



Social Work Engagement in Early Childhood Education and Care Advocacy and Policy

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Social Work Engagement in Early Childhood Education and Care Advocacy and Policy

Amber Moodie-Dyer and Karen Collins

An often-cited founding mother of social work, Jane Addams, championed several causes throughout her lifetime. She is well known for her work in establishing the settlement house movement in the United States and working with and on behalf of urban poor families. Through this work she was also an advocate for poor women and children throughout the country, and inevitably encountered the problem of inadequate child care among working poor families. Addams (2010) described encountering young children who had been locked out of or injured in their homes while parents went to work. She further discussed initial services being delivered haphazardly, but later in a more organized fashion through the creation of a day nursery to address the unmet need of day care for working families. While the issues surrounding early childhood education and care (ECEC) have certainly changed from what Addams witnessed in 19th century America, many problems and unmet needs continue for families today. The field of social work has a unique and important role in ECEC both at the micro and macro levels. This article will describe why ECEC should be a primary concern for the field of social work; however, the focus of this work is to highlight ways that social workers can understand and participate in advocacy and policy work with regards to ECEC through education, scholarship, and practice.

Why ECEC is a Social Work Issue

One link between the field of social work and ECEC is provided through the child welfare system. For example, childhood injury can result from inadequate child care since families without the resources to choose quality child care settings may place children in situations that put them at greater risk for abuse and neglect (Coohey, 2007). Since formal quality care is not as accessible for low

income families, they often rely more on their social networks to provide care (Coohey, 2007). Although this can be a positive experience, it can also be dangerous for children depending on the characteristics of the social network. Parents who face multiple barriers in their environment, such as inability to pay for quality ECEC and inadequate social networks, may feel forced to make decisions which put children at risk. While the child welfare system is often an area where social workers venture into the field of ECEC, social workers' roles should not be limited to these types of interventions (Azzi-Lessing, 2010). Ensuring high quality and safe child care is one way that social workers can participate in the prevention of child abuse and neglect situations. Families may also be forced into unemployment or underemployment, putting their families at risk economically, due to lack of child care in their community or inability to access quality, affordable care (Hofferth, 1999; Michalopoulos & Robins, 2002). Family economic stability is certainly a social work issue due to the impact on the well-being of children and the family system.

Another practice orientation in which the fields of ECEC and social work should intersect is one that places affordable, quality ECEC as an integral part of a set of comprehensive services for families with young children. For example, as part of the Carnegie Corporation Starting Points Initiative grants, several states created integrated systems encompassing family needs around ECEC, health, parenting support, and employment assistance (Levine & Smith, 2001). In West Virginia, local hubs were established to coordinate health, education, and social service needs for vulnerable families (Levine & Smith, 2001). By creating such hubs, social workers who tradi-

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tionally work in health and social service networks can become more involved in understanding and serving ECEC needs of families as well. The settlement house movement in social work also sets a precedent for providing place-based integrated services and many modern day settlement houses still provide ECEC and afterschool care programs (Blank, 1998).

Access to quality ECEC is important to ensure safety of children, economic stability of families, and as an important part of the spectrum of comprehensive services families with young children need to thrive. However ECEC is also critical to enhance learning and development, and future success of children (Lynch, 2004; Polakow, 2007). Much evidence has accumulated over the past several years about the important development that occurs during the early years (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Winter, 2009). In light of this evidence, and evidence of the continuing inequality that exists between families in their ability to access quality care (De Marco, Crouter, & Vernon-Feagans, 2009; Phillips & Adams, 2001; Polakow, 2007), the current state of ECEC in America should be considered a social injustice and therefore a point of focus for the field of social work.

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) identifies social justice as a core value in the field of social work and states that efforts to rectify social injustice should address issues of poverty, among others. The NASW Code of Ethics further defines one of social workers' responsibilities to society as ensuring that clients have equal access to opportunities and goods that allow for healthy development (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). By this directive, social workers have a responsibility to engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to quality child care. The Code also articulates the important tasks that social workers must undertake in the political arena to advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions and promote social justice (NASW, 2008). Social work is a profession that is grounded in social justice and social change with a long standing commitment to advo-

cacy that is unmatched by other professions (Reamer, 1991; Lundy & van Wormer, 2007; Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006; Weiss, Gal, & Katan, 2006). Guided by the Code of Ethics, social workers have several roles to fill in the area of ECEC advocacy and policy. Despite the great potential for social work to be a part of the ECEC policy and advocacy conversation, these issues have been neglected in social work education, scholarship, and practice.

ECEC Advocacy and Policy in Social Work Education

With regard to social work education, several aspects of ECEC advocacy and policy could be integrated into current course content. The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) state that accredited programs must "engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services" (Council on Social Work Education, 2008, para. 2.1.8). The EPAS specify that advocacy, policy formulation and analysis, and collaboration with clients and co-workers are all part of policy work. While general policy courses exist in accredited social work programs, there is room to incorporate policy and advocacy practice throughout more courses in the curriculum that are not necessarily policy-specific. Title IV-E child welfare training programs have recently adopted some curriculum in their programs to be reflective of the new EPAS. Title IV-E programs, created in 1980 to help develop the child welfare workforce, offer specific coursework and field placement opportunities in child welfare (NASW, 2004). These programs recognize the policy and advocacy requirements of social work education in general and have incorporated the EPAS policy requirements. For example, the California Social Work Education Center (2011) applied Title IV-E language to EPAS 2.1.8 around policy practice to articulate the need for child welfare trainees in social work programs to understand child welfare policies and engage in child welfare policy development and advocacy. Child welfare is certainly included in the broader category of ECEC; however, many other services and systems exist within ECEC for which social workers need to be

prepared to work in policy and practice arenas (i.e. child care, early intervention, school-age/ afterschool care, etc.).

A panel discussion took place at the 2010 CSWE Annual Program Meeting which highlighted several different ways that ECEC could be taught in social work programs (Greenberg, Allen, Herman-Smith, & Fram, 2010). In terms of integrating advocacy and policy issues around ECEC into existing social work courses, instructors of policy courses can make a special effort to include information about the history and current status of early childhood policies, the role of federal and state government in decision-making, and how social workers can influence these decisions (Greenberg et al., 2010). Courses that focus on coalition building and community organizing could highlight efforts of the ECEC advocacy community to build coalitions and policy agendas which advocate for better quality child care, universal care, and streamlining systems. Some courses could also be created as electives. For example, a cross-cutting course could be created to focus broadly on advocacy with regard to access to quality early care and education from the parent and child perspective, and advocating for child care providers given the current low wages and benefits available to this workforce. A new policy course could be developed to focus on ECEC policy in a global context which discusses the trajectory of different countries' policies such as parental leave, work flexibility, and child care, and their effects on children and families.

Social work's signature pedagogy, field education, should make sure to incorporate settings in which social work students will be exposed to ECEC advocacy and policy as well (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2010). Students could be placed in agencies and coalitions that advocate on behalf of ECEC issues and policies, as well as in state legislative settings to be exposed to how this work is being conducted in the field. Similar to community-based and policy field placements serving other populations and field, one challenge that will likely apply to ECEC advocacy and policy placements is the lack of MSW degreed supervisors. However, social work programs have developed ways to address

this issue through co-instruction and building partnerships (Johnson, 2000; Ruffolo & Miller, 1994).

The Intergenerational Advocacy and Policy Project (IAP), a curriculum pilot developed by the CSWE project Strengthening Aging and Gerontology Education for Social Work (SAGE-SW), can serve as a model for incorporating ECEC in social work curriculum. The goals of the IAP were to strengthen curriculum in social work around aging policy, community organization, and advocacy, as well as create positive interactions between the elderly and social work students through the development of relationships with community stakeholders and aging advocacy groups (Hermoso, Rosen, Overly, & Tompkins, 2006). Students were able to work with seniors and senior advocacy organizations to organize and mobilize around issues pertinent to the aging population and expressed, as a result, more interest in working in advocacy and social policy practice around issues relevant to the aging population (Hermoso et al., 2006).

When examining social work curricular structure more broadly, it is clear that conceptual changes could also be made to develop the skill set required for competent advocacy and policy work, whether around ECEC issues or other social work-related areas. For example, many MSW programs require students to choose a clinical or administrative track, which can cause students to be separated into micro or macro practice (McIntosh, 2004). This promotes a division between micro and macro social work practice instead of an incorporation of both levels of practice into the curricular plan of each student. This potentially leads to students who may not understand the importance of developing and utilizing both skill sets regardless of their potential job placement. In order for social workers to have knowledge and competency in both areas, curriculum integration might require students to take both micro and macro classes across a specialization area which addresses advocacy and policy skill sets at all levels of practice. An example of one college's attempt to break the micro/macro curricular divide can be seen at The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Social Work. In a

recent presentation at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, faculty and staff from the OSU College of Social Work presented information about how the curriculum was restructured through a community collaborative process (Lee, Gregoire, Davis, Babcock, & Durham, 2011). One major revision was to change the choice for students from clinical versus administrative tracks to a new system of subject specializations (i.e. Aging and Health, Community and Social Justice, etc.) that require students to take four advanced practice micro or macro courses, taking at least one of each type. Essentially, two considerations must be weighed when augmenting social work curriculum to promote skills in ECEC advocacy and policy. Social work education must incorporate more learning around early childhood development issues (Azzi-Lessing, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2010) and promote learning advocacy and policy work across all levels of practice.

ECEC Advocacy and Policy in Social Work Scholarship

Another important role of social work educators is scholarship. Social work scholars can work to better address the issue of ECEC advocacy and policy in their research agendas. Currently much of the research around these issues is carried out by scholars in other fields, such as education, human development and family studies, public policy, and economics. This research has yielded important findings; however, social work scholars have a unique voice and perspective to add to this literature that needs to be represented. The person-in-environment perspective embraced by social work is especially adept to fit the issues of ECEC advocacy and policies because it allows research questions that look beyond individual characteristics of parents, children, and care providers, and incorporate the community, political, and cultural contexts of early care and education (Azzi-Lessing, 2010). The social work perspective can also bring a more prominent focus on issues of advocacy, organizing, and policy development in research of ECEC-related topics through the use of the empowerment framework and community based participatory research (CBPR) methods. Both of these perspectives are very much aligned

with social work principles and studying advocacy and policy at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Trickett (2011) summarizes literature to outline a number of characteristics of CBPR which include community involvement in every aspect of the research process, as well as goals for policy change and community empowerment. While scholars in fields other than social work, such as medicine (Goh et al., 2009; O'Brien & Whitaker, 2011), nursing (Stacciarini, Shattell, Coady, & Wiens, 2011), public health (Gong et al., 2009; Israel et al., 2010), human ecology (Speer & Christens, 2011), and agriculture (Kennedy et al., 2011) have employed CBPR, this research method is perhaps most closely aligned with the ideals of social work's settlement house movement in that CBPR seeks to engage and empower the community through full involvement in the research process, and share power and decision making roles (D'Alonzo, 2010; Westfall et al., 2009). Substitute the word practice for research and the settlement house movement can be understood as a kind of Community Based Participatory Practice.

Given these shared principles between CBPR and the social work profession, several social work scholars have incorporated this model into their research repertoire. Examples of CBPR being used by social work scholars to advocate and advance policy and knowledge in the social work profession can be seen in research around affordable housing (Stahl & Shdaimah, 2008), community economic development (Sherraden, Slosar, & Sherraden, 2002), school social work (Alameda-Lawson, Lawson, & Lawson, 2010), food insecurity (Jacobson, Pruitt-Chapin, & Rugeley, 2009), and end-of-life care (Jones, Pomeroy, & Sampson, 2009). The incorporation of advocacy and policy into the CBPR method in these areas of social work research could, in turn, be applied to studying ECEC advocacy and policy issues. For example, Jones, Pomeroy, and Sampson (2009) describe a research institute in a school of social work which developed as a community effort to understand the needs and priorities for education, research, and practice around issues of grief and loss. The Institute worked with the community to conduct a needs assessment and devel-

op community action steps to better address issues around bereavement. A similar effort could be considered for better understanding ECEC needs in a community. Jacobson et al. (2009) created a steering committee made of community residents to inform their research investigating barriers and opportunities to food security. The steering committee conducted separate town hall meetings for service providers and clients to understand the community's relationship to the issue of food security (Jacobson et al., 2009). Again, it is not difficult to imagine social work scholars conducting similar research around the issue of access to quality ECEC in a community. The discussion to this point lends knowledge and reflection to social work education and research; however, many social workers already in practice also need guidance on how to become better ECEC policy and practice advocates.

ECEC Advocacy and Policy in Social Work Practice

Whether working with children and families, community organizations, or in advocacy and policy positions, the vast majority of social workers to be affected by the issue of ECEC advocacy and policy, and who can, in turn, affect this issue, are those in practice. Azzi-Lessing (2010) discussed that social workers may be involved indirectly, but not necessarily in prominent roles, in the early childhood practice community. Similarly, while there are positions in areas of ECEC advocacy and policy work whose job descriptions often entail social work tasks, the jobs are often not labeled or considered social work positions and therefore are not as apt to attract social workers. It is beneficial to utilize these positions as those which could be held by social workers and to utilize the unique knowledge social workers bring, both in terms of understanding advocacy and policy, and issues surrounding ECEC. Strengths that social workers bring to advocacy practice are strong negotiation skills, coalition and consensus building skills, and a solid understanding of how policy impacts people's lives (Schneider & Netting, 1999).

There is also a great deal more that social workers can do to address ECEC advocacy and policy, even if their job descriptions do not neces-

sarily include these roles. While community and macro level social workers certainly need to be involved in advocacy and policy, micro social workers also need to understand the effects of policy on the lived experiences of the clients that they serve (Schneider & Netting, 1999). Settings and areas where micro social workers will likely need to understand ECEC policies include: (a) child welfare, (b) domestic violence services, (c) public schools, (d) Head Start, (e) child care centers, (f) family and parenting support and education, (g) home visiting, (h) hospitals, (i) public health settings, (j) the Women, Infant and Children Program, and (k) offices that administer child care subsidies, cash welfare, and food assistance, among others.

However, it is important that social workers not only be on the receiving end of dealing with enacted policies, but also be involved in shaping the policies and debates surrounding policy making (Winter, 2009). According to Schneider (2002), if social workers are not involved in the policy making process, other people with potentially less commitment to the well-being of disadvantaged people will be developing the policies. Clinical social workers are often uniquely positioned to tell the stories of clients and how policies may act as a barrier or opportunity both in their own work and their clients' lives (Schneider & Netting, 1999; Sherraden et al., 2002). Clinical social workers who work with families with young children are likely to understand and be able to articulate the struggles families face if they cannot find quality, accessible early care and education settings. These social workers can help to build public awareness and provide testimony for legislative committees which focus on ECEC policy about the experiences of their clients. In an example from a situation involving lack of dental care, a young boy in Washington, D.C. who died from an abscessed tooth due to no health insurance coverage brought awareness to the issue of low access to health care in the community. Lee and Rodgers (2009) point out that a counselor or social worker could potentially be in a situation in this case both to assist this young boy's family on a micro level, but also to move beyond the typical direct practice role to become an advocate of po-

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litical and social change for this issue. Lee (2001) provides examples in which school social workers, traditionally viewed as micro social workers, can engage in advocacy based on their unique position in direct practice, working to advocate for students around issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT), disability rights, and protecting programs for at-risk students.

On a macro level, throughout time social workers have demonstrated their effectiveness in coalition building, advocacy, and influencing policy in areas where social work's presence has been more prominent than in ECEC. In the early stages of social work's development as a field, advocacy and policy change were carried out around the issues of women's suffrage, racial equality, pacifism, fair labor laws, immigrant rights, and New Deal legislation, partially under the auspices of the settlement house movement (Kemp & Brandwein, 2010). Social workers in the 1960s and 70s continued to work toward racial and gender justice in the civil rights and women's movement, and advocated for a number of specific issues including organizing neighborhood health clinics, women's shelters, and counseling programs (Kemp & Brandwein, 2010). Social workers have also worked effectively on coalitions regarding issues such as mental health, child welfare, housing, and wealth inequality, and as advocates for the social work profession itself. In terms of mental health coalition building, an incident in Texas in which an individual with an undertreated mental health diagnosis killed several young people in a church sparked collaborative efforts (Steves & Blevins, 2005). This tragedy brought together health and mental health practitioners, educators, the business community, and other public and private partners to address a disconnected mental health system. Funds were secured, a comprehensive understanding of the available resources was attained, interagency communication was made a priority, and mental health services were made accessible to more people (Steves & Blevins, 2005). In the field of child welfare, increased legislative requirements to build community partnerships and coalitions (Rycraft & Detlaff, 2009), along with child deaths and difficult working conditions for social work-

ers in the child welfare system (Lyons, Beck, & Lyons, 2011), have inspired advocacy and coalition building among social workers. In studying collaborations between advocates and academia, Stahl and Shdaimah (2008) provide an illustration of a housing advocacy agency in Philadelphia in which many employees are social workers. The organization, the Women's Community Revitalization Project, is an example of one of many efforts across the country which provides direct services and advocacy around issues of affordable housing and home repair (Stahl & Shdaimah, 2008). Another research study which brings to light policy and advocacy work by social workers in community economic development efforts was conducted by Sherraden et al. (2002). In this case, social workers participated in creating community economic development programs such as Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) by developing policy, creating coalitions, lobbying, and engaging clients. Finally, the numerous national social work organizations, including the CSWE, the NASW, the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, and the Social Welfare Action Alliance, exemplify the abilities of social workers to engage successfully in advocacy and policy change.

The lessons learned from participating in advocacy and policy change efforts at both micro and macro levels of social work practice in other arenas could be translated to ECEC work by applying the same strategies to a different body of knowledge. Social workers can use their skills for ECEC advocacy and policy at the state and local level by developing socially just child care policy agendas, identifying and training parents who have struggled to afford quality ECEC to provide legislative testimony, or by building a coalition of early childhood providers, advocates, and parents. A community may have several different stakeholders in the ECEC system; however, groups may not be collaborating and social workers are uniquely trained to help build community coalitions and collaborations. Creating one voice for a local or state advocacy ECEC community might then result in more responsive policies and political figures. Social workers can also participate in already established coalitions as identified by

Azzi-Lessing (2010) such as Zero to Three and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Other national efforts engaged in ECEC advocacy and policy work that social workers could become involved with include the Children's Defense Fund, Voices for America's Children, the National Women's Law Center (NWLC), the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (NACCRRRA). NACCRRRA local affiliates can also be found in each state and region which provides further opportunity to become involved as ECEC advocates on the local level. Many states also have non-profit advocacy groups and coalitions which focus on or include issues of ECEC in their agendas. For example in Ohio, the Groundwork initiative began in 2004 to unite organizations and individuals around the goal of ensuring high quality early childhood services to Ohio families. Through this effort Groundwork builds awareness, mobilizes resources, conducts research, and educates government officials about the importance of investments in high quality ECEC (Groundwork, n.d.). According to the Campaign Operations Manager, who is also a licensed social worker, the importance of social workers' involvements in these efforts cannot be overstated since they bring a unique perspective and skill set which may not always be present among other stakeholders (S. Blasko, personal communication, July 25, 2011). In order to engage in this work, social workers in practice must both develop their knowledge of advocacy work in general, and create a coherent advocacy message around ECEC issues.

Becoming Effective Advocates

Hoefer (2005) provides several reasons that social workers, either micro or macro, may avoid the political arena, including not feeling competent, not wanting to get involved with the game of politics, overburdened schedules, limited funding, and constraints on lobbying activity. Rocha, Poe, and Veliska (2010) described other barriers to social workers' involvement in advocacy, including restrictive employment settings, fear of losing a job, and fear of violating laws regarding lobbying. Despite these obstacles, the shift of fund

management and program administration from the federal to state level that has occurred over the last few decades provides social workers easier access to policy makers in their own community who have more power over social policy and program implementation (Schneider, 2002). This shift in administrative responsibility is especially relevant when examining the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which provides funding with minimal guidelines to states to enact policies to assist working families with child care expenses (Blau & Tekin, 2007). Given the flexibility provided in the CCDBG, social workers have an opportunity to advocate for much more generous policies related to child care assistance than are currently in place in most states. Since much of the policy is determined at the state level, social workers can use state networks already in place, such as NASW state chapters, or create other networks to champion these issues. For example, Lee and Rodgers (2009) emphasize the need to support existing alliances or to create new relationships with key people and groups that are interested in similar issues. Networking and negotiating with other groups with similar interests is an important step to developing a solid agenda (Lyons et al., 2011). In addition, legislators and policy makers need to be lobbied at the local, state, and federal levels by advocates or advocate groups that exhibit a united front armed with facts, data, and a solid rationale of the need for change (Lee & Rodgers, 2009; Lyons et al., 2011).

To be effective advocates for more equitable ECEC policy, social workers must be knowledgeable about the policy making process, engage in relationship building both with legislators and other stakeholders, build coalitions, and provide timely information regarding ECEC policy and practice (Hoefer, 2001, 2005). Effective advocates realize that there is a process to creating change. This process often begins with increasing public awareness regarding the issue by utilizing a variety of media, which can include public demonstrations and media coverage in print and in electronic forms (Lee & Rodgers, 2009). Effective advocates at the micro level typically demonstrate self-exploration, a strategic vision, solid

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leadership skills, courage to articulate injustices related to an issue, and knowledge regarding data collection and utilization to depict a story (Lee & Rodgers, 2009). However, advocacy is not only about addressing the issues on a micro level as a practitioner. Advocacy at the macro level can alleviate issues through a more global approach with the potential to impact a large number of people. On a meso and macro level, the most effective advocacy coalitions: a) are proactive and organized, b) promote communication with different people in the policy making process, c) have community integrity, d) collaborate within the community, and e) diversify culturally (Hoefler, 2001; Schneider & Lester, 2001).

A Social Work ECEC Advocacy and Policy Agenda

In order to present a coherent and unified message to policy makers and stakeholders, social workers must go beyond learning advocacy skills in general and also build awareness about the most pressing needs with regards to ECEC practice and policy. Relevant and timely messages about what is needed for better ECEC practice and policy can change frequently because of the evolving nature of state and federal policy making, the advancements in the science of early childhood development, and the changing nature of the ECEC community. Messages also may need to be tailored to specific states or communities, though broad advocacy points can be understood on a national level. While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided a boost to funding towards the ECEC community in 2009 to programs such as Head Start and child care, these temporary funds have been spent (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies [NACCRRA], 2011a). Yet the needs of families with young children for quality ECEC to ensure healthy development of children and serve as work support are as great as ever. Early Learning Challenge Grants, which were recently awarded to nine states through Federal Race to the Top Funding (RTT-ELC), will help fill the gaps in some areas. Advocates in these communities should understand the elements of their state's grant proposals so they can effective-

ly participate in improving their local ECEC community. For example the RTT-ELC purpose is to support work around closing the school achievement gap by building better ECEC systems through integration, raising quality and evaluation standards, and improving support of the ECEC workforce (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 2011). The language of the RTT-ELC priorities offers important information about the direction of the ECEC field which advocates must understand. For the additional 26 states, along with D.C. and Puerto Rico, who applied but did not receive the grants, social workers can advocate for ways to implement the state plans through other funding mechanisms or strategies.

Social workers can look to already well-established advocacy and policy campaigns to understand and advocate for the changing needs of ECEC stakeholders as funding and policy priorities continue to shift in difficult economic times. NACCRRA (2011b) broadly outlines four points which cross programmatic issues and address the needs of families with young children which include: (a) increasing funding to states to protect children's health care, child welfare, public schools and early education from further cuts; and (b) launching a ten year agenda which provides funding to child abuse prevention and treatment, expands Head Start and preschool funding, and promotes access to affordable child care and health insurance for all children. The final two points of the agenda address the importance of promoting tax fairness to increase revenue available to dedicate funds to these efforts (NACCRRA, 2011b). A more targeted national agenda that social work ECEC advocates can use when addressing child care in particular was developed jointly by several state and national organizations working in this area including CLASP, the Early Care and Education Consortium, NAEYC, NACCRRA and NWLC, among others (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees [AFSCME] et al., 2010). Key points of this advocacy message are: a) expand CCDBG funding to ensure health and safe child care; b) create a pool of federal monies and involve non-profits in distributing funding to im-

prove child care facilities; c) make care more accessible and affordable for parents through strategies such as increasing the number of eligible families who receive child care assistance, increasing reimbursement rates to child care providers, expanding community awareness of child care subsidies, and streamlining the application process; d) expand CCDBG funding so that states can improve their quality rating systems, statewide child care resource and referral networks, and provider training and technical assistance; e) expand and improve the quality of both informal and formal infant and toddler child care systems through targeted neighborhood and community development efforts; and f) support research and system coordination around ECEC issues (AFSCME et al., 2010). While this is not an exhaustive or static list of advocacy and policy messages that social workers can employ, it can serve as a foundation that social work educators, scholars and practitioners can use to build upon.

Implications

Social workers have an important and unique perspective to offer in regard to ECEC advocacy and policy. However, social work is also a field which has embraced interdisciplinary collaboration, and is itself a product of interdisciplinary philosophy and practice. Social workers should work in tangent with other fields, including HDFS, education, nursing, and public policy, both in academia and practice, to address these issues. Just as Jane Addams saw the need for ECEC advocacy and improved policy in her settlement house work and stepped up to the call, so must current social workers who may not set out to advocate for this cause. It is not difficult to imagine Addams giving this call to action in current times: we must advocate on behalf of underpaid and underappreciated ECEC workers and on behalf of parents and children who need access to high quality early care to improve child and family well-being. Social workers must embrace their role as advocates and policy makers, and bring the message of social justice to the issues surrounding ECEC for the improved well-being of children, families, and communities.

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