm the oldest grandchild on both sides of the family, so I've always been around little kids,” shared Samantha. Margaret remembers her mom “hiring her” to be her sister’s teacher. “Whatever I learned, I will come home and then I'll teach my sister. So now my sister is a math teacher in co-op in New Haven.” Rather than analyzing a pattern of her childhood, Grace cites one very specific moment from her travels to school as a young child that began her value for early childhood education.

“There was this little girl [and} she looked like she was I don't know, malnourished or whatever it is, but she was always sitting by herself, and not doing anything, and so I kind of have empathy on her and ever since then I'm like, I want to take care of children. I want to help children, you know? That's how it started with me.”

-Grace

The value that each teacher held for early childhood education before entering the field or completing their degree is an important aspect of their agency to join the field. It is important to note that the Bachelor’s degree programs exposed these teachers to the practical, academic, and scientific knowledge, which supported their values. Although studying the content of these Bachelor’s Degree programs is outside the scope of this research, the programs gave these teachers the opportunity to learn more about something they previously valued. In addition, the Bachelor’s degrees programs often provided the teachers with mentors as consistent supports of their work.
Mentors

The mentors that teachers met during their Bachelor’s degree programs had a significant effect on their agency to join in the field. Some teacher mentors were their professors, while other teacher’s mentors were the classroom teachers at their observations sites. Regardless, all mentor relationships arose from the teachers’ degree programs. For Gwen, her degree program provided her with incredible mentorship. “They had a really supportive education leadership staff who really kind of pushed me.” Ellen shared a similar sentiment, “I feel like I've been in the right place at the right time so many times. I came from this great background where I got to work one on one with a core mentor there and I had all these wonderful professors.” Stacy met her mentor during the experiential part of her degree program.

I think that's a really wonderful method. Being in a classroom with really educated teachers that love their job, love what they do, are good at it and enjoy passing down that knowledge for future generations of teachers to have quality educators in schools.”

-Stacy

The support of the teachers’ mentors often motivates the teachers to work in the field. “I remember walking at the ceremony and having my teachers stand for me, and clap for me, and really show me how proud they were of the work I did” shared Bridget. It was clear that mentors do not only support those interested in teaching through their degree program, but also bolster their internal value system for the field. Jen shared “You see all these strong women in positions of power that gives you motivation. They were strong in their identities and what they do they were the role models that were in front of you that look like you.”

For early childhood education teachers who have faced the burden of completing a Bachelor’s degree program, concrete knowledge improved their pre-existing value for the profession and mentoring experiences in the classroom motivated them to continue to work in this difficult field. For many teachers, this cemented their commitment to the field. Samantha
stated, “So, that's why ... I never considered, ever for a moment, anything else.” Grace echoed her sentiment, sharing that earning her higher degree solidified her motivation to work in early childhood. “It was just like my mind was made up to be in the field, you know what I mean?” However, some teachers viewed getting a BA as an opportunity to leave behind the negative component of early childhood education workforce, citing the pay or the low level of lateral movement. Elena shared that “The hard part is lateral, [there is] not a lot of lateral movement. So, with Elementary there's more lateral movement, there's more job openings versus early childhood, which you can do and you can work in. You're just not going to ... keep going. You kind of stay plateaued for a while.” Elena’s theories are legitimate. Despite earning a Bachelor’s degree, the teachers still lack the cultural capital of a professional role in society. This incites teachers to transition to spaces where their degree will provide them cultural capital in the form of respect or finances. Rose said, “Since I've gotten a bachelor's of science under my belt, I’ve started looking at grad programs, I'm looking.” Elinor supported this choice to move away from the field, sharing that this motivation and love for the field is good, but sometimes not enough. “It will always be the right thing to do, but people need to make a worthy wage. Degrees may validate the profession to the outside world, but they also have to validate it for yourself.”

Next Steps

Earning a Bachelor’s degree on the schedule and salary of an early childhood education teacher is difficult. However, for those who have completed this feat, the higher education experience supported their pre-existing value of the field and afforded them valuable classroom experience. From these teachers’ perspectives, raising higher education degree requirements fails to professionalization goals that it sets out to accomplish. As Stacy stated, “There's just this cycle and it kind of needs to start ... we need to rethink. We're training these teachers. Let's think of
more practical ways for teachers to get into schools, to educate, to get the degrees they need to have to properly care for and educate children at this age. It's critical.” To raise public perception and quality, teachers cite an understanding of the knowledge of the field and more experiences for pre-service teachers in the classroom, rather than higher degree requirements.

While most teachers believed that BA’s would have little effect on the public perception of the American early childhood education workforce, Elinor argued that the policy to increase higher education degree requirements might work above the level of individual teachers. The requirement to earn a Bachelor’s degree places the burden of professionalization on the individual teachers without providing any benefit of enhanced cultural capital. However, over time, the entire workforce may benefit from the aggregate of teacher’s individual Bachelor degrees, professionalizing the field. Although this may take a long time, Elinor noted the important power of raising the higher education requirements. “I think you have to change the public perception with policy. You have to make the investment.” Elinor called raising the requirements a “step in the right direction.”

While formalized education requirements often provide support to early childhood education teachers through experience and mentorship, raising the requirements asks individual teachers to take on the burden of professionalizing the workforce as a whole. Despite the hardship of earning degrees, some teachers, like Bridget, recognize their unique positioning in this change.

“This is a growing field. It's a wonderful field, but it's a struggle. I always say to myself, I feel like I'm in the middle ... not the middle. Maybe the beginning, or a little bit towards the middle of this developing thing. And by the time I'm retired, I'm gonna look back and be like, "Wow. I was part of this grand movement in early childhood education." And watching it evolve from what it was even 10 years ago when I started to now, it's amazing. It's incredible.”

- Bridget
The low levels of higher education in the early childhood education workforce both reflect and reproduce the lack of professionalization of the workforce, so Bachelor’s degrees may provide critical change to the professionalization of early childhood education in the years ahead.

**Part VI: Conclusion**

The early childhood education workforce is the key factor to the success of early childhood education in America. Through their work, early childhood education teachers play a vital role in supporting the development of children, the operation of families, and the strength of the economy in American society. Unfortunately, the early childhood education workforce remains structurally undervalued by the public. Stemming from historically stigmatized and gendered work of caring for young children, the lack of value for the early childhood education workforce materializes in small salaries, limited requirements of formalized education, and low levels of respect from parents and administrators. Due to this lack of professionalization, the early childhood education workforce suffers from a negative public perception.

Structurally, if education is to be used as a measure of professional validity (Abbott, 2008), increased formalized education requirements may professionalize the American early childhood education workforce. To unpack this professionalization, this analysis investigated the current effects of higher education, specifically the attainment of Bachelor’s degrees, on individual early childhood education teachers and the workforce as a whole. Through a three-part method, this analysis explored the national demographics of the early childhood education workforce, the access that individuals have to enter the workforce, and their agency for doing so.

First, this analysis determined that low levels of higher education are a unique factor of the early childhood education workforce. Using American Community Survey data, this analysis
revealed a natural structuring of education levels across teacher statuses in which people with less education are more likely to teach young children. Although race and gender affect the workforce of early childhood education, the trends of lower levels of education in Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers persists despite these other factors. This finding implied that the early childhood teachers’ levels of education must be affected by policy or personal motivation. Following this discovery, this analysis explored the policies governing the “access” into the field of early childhood education workforce.

Next, this analysis confirmed that early childhood education policies have supported the historically low level of education in the early childhood education workforce through limited formalized education requirements; however, it also outlined a shifting trend toward raising higher education requirements. An overview of state licensing policy in all 50 states revealed that no state has ever required a lead teacher to hold a Bachelor’s degree to teach in an early childhood education center. Despite this pattern’s continuation today, state funded programs, a more recent development in the support of early childhood education, revealed a trend of BA requirements for early childhood education teachers. 34 states required BA’s for their teachers in at least some of their early childhood education programs. The District of Columbia’s new state licensing policy and Connecticut’s new state funded center policy represented an increase in higher educational requirements on the licensing and state-funded program level. Due to this trend, the effect of higher education on teachers’ “agency” to work in the field needed to be analyzed.

Finally, this analysis determined the complexities of the relationships between higher education requirements, individual teachers, and the professionalization of the workforce as a whole. While earning a BA was a burden for all teachers, the experiences of the Bachelor’s
degree programs reconfirmed their existing beliefs in the value of the field and provided them with strong mentors. The knowledge, experiences and mentors that they gained from their BA programs were some of the key elements that convinced early childhood education teachers to stay in the field despite the continuous low public perception. In order to professionalize the field as a whole, teachers cited other factors, like knowledge about the effects of early childhood education and experiences within classrooms, to raise the public perception and quality of the field. Although teachers did not feel that their Bachelor’s degrees provided them with any benefit of increased cultural capital individually, the effects of these policies for the workforce may not accrue for many years to come. Overt time the increase in Bachelor’s degree in the field of early childhood education may incite the public to view early childhood education teachers as using “specialized skills” to solve a unique human need (Abbott, 1998). These findings have implications for both education and sociological studies.

This analysis provides important implications for teacher-centered early childhood education policy intended to professionalize the field. First, policymakers must acknowledge the burden that earning a BA places on teachers and provide infrastructure that supports their dedication to their degree programs. Next, policymakers must work to increase the public knowledge of the importance of early childhood education. In this analysis, all of the teachers in the sample held a deep value for early childhood education prior to entering the workforce. Finally, policymakers must be require that higher education degrees focus on a field related to early childhood education. The benefits of Bachelor’s degree programs, i.e. content knowledge, observational classroom experience, and early childhood education mentors, are directly related to the fact that the teachers in the sample were studying the early childhood education field.

Although these implications must be investigated further to offer policy recommendations, these
observations form a basis on which to build stronger formalized education policy for early childhood education teachers.

In addition, this analysis provides important implications for the field of the sociology of professions. First, this analysis demonstrates that special consideration must be taken when studying the professionalization of a field dominated by women. Due to historical, social and cultural factors devaluing women’s work, degrees of higher education in fields dominated by women may not hold as much cultural capital as degrees in fields dominated by men. Attempting to professionalize “women’s work” through degrees may not engage the benefits of cultural capital in the same way as in other fields. Next, in order for the public to recognize the legitimacy of the early childhood education workforce, more information must be disseminated on the importance of early childhood education. Although early childhood educators value their work, they all had a pre-existing value for the work before entering the field. By understanding the early childhood education’s role in society, the public may gain a higher perception of the workforce. This value may result in structural indications of value, like higher salaries and more respect for the workforce or census questions that differentiate between early childhood teachers and Kindergarten teachers. Finally, the increase of higher education requirements varies for the individual teachers and the workforce as a whole. Despite the limited increase in cultural capital for individuals, an aggregate of Bachelor’s degrees in the early childhood education workforce may professionalize the workforce over time. Thus, individual teachers must remain committed to the field and dedicated to earning Bachelor’s degrees in order for the workforce to gain cultural capital through professionalization.

This analysis beckons for a great deal of further research in the field of education policy and sociology. First, in order to fully understand how higher education affects the workforce, the
sample of this study should be expanded. As the sample of this analysis only consists of current early childhood education teachers, the expanded analysis should include teachers who had to leave early childhood education due to their lack of desire or ability to earn their degree. Furthermore, an even more extensive study could include teachers who chose to move to the K-12 system after earning their Bachelor’s degree. This expanded analysis would provide more knowledge into how the lack of cultural capital received by early childhood education teachers with or without a degree affects their societal position. A second extension of the research would create and disseminate a survey to the American public about their perceptions of early childhood education and their conception of its importance in American society. Unlike surveys in the past, this survey would focus on structural indications of value, like how they interact with or support the early childhood education workforce. Thus, both sociologists and education policymakers would gain a more solid foundation for creating strategies to increase the public perception of early childhood education as solving a unique human need. A final extension of this research would explore the inter-generational model of teacher training in early childhood education. Most teachers cited mentors as one of the most concrete supports for their work in this field. When I was interviewing within classrooms, I noticed that the most senior teaching staff most frequently interacted with the younger future teachers. It would be interesting to study how the relationship complicates or validates the process of professionalization, in regards to historical norms and changing policy trends, in the early childhood education field.

Early childhood education teachers’ low levels of education both reflect and reproduce the lack of professionalization in the early childhood workforce. This lack of professionalization is the confluence of historical norms surrounding early childhood education and policy trends of low levels of formalized education requirements for the workforce. Raising the higher education
requirements of early childhood education teachers may not directly affect the cultural capital of the individuals in the workforce at this time; however, this trend may symbolize a growing value of early childhood education in America. Regardless of professionalization or public perception, early childhood education teachers trust in their personal understanding of the value of their work. This value sustains them through the struggles of low salaries and little public respect in order to support the children and families of America—all while earning Bachelor’s degrees “for the profession and for ourselves.”
Appendix: Glossary of Key Terms

Access: the formalized educational requirements that teachers must earn in order to work in a classroom.

Agency: the motivation to work in an early childhood education space regarding higher education experience

Certifications: the completion of a set of requirements including coursework, fieldwork, exams, and observations; most common certification is the Child Development Associates credential, which requires 120 hours of professional education in six core competencies and 480 hours of teaching hours in a classroom and includes observation, family questionnaires, and a national exam; issued by a certification program, like NAEYC. (Barnett, 2016).

Early Childhood Education: Education and care for children age 3-5

Early Childhood Education Center: a center located outside of a home that provides care and education for children age 3-5 in a group based setting

Early Childhood Education Lead Teacher: someone who provides care and education for children age 3-5 in a center

Endorsements: specialization or focus in an area that can be added to a teaching license if enough coursework has been completed; determined by licensing body

Licenses: the completion of a set of requirements including a background check, a complete immunization record, a certain level of training, and a certain amount of work in the classroom; issued by the state (Kagan et al., 2008)

Professionalization: the attempt to transform a workforce into “an occupational group with some special skill” (Abbott, 1998)


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