



Chaudry, A., Morrissey, T., Weiland, C., & Yoshikawa, H. (2017). *Cradle to kindergarten: A new plan to combat inequality*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

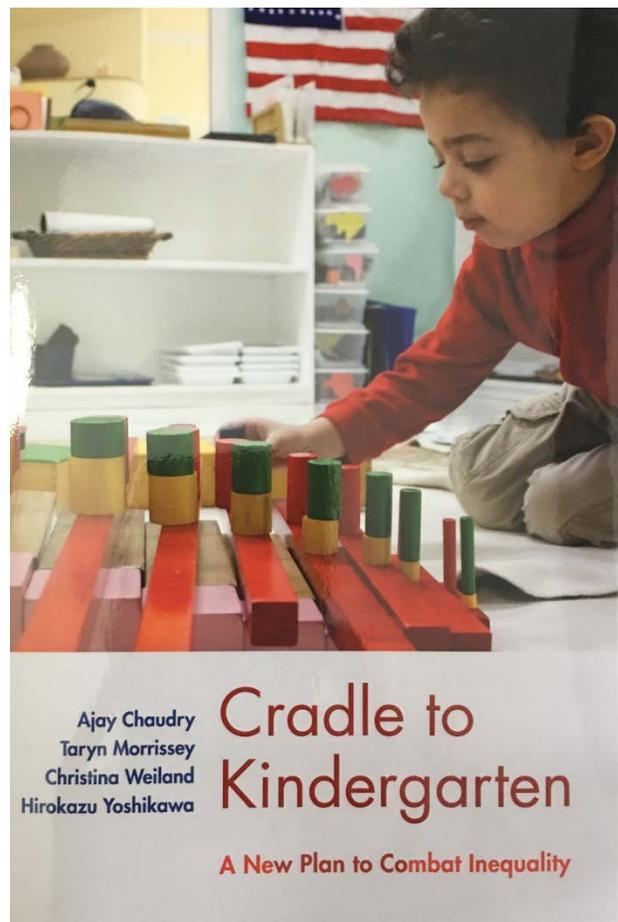
Pp. 230

ISBN: 978-0871545572

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For many families, locating affordable, quality childcare can be an overwhelming and daunting experience. According to Laughin (2013) 61% of children under the age of 5 spent time in childcare in 2011. Despite dramatic increases in programs of early care and education including home-based childcare programs, disparities remain in the availability and quality of childcare services at state and county levels (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In the book *Cradle to Kindergarten: A new plan to combat inequality*, the authors propose a comprehensive, evidence and research-based strategic plan to expand access to quality, affordable programs for low and middle-income families with children birth to pre-kindergarten.

The authors, A. Chaudry, T. Morrissey, C. Weiland, and H. Yoshikawa, contend that affordable quality care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry is achievable. The plan was developed on the foundation of five principles: “tackle



disparities in both access and quality, ...support both children's early learning and parents' employment, ...support parents' own choices for nurturing their children's early development, ...accords a central role of equality of opportunity to learning and education, [and]...supporting children's developmental needs in the early years is a shared private and public responsibility" (p. 16). Using these principles as a foundational guide, the authors crafted a plan comprised of four components to unify and expand the current fragmented systems of subsidies and services available to low and middle-income families. The authors noted, "we propose an integrated set of national and state policies that can support families in nurturing their children's learning and development to promote not only their children's long-term success but also our nation's" (p. 10). The plan consists of paid parental leave for both mother and father; affordable, high-quality care and education with particular efforts to expand into communities currently underserved such as rural and inner city communities; universal preschool; and transitioning Head Start into Early Head Start, providing services for children birth to age 3.

The book begins with poignant stories of families struggling to find consistent, affordable, high-quality childcare. Stories document families struggling to find affordable quality care for flexible working or school schedules, the financial impact of unpaid leave from work due to pregnancy, and finding childcare for all children in the same household at the same provider. One mother shared her story of returning to work a mere seven days after the birth of her child (p. 19). Following each story, the authors present well-organized, research- and evidence-based arguments for each component of the plan (i.e., paid parental leave, affordable quality childcare, universal quality preschool, and transitioning Head Start to Early Head Start). A chapter is devoted to each of the four components of the proposed plan providing

an overview of the gap in childcare services; the need to fill the gap; the benefits to the child, family, and other systems such as the economy, and workforce; cost and funding of the plan component; and advantages and limitations of the proposed component. The final chapter includes a summary of the entire plan, the projected number of families that would benefit from the plan, and a course of action to phase in the plan over 10 years. The book ends with a 10-page summative table in the appendix.

Unpaid leave for the care of a new child disproportionately impacts lower-income families and forces many parents to return to work earlier than parents with higher incomes. Under the proposed component, paid parental leave would provide a total of 16 weeks of paid leave to be used within the first year after birth "or care of a new child"—eight weeks for maternal leave, four weeks for paternal leave, and an additional four weeks for either parent (p. 30). Inclusive language recognizes the diversity of today's family systems, noting "maternity leave, paternity leave, or gender-neutral leave" and allows for paid leave for "care of a new child (pp. 30-31), which includes birth, adoption, or care of other proximal or distal children. Paid parental leave would guarantee wage replacement rates of up to 80% for lower-income families. Families would also have the added option of combining paid leave with Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for up to 24 weeks of maternal leave, of which only 12 would be paid. Eligibility and payment would be tracked through modifications of the current Social Security system, the cost of which would be partially offset through increased employee taxes, federal funds, and a proposed delayed retirement of the child or parent.

Affordable quality childcare would be accomplished through combining the Child Care and Dependent Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Social Services Block Grants into one system, Assuring Care and Education for Young

Children (ACE). Under ACE, subsidies would offset the cost of childcare, high-quality preschool, and after-school programming for children birth to age 13, capping qualifying families to paying no more than 10% of their total annual income on childcare. The authors also propose an expansion of the Child and Dependent Care Tax credits, which could be refunded to the family to pay for childcare. The plan would increase the tax credit from \$3000 to \$6000 for children under the age of five, and \$6000 to \$9000 for families with more than one dependent. Annual family incomes of \$60,000-\$105,000 would receive subsidies computed at a decreasing sliding scale rate. The federal government would provide 80% of the funds and states would provide 20%.

Another component of the plan would be the expansion of universal quality preschool for children ages 3 to prekindergarten entry 5 at the state or school district level. The plan would provide 11 months of full-day service for children ages 3-5 and would include therequirement for all states to provide full-day kindergarten. As envisioned by the authors, universal preschools would become community hubs linked to community schools providing comprehensive family services and resources by highly trained, and educated professionals, many at the master's level. Alignment of curriculum and standards between preschool programs and K-12 schools would provide smooth transitions between programs as well as provide continuity of services for children and their families. Quality preschool and early childhood experiences would be achieved with increased educational and ongoing professional development requirements for early childhood educators (including ongoing coaching by a master's level professional in the field), adherence to national quality standards, and the development of a national quality rating system to monitor programs and track child outcomes.

The final component of the plan is the transition of current Head Start programs to Early Head Start (EHS) programs. The authors noted "yet with a patchwork of early care and education policies that are even more threadbare than programs for preschool-age children and their families, this period [prenatal to first 1000 days] is the least consistently supported in the United States" (p. 125). EHS programs would also serve as community hubs for educators for professional development, and service providers such as mental health, addiction, and smoking cessation services, providing services for children and their families. Head Start and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program funds would be rolled over to EHS "to intervene even earlier to mitigate the emergence of the learning gaps and to build a comprehensive and well-integrated set of supports for young children and their families to further narrow these disparities" (p. 108). Current preschool-aged children served by Head Start programs would be served by universal pre-k. The EHS programs and preschools/community schools would work collaboratively to provide services and high-quality educational experiences to close the gaps associated with poverty and under-served communities.

The evidence-based, comprehensive plan comes at an annual cost of \$99.4 billion (see Table 6.1, p. 142 for a summary), funded primarily by federal dollars. Though this may seem exorbitant, the authors estimated that \$29.1 billion would be offset by savings from the elimination or combination of current disjointed programs, increased employee taxes, and would result in long-term savings in healthcare and social support programs, as well as provide substantial financial benefits to the workforce.

Who are these authors who propose an annual investment of nearly \$70 billion? The authors are well qualified; they have combined experiences at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in policy

research, and have expertise concerning women and children in poverty, child development, and early childhood education and care. Funded by a grant through the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the School of Public Affairs at American University, the book was reviewed by 13 other experts in the field, both of which lend to the credibility and viability of the proposed plan.

Across the US, evidence of uncoordinated efforts or initiatives to increase access to quality affordable early childhood programs are occurring. The authors noted, “there are current efforts, but they focus on one aspect of the problem rather than providing a comprehensive policy proposal spanning the first years of life” (p. 17). In addition to the examples identified in the book, there is evidence of such efforts, such as the Race To The Top – Early Learning Challenge Grants (RTT-ELC), which began dissemination in 2010 and resulted in increased access and enrollment of young children and increased enrollment of programs into Quality Rating Systems (QRS; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Head Start and Early Head Start programs received an additional \$85 million in funding for the fiscal year 2017 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017), and additional block grants were available to increase the number of EHS slots (National Head Start Association, 2018). Also, most states have aligned or are in the process of aligning state early childhood education standards to the K-12 standards (Barnett et al., 2017). As noted in the book, some states and school districts have provided public preschool, though primarily for 4-year-olds. The success of these initiatives add credence to the proposed plan to unify and expand efforts into a comprehensive plan of early childhood services from birth through age 13.

Though dense with research-based facts, data, and cost analyses, the information is well organized and contains numerous figures and tables, making the book a short

and engaging read and easily consumable for most readers. Despite the comprehensiveness of the book, loose ends remain. The authors expressed the need for on-demand scheduling for childcare (pp. 41-42) yet in their proposed plan, universal preschool programs would provide wraparound services from 7:30-8:30 and 3:00-6:00 (p. 92). This proposed model is consistent with current childcare models and does not address the needs of parents with “nonstandard or unpredictable work hours with just-in-time scheduling” for employment or class schedules (p. 41). Also, programs serving low-income families typically report higher rates of absenteeism (Attendance Works, Everyone Graduates Center, 2017) which may be related to lack of transportation and other resources (Applied Survey Research, 2011, as cited in Dubay and Holla, 2015; Chang & Romero, 2008). Many Head Start programs and schools provide transportation to and from programs; families may be challenged trying to transport children to and from the patchwork of childcare options subsidized by the proposed ACE. Under the proposed plan, it was not clear whether transportation would be provided to and between the programs providing flexible hours and scheduling, between center-based, home-based, or family care options. Additionally, the authors proposed that high-quality, affordable universal preschools expand into underserved areas and link to public school systems (p. 95), yet neglected to address the possibility of high-quality preschools linking to public schools of varying quality and resources (Bernardo, 2017; Feltscher, 2018). Finally, the authors noted that teachers with similar credentials and work experiences be paid the same rate whether in early childhood or K-12 (p. 99), but little detail was noted about funding for such pay increases through federal funding for the expansion of universal preschool programs.

The book contributes to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care by providing opportunities for continued research in areas of quality programs, determinants or

indicators of quality, and the relationship of quality to child outcomes. The book also provides a glimmer of hope to the under-recognized and underpaid early childhood professionals who work long hours with minimal support, resources, and pay, and the struggling families they serve. Unfortunately, a plan such as this, though comprehensive and evidence and research-based, might be more viable if presented with a more cost-effective

option, as opposed to annual investment of \$70 billion. If funding wasn't an issue, this book could provide a good plan for accessible high-quality and affordable programs for children birth to kindergarten regardless of socio-economic status. As such, this is not the case, with such a large investment of state and local funding, the plan as outlined in the book may better serve as a guide for advocacy.

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**Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University**

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