Alternative policy designs and the socio-political construction of childcare [1]

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Abstract

Policy makers and advocates have a variety of tools from which to choose when designing childcare policy. Policy design choices, such as whether to provide childcare assistance through a new government program or via a voucher for use in the private market, are in fact social, political, moral, and value-laden choices that shape the nature of young children's experiences in care settings. Although rarely discussed, these choices also privilege particular social constructions of childcare by defining our understanding of the policy problem and the characteristics of the target populations. In addition, policy designs institutionalize and legitimize particular forms of governmental involvement in children's lives – as well as give power and voice to some interests over others – resulting in a new political context for future policy debates. To better illustrate these socio-political effects, this article documents and compares these consequences of five common childcare policy designs.

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