

'Child Care Today' Gives US efforts low marks [US] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

'Child Care Today,' whose subtitle could more accurately read, "Getting It Right for Everyone (Except for the US, Which Is Still Getting So Much of It Wrong)," is not a how-to book for parents on choosing child care (if it were, the best advice would be, Move to Sweden!).

Rather, it's "an examination of Western child care in the first decade of the second millennium," an exhaustive amalgam of research findings, options for child care, public policy initiatives, a vision of superlative child care that is a reality in Scandinavia, and a condemnation of the US government's policies on how we care for our children in the first years of their lives.

Penelope Leach is the author of the international bestseller "Your Baby & Child" which, with its hands-on, compassionate advice, has sold more than 2 million copies in the United States alone. "Child Care Today" draws from wide-ranging data on how industrialized countries and regions - notably Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States - care for their young children.

What she discovers is deeply concerning: While some policies regarding child care are good (Europe), improving rapidly (the UK), and superlative (Denmark and Sweden), "The vast majority of American child care is of unacceptably low quality and in the first 3 years of life does not meet even minimal recommended guidelines."

...

In many other countries, family day care and child care centers/nurseries are regulated by the government; child care workers have mandatory training; and parents' costs for day care are covered or capped. In Scandinavia, integrated children's centers encompass both care and education from birth to the secondary school years, with "extended" schools providing "wraparound" care. In contrast, 90 percent of US family day care is unregulated, most day care is paid for solely by parents, and "the required qualifications and pay for child care assistants are both shockingly low."

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But the news from the United States is not all bad: Leach says that Head Start, and Early Head Start, have been getting it right for years, though they're "tragically few and far between." Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Center, Georgia's universal access to pre-kindergarten programs for 4-year-olds, North Carolina's Smart Start, and Ohio's Families and Children First initiative "could be pathfinders for the nation."

"Child Care Today" is a masterful work by a luminary in the world of child development. If implemented, Leach's findings would revolutionize the way America cares for its young children and bring about a radical improvement in the lives of children and their parents - and in the economic, social, and intellectual well-being of our country.

- reprinted from The Boston Globe

Region: United States ^[2]

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