

Putting the child back into child care: Combining care and education for children ages 3-5 ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Article abstract: Currently there is a lack of affordable, accessible, quality child care in America. A substandard child care system not only negatively affects families, but also impacts broader societal and political issues, such as the economy, gender equity, tax and budget policies, and welfare reform. The inadequate state of child care is in part due to the fact that care and education continue to be viewed as separate issues. The authors define "care" as simply caring for a child and meeting basic health and safety needs, while "early education" is defined as implementing developmentally appropriate curricula that fosters a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. In this report, the authors explore current state regulations, the economics of child care, and how child care is framed in order to illustrate why poor quality care continues in the United States. An examination of current state regulations illustrates that, although we know what quality is, how to measure it, and the negative outcomes associated with poor quality care, there is no system in place to ensure that children receive even minimally appropriate care. From an economic perspective, parents and society as a whole do not demand quality care, instead seeing "good care" as a place that keeps children safe and warm. Additionally, child care is presently in a state of market failure—the market is supplying too little high-quality child care compared to what our society needs, and parents cannot easily access information about child care. Finally, an exploration of the way parents and society view the relationship between child care and education reveals that the majority of individuals see child care simply as a custodial service for working parents and view education as a separate endeavor. In this report, the authors propose two recommendations to help improve the quality of child care in the United States. First, they assert that an infrastructure that combines care and education must be built. One approach is to place educational components into the child care system. A more enduring approach is to place care into the educational system. Second, in order to have a successful child care system, it is first necessary to reframe the relationship between care and education. This effort can be mounted on several fronts, and can be carried out by changing the current terminology and constituency of child care and increasing parental and societal awareness of the components and benefits of quality care. Only when this happens, will the state of child care begin to improve. Without the help and commitment of informed adults, the needs of children will continue to be left unmet, having harmful consequences not only for our youngest citizens but also for the future of our nation and society.

Region: United States ^[3]

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