

**Applicant:** Deanna D. Hall

**Position:** Professor Child Development, Education, and SLPA

**Institution:** Ventura College

**Sabbatical Duration:** Fall 2026 (one semester)

**Previous Sabbaticals:** 0

**Hire Date:** August 2015

### **I. Purpose & Rationale of Sabbatical Leave/ Introduction and Background**

The teaching profession has become highly feminized in the United States over the last 150 years, transitioning from a male dominated to a female dominated workforce. As the advent of non-custodial care of the youngest children in our society became common place beginning during World War II, the workforce has remained overwhelming female. Throughout the history of education in this country, there have been few dictates about the specific content to be introduced to children, the manner in which it is to be introduced, or the qualifications of those who teach.

Beginning in the 1960's, there has been a move toward standardization of early care and education and by the 1990's many states had created standards that attempted to align expectations of young children with state K-12 standards. With the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2002 by George W. Bush (which became popularly known as the No Child Left Behind Act), extreme standards of performance expectations were put into place without appropriate funding, training, or consultation from the professionals working in the field, particularly the female dominated teacher workforce. In addition, the ESEA of required a means by which states determined "highly qualified" teachers thus continuing a decades long effort to further "professionalize" the field.

This began the era of canned curriculum, stringent time tables of when content would be covered in the K-12 system, and passage of state and national standardized teacher candidate testing (which is often culturally, linguistically, and racially biased) driven by a neoliberal agenda. At the same time, the pre-kindergarten (birth to kindergarten entry) system was at the height of capacity, but unlike the K-12 system, had no unifying governing body at the state or federal level. Most 0-5 programs (with the exception of Head Start), were independently operated within the community by schools, churches, synagogues, private for-profit companies, and families. By 2010, all US states had adopted preschool standards and many had also adopted infant toddler standards. Information and education to learn more about these state-imposed expectations were either not provided to the workforce or were provided minimally. Today, these standards are aligned to the K-12 system, the increase in canned curriculum has infiltrated the 0-5 education systems, and school districts are increasingly providing transitional kindergarten and/or universal pre-k. These systems are highly structured, do not have the appropriate facilities, do not have a workforce with the appropriate educational or experiential background to work with 3- and 4-year-old children, , do not meet the needs of the predominately female workforce, and do not provide sufficient autonomy to meet the needs of children at this stage in their life.

Teaching in early childhood has always had additional emotional and physical burdens not commonly associated with 1st-12<sup>th</sup> teaching. These burdens have been mediated in part by the autonomy teachers

have had in meeting the needs of children and families in a wholistic manner. With the decrease in teacher autonomy and increase in data collection and reporting (and other supplementary tasks), early childhood teachers are finding their essential work with children compromised. Educational policy is shaping the early childhood field in a way that is not conducive to how children learn and grow. These same policies seem to be impacting the overall well being of teachers and making the teaching profession a less desirable choice for those considering careers.

## **II. Objectives of the Project/ Components of the Sabbatical Project**

The focus of my dissertation topic is to delve into how educational policy impacts a female dominated workforce of ECE teachers.

During this sabbatical, I will finish the first draft of my doctoral dissertation. The components that will be conducted during this sabbatical to meet this objective are:

*Data collection:* This dissertation project will be a mixed methods model. Questionnaires will be distributed to in-service ECE teachers which will gather quantitative data for analysis. Specifically, the questionnaire will be looking at three main questions: 1. To what extent do ECE teachers perceive the influence of educational policy on their day-to-day practice? 2. What autonomy do ECE teachers have, or take, in their day-to-day practice? What is the overall impact to ECE teacher well-being as it relates to educational policy. Interviews with these ECE teachers will be conducted using a select sampling method. This mixed methods approach is designed to provide insight and perspective of those in different parts of the country, school environments, with varying education levels and years of experience, and working under varying education policies.

*Data analysis:* Data will be collected during the summer and at the beginning of the sabbatical period in the fall. Data analysis will comprise the first half of the sabbatical period. Analysis will be conducted on the quantitative data using software applications like the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data collected from interviews will be video recorded, transcribed, evaluated for themes, coding developed, coding applied to each interview, and analysis conducted.

*Dissertation first draft:* Upon analysis of both data sets, the first draft of the fourth (findings) and fifth (discussion and implications) parts of my dissertation will be completed.

## **III. Benefits to Students, Campus, and District**

- *Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College and the Ventura County Community College District*
  - Direct connection to the root of educational policies is a little discussed topic in the research literature. This is an opportunity for VC/VCCCD to support research that may lead to state and national policies that are appropriate, meaningful, and in the best interests of the workforce we educate at Ventura College and the communities we serve.
  - This sabbatical proposal demonstrates commitment to the VC and VCCCD value to "...foster an environment where all individuals are respected and have equitable opportunities." and "...innovative, strategic risk-taking to create new opportunities and foster continuous personal, professional, and organizational growth mindset."

- *Value of Sabbatical Project to Instructor*
  - As an advocate and leader in California and other states throughout my 35-year career, this sabbatical gives me the opportunity to further explore my own lived experiences as part of the ECE female dominated workforce, to complete a lifelong goal of obtaining my doctorate degree, and contribute to the research literature that informs local, state, and national policy which impacts teachers, children, families, and communities.
- *Value of Sabbatical Project to Students*
  - Students will benefit from the research conducted and my continued professional development through completion of my doctorate. Through coursework, discussion, and local policies, students will benefit by having better access to the historical background that informs current practice in the field, opportunities to increase critical thinking and decision making about the field, and an avenue that encourages advocacy for their profession and creation of positive educational policy formation that directly impacts the children and families they work with and the communities in which they live.
  - Students also benefit tangentially by seeing their own professor modeling life long learning, curiosity, continued education, commitment to the field, and advocacy to make their career futures better.

#### **IV. Dissemination**

Dissemination of the final product of this sabbatical will be done through the completed dissertation which will be publicly available. Additionally, information informing the dissertation research will be shared with faculty and students to support their continued learning and professional advocacy. This can be done through department meetings, workshops, course readings, and activities.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Understanding more directly how educational policies implemented by a female dominated workforce impact the classroom environments, the individual teacher, and the workforce as a whole has broad implications about the quality of life and the quality of care and education for teachers, children, families and inevitably our entire community. A non-developmental lens through which to implement policies and create a less hostile work environment is imperative to appropriately partner with families during the most formative and important years of children's lives. These years set the foundation for children in all that comes next. Therefore, it is vital that the environments (and adults) children are surrounded by are consistent, have low-stress, and are highly-valued. My work on how educational policies (which are often centered on genderized values and neoliberal ideology) impact a female dominated workforce is the beginning of bringing about change to these policies.