A Model Early Childhood Program: Quality is the Key

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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This project serves as a planning guide for administrators, directors, and educators of young children. It is designed in such a way that persons wishing to develop an early childhood program may refer to it as a source of guidance from which they can begin their commitment to quality early childhood education. It is also designed for those people who may not understand the full scope of early childhood education or may question its intentions. To begin with, I will briefly discuss the various aspects that are involved with the planning of a quality early childhood program. Included will be the plans for a model early childhood center. Next, I will discuss various facets of a quality early childhood curriculum. Finally, I will summarize research that has been published showing the effects of quality early childhood education. The key word in this project, as should be in all early childhood programs, is quality. Children need quality planning, a quality curriculum, and quality teachers to provide the kind of quality environment that will be of most benefit to them.

Quality Planning

In developing an early childhood program, as in developing a shopping mall, a business merger, or just about anything else you might think of, quality planning is the first step to success. In the case of developing an early childhood program, exploring the market is a logical place to
start. A person interested in opening a new early childhood center should first investigate the child care needs are in the community. Questions such as, "What programs are available now?"; "What ages do they serve?"; "Are parents satisfied with the quality of care now available?"; "Which families need good early childhood programs?"; "What are the ages of the children in these families?"; "When is care needed?"; and "What locations would be most convenient for parents?" are all valid concerns to someone planning to provide a child care service (Brown, 1984).

After answering these questions, it would be a good idea to observe a variety of local programs for young children. Here more questions should be considered. For example, "How do these programs seem to meet the needs of the children?...their families?...the staff?"; "What aspects might be improved?"; "What can you learn from their experiences?"; "How are the programs supported?"; and "How could a new service be coordinated with the existing programs?" Again, all of these second step questions are important concerns for the developer of a new child care program (Brown, 1984).

The next logical step in designing a child care center would be to consider location. To begin with, the location of the center must meet local zoning requirements. The location should be easily accessible to families who will use the service. This can be done in a number of ways. Locations close to residential areas are convenient, and so
are locations near places of business. In smaller communities where most people work in the town, a central location near the business district may be a good choice. In small communities where many residents commute to a nearby larger city for work, a location near a major highway or street leading to the city may be a wise choice. Another option for location would be nearness to an elementary school. This will be especially convenient if after-school care is to be provided for children of ages 5-12. This type of location may also be convenient for parents who have school-age children as well as younger children.

Another major concern to the developer of an early childhood program is the building in which the program will be run. Will you build a new building? Will you remodel an existing building? Or will you use rented space? Many early childhood programs are housed in renovated residences. This provides a home-like atmosphere, but it is hard to find such homes in the proper zones. A building built especially for use by young children has many advantages. For example, space may be allotted for the many components of the program. It may be equipped with appropriate storage areas, and it could include durable surfaces. If you are planning to use rented space, some landlords may be willing to renovate if extensive structural changes are not needed. Churches, private schools, and community centers may also rent space. In this case, sliding or movable partitions can be used (Click, 1981).
Along with these planning steps, the developer of a new child care program must also obtain a copy of all licensing requirements. What state or local regulations, such as child care, education, zoning, fire, building, health and other such regulations, apply to the type of service you are planning? How will regulations affect funding? How will they affect the opening date projections of the facility? And how will they affect the families served? The State Department of Welfare is usually the authority for licensing; although, sometimes it is the State Department of Health. Most agencies will have a packet of information available that lists procedures, clearances, and permits that are necessary before licensing can be issued. Before licensing can be awarded, states require evidence that certain building requirements have been met. For example, plumbing, utilities, fire extinguishers, alarms, fire walls or doors, safe storage of flammable materials, plans for evacuation, food storage and preparation, toilet facilities, ventilation, lighting, heating, and provision for isolation of a sick child must all meet standards set by the state.

There are three major types of day care facilities required to obtain licenses in the United States. The first is a family day care home. Service of this kind is for a limited number of children and has the fewest requirements. The second type is a group day care home, in which larger numbers of children are allowed when an additional adult is employed. The third type is a day care center. In this
situation, a larger number of children may be enrolled. The requirements are much more stringent and cover many aspects of operation from physical space to staff qualifications, to food service, fire safety, and equipment. All of these licensing requirements are spelled out by the state, and must be followed closely in order to provide a safe, quality program (Click, 1981). Although each state provides numerous criteria that must be met for accreditation, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) sets high-quality standards that sometimes surpass the state requirements. It is advisable that anyone opening a new child care center meet the NAEYC's requirements for quality. A list of these requirements may be obtained by simply calling the NAEYC.

**Finances and Budgets**

Finances are a major concern for the developer of a new early childhood program. Firstly, a preliminary budget must be made. With the trend toward lower federal, state, and local human service budgets, child care providers are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that they are using their share of public and private funds wisely and effectively. For someone who may not be familiar with making educated projections of income and expenditures, this may be a intimidating task. Here are some simplified hints and rules to follow. Projected expenditures can be divided into fixed
costs, variable costs, shared costs, and hidden costs. Fixed costs never change, even when the number of children enrolled changes. Initial and projected investments in the physical facility, start-up and program preparation expenses, mortgage or rent, real estate taxes, utilities, certain salaries, and certain supplies are included as fixed costs. Variable costs do change. Variable costs include most staff wages, food, curriculum supplies, costs for in-service training. Some variable costs do not change steadily with increases/decreases in enrollment, but only at certain points. For example, staff wages jump when enrollment increases. Shared costs are those incurred with other programs or agencies. Hidden costs are those stemming from free use of goods and services. The first step in formulating a budget is to project expenditures.

The second step of budget formulation is projecting the program's income. To do this, calculate the likely amount of fees to be collected and other sources of income sure to be generated through donations, subsidies, grants, and so forth (Halpern, 1984). Surveying existing child care programs will help to determine the "going rate". Other considerations when deciding what to charge for fees include whether the children will be attending half or full day, other sources of income, transportation charges, and registration fees. Expenses for the first year will probably be greater than they will be once the school is established. One must also consider that enrollment will not be full immediately
The main thing to remember when calculating a budget is that expenditures CAN NOT exceed projected income.

There are many other aspects to formulating a budget. Determining optimal enrollment, monitoring spending, and determining appropriateness of expenditures and income are all important factors. However, more time will be spent here on other factors that go into providing a quality early childhood program. Who might help do an economic analysis if needed? The director of the program should try to do as much as possible; however, an accountant or a management consultant with accounting skills can be helpful when setting up a bookkeeping system, in examining books at least once a year, and when considering a basic program change with financial implications. To gain skills needed to do budgeting and other kinds of economic analysis, referral to a basic accounting book may help.

Where will funds be found to support the program? People and corporations are not just going to give the director of a child care program money for the asking. They are going to want to know what they will get out of it. They will want to know what the benefits will be. When approaching sources of funding, the director must be prepared to face the doubts and skepticism that others might have. Using economic terms and definitions may add credibility to the director of an early childhood program. There are three kinds of economic arguments that can justify funding.
Firstly, the program is cost-beneficial; the monetary benefits of the program exceed the monetary costs. Secondly, the program is cost-efficient; management of funds and personnel is yielding optimal outcomes for children and optimal services. In other words, they are getting the most out of the funds available. Finally, the program is cost-effective; it offers a low-cost approach (relative to other approaches) to achieving certain societal goals such as increasing worker productivity in the long run (Halpern, 1984). It will also be of great benefit to cite evidence from research that supports early childhood education as a cost-beneficial investment, but this will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

Insurance is another dimension to consider when planning an early childhood program. A child care program will need liability and property damage insurance to provide legal protection for the owner or operator of the school. Fire damage insurance to cover the building and its contents will also be needed. Insurance for accidents that may be incurred by children and staff members is another concern. There are numerous types of insurance available, and it may be a good idea to consult legal advice to be on the safe side. Because private assets of the owner can be levied for payment of indebtedness, it is very important for the owner of an early childhood center to protect himself/herself against personal loss. Of main concern, of course, is the safety and protection of the children (Click, 1981).
The Board of Directors

The board of directors formulates major school policies, and with the director, formulates policies for operation of the school. It is important that the board of directors participate actively in community relations. Along with many other responsibilities, it is the board's job to adopt and support the budget. (Click, 1981). The board of director's role should be adapted from program to program to fit the program's needs. Who participates on the board of directors? It is a good idea to involve persons from all disciplines. A lawyer, a doctor, a politician, parents of children enrolled in the school, and the principal of a local school might all be members of the board of directors.

Advertising and Recruitment

What would an early childhood program be if people did not know about it? Advertising and recruitment are essential aspects of a child care program. There are many ways to advertise. Small ads placed in local newspapers or neighborhood periodicals are a good place to begin. Notices on bulletin boards in places families frequent, community centers, parks, children's clothing stores, and
pediatricians' offices may also be seen by families that may be in need of child care. Telephone advertising is best for long range advertising. The director of the program should also consider the best possible time for the opening of the center. If possible, it is best to plan the opening for Fall, because this is the time parents are thinking about school for children. The beginning of the calendar year is another possibility. It is important for the director to make sure the school is ready to be seen at its best. If parents must see the physical facility before it is finished, be sure to present the schools objectives in another way. A brochure or other written materials covering the educational objectives of the program will help. A clear presentation by the director of essential aspects of the program and of the ways that it will be different from other schools will be an effective way to put parents at ease (Click, 1981). When advertising and recruiting, the director should be as creative and imaginative as possible.

The Director's Role

It is obvious that many tasks lie in the hands of the director of an early childhood education program. The director may perform any of the following tasks:

* greet parents and children
* help some children part with parents for the day
* find substitutes for ill teachers
*review rainy day schedules with teachers
*prepare monthly financial reports
*arrange for repairs of the facility
*hire new employees
*outline agendas for staff meetings
*arrange conferences with parents to discuss problems
*resolve disputes between teachers
*show new parents and children around the school
*confer with the cook about menus for the following week
*order supplies
*schedule trips for groups of children

(Click, p1).

In some schools, the director assumes part or total responsibility for teaching a group of children. It is essential for the director to foster good human relations through use of effective and clear communication with children, teachers, and parents. There are many elements of the director's responsibilities. The director is not only a manager, but also an organizer, and a communicator.

**Director as Manager.** To begin with, we will look at the director as manager. There are three styles of management that could be implemented by the director of a child care center. Democratic management means that the director involves others, especially the children, in decisions and policy-making. The authoritarian style of management is one in which the director makes all decisions and determines all policies. Finally, the laissez-faire style of management
dictates that decisions and policy-making is left to others, providing occasional suggestions by the director. It should be recognized that the democratic style of management is the most beneficial to all involved; the children gain from it, the director is still in control of the program, and parents can even be included if the director so desires. As a director of an early childhood program, one is responsible for determining which state and local regulatory requirements must be met regarding licensing, health, and safety. The director also provides leadership for setting over-all goals for the school. These will be used as a basis for curriculum objectives. It is also important that the director evaluate his/her own work as director and plan for continuing professional growth (Click, 1981). All of the above make for a good director, and consequently for a good program.

The director also holds enrollment duties. The director enrolls children and keeps accurate waiting lists. The director interviews prospective parents, giving them information about the program. He/she plans an orientation for new parents and knows the changing needs of the community in order to maintain full enrollment.

Another management responsibility the director holds is working with the curriculum. The director provides direction to staff in setting curriculum objectives appropriate to the school, works with the staff to implement and maintain these objectives, and provides leadership in evaluating the curriculum. The curriculum will be discussed in more detail
in a later section.

The director is also responsible for the physical building and its equipment. This means he/she plans, allocates, and uses space effectively and plans for future needs of the school in the way of space and equipment. The director is in charge of keeping records, such as inventories, repair schedules, and purchasing information as well as managing supplies, and reordering as needed. The program will not operate efficiently without the director managing these responsibilities wisely (Click, 1981).

One of the most important jobs of the director of an early childhood program concerns staff selections and relations. The director recruits and hires competent staff members. If the school is just opening, the director should make sure to, "Choose the first teachers for the school with care. During the first year of operation, the reputation of the school is being formed. The teachers are an important part of this process" (Click, p.28,30). The director should also help teachers implement the goals of the program by communicating with them openly and often. When opening a new center, it is very important for the director to get to know each teacher quickly and to provide opportunities for the teachers to meet each other. Along with the previous requirements, the director must also prepare job descriptions for each position, formulate and implement personnel objectives, and provide continuing assessment of staff development and needs (Click, 1981). The director is
obligated also to build and maintain good community relations by representing the school at community functions and encouraging staff members to do the same. It is important that the director interpret the school and its objectives to visitors and establish contacts with community agencies.

It is obvious that a quality director is an essential building block of a quality early childhood program. The director holds many managerial responsibilities, such as managing the program with an appropriate management style (preferably the democratic approach), the hiring of competent staff members, keeping enrollment at an appropriate level, working with the staff to implement a quality curriculum, keeping up-to-date records of finances, and maintaining a good repertoire with parents and the community.

**Director as Organizer.** As Click (1981) points out, the director has available to him/her three important resources when organizing a child care program: people, time, and materials. People are a director’s most valuable resource. The director must create and foster feelings that each staff member, each parent, each volunteer, and each child is important as an individual and also as a member of a close-working group. If this is done, the director’s job will be much easier. Time is another important resource to the director. Schedules must be flexible enough to allow for unexpected and unplanned activities. A director who makes the staff members feel they must stick to a tight, no-room-for-adjustment schedule is only developing a sense of
uncomfortableness in the staff that will also rub off on the children. The director may choose to organize the program into small units for each activity or schedule blocks for choices of several activities. The latter is the best method. "It is the responsibility of the director to assess, use, and organize time well and still satisfy as many needs as possible" (Click, p7). The third resource available to the director is materials. The director must organize and distribute materials so that each staff member is adequately supplied, while also minimizing waste. Either organizing an open central supply area or passing out supplies at intervals as needed will suffice. If the director will only organize people, time, and materials effectively, a quality program will fall into place.

**Director as Communicator.** Click is correct when she states that, "Much of the work of early childhood education is based on communication between adults and between adults and children" (Click, p7). Closer relationships among people, changes in behavior of one or more parties, solutions to problems, and sharing of experiences not otherwise possible can develop through communication. There are two ways one can communicate with another. Verbal communication, based on words, symbols, and ideas, is one form of communication. Nonverbal communication, based on facial expression, movements, tone of voice, and posture, is the other. When communicating with a parent, a staff member, a child, or anyone else, the director should be sure what
he/she wants the other person to know. He/she should also carefully consider when to convey the message, allow enough time for the sending-receiving process, decide where the message should be conveyed, decide how to convey the message, and follow up on the message. This may seem like a lot to think about when all one wants to do is communicate with someone else, but communication is a cornerstone that can make or break an early childhood education program. It is essential that the director have good communication skills.

Because the director is such a vital part of a quality early childhood program, it is necessary that he/she perform a self-evaluation. The director may want to concentrate on a specific part of the job since there are many responsibilities involved. For example, he/she may want to zero in on staff relationships. Questions that would be appropriate for the director to ask himself/herself are, "Have I found the best possible teachers?"; "Do job descriptions include all tasks I expect from the staff?"; "Do I convey the attitude that I am willing to help others solve problems?"; "Have I created an atmosphere in which teachers see evaluations as a way to help them?" Some of the following tips may help a director satisfy the questions asked above. Remember to praise for work well done! Remember to spend a few minutes each day with each teacher. Try to understand the feelings of others by listening. Offer help without being asked, but encourage teachers to increase their own abilities by trying new things. Finally, really
consider suggestions made by others. The director of an early childhood education program should perform such self-evaluations regularly, because a quality program needs to be evaluated often to make sure everyone's needs are being met. Improvements are always necessary and should always be sought, because children, parents, and teachers are always changing.

So far, methods for planning a quality early childhood education program have been discussed and the director's responsibilities have been outlined, but what exactly does it take to build a high quality early childhood program? In the following section, criteria for high quality early childhood programs will be discussed.

The Physical Environment

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that there should be a minimum of 35 square feet of usable floor space indoors per child and a minimum of 75 square feet of play space outdoors per child (Brown, 1984). It is suggested that activity areas be defined clearly by spatial arrangement, so that children can work individually, together in small groups, or in a large group. Pathways from one area to another should be clear. Space for toddlers and preschool children needs to be arranged to facilitate small group and/or individual activities. The space can be divided into such areas as
block building, sociodramatic play, art, music, science, math, quiet book reading, sand/water table, and woodworking. With a design such as this, the child is able to pick the area in which he/she wishes to work. There should be carpeted areas and ample crawling space for non-walkers, along with sturdy furniture for these children to pull themselves up or balance. It is advisable that school-agers have their own separate space to facilitate a variety of age-appropriate activities. The children should have their own individual compartments in which they can hang up their coats and store personal belongings. It is important that the children have this space that they know is their own; it helps foster feelings of self-worth and independence. There should also be private areas indoors and outdoors for solitude. Soft elements, such as rugs, cushions, and rocking chairs are important. The outdoor area should include a variety of surfaces and must be protected from access to streets (Brown, 1984). Along with other creative and insightful elements added by staff members, these guidelines will help create a quality physical environment.

Health and Safety

Licensing and accreditation with the appropriate agencies has already been discussed, but there are other valid concerns when it comes to health and safety. For example, written records should be kept for each child
containing the results of a complete physical examination. This examination must be performed by an approved health care resource no more than six months prior to enrollment. A record of immunizations, emergency contact information, names of people who the center is authorized to contact concerning the child, and pertinent health histories must all be included in a child's health file.

Staff members should be alert to the health of each child. Individual medical problems and accidents should be recorded and reported to staff and parents. At least one staff member who has certification in emergency first aid and CPR from a licensed health professional must always be in the center. Suspected incidents of child abuse and/or neglect by parents, staff or others MUST be reported to the appropriate local agencies. In addition to all of the above health concerns, adequate first aid supplies should be readily available, and a plan should exist for dealing with medical emergencies.

As far as the physical facility is concerned, it should be cleaned daily to disinfect bathroom fixtures and remove trash. Infants' equipment needs to be washed and disinfected at least twice a week. Toys that children have put into their mouths should be washed daily. Soiled diapers must be disposed of immediately or held for laundry in closed containers inaccessible to the children. The cover of the changing table must be either disposable or must be disinfected after each changing of a soiled diaper. It is
imperative that the staff wash their hands with soap and water before feeding and after diapering or assisting a child with toileting and nose wiping. A sink with running hot and cold water should be adjacent to the diapering area. All equipment and the building itself must be maintained in a safe, clean condition and in good repair. Individual bedding for nap-time must be washed once a week and used by only one child between washings. Individual cribs, cots, or mats must be washed right away if soiled. The sides of infants' cribs must be in the locked position when occupied. Toilets, drinking water, and hand washing facilities should be easily accessible to children, and soap and disposable towels should be provided. Children should be encouraged to wash their hands after toileting and before meals. The hot water temperature on sinks the children can reach must not exceed 101 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius) to avoid scalding. All rooms should be well-lighted and ventilated, and stairways should also be well-lighted and equipped with handrails. There must be screens on all windows that open, and all electrical outlets must be covered with protective caps. Also, floor coverings should be attached to the floor, or at least backed with non-slip material. All chemicals and potentially dangerous products, such as medicines or cleaning supplies, must be stored in the original, labeled containers in locked cabinets which are inaccessible to the children. Medication should be administered to children only when a written order has been submitted by a parent. It is
important that medication is consistently administered by a designated staff member, and it may be a good idea to keep a written record showing times medications were given for parents to check. Smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are a must. They must be periodically checked. Primary and secondary evacuation routes should be familiar to staff members, and should be practiced monthly with the children. This may be quite a traumatic experience for very young children, so the teacher should try to prepare the children for the event as much as possible. Emergency procedures must be posted in conspicuous places, and emergency phone numbers should be posted by the phones (Brown, 1984). Some of the above recommendations may seem to be common sense, but quality is important, and by meeting all of these requirements, the program is on its way to becoming a quality early childhood education program.

Nutrition is an important facet of a child's learning and growth. Meals and/or snacks should be planned to meet a child’s nutritional requirements as recommended by the Child Care Food Program of the USRDA in proportion to the amount of time the child is at the center each day. Menu information should be provided to parents via newsletters or bulletin boards located where parents will notice them. Feeding times and food consumption information should be provided to parents of infants and toddlers at the end of each day. Meal times should promote good nutritional habits. Toddlers and preschoolers should be encouraged to serve and feed
themselves. Chairs, tables, and eating utensils must be suitable for the size and developmental levels of the children. Meal should be seen as a pleasant social and learning experience. Infants should be held in an inclined position while bottle feeding. Foods indicative of the children's cultural backgrounds should be served periodically. At least one adult should sit with the children during meals. Developing good nutritional practices early in a child's life will help him eat healthily for the rest of his life.

**Staff Qualifications and Development**

As stated earlier, one of the director's responsibilities, and probably one of the most important ones, is staff selection. Staff members must be at least 18 years old and must be trained, or in the process of training, in early childhood education and child development, and must demonstrate appropriate personal characteristics for working with children. Staff members working with school-age children should be trained in child development and recreation, or a related field. The amount of training required will vary depending on the level of responsibility (See TABLE 1). In cases where staff do not meet the specified qualifications, a training plan, both individualized and center-wide, should be implemented for those staff members. Training should be appropriate to the
age group with which the staff member is working. It is practically a necessity that the chief administrator of the program have some type of training and/or experience in business administration. If the chief administrator is not an early childhood specialist, one must be employed to direct the educational program. New staff members should be adequately oriented about the goals and philosophy of the center, emergency health and safety procedures, special needs of children assigned to the staff member’s care, guidance and classroom management techniques, and planned daily activities of the center. The program should provide regular training opportunities for staff to improve their skills in working with children and families. Staff should be expected to participate in staff development workshops and seminars. Visits to other programs, access to resource materials, in-service sessions, and enrollment in college level courses are all routes to be investigated for staff improvement. Training might address these issues: health and safety, child growth and development, planning learning activities, guidance and discipline techniques, linkages with community services, communication and relations with families, or detection of child abuse. It is important to make sure that these training sessions are more than just lectures that staff members will have to sit through. Hands-on types of activities work best for adults as well as children. It is very important to keep accurate and current records of staff qualifications; for example, transcripts, certifications, and
other documentation of continuing in-service education. Staff members should receive pre-employment physicals, tuberculosis tests, and evaluations of any infections. With all of the courtroom turmoil and bad publicity that some day care centers have received lately, regarding accusations of child abuse and molestation, it is absolutely imperative that hiring practices include very careful checking of personal references. It is also a good idea that new employees serve a probationary period (Brown, 1984); not because new teachers are more likely to commit child abuse or molestation, it is impossible to know what kind of repertoire he/she will have with the children and their families. Staff members can make or break an early childhood program; therefore, it is in the best interest of everyone involved to hire competent, quality teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-professionals who implements program activities under direct supervision of the professional staff</td>
<td>Early Childhood Teacher Assistant</td>
<td>High school graduate or equivalent, participation in professional development programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals who independently implement program activities &amp; who may be responsible for the care of &amp; education of a group of children</td>
<td>Early Childhood Associate Teacher</td>
<td>Child Development Associate credential or associate degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals who are responsible for the care of &amp; education of a group of children</td>
<td>Early Childhood Teacher</td>
<td>BA in Early Childhood Education/Child Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals who supervise &amp; train staff, design curriculum, and/or administer programs</td>
<td>Early Childhood Specialist</td>
<td>BA in Early Childhood Education/Child Development &amp; at least 3 yrs full-time teaching experience with young children and/or graduate degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brown, p6).
Interactions Among Staff and Children

Obviously, it is important for staff members to interact frequently with children. It is essential that staff express respect for and affection toward children by smiling, touching, holding, and speaking to children at their eye level throughout the day, particularly on arrival and departure, and when diapering or feeding very young children. The staff should be available and responsive to the children, encouraging them to share experiences, ideas, and feelings. Teachers must speak with children in a friendly, positive, courteous manner. Conversations should take place frequently, and open-ended types of questions should be asked. Staff members should make time to speak to each child individually (as opposed to the whole group) as much as possible. The staff can encourage developmentally appropriate independence by having the children pick up toys, wipe spills, toileting and washing hands on their own, and obtaining and caring for materials. Positive techniques of guidance should be used. These techniques include redirection, anticipation and elimination of potential problems, positive reinforcement, and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, or criticism. Staff members should NEVER use corporal punishment or other humiliating or frightening discipline techniques. Constant, clear rules which are explained to the children and understood by adults will eliminate many behavior problems (Brown, 1984).
Pleasant interactions between staff members and children will provide much to a quality program.

**Staff-Child Ratios**

The number of children in a group should be limited to facilitate adult-child interaction and constructive activity among the children. Groups may be age-determined or multi-aged. Maximum group size is determined by the distribution of ages. Optimal group size would be smaller than the maximum. Group size limitations vary depending on type of activity, whether indoors or outdoors, the inclusion of children with special needs, and other factors. A group is the number of children assigned to a staff member or team of staff members occupying an individual classroom or well-defined space within a larger room. TABLE 2 shows NAEYC's recommendations for staff-child ratios.
TABLE 2 (Staff-Child Ratios within Group Size)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Children*</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>24</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>infants (1-12 mos.)</td>
<td>1:3</td>
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<tr>
<td>toddlers (12-24 mos)</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>1:4</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2yr olds (24-36 mos)</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>1:6**</td>
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<td>2 &amp; 3 yr olds</td>
<td>1:5</td>
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<td>3 yr olds</td>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>1:7</td>
<td>1:8**</td>
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*Multi-age grouping permissible and desirable. When no infants are included, the staff-child ratio and group size requirements are based on the age of the majority of the children in the group. When infants are included, ratios and group size for infants must be maintained.

**Smaller group sizes and lower staff-child ratios optimal. Larger group sizes and higher staff-child ratios acceptable only in cases where staff are highly qualified (Brown, p8).
Staff-Parent Interaction

It is of utmost importance that staff and parents communicate regarding home and center child-rearing practices in order to minimize potential conflicts and confusion for children. Information about the program should be given to new and prospective families; included should be written descriptions of the program's philosophy and operating procedures. A process must be developed for orienting children and parents to the center, which may include a pre-enrollment visit, a parent orientation meeting, or gradual introduction of children to the center. It is important that parents feel, and genuinely are, welcome visitors in the center at all times (to observe, eat lunch with a child, or volunteer to help in the class). A verbal or written system should be established for sharing day-to-day happenings with parents. Changes in a child's emotional state should be regularly reported. Conferences should take place at least once a year and at other times, as needed, to discuss children's progress, accomplishments, and difficulties and home and at the center (Brown, 1984). Conferences can be an intimidating experience for parents, but this need not be the case. There are many precautions teachers can take to make parents feel more at ease with a parent-teacher conference. To begin with, and probably most important of all, teachers must make a real effort to avoid calling parents only when there is a problem with a child. If the teacher establishes
an open line of communication with parents through frequent "Happy-Grams", parents will not feel panic-stricken when the teacher wants to speak with them about their children. Some basic guidelines which will help teachers conduct successful parent conference are listed below.

1. **Plan for the conference.** Gather materials that illustrate all the topics you want to cover. The time spent in planning always pays dividends in the long run.

2. **Set a time limit.** Most parent conferences can be conducted in about fifteen minutes.

3. **Be on time and start on time.** Care-givers should not make parents wait for them to start a conference. If parent conferences are scheduled one after the other, being on time keeps things moving and avoids making everyone wait.

4. **Talk so parents understand you.** Don’t use educational jargon or words parents won’t understand.

5. **Be positive and provide specific helping suggestions.** Parents expect that care-givers will help guide and direct them with positive, helpful parenting suggestions.

6. **Solicit and consider parents’ feelings and ideas.** Remember that parents have feelings too and want to be treated as competent human beings. Parents know
a great deal about their children. Use this information to help everyone concerned.

7. **Bring closure to the conference.** Summarize who said what and who is going to do what.

8. **Follow up and follow through.** A parent conference is only as good as the follow-up. If nothing results from a conference, then, in a sense, the conference was a waste of everyone's time.

(Morrison, p330-331).

Some of the information presented in the preceding sections may seem a bit much, but there are many aspects involved in a high-quality early childhood program. Careful planning is the first step. Meeting licensing requirements, financing and funding the program, obtaining insurance, organizing a board of directors, advertising and recruiting, outlining the director's responsibilities, and other critical steps are also involved. Opening a new early childhood program may seem like an overwhelming experience, but if the process is broken down into smaller units, it is an experience that can be conquered.

The next section will consist of plans drawn by an architect that could represent a model, high-quality early child environment.
These plans are representative of ideas and instructions presented to me by Christina M. Rice. The design of the facility is a direct representation of her ideas. My involvement was merely to take her ideas and put them into architectural form.

William Comb
Now we have gone through the planning stages of building an early childhood education program, but what actually happens from day to day in the program? The next section explores various aspects of an early childhood curriculum.

**The Right to Play**

Some uninformed individuals may hold the notion that day care centers, and early childhood programs in general, are nothing more than glorified baby-sitting services. This is simply not the case, at least it should not be. On the other hand, however, these programs should not emphasize formal pen-and-pencil learning tasks. So what should the emphasis be? Children have a right to play; play is a child's work; through play, children learn to organize information about the world around them. Play is not a time-filler. When children play, their interest is self-directed, and their intrinsic motivation to solve problems stemming from the world that is so important to them takes over. When children play, they are not concerned with particular goals or ends, but rather with the variety of ways to obtain the goal. In other words, they experiment with possibilities and become more flexible in thinking and problem solving (Almy, 1984). For example, one child may see another child tossing a ball up in the air and may decide to imitate the act. Upon doing this, he may realize that if he extends his arms as the ball comes down, he can catch the ball. Very often, when children
play, their behavior is not literal. Much of what they do stands for something else; they represent their experiences symbolically. Researchers think that their ability to conceive objects and situations as if they were something else contributes to later skill in hypothetical reasoning and understanding of abstract symbols and logical transformations (Almy, 1984). Almy (1984) also suggests that when children play, they free themselves from external rules, from restrictions imposed by time and space. However, they make up their own rules and establish roles and plots. Close study of such play indicates that children's negotiations with each other are complex; they make longer utterances and use more varied vocabulary than in other situations. When children play with objects they discover what they can do with them, increasing their own repertoire of behaviors; for instance, the catching a ball example used earlier. Both play and exploration, involving the familiar and the unfamiliar, are essential to children's understanding of the world and their own powers (Almy, 1984).

Play is the child's way of coming to terms with personal experiences in and knowledge of the physical and social world, but it is not sufficient in itself. Teachers hold a crucial role by responding to and supporting children's play ideas, while not overwhelming them. Adults must provide ever-expanding opportunities for children to learn from their own actions and observations (Almy, 1984). This may seem to be quite a task, but with a little practice and some
imagination and creativity, it is definitely possible to provide experiences in which the children themselves will make the discoveries the adults are hoping they will make, and probably a few the adults had never even thought of, to expand their ever-changing views of the world around them.

Everyday Experiences

Using events and objects in the curriculum that are common almost every day helps children learn about the world around them. Joseph H. Stephens, Jr. (1984) evaluates Carew's 1980 research on the subject. Carew found four types of presumably intellectually valuable everyday experiences. To begin with, there are the language-mastery experiences. These experiences include describing, classifying, comparing, defining, and vocabulary expansion. There are an indefinite number of these types of experiences that can be incorporated into the curriculum, and even practiced at home between the child and his parents. For example, children can classify their cereal by shape or color. They can sort their socks by color, pattern, or size. They can sort their books by cover color, size, type of story, whether read or not, etc. The possibilities are limited only by one's imagination.

Stephens (1984) goes on to discuss Carew's second category of experiences--spatial, fine-motor events. These include ordering of objects by perception, fitting, stacking, matching, or building. Some examples of this type of
activity include having the child line up his peanuts (or other like food item) at snack time, making the line go away from him. Ask him to eat the peanut that is farthest away from him; closest to him. Another example may be to take a walk and discuss which trees are tallest and shortest, matching cards and their envelopes by laying each card on an envelope and then checking by putting the cards into the envelopes. The third type of everyday experiences are the concrete reasoning and problem-solving experiences, including gravity, volume, trajectory, or reflection experiments. Activities that would go along with this category are dropping objects of various sizes and weights from a certain height to see which ones will hit the ground first, and pouring water from one container to a container of a different size. The fourth and final category Carew recognizes is the expressive-artistic experiences. These activities include construction and role playing, activities that children usually do very well without much help from adults. Carew found that everyday experiences judged to be intellectually valuable were predictive of children's IQs, spatial abilities, language activities, and abilities to generate their own such activities. Intellectually valuable experiences that involve the teacher and/or parents as active participants (without overwhelming or directing the child too much) can support intellectual development (Stephens, 1984). What does all of this mean? It means that it is important to incorporate everyday experiences into the curriculum as
valuable learning experiences, and it is important to encourage parents to follow through with similar types of activities at home.

Transitions

Transitions are another important aspect of the early childhood curriculum. It has been stated by J.G. Stone that "The key to classroom management is to help children develop self-control over their environment in increasingly responsible ways" (Brown, p88). The major task in working out transitions is to arrange the environment so that the children can begin to direct their own behavior.

Arrival is the first transition time. This is one of the most critical times for averting trouble. It is important that the teachers or director try to give each child and parent genuine, undivided attention. Even though some children may be active eating breakfast, or morning group time may be going on when other children arrive, it is important to check each child's emotional state as they arrive, because a disturbed child may become a disruptive child suddenly. At the beginning of each day, the teacher should be at the door, not preparing for the day; activities available at this time for children should be interesting, easy to monitor, and supervised by capable adults. This often means training parents, volunteers, or students to assist. Centers should have some of their best teachers
scheduled in the morning because sometimes children cling and cry at separation from their parents. Children may try to test everyone's affection and temper by refusing to take off coats or by running around stealing toys from other children. Parents may be embarrassed or feel bad and may react harshly. Good communication is needed between early morning teachers and others who arrive later. Information gained during the first few moments must be shared with other staff. Some children may need an adult's presence each time a transition nears. If something unavoidable does distract the teacher when children and parents are arriving, she should excuse herself rather than talk while attention is divided, but the teacher should make a mental note to spend time with that child as soon as possible. When a child is bubbling over with news, the teacher should take her by the hand to accompany him while he solves the problem and then resume the conversation. If a child comes in, says "Hi", and dashes over to an activity, do not force a conversation, but make an effort to share a special time together later on. When parents want to talk, the teacher can ask them to stay for a few moments. If this is not possible, the teacher should ask if he/she can call later or sit down for a few minutes when the parent returns. Sometimes making an appointment is the best option (Brown, 1984). Arrival time can often be very hectic, but it is important that the staff make the transition from home to school as smooth as possible for the children and parents.
Sharing time is another way to ease transition from home to school and give the teacher information about how the child is feeling and what is going on in his life. Sharing times in which children are encouraged to talk about interests, feelings, and experiences are preferred to show-and-tell, which can turn into a display of children's latest toys. Sharing time should be short. If many of the children are eager to share, a few short sharing times may be appropriate; let two or three children talk before and/or after activities. Encouraging children to share experiences may raise the issue of confidentiality. Do not stop a child from telling something personal; the child may feel rejected and the issue may be magnified in the other children's eyes. Just say, "This sometimes happens. How did you feel?" and go to other children (Brown, 1984).

Transitions occur all day long. When the teacher wants the children to change from one activity to another, he/she can motivate them to do so quickly and in an orderly fashion by turning off the lights, playing a short melody on the piano, starting a little chant, or something of the sort. It may take the children awhile to learn to make transitions smoothly, but after they learn the procedures, transitions can be a fun part of their day.

Infants and Toddlers

What is different about infants and toddlers? They have
unique physical, intellectual, and emotional needs, skills, and styles. They grow and change very rapidly, and they are especially vulnerable to inadequacies in their environments. Because of these differences, their care must be more personal, intense, and family-centered. There are nine different approaches to infant/toddler programming, as explained by Janet Brown (1984).

**High Quality Care Giving.** This approach provides good home-style care in such a way that growth is nurtured during typical daily routines. Individual affection and learning opportunities are part of this approach. Self-esteem and autonomy are encouraged. Play materials and social interaction provide enrichment for the children. Examples of the care giving approach include using words for clothes and body parts during dressing, providing soft blocks and activity centers in cribs, singing songs during feeding, looking at books in a quiet area of the room, and making playthings available throughout the day.

**Babies' Needs.** In this approach, special attention is placed on the range of development requirements known to be important in the early years. Adults' awareness of and planning for infants' needs are the cornerstone elements of this approach. Children's interests in sensory, exploratory, and toy play and peer interactions are also considered. Examples of the needs approach include holding and hugging fussy babies, providing self-feeding
foods, playing pat-a-cake with an alert child, supplying new rattles and pictures regularly, and clearing floor areas for wobbly walkers.

**Adult Roles.** This approach sees teachers and care givers as the critical element. Their comfort, guidance, language modeling, playing participation, and knowledge about child development are children's assurance of love and learning. Training and continued support are emphasized. The two most important responsibilities are providing interesting activities for babies and interacting positively with them. Use of theories of Piaget and Erikson guide interaction and play. Examples of the adult roles approach include remembering the baby's abilities and interests, using praise and affection often, providing tasks that build thinking, explaining events and using new vocabulary, and giving one-to-one attention to each child every day.

**Play and Learning.** The focus in this approach is on the belief that the business of babies is to play and interact. Playing and learning are seen as inseparable. Games, materials, and activities are described in terms of how adults and children can be involved with each other in the context of play. Use of blocks, vehicles, dramatic roles, creative materials are all suggested. Examples of the play and learning approach include using dishes and dolls for pretend play, joining two and three sitting babies using toy assortment, creating games with
balls, music, and puppets, helping two toddlers play together at the sand table, and modeling sharing and turn-taking with toys.

**Environment.** This approach views babies as explorers whose investigations are limited only by the surroundings and materials. Curiosity and delight propel babies into educational encounters using playthings and equipment within their reach. Materials are selected and arranged to facilitate learning and play. An interesting caregiver and setting fulfill the roles in organizing and mediating babies' experiences. Examples of the environmental approach include organizing simple activity centers in the room, providing varied, multi-level toys, using textured natural objects and materials, changing some playthings each month, and using water, sand, and dough to explore.

**Tasks and Activities.** This approach involves planned independent and guided activities. The developmental sequence of predictable early milestones of growth and learning are the basis for designing activities to enhance observable skills and understandings. Enrichment activities add spice or help accomplish new skills. Examples of the tasks and activities approach include helping babies to use shape sorters and nesting blocks, providing seasonal resources such as pumpkins and flowers, using developmental checklists to spot needs, arranging a sequence of easy to difficult toys,
and encouraging persistence in finishing a simple puzzle.

**Administration.** In this approach, procedures, forms, charts, and specific management strategies are described to help caregivers monitor children's progress and to manage the center. Detailed descriptions and smooth functioning are seen as means by which very young children are provided with safe, appropriate experiences. Examples of the administration approach include recording babies' play activities and interactions, noting changes in abilities and interests, using suggested health and daily routines, comparing actual to recommended care practices.

**Parent-family.** For this approach, it is the responsibility of the professionals to provide families with information, emotional support, and shared activities with other families. The emphasis is on including mothers and fathers as part of the program as learners in meetings and related projects. Examples of the parent-family approach include helping parents to play with their babies, providing ideas for home activities, demonstrating educational uses of toys, describing goals of the program activities, and pointing out changes in babies' development.

**Program Collage.** This ties together all of the above approaches. A good infant/toddler program integrates aspects of each approach. The director should ask,
"What are the program's major strengths?"; "Are there gaps?"; "Are there appropriate differences in the child's experiences during the earlier and later years?"; "Where is continuity maintained?" Good programs for babies are enriching without being formal or concentrating too much on a single approach at the expense of others. Education is a life-long process that begins very early, is guided by maturation and experience, and has unique challenges at each stage (Brown, 1984).

**Physical Care of Infants**

Infants, obviously, need quite a bit more physical care than do older children. Diapering is one thing that caregivers of infants will have to do often. The changing table should be about waist high and should have a colorful mobile hanging above it. The adult should sing or talk to the baby while the diaper is being changed. A solution of 1/4 cup of bleach per gallon of water should be kept in a spray bottle near the changing table for disinfecting the area. Diapers that have been soiled by bowel movements should be tied in a small plastic bag and kept in a covered waste container that is lined with a plastic bag and designated for soiled diapers only. The caregiver should wash his/her hands and the baby's hands after each changing (Maxim, 1990).

Feeding time is another event that occurs often in the
infant program. Be sure to label each bottle with the babies' names so it is easily known which formula belongs to which baby. Hands should be washed thoroughly before feeding a child. During feeding, the care giver should cuddle the baby, make eye contact, and talk and hum to the baby.

There are many play activities that an infant will enjoy. Mimicking; drop and fetch; peek-a-boo; pat-a-cake; and action games, such as swinging the baby between one's knees, tickling, and bouncing on the knee, are all enjoyable for infants. It is important that the care giver hold a favorite toy in front of the baby and encourage him to reach for it. It is also important to lay the baby on a variety of surfaces during feeding, changing, rest, and play. Toys with a variety of surfaces such as plastic, cloth, furry, soft, and smooth should be provided.

Crib toys are an essential part of any infant program. Crib gyms can be made by stretching a length of heavy-gage elastic across the crib and attaching it on both sides. Several shorter lengths of elastic can be tied on so they hang down a short distance. Rattles, plastic spoons, etc. can be securely tied to the shorter lengths; just make sure the items are big enough so the baby will not swallow them. The infant will begin to enjoy hitting the objects and will soon find she can grasp them. Make sure cuddly toys are safe. The eyes, nose, mouth, and such should be embroidered on, so the baby can not pull them off and swallow them. Music boxes are definitely an asset to the infants'
environment. Caregivers should check with parents about pacifiers. If the parents want their child to have a pacifier, one should be sent from home. If it drops onto the floor, it should be immersed in boiling water for 25 minutes. Squeeze toys made from vividly colored fabric and stuffed with old pantyhose make wonderful playthings for infants. Doughnut shaped toys are probably the best because the infant can firmly grasp the toy (Maxim, 1990). Adults should use their imaginations to create inexpensive toys for infants. Care should be taken, however, to make sure the toys are large enough that infants will not choke on them.

Activities for Toddlers

Toddlers are busy little people. They are beginning to walk, and are falling down often. They enjoy pulling and pushing toys and can stack two to four objects. Toddlers repeatedly pick up and throw objects and are fascinated by looking inside containers. They crave adult attention and are openly affectionate. They enjoy scribbling energetically. Older toddlers (2 to 3 years of age) are learning to jump, hop, and gallop. They can pedal a tricycle and other wheeled toys. And anyone who has been around toddlers much knows that they invariably ask "Why?"

Young toddlers need low furniture to hold onto. They will enjoy surprise boxes and music boxes. Record players and records are a good suggestion. Blocks, balls, nesting
toys, plastic containers, and pounding toys are popular items for toddlers. Toddlers enjoy playing Follow the Leader, Name It, Lotto games, Pouring Fun, and laundry basket Basketball (Maxim, 1990). Toddlers are very energetic, and teachers should provide many stimulating activities to keep up with their busy minds.

**Older Preschoolers**

The curriculum of older preschoolers (4- and 5-year-olds) includes many facets. It is important to include special daily routines such as calendar concepts and attendance recordings. Children feel comfortable with routines, and these routines help children learn the names of the days of the week, the names of the months, and the names of the other children. Sociodramatic play, constructive play, art, and music can all be incorporated into the curriculum by defining special "areas" for these activities. Basic concept skills, such as color, shape, and perceptual games should be introduced and reinforced throughout the year. Language and literacy skills, such as speaking, listening, rhymes and poems, and reading stories are all integral parts of the preschool curriculum. Formal subjects, such as mathematics and science, should not be formally introduced to the children in a "sit down and learn" method. Certain basic concepts from these and other subjects can be explored with young children, but the learning should be in
the form of games, songs, experiments, and using manipulatives, opposed to pencil and paper activities such as worksheets. Another fun activity for these youngsters is cooking. Simple, uncooked recipes and supervised cooking recipes can be great activities for preschoolers. If an cooking activity is followed by discussion and the making of an experience chart, the children are practicing speaking, listening, and reading skills all at once (Maxim, 1990).

Experience charts are a wonderful means of education. After any kind of field trip, walk to the park, exciting event, or visit by a guest, the children can tell a story about what has just happened while the teacher writes exactly what they say on large, mural-size paper. This helps the children make the connection between their spoken words and the words the teacher is writing on the paper. After the story is finished, it is important that the teacher go back and read the story, exactly as it was said and written, to the children. At some point, the children will start to be able to "read" what is written just because they remember saying it a few moments earlier. This step is exciting, because it is the first step to reading. Preschool children are so exciting to work with, because they are extremely interested in the world around them, and they are starting to make the transition into young people who can communicate effectively with adults and who may someday become important leaders. For these reasons, it is of extreme importance that educators of these children do their best to provide a stimulating
environment for young children. It is also for these reasons that it is important for society, in general, to begin to look at early childhood programs as more than babysitting services.

Choosing Good Toys and Activities

What are good toys for young children? Good toys for young children are attractive and interesting, well constructed, durable, and safe. They are matched to children's abilities, good for children of different ages, and useful in various ways. Safe toys for young children are well made with no sharp parts or splinters and will not pinch the child. The toys should be painted with nontoxic, lead-free paint, should be shatter proof, and should be easy to clean. Toys should be arranged on low, open shelves, so they are easy for children to reach and return. It is important to note that wonderful toys and play materials can be made from common household items, such as plastic containers, fabric scraps, and magazines. Toys need not cost a lot, and too many can overstimulate a child and make it hard for him to select something interesting (Brown, 1984).

The following chart gives a good idea about which types of toys and activities are appropriate for given age levels.

**Birth to 3 months:** rattle, large rings, squeeze or sucking toys. Lullabies, nursery rhymes, poems. Bright
pictures of faces hung so the baby can see them. Bells firmly attached to baby's wrist, ankle, booties. Cardboard or vinyl books with high-contrast illustrations to stand in baby's view. Brightly patterned crib sheets. Mobile with parts visible from the baby's position.

4 to 6 months: soft doll, texture ball. Toys that make noise when batted, squeezed, or mouthed. Measuring spoons, teething toys. Cloth or vinyl books with bright pictures to grasp, chew, and shake. Pictures of faces covered in plastic, hung at child's level; unbreakable mirror. Fingerplays, simple songs, peek-a-boo. Socks with bright designs or faces.

7 to 12 months: all of the above, plus rag and baby dolls, stuffed animals, and puppets. Container for large beads, blocks, balls. Nesting toy or plastic containers. Board books to read, old magazines to tear. Recordings of voices, animal sounds, and music. Wooden blocks, large soft blocks. Water toys that float. Rubber or large plastic balls. Soft plastic or wood vehicle with wheels. Games like peek-a-boo.

1 to 1-1/2 years: all of the above plus surprise or music box. Puzzles (2 to 6 large pieces with knobs). Books and recordings with songs, rhymes, simple stories, and
pictures. Wide watercolor markers, non-toxic fat crayons, large blank paper. Geometric, unit, or cardboard blocks. People and animals, vehicles: wood or rubber. Pounding bench. Sand and water play--plastic measuring cups, boats, containers, washable doll. Large cardboard box to crawl in. Toys that jingle or move when used. Kitchen cupboard of safe pots, pans, lids, and utensils.


2 to 3-1/2 years: wood puzzles with 4 to 20 pieces. Pegboards, sewing cards, stacking toys, picture lotto, dominoes. Picture/story books about familiar things, poems. Classical, folk, children's music. Finger or tempera paint, 1/2 inch brushes, blunt scissors, white glue. Unit blocks and accessories, wood train set with large pieces. Hammer (13 oz. steel shanked), soft wood, roofing nails, nailing block. Triangle, wood block, texture- and sound-matching games. Wagon or wheelbarrow, large rubber ball, riding toy. Washable doll with a few clothes, doll bed. Dress-up clothes
(hats, shoes, shirts), hand puppets.


5 to 8 years: all toys for 3- and 4-year-olds plus more complex puzzles. More difficult games, including board and card games. Yarn, big needles, mesh fabric, weaving. Magnets, balance scales, magnifying glass, math games made for 5- through 7-year-olds with pieces to handle. Books with chapters, favorite stories.
children can read and adults can read to children (even 7- and 8-year-olds), children's recipe books, diaries for older children to write in privately. Watercolors, stapler, hold punch, chalkboard, oil crayons, charcoal, simple camera, film. More unit blocks, props, hollow or attribute blocks. Brace and bits, screwdriver, screws, metric measure. Sand and water play--food coloring, pump, funnel, containers. Harmonica, kazoo, guitar, recorder. Outdoor toys--playground ball, tetherball, jump rope, Frisbee, bicycle, roller skates. Cash register, typewriter, other dramatic play props. Nature activities. 7- and 8-year-olds are beginning to be interested in hobbies, group and team games, clubs, and time to "hang out" and talk with friends. (Maxim, p305-308).

Parent Involvement

Parents can play an important part in the early childhood education curriculum. Teachers must learn to respect and use the abilities of parents. Parent involvement will benefit the school and family. Click (1981) points out that parents who took part in early cooperative school found they learned a lot about their children and gained a greater knowledge of child development; they found comfort in knowing that other parents experience the same problems as they; they learned that the school is a social unit as well as an
educational one. It is important for parents not to feel intimidated by teachers and for teachers to not fear that the parents will take over their classrooms. Parents and teachers must work together to determine the best environment for the child's physical, social, and intellectual growth. There are many ways parents can take part in the program. Parents can be aides in the classroom, can be taught how to expand on activities at home, can be part of planning and advisory committees, can offer professional skills for consultation, and can provide enrichment to the curriculum (Click, 1981).

Click (1981) says that the first step in bringing about parent involvement is initial contact with parents. Also, incentives must be provided, and contact must be sustained. The first impressions of the school may determine whether or not parents feel welcome and able to be involved. Some suggestions include having the parent and child come to school during or after school hours for initial contact, so the teacher can have a chance to talk to the child and parent in the school setting. Also, maybe a home visit could be scheduled before the day the child is to begin school. Initial contact can also be gained through an open house. Teachers must be just as responsive to parents as they are to children. A few words of greeting when the parent brings the child to school in the morning and a brief chat at the end of the day will help the parents feel appreciated. A lounge area should be provided for the parents. The lounge should
convey a nice home-like atmosphere. Couches and tables should be attractive. On the tables, pertinent articles about child care and child development should be displayed for the parents to read if they wish. A bulletin board will help keep parents informed of school and community events that affect their families. The weekly meal menu, most recent newsletter, and activity ideas that the parents can try with their children at home can all be posted on the bulletin board.

The most important incentive for parent involvement is the parents' interest in their children. Also, in a program sponsored by a business or corporation, mothers may be allowed paid time away from the job to visit or help at the school. In a day care center, participation can be encouraged by arranging dinner meetings right after school. Care for children can be provided while parents participate. To sustain interest, feedback about children's progress, frequent recognition of parents' contributions, and making parents feel useful and good about themselves will all help. Activities can be geared to adult needs and unrelated to the children. For example, sewing classes, classes in nutrition, classes in family finance, and trips to museums or theaters (Click, 1981). However, I feel it is important that the parents know what their children do every day, and the importance of the activities the teachers prepare. For this reason, it would be a good idea to invite parents for "Activity Night" and provide finger painting, block building,
sociodramatic, music, and science exploration experiences. Teachers should encourage the parents to really dig in and enjoy the activities. While the activities are going on, teachers should discuss with parents the skills that each activity builds in the children. At the end of the evening, parents will have art papers to take home and share with their children (and maybe even hang on the refrigerator next to the child’s papers). Records should be kept to show the extent of parent involvement: lists of committee members should be current; minutes of meetings should be taken; attendance at committee meetings and board meetings should be kept; copies of resolutions made at meetings should be available for all parents in the school; correspondence pertaining to parent activities should be copied and filed; evaluations of parent involvement should be recorded; information regarding any citations or awards to parents should be kept.

Along with quality toys and activities for the children, quality involvement with parents helps promote a quality early childhood education curriculum. There are many aspects of the curriculum that must be monitored closely to make sure quality is kept. Play should always be involved in the curriculum, everyday experiences help the children develop intellectually and help them make sense of their world, infants and toddlers are unique and sometimes need special care, older preschoolers are rapidly developing intellectually, and parents should be included in all of this
and made to feel welcome at the school. A quality curriculum will make all involved feel more comfortable and satisfied with the program.

In Support of Early Childhood Education

Many people do not understand the full realm of early childhood education. To many people, day care centers are merely baby-sitting services for parents who have to work and can not stay home with their children. This is not the case in a quality early childhood setting, and many studies have been conducted which prove this. Two of the most famous studies are the Perry Preschool Project and Head Start.

To begin with, Schweinhart, Berruets-Clement, Barnett, Epstein, and Weikhart (1985) summarize the effects of the Perry Preschool Project, which was conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan. For this 1962 study, 123 children born between 1958 and 1962 were randomly divided into a preschool group and a non-preschool group. The 4-year-olds selected in 1962 spent one year in preschool, while all the younger children spent two years in preschool. This longitudinal study followed the children to the age of 19. The subjects were primarily low-income blacks whose parents average education level was 9.4. Forty-seven percent of the children lived in single-parent homes. Teams of four teachers staffed the program each year. The program lasted 7-1/2 months for 2-1/2 hours each weekday morning; the child-teacher ratio was 1:5
or 6. The teachers also made home visits to each mother and child for 1-1/2 hours weekly. The major sources of data for the results were interviews with the children at age 19, reports from primary and secondary schools, police and court records, and records of social service agencies. The results were as follows. As far as scholastic success is concerned, the children who were involved in the preschool program stayed in school longer, scored better on tests of functional competence, were less often classified as mentally retarded, and spent fewer years in special education classes when compared to the control group. On measures of social responsibility, when comparing the study group to the control group, members of the study group were arrested less often, and the females had fewer teenage pregnancies. On socioeconomic success, twice as many of the study group were employed, and half as many were receiving welfare as compared to members of the control group. In a cost-benefit analysis, the return of the initial investment was 3-1/2 times the cost of two years of preschool and seven times the cost of one year. The major benefits to society include reduced cost of later education and increased earnings, decreased costs for welfare assistance and crime (Schweinhart et al, 1985). This is not to say, however, that all preschool programs produce marvelous effects. The content of the program must be carefully designed. Quality is essential if a program is to have long-term benefits. Quality calls for "parent involvement, programmatic leadership by supervisors and
directors, competent and genuinely enthusiastic teachers, an articulated curriculum of proven effectiveness, a sound in-service training program, and the feedback provided by program evaluation" (Schweinhart et al, p553).

The Head Start Program is another familiar preschool project. The concern for righting the wrongs of poverty in the early 1960s lead to the development of Head Start. This program is similar in design to the Perry Preschool Project, with programmed activities, as well as home visits. At first, the research on Head Start showed an increase in test scores, but after a few years the children's scores leveled out near control group children's scores (Featherstone, 1986). The difference, however, is not to be found in standardized test scores, but in children's abilities to meet teachers' expectations and to avoid being labeled failures.

It is plain to see that the bandwagon is growing in support for early childhood programs, money-wise. 1.5 billion dollars annually are funded by the federal government for Head Start, other federally funded child-care programs, programs for disadvantaged children, and incentive grants for handicapped children (Schweinhart et al, 1985).

Studies have been done comparing three different models of preschool programs for disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds. Schweinhart discussed three part-day programs with Ronald Brandt (1986). One program was heavily teacher-directed, or authoritarian. The other two programs focused on child-initiated learning activities. The High/Scope model, where
teacher and child collaborate to plan and the teacher's role is largely facilitator of learning was one model. A traditional nursery school, where the teacher tries to respond to children's needs and in which the children choose activities, but do not necessarily engage in planning was the other model. The children in the teacher-directed model were involved in twice as much delinquency, five times as many instances of property damage, twice as much personal violence, twice as much drug abuse, and were less likely to be involved in sports and other student activities. Their parents did not think as highly of them (Brandt, 1986). All models were successful on short-term IQ, however.

Schweinhart and Weikart (1985) provide more evidence that good preschool programs have short- and long-term benefits for low-income children by looking at seven exemplary studies. The seven studies they reviewed are the Early Training Project; 1962; Murfreesboro, TN. The Perry Preschool Project; 1962; Ypsilanti, MI. The Mother-Child Home Program; 1965; Long Island, NY. The Harlem Study; 1966; New York, NY. The Rome Head Start Program; 1966; Rome, GA. The Milwaukee Study; 1968; Milwaukee, WI. The New York Pre-K Program; 1975; New York State. The seven studies differed in structure. Some were compiled of only home visits, some were compiled of classroom programs five days a week, some were twice-weekly tutoring sessions, but all are of merit. Outcomes for participants at each period of their lives included improved intellectual performance during early
childhood; better scholastic placement and improved
scholastic achievement during the elementary years; and lower
rates of delinquency and higher rates of graduation and
employment during adolescence (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985).

All of these results seem to be saying the same thing:
quality early childhood education pays off. So, why don't we formalize early childhood education? There are many reasons why. To begin with, "before young children can enter the symbolic world, they need to conceptualize the concrete world which the symbols represent" (Elkind, 1986). With more exposure to technology in this generation, some people may feel that mental development is accelerated. As Elkind (1986) points out, this is simply not true. Technology can extend and amplify, but it can not alter our biological capacities. For example, when learning to read, knowledge about written symbols (learning to recognize and decode them) does not automatically lead to knowledge of the material decoded (comprehension). Elkind makes a good argument against the introduction of formal education programs at the preschool or kindergarten level, "modern technology does not accelerate mental development; research on child development does not indicate that children are brighter than in the past . . . and children with a year or two of day care or nursery school are not in need of formal programs (Elkind, p9). School readiness does not mean pushing first grade material down to 4-year-olds. It does not mean reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children learn from toys, from
play, from touching and moving things around, from poking things to see how they react, and from their senses (Brandt, 1986).

The most valuable benefits of early childhood education are attitude and behavior, not test scores. In the past, there was not much evidence to support early childhood education, but recent research has begun to change this due to longitudinal studies through elementary school and even adulthood. Helen Featherstone suggests that, "if preschooling becomes available to all, thousands of youngsters who would otherwise repeat a grade or require a special education placement will meet their teachers' expectations and proceed through school alongside their peers" (Featherstone, p17). Care must be taken, however, that programs do not become too formal, and quality must always be an essential part of the program.

This project has looked at various aspects of building a quality early childhood program. From planning, to curriculum, to reviewing support for early childhood education, quality is the key word. This project is summed up by Schweinhart et al, when they state, "The quality of life of today's young children has profound consequences for tomorrow's adults. For better or worse, that is the promise of early childhood education" (p553).
WORKS CITED


