

Accreditation Stories from the Field

The Arkansas Journey to Accreditation

By Trude Puckett

May, 2010

Pulaski Technical College was a member of the first cohort of Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation (ECADA) and received NAEYC Accreditation in September 2007. The Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) provided 2 weekend retreats for several of the community colleges in our state to work on their self-study reports. But Pulaski Technical College was the only one who completed the self-study and applied for accreditation.

The Higher Education Work Group met in our state in May, 2008 to help in the placement of state training opportunities, college courses and degrees on the professional development registry system. There was a need for the development of a sub-committee which would be composed of two and four year institutions of higher learning to address ways to provide for a more seamless articulation between the institutions. Several institutions signed up to be on this committee and the work began. We began actively networking in September, 2008. We had representatives from 14 of the community colleges, the Head Start Coalition office, and 4 representatives from two universities that became committed to working together as a group. We knew the first step would be to assist community colleges in acquiring NAEYC accreditation since this was the requirement of the universities who are NCATE accredited.

A sub-committee of the Higher Education Work Group had their first meeting in November, 2008 and learned there was an Arkansas bill in the state legislature addressing teacher licensure that had been in interim study for the past 2 years. We learned that the bill was being presented as a teaching credential for birth through prekindergarten instead of a teacher license. We were not happy with this, but efforts for teacher licensure for teachers working with children birth through prekindergarten had met a brick wall. We knew with Head Start requiring a bachelor's degree for 50% of their staff by 2013, the re-appropriation of Head Start monies to include birth through two year olds and ABC non-public school child care facilities requiring a bachelor's degree for the lead teacher, there was a greater need for the development of highly qualified caregivers for birth through prekindergarten ages now more than ever. This called for a seamless transition from the two year colleges to the four year universities for students desiring a bachelor's degree.

This sub-committee decided to develop a set of common courses that would be offered on each of the community college campuses around the state. Three courses were already in place which provided the training for the CDA credential. We began developing the competencies that we felt needed to be included for the AAS degree in Early Childhood. These competencies later fell into nine agreed upon core courses. It was agreed that each school would maintain the flexibility needed to serve the communities assigned to our individual colleges. We thought this would require a different type of degree plan since Arkansas legislators and others in our state thought of the AAS as a terminal degree. However, we were told by the AR Department of Higher Education (ADHE) not to create a different degree plan only to develop the competencies for a teaching credential.

Then in March, 2009 the AR Legislature passed ACT 187 which created the Birth through Pre-kindergarten Teaching Credential which was to be developed by DCCECE. A

statewide committee was formed to discuss how this credential would be created. The competencies being developed by the sub-committee of the higher education work group were presented. This state-wide committee was pleased that we were also imbedding the concepts of the training courses offered in our state. Students would also receive the certificate for those trainings upon successful completion of the course with a grade of C or better.

This group of committed two year and four year instructors met once a month for a year and collaboratively developed a set of competencies for this credential. We placed these competencies into a core of nine courses with common course names, course descriptions and measurable objectives. These competencies were approved by DCCECE in January, 2010. The work group placed them into nine core courses (27 college credit hours) which are part of the AAS degree in Early Childhood which is offered on each campus. Several of the community colleges redesigned their AAS degree plans to include the nine common courses with new numbers, new names, new course descriptions, and new course objectives and presented this to the respective curriculum committees for approval on each campus.

We learned other states had a common course numbering system to indicate automatic transfer courses within their higher education system. The committee decided to follow the same pattern. At the same time it was discovered on the ECADA website there were 13 state cohorts. We declared ourselves the Arkansas Early Childhood Cohort in January, 2010. From this point forward it would include only the colleges and universities that were committed to this work.

This has been a very unique journey in our state as the community colleges and universities in our state have historically been very territorial. All 14 community colleges in our state have created a partnership, working together for the common good of the students we serve. We do not have a state agency that works for us or coordinates us. We did this together. We developed a network of colleagues who enjoy working together, bringing fresh ideas to the table and are willing to have an open mind, to listen to each other's concerns and offer suggestions which are beneficial to progress of the work. This is the value of a cohort.

One university who had not been a participant with us, but heard of our work, is in the process of developing a BAS in Early Childhood which will include all nine of our courses. We have been invited to their table to provide input as this is being developed. Other four year institutions are asking for the contact information to inquire about the development of this degree. These four year higher education institutions are realizing there are a large number of students who are potential transfers into their programs. The AR Early Childhood Cohort chose textbooks for each of the courses which match the approved competencies. They all happen to be published by Cengage. Kara Kindstrom and Keith Tutor of Cengage have been working with us in the selection of the various technological supports needed for these courses, our journey took another turn. Michael Stranz, the Executive Editor for Cengage, met with our cohort and is developing a web site specifically for our EC cohort. The cohort is now collaborating with Cengage as this website is being developed. This partnership is unique and meets our needs as well as those of our students. We don't know where all of this will lead but we are eager to see how this partnership develops.

We have been frustrated and confused at times, but have waited to see if the roadblocks would disappear. Every time we thought the journey was ending and we didn't know what else we could do, someone would contact us and open a pathway which indicated we needed to move in a different direction. We had hoped to work toward teacher

licensure for birth through prekindergarten but that is not where we happen to be at this point. It doesn't mean that it won't happen someday but this is where we are right now. We know the work we have done will have significant implications for the education of young children in the state of Arkansas. We'll just wait and watch. We'll be ready to take the step together as we continue to meet each month and develop more fully the courses to meet the needs of our individual campuses.

One of the community colleges is completing their self-study for accreditation this spring and there are several others who are working on their self-study. We are each unique but are united by a common thread. We are gaining more respect in the state by many different groups. Because of the common work, some community college department chairs are seeing changes in attitudes toward their programs and more support is being provided.

We have worked together toward a common goal. We have listened to each other's problems and offered possible solutions. We are committed to working together and truly enjoy each other. We have learned the value of a cohort is sharing ideas serves as a catalyst for change in many ways. Collaborative leadership throughout the state is being more fully developed every day.

We are now waiting for the Arkansas DCCECE to develop the procedure for students to apply for the Birth through Prekindergarten Teaching Credential. We know it will require our students passing a nationally recognized assessment designed to test theory to application in a classroom setting. We have given our students the sample assessment available on the ETS website to provide a baseline for our own information. The cohort presented several questions to the Division about how this procedure will actually work. We still have much work to do but are committed to working it out together.

Nevada's Accreditation Journey

By Crystal Swank

September, 2010

Nevada is a largely rural state with two metropolitan areas, Reno and Las Vegas. Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) is in Reno and is one of only four community colleges in the state. TMCC was the first college in the state to become accredited by NAEYC (2009). As the saying goes, the journey is more important than the destination. This continues to be true for the Early Childhood Education Program at TMCC!

Our goal was to become accredited so I decided to learn as much as I could about the process, beginning with becoming a peer reviewer. My strategy was to use that experience to navigate us toward accreditation. Beginning in 2006, we initiated the accreditation process with an application and a mini-grant from ACCESS. *Thanks ACCESS!* Over the following three years our program engaged in the self-study process. With only two full-time faculty and a cadre of dedicated adjunct faculty, we completed a curriculum mapping process to align our curriculum with the Standards and Supportive Skills. This proved to be very valuable in identifying gaps, and subsequent program changes to better align our curriculum with the NAEYC Standards. The result was the creation of two new courses and some changes to our degree programs to better meet the standards. In addition, the curriculum mapping process helped us identify the five key assessments we wanted to use for our self-study report and site visit.

At the same time, our college was becoming more engaged in the assessment process. We had to do a comprehensive curriculum review which included student learning outcomes and measures for each course, as well as the program. This also presented an opportunity for us to examine how our assessment work aligned with the NAEYC Standards for accreditation. Luckily, we were able to do the assessment work for both the college and our accreditation self-study simultaneously. One key factor in the assessment planning process was including our Office of Institutional Research. Our work included meetings to discuss an approach to assessing individual assignments and courses, as well as how to align the NAEYC Standards in the data collection process. We engaged in dialog about assessment and grading, rubrics, and crafted an assessment plan. We also developed specific rubrics and decided how we were going to collect and analyze data.

Another key factor in our self-study process was the involvement of our adjunct faculty. Their buy-in and participation was vital to our work! We were fortunate to also have the support of the college administration (Dept. Chair, Dean, VPAA, and President), who provided resources which made some of our work possible. For example, our adjunct faculty were paid a small stipend for participating in our assessment planning meetings. The college also established our ECE teaching lab, a dedicated space for our program and students. The lab is a large classroom which is now equipped with wonderful furniture, equipment, and teaching materials that not only support the teaching/learning process, but also create a comfortable and welcoming environment for our busy, hard working students.

Some lessons learned:

- Make *process* part of the journey, include as many partners and stakeholders as possible.
- Get the support of administrators and keep them updated on your progress.
- Ask for the resources that you need to do the self-study work, and for the work that continues beyond the accreditation decision.
- Engage colleagues in your Office of Institutional Research.
- Talk to your colleagues around the country; learn from the experience of others.

Accreditation is still a journey, one that continues to help us as faculty learn and improve our program. My first accreditation report is due at the end of this month; it's a chance to once again, examine our work over the past year...our journey continues!

Connecticut's Community Colleges Journey Through Accreditation Polly Parker, Asnuntuck Community College May, 2011

ACCESS President Carrie Nepstad asked me to share the CT Community College's approach to seeking NAEYC accreditation for our twelve A.S. Degree Programs in Early Childhood Education. It has been a systematic and intentional approach that began in June, 2008 when Darlene Ragozzine, Executive Director of Connecticut Charts a Course (CCAC) obtained grant funding to facilitate the successful acquisition of the NAEYC Associate Degree Accreditation for the twelve Connecticut Community College Early Childhood Education Programs by December 30, 2014.

We began the process by attending a two day technical assistance training for all Early Childhood Education faculty in the community college system known as the 7C's (The Consortium of CT Community College Child Care Coordinators). The training was led by Alison Lutton, Director of NAEYC Associate Degree Accreditation Program. Some of the faculty had attended the Technical Assistance Day for Associate Degree faculty at the PDI in Pittsburgh in 2007. And other faculty were trained to be Peer Reviewers at the PDI in New Orleans in 2008. We were on our way!

A proposed Associate Degree Accreditation timeline was developed and three college cohorts were established to work together and support each other in this accreditation process. Each program coordinator created her own program accreditation timeline. Our timelines were impacted by the fiscal and administrative support provided by each educational institution, required program improvements, and other circumstances due to changes in faculty. Education consultants Dr. Regina Miller, Professor Emeritus of Early Childhood Education from the University of Hartford and Dr. Merle Harris, retired president of Charter Oak State College were funded by CCAC as —Project Facilitators. Dr. Miller and Dr. Harris offered invaluable assistance to each community college using their expertise and knowledge, to guide us through the accreditation process.

To date, Gateway Community College and Asnuntuck Community College have received NAEYC accreditation. Goodwin College, a private two year college in East Hartford, has also received accreditation. A third Connecticut Community College hosted its site visit in March 2011 and two other CT Community Colleges have submitted their self study reports and will host their site visits this coming fall.

During the past three years the 7C's have met regularly for many professional development opportunities that have focused on NAEYC accreditation. ACCESS President Carrie Nepstad came to CT in February of 2009 and presented on —Collecting, Analyzing and Applying Assessment Data to Produce Meaningful Change in Associate Degree Programs. In December, 2008 ACCESS V-President Debra Murphy presented on —Developing Rubrics Using the NAEYC Standards and Supportive Skills. At the time both Carrie and Debra were ACCESS Fellows. The relatively small size of the state of Connecticut permits us to meet on a regular basis. Because of this collaboration we decided to become an ACCESS state affiliate. We have found the professional development activities hosted by ACCESS at both the November NAEYC Conference and the PDI Conference in June, the ACCESS Newsletter and Website, ACCESS Mini-Grants and SKIP committee calls on the

NAEYC ECADA process have all been valuable resources to our state affiliate members and the accreditation process.