

Parents' knowledge of children's daycare experience incomplete, study finds

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Nearly 1.5 million Canadian children grow up living double lives: one at home with their parents and another in some form of childcare environment. While parents hope to be informed of what goes on when they're not around, a recent Concordia study suggests that parents ought to be more involved in the daycare experience, a major component of their child's development.

Nina Howe, a professor in Concordia's Department of Education and a lead author on the study, set out to uncover what Canadian parents really know about their children's care. "We suspected that most parents know very little about the education, training, and background experiences of their children's educators or what goes on during the child's day," she explains. "No one buys a car without doing some homework, so why don't parents do some homework when selecting childcare?"

The past few decades have seen a historic change in the number of Canadian women employed in the workforce, and consequently more parents require childcare. With the demand far exceeding the number of available spaces, Howe believes some parents may ascribe more importance to factors like the centre's proximity than its philosophy.

The study, which will soon be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of [Early Childhood Research](#)*, was part of a larger project on delivering professional development to early childhood educators. Howe and her colleagues Ellen Jacobs and Holly Recchia at Concordia's Department of Psychology and Goranka Vukelich at Conestoga College

in Kitchener, Ontario were interested in whether parents noticed a difference in the quality of their children's education after changes in curriculum had been implemented.

The researchers singled out several aspects of the daycare experience, from the childcare centre's educational mandate to the teacher's education. They based their research on 44 not-for-profit daycare centres in three cities across the country—Halifax, Montreal and Winnipeg. The research team interviewed 261 parents or guardians by phone, and found that while seventy-five percent of parents reported some knowledge of the centre's philosophy, which was for the most part acquired from written statements issued by the educator, even fewer parents, about forty percent, knew how much education the teacher had.

Research indicates that teachers with more formal training provide more developmentally appropriate activities for the children and have stronger relations with parents. This is due to the fact that during his or her training, the teacher would have had courses and field placements that would have taught them to establish a good rapport with parents and keep the lines of communication open.

"Parents are often unaware of the role that teacher education plays in providing high quality care for children; they think that an attractive centre with a warm and nurturing teacher is sufficient," Howe explains. "While these factors are important, [parents](#) need to know what the centre's philosophy is, what kind of activities are offered to the children, how the day is organized, and so on. Considering that many children spend eight to nine hours a day, five days per week in childcare, this is a critical question."

Howe has written a new book with Dr. Larry Prochner at the University of Alberta titled *Recent Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada*. The book provides an overview of early childhood

education with a focus on historical context, aspects of various curricula, and government involvement in [education](#) programs.

More information: Journal of Early Childhood Research
ecr.sagepub.com/

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