



## The African American Pioneers: Legacy Influences on Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

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RECOGNITION

*White Paper*

In 2015, The Health and Medicine Division (HMD) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, formerly known as the Institute of Medicine (IOM), issued a report titled “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.” This report included recommendations about the preparation of early educators, noting that: “[p]rograms need to provide future teachers a formally defined, accredited course of study in child development, early learning, and instruction.”<sup>1</sup> The Council for Professional Recognition affirms the major ideas of this influential report. But what is most interesting is how the HMD report compares to or reflects the ideals and principles in the CDA<sup>®</sup> performance and assessment process, which has been established for over 40 years. To illustrate these principles, we will explore and celebrate the role of African-American pioneers in this white paper, whose work advanced key concepts that are evident in both CDA<sup>®</sup> Credentials and the HMD report.

### Historical Context: Diversity as an Essential Framework for Teacher Preparation

When President Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, the Head Start program was the primary federally funded program addressing early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. But Head Start had a significant challenge: how to properly train and equip personnel, many of whom were community residents, to staff the programs. To address this challenge, the Child Development Associate Consortium, a private, non-profit organization was established during June of 1972 in an effort to create strategies to “assess the competence of child care personnel and to grant credentials to those persons assessed as competent.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1973, the Consortium developed the process of defining competencies and creating an assessment process for the Child Development Associate<sup>®</sup> Credential. One of the Consortium’s first considerations was the inclusion of input from educators and experts from a variety of social sciences. However, according to Canary Girardeau, former Director of Credentialing and Community Relations for the CDA<sup>®</sup> Consortium, that input did not sufficiently represent populations whose children would be served by those potential CDA<sup>®</sup> candidates.

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In a recent interview, Girardeau reflected on the initial concerns: “Dr. C. Ray Williams, who was the [Consortium’s] Executive Director, said the comments gathered were good but they didn’t reflect the [breadth of] communities who were involved with these programs. So he said come up with a plan. So [the Consortium] came up with colloquies to see what they would say about these competencies and see what changes they might make.”<sup>3</sup>

In this spirit, “colloquies”—gatherings of minority groups—were created to review the CDA® and its process. These colloquies were the African-American Colloquy, the American Indian Colloquy, the Chicano Colloquy, the Asian Colloquy, and the Puerto Rican Colloquy.

According to Girardeau, one of the recommendations of the colloquies was the creation of Consortium advisory groups known as “task forces.” These task forces addressed the need for representative analysis from minority groups to provide the feedback on the CDA® itself. In this way, from its very inception, an explicit and intentional focus on diversity, community, and cultural competence would be embedded in the philosophy of teacher education, generally, and in the CDA® Credentials, specifically. This focus on diversity is an overarching framework from which all other legacies derive.

The emphasis on diversity was explicit and intentional. In the second paragraph introducing the final report of the Black Advisory Task Force, C. Ray Williams stated: “In its efforts, the [CDA®] Consortium has recognized that American children live in various social settings, possess different cultural heritages, and know many economic backgrounds. Their preschool experiences take place in surroundings that differ vastly.”<sup>4</sup> The Black Advisory Task Force realized that to teach in such a heterogeneous environment required an acknowledged respect for and recognition of the diversity within U.S. communities, and that respect informed their development of the “collaborative assessment” approach for evaluating CDA® candidates, which mandated community involvement.

The diversity of our nation’s children and families has increased substantially since the work of the Black Advisory Task Force forty years ago. However, construction of the framework of diversity recommended by the task force has, in actual practice, stalled. Rather, in the 21st century, the HMD report is clear in its analysis of the lack of content related to any type of diversity in teacher preparation programs:

*“Efforts of preparation programs to train educators to teach culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse students also are limited, and many teachers do not learn to set aside their own biases in practice (Whitebook et al., 2009). A review of course content across 1,179 teacher preparation programs in the United States revealed that only a small number of programs required any coursework focused on bilingual children, program administration, and adult learning, even at the master’s level (Maxwell et al., 2006).”<sup>1</sup>*

In sustaining the legacy of the Black Advisory Task Force, the current CDA® Credential incorporates respect for and encouragement of diversity throughout its curriculum in the CDA’s® *Essentials for Working with Young Children* textbook and in the recruitment of CDA Professional Development (PD) Specialists™, who are multilingual and a representation of community cultures. For example, in the past year, the CDA® assessment was offered in thirteen different languages, and it may be offered in any language that is being used in the setting with young children.

## Six Legacies of the Diversity Framework: The Black Advisory Task Force, the HMD Report, and the CDA® Credentials

Through their research and evaluation, the Black Advisory Task Force provided the foundation for what the CDA® is today, which ultimately defined what hundreds of thousands of early educators were expected to know and be able to do. Rooted in a diversity framework, the contributions of the Black Advisory Task Force resulted in six powerful legacies for the field of early care and education. They taught us that early childhood teacher education should include:

1. **Multiple sources of evidence about teacher competence**
2. **Family engagement**
3. **Observation of a teacher’s practice**
4. **Academic training**
5. **Work experience**
6. **Career Pathways**

The following is a brief overview of each of these legacies, their influence on contemporary CDA® Credentials, and their relevance to ongoing recommendations that enhance teacher education today.

### 1. Multiple Sources of Evidence About Teacher Competence

The HMD report explained: “[b]ecause of the variable nature of children’s learning and development from birth through age 8, considering multiple sources of evidence derived with multiple methods and at multiple times is important when evaluating and assessing educator performance.”<sup>1</sup> This important principle, although not widespread in the practice of teacher education, has been a fundamental element of the CDA® since its inception over forty years ago. Members of the Black Advisory Task Force provided the primary intellectual and applied practice contribution towards the CDA® prototype assessment that was based on multiple sources of evidence.

The Black Advisory Task Force focused on a “community collaborative approach”: “When we [The Black Advisory Task Force] speak of collaboration, we refer to a collective enterprise of shared planning, implementation, review and judgement.”<sup>4</sup> With robust intentions, the Black Advisory Task Force distinguished the community collaborative approach from standardized education assessments. Andrews et al. (1974) argued: “The Black Task Force feared that attempts to measure performance could lead to the creation of an “item pool,” having neither theoretical nor programmatic integrity.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the task force wanted to create an assessment that wasn’t solely based on a standardized test. “The Black Task Force suggested that use of a standard item pool or any sample of items taken from it to make a ‘test’ would result in arbitrary measures, atomistic views of candidates, and lack of predictive validity.”<sup>4</sup> Since at times there isn’t a correlation between high test scores and high quality standards for early educators, they felt that other assessment measures should be in place. By having merely a standardized test, certain aspiring early educators could be left out of obtaining CDAs®.

During spring of 1973, the task force began testing their theories about “collaborative assessment” and how to best measure early childhood classroom competencies. There was a small pilot project to develop this form of assessment, and in 1974 a field test took place; both of which were funded by the Consortium. Originally, assessment was the role of the LAT or Local Assessment Team for the CDA®. The LAT operated collaboratively with the CDA® candidate to plan for and implement the CDA® assessment to ascertain teacher competencies.

In this way, the CDA® candidate is continuously collaborating with others' perspectives through the CDA® process itself.

The current CDA® process still uses multiple sources and methods of gathering information about a candidate's competencies by: (1) requiring 120 hours of early childhood education courses in eight specific competency areas; (2) securing Parent Questionnaires about encounters with the candidate during the 480 hours of classroom experience; (3) selecting a CDA Professional Development Specialist™ from the community who observes the CDA® candidate working with children; (4) personalizing the CDA® through a *Professional Portfolio* that samples how the candidate turns their study of theory into practice; (5) a "reflective dialog" with the CDA Professional Development Specialist™, who reviews the portfolio, and provides counseling and mentoring on professionalism and future plans in the field of early childhood development; (6) a standardized examination of teacher knowledge; and (7) requiring 480 hours of work experience. These multiple sources of evidence work together to provide a profile of the candidate's qualifications and competency in a holistic manner.

Not only do we find the Black Advisory Task Force's legacy of "collaborative assessment" in the contemporary CDA® process, that legacy is also reflected in the HMD report recommendation #7a, which states: "Federal and state policy makers, school district leadership, and school, center, and program leadership, in partnership with representatives of professionals and of families whose children are served in their settings, should review and improve their current policies and systems for evaluation and assessment of care and education professionals. The goal should be to improve the extent to which current evaluation and assessment procedures, including portfolios of assessment and observation tools, achieve the following: assess a broad range of professional knowledge and competencies, account for setting-level and community-level factors, and are incorporated in a continuous system of supports to inform and improve professional practice and professional learning systems."<sup>1</sup>

## The Black Advisory Task Force Members

*For their dedication and efforts, we honor their names here in full<sup>4</sup>:*

**Mr. J. D. Andrews**, National Conference Coordinator; National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington D.C.

**Ms. Pamela Almeida**, doctoral candidate, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Mr. Robert Bentley**, Director of Special Projects, Bank Street College of Education, New York, New York.

**Mr. Joseph Drake**, Assistant Program Manager for Human Relations Training, Seattle Public Schools, Seattle, Washington.

**Dr. Frankie Ellis**, Chairman, Department of Teaching Disciplines, School of Education, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama.

**Dr. Phyllis Greenhouse**, Chairman, Home Economics Department, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

**Dr. Asa Hilliard**, Dean, School of Education, San Francisco State College, San Francisco, California.

**Ms. Frieda Mitchell**, Director, Child Development Program, Penn Community Services, Inc., Frogmore, South Carolina.

**Ms. Glendora Patterson**, School of Social Work, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California.

**Dr. Evangeline Ward**, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Dr. Ernest Washington**, Chairman, Human Potential Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.

**Mr. Preston Wilcox**, President, AFRAM Associates, Inc., New York, New York.

**Dr. James C. Young**, Department of Early Childhood, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

## 2. Family Engagement

The “community collaborative” assessment ideal is hardwired in the importance of family engagement; parents served as key members of the LAT. The Black Advisory Task Force philosophy included the idea that families had to know if the educators were “authentic persons” who could succeed within the set environment and create valuable bonds with those children and their families.

Jean Simpson, who during the 1970s was the Director for Model Cities Early Childhood Program at the Harris YWCA in Chicago, noted: “One of my concerns was that for the Head Start model they [program designers] wanted the parents to be involved and they wanted parents to be that third person in the classroom. Yet the parents were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds based on income, so I thought many times that the exposure they had was very limited. How do you expect these parents to teach their children and just give them a head start? To me that was a contradiction.”<sup>5</sup>

The Black Advisory Task Force recognized that although the parents may have had different life experiences, they did have extensive knowledge of their children and the community in which the staff and programs operated. Therefore, parent voices were critical on every LAT.

Today’s CDA® Credentials continue to value families’ voices through the form of Parent Questionnaires, to which a majority of the families of the children in the Candidates’ work experience must respond in order for candidates to earn their CDAs®.

External to the CDA® process, and Head Start, families’ voices are not a strong element of teacher education practice today. Nevertheless, the HMD report identifies the following competency as critical for working with families: “[the] Ability to communicate and connect with families in a mutually respectful, reciprocal way, and to set goals with families and prepare them to engage in complementary behaviors and activities that enhance development and early learning.”<sup>1</sup> The HMD Committee also stated that knowledge of and fitting into the community is critical in their development of the rationale for their *Blueprint for Action* - Recommendation 7a, and they also call for additional involvement of family advocates and parent groups in their notes related to the *Blueprint for Action*. The Council for Professional Recognition shares these ideals and also recommend that these theories find their way into practice.

## 3. Observation of a Teacher’s Practice

Observing the teachers’ actual competence in performing their roles through what became known as a “Verification Visit” was an important value for the Black Advisory Task Force. Task force members explained their stance: “Traditional assessment yields little if any information about a candidate’s values and feelings, and values may manifest themselves in a real setting. Consequently, important feedback is not available to the candidate and others to guide professional development.”<sup>4</sup> The task force determined that it would be ideal to not just have a test of the CDA® candidate’s knowledge, but a holistic perspective with measurements of job performance, such as observed competencies based on experience and training within the early childhood and education field.

### Multiple Sources of Evidence of Candidate Competency

- 120 hours of professional education in early childhood development
- 480 hours of work experience
- A Professional Portfolio that demonstrates an understanding of competence
- Feedback from families (Parent Questionnaire)
- Observation that demonstrates effective practice
- Content knowledge via a Standardized CDA® exam

Council for Professional Recognition,  
The Child Development Associate® National Credentialing  
Program and CDA® Competency Standards, p. 8-28.

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The legacy of observing a teacher’s practice was implemented through the Local Assessment Team (LAT). This team composition involved community members assessing the CDA® candidate, including the CDA® candidates themselves, a LAT advisor, and a parent. “The community assessment team must be organized to provide continuing feedback to the candidate to make the final assessment a much less threatening prospect,” specified task force members.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Ernest Washington, Black Advisory Task Force member, explains the LAT concept: “[These were] community people who were perfectly capable of helping define what the competencies [looked like in action] and making judgements about whether or not the candidate was capable of mastering it and judging their own progress.”<sup>6</sup>

The leader of the Black Advisory Task Force, Dr. Asa Hilliard, explained how feedback from the CDA Verification Visit™ was used: “Data to be developed and used for feedback for: staff development and improvement; program development and improvement; diagnostic information about the children served; establishing realistic normative referents for Black children. Data not to be developed for: decision to pass or fail pupils; program comparison.”<sup>7</sup>

Today’s CDA® Credentials still require direct observation—a CDA Verification Visit™ by a CDA Professional Development (PD) Specialist™. During the observation, the CDA PD Specialist™ uses a Council designed scoring tool, called the *Comprehensive Scoring Instrument*, to ensure that all candidates are viewed against the same criteria and for the same competencies and to ensure a measure of inter-rater reliability across the measures.

Dr. Hilliard’s discussion of how to use the results of teacher assessment presages the leadership competencies described by the HMD Committee. However, actual discussion of direct observation of teacher practice is only debated within the context of field experience and then mainly through recommendations for how to improve current teacher educational preparation. More, the HMD report devotes a great deal of discussion about observing children. However, very little attention was directed toward observation of teacher practice beyond discussing it as a tool for measuring instructional quality or that childhood mental health consultants, and educational mentors/coaches can offer teachers advice and continuing support as they improve their practice.

#### 4. Academic Training

Academic training for teachers of young children through the age of eight, its content, duration and setting, whether within an institution of higher education or through professional training organizations, has been debated for decades. In fact, much of the HMD report, and the conversation about it, focuses on this aspect of teacher preparation.

The HMD Committee address this rift about the academic qualifications of early educators head-on by stating: “Policy decisions about qualification requirements are complex, as is the relationship among level of education, high-quality professional practice, and outcomes for children. Given that empirical evidence about the effects of a bachelor’s degree is inconclusive, a decision to maintain the status quo and a decision to transition to a higher level of education as a minimum requirement entail similar uncertainty and as great a potential consequence for outcomes for children.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the HMD report recommended that early educators earn a bachelor’s degree as the minimum for lead teachers. The HMD Committee further states:

*“Challenges to interpreting the existing research about the relationship between the education level of educators and the quality of instruction and children’s learning and development arise from variability in their design and purpose and the extent to which other variables—such as the quality of the degree-granting program; state and local policies; and features of the practice setting,*

*such as the work environment, curriculum, educator supports, ongoing professional learning opportunities, collaboration among educators, and compensation—can be taken into account in interpreting the findings. The available studies alone are insufficient to enable conclusions as to whether a bachelor's degree improves the quality and effectiveness of educators, whether for early childhood settings or for K-12 schools.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Black Advisory Task Force instilled the idea of necessary training for all potential CDA<sup>®</sup> candidates, since receiving formal training should be an essential component towards best practices of high quality early care and education. Dr. Frankie Ellis, Black Advisory Task Force member, explains: “Instead of planning a program for CDA’s<sup>®</sup> around existing catalogue courses, it would be planned around competencies established as priority for CDA’s<sup>®</sup>. Even these competencies will have to be interpreted in terms of credit hours when CDA’s<sup>®</sup> seek admission into colleges where performance-based criteria is not used for credit or certification.”<sup>8</sup>

The Black Advisory Task Force provided some of their most provocative advice in the area of academic preparation for early educators, advice that continue to be relevant: “It is also most important to note that when assessment follows the collaborative pattern described, it makes no real sense to separate training from assessment, either in practice or in conceptualization.”<sup>4</sup> The CDA<sup>®</sup> process works to integrate training, experience (development of practice) and assessment as evidenced by the content of the CDA Verification Visit<sup>™</sup> discussed earlier.

In refining the current process for the CDA<sup>®</sup> Credentials, The Council for Professional Recognition acknowledges the importance of a strong background in the theory of child development as well as uniting theory with work experience to develop a unity of practice. Today’s CDA<sup>®</sup> requires 120 clock hours of training and at least 10 hours must be accumulated in eight required subject areas to ensure that all CDA<sup>®</sup> recipients have a core knowledge base in child development, safety, health, working with families and embracing diversity. The required academic areas of focus closely parallel the CDA<sup>®</sup> core competencies.

## 5. Work Experience

The HMD report dwells a great deal on the variability across institutions of higher education on all aspects of teacher preparation from coursework and field experience or practicum and on the range of experiences and expectations placed on teaching candidates for the public education sector (K-12) and community based preschool settings. They state that 96% of institutions of higher education have field placement programs, but they go on to discuss the fact that few states have developed any consistent standards around field experience. The incorporation of a practicum or any type of pre-placement work experiences receives scant attention except to state that outside of the public school system, most teachers’ “field experience is acquired on the job.”<sup>1</sup> In their recommendations about how to improve higher education experiences they recommend: “These educators

### Academic training requirements of the CDA’s<sup>®</sup> Eight Subject Areas include:

- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment
- Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development
- Supporting children’s social and emotional development
- Building productive relationships with families
- Managing an effective program operation
- Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
- Observing and recording children’s behavior
- Understanding principles of child development and learning

need high-quality field placements that build instructional competencies and also allow them to gain experience working with diverse populations of children and families”.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Phyllis Greenhouse, Black Advisory Task Force member, touches on the importance of CDA® Credentials’ requisites being a balance between traditional early education training and field experience: “field experiences must also accompany our many technical courses before they can have meaning...this is necessary before these experiences can have meaning and know-how in a pre-service total experience.”<sup>9</sup>

Today, a CDA® candidate must have 480 hours of professional work experience in a group setting with children between the ages of birth to five years old. A CDA® candidate’s work experience can be on a paid or volunteer basis, but it must be in a “setting” with the age group for which the candidate wants the credential. Work experience is critical for candidates because it not only enables them to develop their practice; it provides them with an opportunity to meet and work with families as they encourage their child’s development. This opportunity is a critical source of evidence leading to the credential. The Black Advisory Task Force maintained that hearing from parents about their interactions with the candidate was critically important to the candidate assessment process.

## 6. Career Pathways

Another contribution from the Black Advisory Task Force was the focus on articulating and promoting career pathways for early educators from various minority groups. “At that time [1970s] there was no path for [the African American or other minority candidate] to begin to make that journey from being classroom aid to being a teacher, we got the idea that the CDA® could be a first stepping stone towards a professional life and also the person that we’re interested in is the parent, who has been working at the Head Start center, who’s thinking about having a career, that this could be the first step, [and] that quickly became the touchstone for what we were thinking about at the time,”<sup>6</sup> states Dr. Ernest Washington. The idea was that these early educators could impact the community in a great way because they would be working in programs to properly assist children under their care. “Even if sufficient funds were available, we are not sure that the caliber of teachers and aides

could be recruited within the community,”<sup>10</sup> explained Frieda Mitchell, Black Advisory Task Force member. Therefore it was envisioned that the CDA® would provide that bridge between giving opportunities to lower income early care and education staff, many of whom happen to also be minorities, to have the chance to start a professional career in early education by first mastering the competencies recognized through the CDA® Credential.



*Florence Trimble, one of the “Symbolic 12” receives congratulations from Edward F. Zigler and Marilyn M. Smith, upon receipt of her CDA® Credential on July 24, 1975.*

The need for career pathways for early educators from diverse groups is more evident today than ever. According to the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, 18% of the early childhood workforce is composed of recent immigrants to the United States; whether or not they are immigrants, creating higher education pathways for early education English language learners is difficult—even though this population is the fastest growing segment of the early education workforce.<sup>11</sup> The HMD Committee recognizes that: “Recruiting diverse

faculty and prospective educators now will help create a diverse body of teachers that resembles the population of young children they teach”.<sup>1</sup> In all of these situations, creating pathways from recommendations has proven to be elusive. The CDA® Credentials, we believe, are the “*best first step*” in this pathway.

## Conclusion

In this overview, it becomes immediately evident that the Black Advisory Task Force’s contributions to early childhood teacher education continue to echo in contemporary calls for reform, including the HMD report. Forty years ago, the Black Advisory Task Force advised that the diversity of children and families must be central to teacher education practice.

Evangeline Ward, first Council Director, defines the CDA’s® efforts since its beginning: “Progress is the result of opposing forces, things pushing against each other, and in other words, it is called work.”<sup>5</sup> As the CDA® evolves, the legacy ideas behind the Black Advisory Task Force will also evolve alongside it. However, with the technology and process improvements in the newest CDA® assessment system, strong attention was given to preserve the diversity framework and the legacies of the Black Advisory Task Force. For example, as CDA® 2.0 streamlined and eased the assessment system, the knowledge base was strengthened. There is no longer a LAT system, but the voices of families and community members are still hardwired into the assessment system through the Parent Questionnaire and CDA Professional Development Specialists™.

Almost 400,000 early educators have earned their CDAs® – the CDA® is by far the premier credentialing system for early educators in the United States. Thanks to the efforts of the Black Advisory Task Force, the CDA® will continue to stand the test of time as evidenced by the HMD report, which reiterates its objectives. ■

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