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## The Quality of Child Care

Toranna Wermes

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## The Quality of Child Care

### **Abstract**

This study examined the effects of child care environments on children. Benefits, as well as problems, were discussed and were associated with how children are affected by the quality of child care environments. Guidelines were presented for establishing quality child care environments for children. Also, conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the future of child care in our state and nation.

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The Quality of Child Care

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Toranna Wermes

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This research paper by: Toranna Wermes

Titled: The Quality of Child Care

Has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the

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## Abstract

This study examined the effects of child care environments on children. Benefits, as well as problems, were discussed and were associated with how children are affected by the quality of child care environments. Guidelines were presented for establishing quality child care environments for children. Also, conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the future of child care in our state and nation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Iowa is currently facing a child care crisis. As we enter a new millennium, Iowa ranks first in the nation in the number of working parents who have school age children and it ranks second in the number of working parents who have children under the age of five (Child Care Resource and Referral Statistical Report [CCR&R], 2001). Inherent in these statistics is the fact that Iowa's children must have child care services.

Nationwide, in the last fifteen years, the majority of children under the age of six, including more than 50 percent of those younger than one year of age, have participated in some form of child care while their parents worked (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). This fact has had a profound effect on the direction of child care research. Whether or not children should be in child care is no longer an issue. More than twenty years ago, a national day care study indicated that economic necessity was a major reason for child care. A second reason was found to be an increasing number of women who chose to work out of the home for psychological, as well as economic reasons (Ruopp, Travers, Glanz & Coelen, 1979).

#### Quality in Child Care

While availability and affordability are two important factors when parents seek child care for their children, the current research about brain development during the crucial first years of life indicates that the quality of child care is perhaps the most important factor. The last two decades of research have suggested that non-maternal child care, as long as it was of high quality, was actually beneficial to children (CCR&R



Statistical Report, 2001). The most important concept in this conclusion is the term *high quality*. Not all child care programs achieve this somewhat nebulous standard. In considering all of the child care options available to parents, arrangements can range from very good to very poor, and the recent research has examined this diversity of quality.

Child care is best understood if it is addressed in terms of what has been happening to child care in this country, and in other industrialized countries around the world. Since human beings evolved as a species on earth, children have required continuous and intensive care during their early years in order to ensure their survival. Biologically speaking, human intellectual growth requires a prolonged period of infancy and childhood, as well as the individualized socialization that is characteristic and possibly unique to human caregiving. Probably for the last 50,000 years, children were raised in small family groups, primarily by their mothers. The traditional child care system that we can begin to recognize emerged in the 1800s as a result of the Industrial Revolution. By the mid-1900s, the majority of children over the age of six in western industrialized societies were being cared for, socialized, and educated by persons outside of the family. This shift to non-parental care is profoundly interesting when it is considered that a mere hundred years earlier, children in most countries in the western world had little or no formal school experience. By 1860, for example, only a few states in the United States had enacted compulsory education laws. These laws generally required a child to be in school about three months a year until the age of twelve, when he or she could be useful at home, or productively employed (Endsley & Bradbard, 1981).

Historically, the process of caring for younger children out of their homes by non-family members is not an entirely new concept. Day nurseries and infant schools have existed in the United States since the mid-1880s, designed to accommodate children of destitute immigrants and women who were forced to work in order to survive. Today, we are attempting to provide child care to millions of families, for a variety of reasons. What has caused this upsurge in the need for child care? Simply stated, the growth in child care is the direct result of the sharp drop in the number of caregivers available in each home. Less than four percent of all American households have grandparents and other relatives residing there in addition to the parents, which was customary in past generations. The traditional two-parent family itself is becoming rare, with one out of four children now living in a single-parent home. Ninety-five percent of single family households are headed by women who must work. The demand for child care services for their children is obvious. To this number, also, are added the children of married women who work for economic or other reasons. Today, more than 60 percent of mothers work outside the home (Endsley & Bradbard, 1981).

Because of the social and economic realities of modern life, child care has emerged in a variety of forms and has been subject to study. In 1979, the United States government began the on-going National Day Care Study ([NDCS], Ruopp et al.). The task of the original study was twofold: to try to identify those aspects of child care that could reasonably predict good outcomes for children; and to develop a framework of cost estimates for offering these so-called quality provisions. Quality is a difficult feature to define, as it is a judgmental concept that is personalized through the experience of each child and each family. Research efforts since the NDCS have attempted to specifically

identify quality dimensions of child care by viewing it structurally, dynamically, and contextually. Child care research has come to us in cycles. The first cycle in the 1960s and early 1970s answered rudimentary questions such as, should children be in child care? Is it good or bad for them? Would children be better off if cared for by their mothers in their own homes? This line of questioning became moot by the late 1970s, and researchers forged ahead to examine the different forms of available child care. Now, we are in the middle of a new research cycle which is attempting to answer more complicated questions. Current research is trying to discover which specific child care attributes, when they are combined with family factors, produce the most optimal effects on children's development. Finally, the issue of quality is being addressed.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of child care on children's growth and development and to present guidelines for establishing quality child care environments. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of high quality child care?
2. What are the benefits of quality child care on children's growth and development?
3. What are the problems involved in identifying and establishing quality child care environments for children?
4. What are the guidelines for identifying and establishing quality child care environments for children?

## Need for the Study

Researchers have shown an increased interest in what effects child care has on children. Clearly defined, observable guidelines would enable child care providers and parents who seek child care for their children to look beyond the issues of affordability and availability of child care to what really matters: its quality.

## Limitations

The majority of the research examined for this study investigated the effects of child care on children's growth and development. These studies are important in understanding the child care environment and its impact on children, but it is imperative to recognize the difficulties researchers have in quantifying the concept of quality. The measures of quality encompass a wide range of options, some of which are not amenable to regulation. Many times, these regulations vary from state to state. The measures of quality, if observed, are often subject to personal bias and interpretation. This study is limited to literature that provides general information about child care environments. Another limitation of this study is that some pertinent articles were not available.

## Definitions

In the literature reviewed for this study, researchers often used the term *child care* synonymously with *daycare*. In this paper, the term child care will be used. With the increasing demand for non-traditional hours of child care (nights and weekends, for example), daycare is not always an appropriate term. For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined:

Accreditation: A process in which a child care provider has participated in a recognized evaluation designed to assess the overall quality of their program, such as, the

National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (NAECP) through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), or the National Association of Family Day Care (NAFDC).

Care for Children with Special Needs: Home-based and center-based child care programs are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act to make accommodations to include children with special needs. Specialized services such as respite care are also available in many communities.

Child Care and Early Childhood Development Programs: These include many types of care for children from birth to age 13 and care for children with special needs to age 19 in a variety of settings.

Child Care Resource and Referral: The national system that offers community based services to parents/guardians, child care providers, employers and the community. Child Care Resource and Referral promotes consumer education and parental choice of child care and early childhood development programs, maintains a data base of information on child care providers and referrals, documents needs and trends in the child care delivery system, and serves as a resource to plan and leverage additional child care resources through public/private partnerships.

Developmentally Appropriate Activities/Practices: Experiences that provide for each child's social, emotional, intellectual and physical development that are age and individually appropriate. Cultural appropriateness is also a factor.

Family Child Care Home: This is a facility, usually a home, which may provide care for six children not attending school, and five additional school-age children for less than two hours at any one time. Registration in the State of Iowa is currently voluntary

(the law is scheduled to change as of October 1, 2002), but the limit on numbers of children and amount of attendance time apply whether the home is registered or not registered.

Group Day Care Home: This is a facility which may provide care for six children not attending school, and five additional school-age children. When the school-age children are present for more than two hours, an additional caregiver must be present. In the State of Iowa, registration is mandatory for group day care.

In-Home Child Care: This is an arrangement in which an individual is hired to come into your home to care for your child. Nanny and Au Pair agencies provide screening and hiring assistance for a fee. Individuals who provide this service are not required to be licensed or registered.

Licensed Child Care: This refers to a form of regulation in which the Department of Human Services certifies that the minimum requirements for licensing are being met, as specified by the Code of Iowa, Chapter 237A. An initial evaluation is followed by at least annual inspections. Licensing is mandatory for any facility caring for seven or more children not attending school. Licensing includes inspection by the State Fire Marshall as well as criminal records checks and child abuse registry checks on all staff.

Provider: This is an adult in a facility responsible for the care and supervision of one of more children in the absence of the parents.

Quality child care: Child care that positively affects children's growth and development. In this paper, the term *quality child care* is presumed to mean high quality child care.

Registered Child Care: This refers to a form of regulation in which the provider certifies that the minimum requirements for registration are being met, as specified by the Code of Iowa, Chapter 237A. At least 20 percent of all registered facilities are to be inspected annually. Registration includes criminal records checks and child abuse registry checks on providers and anyone living in the home.

Ryff Measure: This refers to characteristics of adult psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, a sense of personal purpose, and a desire for personal growth.

School-Age Child Care Programs: These are available in a variety of settings including public schools, child care centers, family and group child care homes, the YMCA or churches. Care is provided during school breaks or before and after school and sometimes transportation is provided. Licensure requirements depend upon the location of the program.

Seamless Service: This term refers to the delivery system designed to meet the needs of children and families through provision of services that reduce bureaucratic red tape for the family and matches the family with the needed services through a single point of entry.

Subsidized Child Care: This is the term that refers to child care funded through the state for parents meeting eligibility requirements. There are nine funding streams for child care subsidies administered by the Iowa Department of Human Services. Four of these subsidies are entitlement programs associated with welfare assistance. The other funding streams provide assistance to children who have been abused or are at risk of abuse, employed families at risk of becoming eligible for welfare assistance, low-income

working families, and low income families participating in education or training programs, or families having children with special needs.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Improving Child Care and Its Ramifications

Several major studies have contributed to the wealth of information that has been collected about child care. Recent research reflects the current attention paid to the concept of quality by early childhood educators. Many of the research articles addressed the important issue of how child care can be improved. In order to do this, research encompassed the diversity of child care environments and their effects on children. Key indicators of child care quality were identified, analyzed, and discussed in an effort to guide child care practitioners in a new direction and perhaps to influence policymakers who are in positions to support that direction.

The Chicago Design Study (Clarke-Stewart, 1984) was a forerunner in identifying characteristics and features of different types of child care, and in distinguishing levels of quality. Characteristics of child care forms were examined and compared in terms of child characteristics, caregiver characteristics, the physical setting, the program and activities, and the social context. The purpose of the Chicago Design Study was to determine how well individual characteristics of child care environments (most of them regulatable) predicted measures of quality and vice versa (1984). The dimensions and effects of child care quality were explored in the Bermuda Study (McCartney, Scarr, & Grajek, 1985), which also helped determine those specific features of a good child care program that can be observed and regulated. Capacity, group size, and the ratio of adults to children were the structural features that most consistently related to any aspect of quality. The Pennsylvania Study (Fiene & Kontos, 1985) went so far as to discern

correlations between quality variables and regulatable variables. The correlations of environmental characteristics and quality measures were then compared with child development outcome measures. The Pennsylvania Day Care Study provided a model of policy research, as it was designed in collaboration with the child care licensing office in Pennsylvania which sought to quantify and then monitor quality child care environments (Fiene & Kontos, 1985). The Los Angeles Study (Howes & Oelnick, 1990) examined quality indicators in infant and toddler child care and issued findings on what type of care was best for children younger than three years. The Victoria Day Care Research Project (Goelman & Pence, 1987) was a longitudinal study of children, parents, and caregivers from a variety of child care settings. This study examined the question of the effects of child care from several perspectives and offered insights about the characteristics of child care providers, the child care environment and program, children's experience in daycare, and their subsequent performance on standardized language development tests (1987). The ongoing longitudinal data from the National Day Care Study (Ruopp et al., 1979) has continued to identify key predictors of good outcomes for children who participate in daycare as well, and has attempted to develop an analysis of what quality child care costs. This extensive study was initiated by the federal government to guide in developing what were termed *national child care standards*, especially important in determining the effect of child care on children's cognitive, physical, emotional and social development.

Articles in educational journals range through the gamut of topics. The current thrust of research seems to have two focus areas: identifying those aspects of child care that affect children positively and making correlations about that data; and studying the role of child care as a work environment for adults. In April 2001, Robert Bock

presented a paper at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development in Minneapolis in which he reported on preschoolers who experienced higher quality care and the correlation between that care and their achieving better intellectual and language skills. Also, Bock presented a second paper at the Minneapolis conference about a study he conducted to determine if quality child care in a group setting actually increased school readiness. In this study, he identified guidelines for high quality centers which included such factors as lower staff-child ratios, smaller group sizes, lower staff turnover rate, higher education level of the staff and increased professional training opportunities. Other researchers have focused on other aspects of child care. Carollee Howes' recent research offered insights into understanding caregiver behavior in both centers and child care homes and also addressed family influences on child care (1999). Kontos and Fiene (1984) have reported on those variables in child care that can be measured and regulated: the adult-child ratio, caregiver experience, caregiver stability, caregiver education and training, and group size. Clarke-Stewart's studies (1984, 1989, 1992) investigated the significance of family background variables on children's development, whether or not they were in child care. These studies examined interactive effects between children's experience at home and in child care. Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy Temple, Dylan Robertson and Emily Mann (1995) investigated the long-term effects of a quality early childhood intervention on later educational achievement levels. This research revealed that high quality early intervention programs raise the academic achievement levels of children throughout the elementary school years. This same study drew a correlation between early childhood intervention programs and lower juvenile arrest records.

## Benefits of Quality Child Care

Researchers, educators, and early childhood practitioners have spent many decades and devoted energy and resources to developing better quality child care. The professional knowledge core of early care settings stipulates that good child care is performed by qualified providers, working in well-planned, nurturing environments that support children's health and safety and promote learning through play (Cryer, 1999). The type of child care parents seek remains the choice of the individual family; however, many parents prefer family child care homes, which can offer a smaller number of children who are cared for by one primary provider in a family setting (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Kontos (1995) observed that regardless of the choice or type of child care, parents and child care providers, as well as policymakers, should become familiar with those characteristics that define quality child care. Child care providers need to improve their skills and knowledge of the way children learn and grow, have a thorough understanding of developmentally appropriate practices, ages and stages, and be well versed in the current theories of guidance and special needs and inclusion (Kontos, 1995). At the same time, Kontos suggested that child care providers must be able to maintain a viable business (1995). In addition, Kontos identified the areas in which quality child care providers demonstrate strengths. These areas include commitment to child care, early childhood education training, supportive child care connections, stable finances, and personal psychological well being (1995).

## Problems Associated With Child Care

Non-parental care is the norm for the majority of American children (Burchinal, 1999). High quality child care promotes children's cognitive development, fosters the

development of social skills, and results in a higher level of school readiness (Ruopp et al., 1997). There is an increased demand for child care and substantial investments in state child care subsidies (Hofferth, 1999). Burchinal's research also suggested that although all children benefit from higher quality care, children from lower economic backgrounds generally experience poorer quality child care, but frequently have the most to gain from higher quality care (1999).

Many factors are associated with the quality of child care which parents choose. Income, education, and cultural preferences all influence that choice (Kontos, 1995). If parents become more aware of what constitutes quality care, it is logical that they will subsequently become more intelligent and sophisticated child care consumers. Policymakers likewise need to understand the concept of quality. This could result in better child care investments at the state and national levels (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Improvements in the quality of child care predictably offer better outcomes for children and their families (Kontos, 1995).

#### Characteristics of Quality Child Care Providers

It is important to examine several attributes of quality child care providers. The first is regulation. In the State of Iowa, regulation for home providers is considered the first step toward quality. To be a home provider caring for six or fewer children, regulation has been a voluntary process, although this will change as of October 2002. Currently, joint and group day care homes must be registered and day care centers must be licensed. Regulation in Iowa stipulates a basis for children's health and safety and provides child care consumers with a system for making and addressing complaints. Child Care Resource and Referral is the state system identified in the Iowa code that

gives parents child care referrals and provides information about available training and resources (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Kontos' research (1995) stated that the most effective child care providers are regulated, and revealed that states with higher licensing standards and regulations have a larger number of quality child care programs than non-regulated ones.

Research documented the fact that quality child care requires better educated and trained child care providers (Kontos, 1995). Kontos observed that regardless of individual educational backgrounds, superior child care providers are lifelong learners. They pursue education and training in early child care, often seeking accreditation, child care credentials, and leadership skills (1995). Kontos determined that this attitude towards lifelong learning is a crucial determinant of a quality child care provider. Also, her research revealed that higher quality providers are less authoritarian in using child rearing practices and are better facilitators of children's intellectual and social achievement (1995).

Ryff (1989) discussed and identified characteristics of adult psychological well-being. Those indicators include self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, a sense of personal purpose, and a desire for personal growth. Weaver (2001) suggested that highly qualified child care providers, who are able to make their homes into warm, responsive, sensitive learning environments, rate high on the Ryff measure. Evidently, the strengths of education and training coupled with psychological well-being are important in influencing a child care provider's ability to create a warm, nurturing, quality child care environment.

Bollins' research (1993) stated that quality child care providers are committed to child care. This commitment encourages and nurtures the relationship between children and their child care providers and promotes stability in the child care environment. Several interesting studies have examined the characteristics and degree of commitment of child care providers. The majority of providers see themselves as permanently committed to the profession (Weaver, 2001). Job commitment is higher among regulated providers (Pence & Goelman, 1987), while Eheart and Leavitt's research indicated that many providers view their work as temporary- something to do while their own children need care (1986). Kontos' research suggested that there are strong linkages between job satisfaction, stress and morale, and the level of commitment of the child care provider (1995).

Kontos' research (1995) determined that quality child care providers have supportive connections with the family child care community, including those connections to child care resources, support groups, and networking associations, and formalized child care systems, such as Child Care Resource and Referral. Family child care tends to be an isolating profession and successful home providers seek access to support.

Quality providers need financial resources sufficient to guarantee an adequate and predictable income (Weaver, 2001). Weaver's studies also suggested that helping child care providers develop their financial base actually improves the quality of that care. A secure financial foundation allows the provider to meet the regulation requirements of the child care environment, as well as to purchase toys and equipment to build and maintain a quality child care program.

## CHAPTER 3

### GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING CHILD CARE QUALITY

#### Developing Guidelines

In 1990, the Congress of the United States established new funds for child care assistance. The funds were designed to improve child care quality and affordability, especially for lower income families. In the last decade, it has become clear that more must be done. We now recognize that good early childhood programs not only benefit children and their families, but are an essential support to business and industry. Parents are more productive workers when they know that their children are in safe, quality environments. The children who attend high quality programs are better equipped to succeed in school, and eventually to enter the workforce as effective, functioning citizens. The following guidelines are needed so that quality child care programs will become more abundant.

1. The limitations of child care must be understood.

As more and more families come to rely on some form of child care, we should recognize and understand its limitations. Most early childhood programs operate on limited budgets and often, parental fees alone are not sufficient to cover the cost of high quality care. Many child care programs do not pay staff wages and benefits that are comparable to other professionals who work with children. For example, child care providers earn roughly half the salary of public school teachers with similar levels of preparation and job responsibility (Manlove & Guzell, 1997). This is one reason that centers nationally experience a 40 percent turnover in staff each year (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2000). Our nation supports



a public system of education, because all our citizens benefit from it. Families are not expected to pay the full cost of that education, because of the resulting benefits. Early childhood programs must be viewed the same way and supported for the same reason.

2. The components of high quality child care must be understood and accepted.

To provide a high quality child care program for young children, good relationships between adults and children must be established. Caregivers must be individuals who understand how children grow and learn. Caregivers need to know how to work effectively with children and their families. Most essential, there must be adequate compensation (salaries and benefits) available to attract and retain quality caregivers. In short, there must be a good learning environment for children and a good working environment for adults who work with children.

The long-time focus of child care has been its affordability and availability (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Certainly, higher quality care will be more expensive. Identifying what constitutes quality child care has been difficult, and it has been virtually impossible to determine if high quality child care is the norm or the exception in the United States (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Researchers have depended upon suggestive data from multisite studies to identify process quality, as well as structural and caregiver characteristics (Phillips, 1987). Because of this, although it has certainly been established that, almost everywhere, there is room for improvement in child care environments, setting up guidelines will continue to be a somewhat subjective activity.

3. The research concerning regulatable elements of child care must be evaluated and used to improve child care.

The plethora of available research suggested that there are negative and positive consequences to attending child care, and that these consequences are directly related to the quality of care that is provided. Various studies have attempted to identify those characteristics of child care which are amenable to regulation and which can impact child care environments. Lower child:adult ratios and smaller groups sizes have been associated with improved quality in child care centers (Helburn, 1995). Staff turnover rates are clearly connected to the quality of the child care program and turnover is closely connected with compensation, which is abysmally low in the child care field in the United States (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989). Whitebook, Howes and Phillips' research showed that the general education level and the specific training in child-related fields are also related to the quality of child care programs (1989). The Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team determined that turnover, education level, and compensation are all interrelated (1995). This same research revealed that the performance of a child care center director, especially as relates to the provision of leadership, supervision and employee feedback, affects program quality. Safe and sanitary design and maintenance of the physical environment, as well as the requiring of hygienic practices by child care workers is also important to program quality (Black, Dykes, Anderson & Sinclair, 1981). The continuity of child relationships with adults, maintaining positive relationships between parents and staff, and a program emphasis on child-initiated activities in a play-based curriculum also have a significant impact on quality, and offer more of a challenge as to regulation (Peisener-Feinberg, Burchinal & Howes, 1999).

#### 4. The public must invest more resources in child care.

A strong case needs to be made for public investment in quality child care.

However, what economists define as market failure- an inability to allocate resources efficiently- has occurred in the child care industry (Hofferth, 1999). This has happened for several reasons. First, market failure has happened because of a lack of information. This occurs because the child care field is made up of many small providers, making it difficult for parents to acquire necessary information about comparative quality, cost, and availability of care. A system of seamless service would alleviate this. Parents' diverse and individual backgrounds make it difficult for them to evaluate any information they do acquire. A second cause of market failure has happened because of externalities- that is, effects beyond the primary consumers. This means that, not only do children and their parents benefit from high quality care, society as a whole reaps benefits, too. Societal benefits may include such things as lower costs for later schooling, since children who experience quality child care enter school more ready to learn and achieve; a lower crime rate, as juvenile delinquency diminishes; an increased workforce productivity level and lower need for social services, as working parents, whose children are in quality child care, are more attached to the labor market and have fewer child-related absences or terminations (Kritschinsky & Jones, 1972).

Parents of young children tend to have lower income levels and this affects their ability to pay for high quality child care. Research has indicated that difficulty in obtaining high quality care especially affects low-income families (Clarke-Stewart, 1984). This is especially true of poorer families whose members may work non-traditional hours, have intermittent, rotating schedules, or weekend work schedules. Only

ten percent of centers and six percent of family day care homes provide week-end care (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Thus, many parents must depend on a patchwork of child care providers. These arrangements often are unstable, which in itself is a measure of poor quality child care.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The intent of this study was to examine the effects of child care on children's growth and development (physical, emotional, social and cognitive) and to present guidelines for establishing quality child care environments. To accomplish this purpose, this paper addressed the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of quality child care?

Important statistics about child care were introduced. Currently, thirteen million preschoolers, half of them infants and toddlers, spend part or all of their days in non-parental care. Three out of five preschoolers attend a child care program every week. Millions more school-age children are in child care before and after the school day. Nearly seven million children are left in self-care, home alone before and after school each week (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Researchers agreed that all children should receive the best care possible.

2. What are the benefits of quality child care on children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth?

Child care was identified as both a state and a national concern. Quality child care was recognized as critical in meeting two of America's highest priorities: helping families work and ensuring that every child enters school ready to learn. It was established that quality child care- safe, reliable, stimulating care- allows parents to be productive in the work force as contributors to the national economy. Researchers agreed

that children are more likely to succeed in school if they have a foundation of good early learning opportunities.

Bocks's research revealed that children who are in high quality early care and education score markedly higher on math and reading tests, and are more likely to complete high school and attend college (2001). According to long term, on-going NDC studies, children who have had high quality early care are less likely to be retained in school or be charged in juvenile court. In contrast, children who have experienced poor quality child care are often delayed in reading and language skills (Bock, 2001).

Burchinal's research showed that high quality early child care and education improves children's development and their readiness for school. Children who enter school ready to learn are more successful academically and socially throughout their school years (1999). Clarke-Stewart's studies have consistently shown that high quality child care has a strong impact upon lower income children, while poor quality care is particularly damaging to lower income children (1984).

3. What are the problems involved in identifying and establishing quality child care environments for children?

Reynolds, Temple, Robertson and Mann's research highlighted the fact that children who have experienced poor quality child care show more aggression towards adults and their peers (1995). Children in self-care, or in poor quality child care environments before and after school, had more exposure to crime, violence, and early sexual activity (Phillips, 1987). Bock stressed that many children do not enter school ready to learn. Forty-six percent of kindergarten teachers nationwide report that half of the children in their classes have trouble following directions, have difficulty working

independently, and lack the necessary rudimentary academic skills that typically predict school success (2001).

Not all aspects of quality child care are amenable to regulation. For example, the attitudes, backgrounds, values, and biases of individual child care providers certainly impact child care environments, but cannot be controlled or regulated. Since child care remains the choice of individual families, the social and cultural contexts of those families should also be considered.

#### 4. What are the guidelines for identifying and establishing quality child care environments for children?

Iowa has one of the highest needs for child care in the country, leading the nation in the number of families in which both parents work. In Iowa, there are many single parent families as well, where the only parent in the family works. Over 77 percent of all families with children in the birth to five population have both parents, or in the case of single parent families, the only parent in the workforce. That is more than three-quarters of all Iowa families with preschool children (CCR&R Statistical Report, 2001). Identifying and establishing quality child care environments for children remains a daunting task, partly because choosing child care remains a subjective experience that is personalized by each family.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Child care has become the norm for young children in the United States, which is why the concept of quality must be addressed.

2. Among child care researchers, the established view is that child care quality contributes to children's developmental outcomes; higher quality care is associated with better developmental outcomes and poorer quality care is associated with poorer outcomes for children.
3. Good quality child care, care that provides a safe, loving, stable, and stimulating play environment, helps children enter school ready to learn and succeed, and provides them with the starting blocks necessary to succeed in school.
4. Quality child care environments can be identified, although this process is difficult and somewhat subjective. Some characteristics of quality child care can be quantified, and therefore are more amenable to regulation.

### Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Making more quality child care available helps to support a strong economy by allowing families to find and keep jobs, and by preparing the workforce of the future. Clearly, we cannot delay making major new investments in child care.
2. The child care industry should be regulated at both the state and federal levels and the ongoing education and training of child care providers should be required.
3. It is necessary to get beyond the issues of affordability and availability before the more complex issue of child care quality can be adequately addressed.
4. Further descriptive research is needed to understand the complex issue of child care quality and lend support for the notion that public investment in child care is essential.



5. Research should be recognized as an important link in the chain of events that can stretch the limits of what is considered possible and what is considered essential for the well-being of the nation's children and families. Child care should be recognized as the mutual enterprise of children, parents, caregivers, the community, and the state and federal governments, all who can benefit from it.

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