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The Relation between Parents' and Trained Observers' Ratings of Quality of School-Age
Care Programs: Satisfaction Levels and Selection Criteria

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ABSTRACT

The Relation between Parents' and Trained Observers' Ratings of Quality of School-Age
Care Programs: Satisfaction Levels and Selection Criteria

Julie Beaumont

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether parents assigned higher quality

ratings to school-age care centres than trained observers. Parents' and trained observers'

measured the global quality of 20 school-age care centres using the School-Age Care

Environment Rating Scale (SACERS; Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996). Comparisons

revealed that in the lower quality centres, parents were overestimating quality, however,

there was little indication as to which specific areas parents seemed less knowledgeable

about. Parents' satisfaction levels were measured showing that overall, parents were

highly satisfied with the care their children were receiving. Correlations between parents'

satisfaction ratings and trained observers' measures of quality indicated that parents'

satisfaction levels were independent of centre quality, that is, whether the quality was

low or high, parents' levels of satisfaction were high. When parents were looking for

school-age care, location emerged as the most significantly important variable for parents

to consider. When parents' search patterns were examined, no significant differences

emerged between the school-based and non-school-based groups, however, there was

some indication that parents in the school-based group were less likely to visit their

chosen program before enrolling their child. Limitations of the study and suggestions for

future research are also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

When the number of working mothers with preschoolers rose dramatically in the early 1970's, there was an increase in the availability of child care services in order to accommodate the high demand for day care. By 1992, the number of working mothers with school-aged children had reached a high of 76%, creating a large demand for child care, which included before and after school care (Friendly, 1994). Regardless of the type of child care arrangement used, high quality is an essential feature, and although there have been many studies conducted on quality issues at the preschool level, it continues to be a highly researched topic. With school-age care becoming a more necessary mode of child care, it is essential to continue researching quality issues with this age group as well. As school-age care is still a relatively new form of child care, quality factors are not as well known as they are for preschool child care, therefore, the need to research quality exists (Towell & Tsuji, 1990).

Research has shown that generally, parents are satisfied with their chosen child care arrangements, despite the fact that their children may be enrolled in low quality preschool settings (Bradbard, Brown, Endsley, & Readdick, 1994; Endsley & Bradbard, 1987; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Roche & Camasso, 1993; Sonenstein & Wolf, 1991; Winkelstein, 1981; Shinn, Phillips, Howes, Galinsky, & Whitebook, 1991). In addition to parents being satisfied with the quality of care provided, they also assigned higher quality ratings to the centre as compared to those assigned by experts (Miller, 1990; Roche & Camasso, 1993). High quality ratings and high levels of satisfaction could be due to several factors. Parents may not admit to themselves or to researchers that they have

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placed their children in an arrangement considered less than ideal, therefore guilt or denial could be one explanation for high satisfaction ratings (Shinn et al., 1990). In addition, lack of knowledge about what constitutes high quality, or selection criteria important to parents such as convenience factors can also influence satisfaction and quality ratings (Sonenstein, 1991; Bradbard et al., 1994; Kisker & Maynard, 1991).

As there is still little research in the area of after-school care, a closer examination of the current research regarding preschool day care quality might provide some indication as to what may be happening in the field of school-age care with regards to quality and parental satisfaction. For this particular study, it was thought that obtaining parental input regarding school-age care issues might provide pertinent information about their selection of school-age care programs and whether or not children are receiving the quality of care parents hope for.

The literature will be reviewed in the following manner. As the study is focused on school-age care, an overview of the different types of school-age care arrangements will be provided. Quality will be a central issue in this study as research has shown that high quality care contributes to positive developmental outcomes in all areas (i.e., social, emotional, cognitive, and physical) (Phillips & Howes, 1987; Phillips, McCartney & Scarr, 1987). As school-age care has become a popular form of day care, it is also important to look at quality issues at the school-age level as well. Therefore, following the examination of quality factors at the preschool level, quality factors at the school-age level will be discussed.

One of the main objectives of this study is to illustrate that parents do not always select high quality care for their children because they are not always aware of what constitutes high quality child care. Therefore, parental knowledge of quality and how it may or may not influence their level of satisfaction will be discussed. A closer look at parental satisfaction will follow, again based mostly on findings at the preschool level. An attempt will be made to show how satisfaction with school-age care might be based more on selection criteria (e.g., convenience) than knowledge of quality. Therefore, selection of child care arrangements will be the next topic of discussion, which will examine more closely how parents select care, and what criteria they take into consideration. A link will be made between parental knowledge of quality, parental preferences, and actual selection. This link will attempt to show that quality may not be the basis of parents' final decisions in terms of child care and that convenience may be the primary influence on parents' decisions (i.e., the more convenient the arrangement is, the more satisfied parents will be). If parents are limited in their choices, perhaps they might require more information about what constitutes high quality, which may encourage them to become advocates for their children, and improve the quality of care their children receive.

School-age care

Although school-age care has rapidly become a major area of research for many child care specialists and policymakers (Powell, 1987), recommendations are still being made based on research conducted in preschool, on the assumption that similar problems and concerns arise in school-age care (Jacobs, Mill, Gage, Maheux, & Beaumont, 1999).

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Although the number of working mothers is not a new concept, the fact that parents are unavailable for their children before and after school creates concerns. Most preschool day care centres operate during typical working hours, opening at approximately 8:00 a.m., and closing at 6:00 p.m. But when children reach school-age, not only do parents have to decide which school will be best for their children, they also have to rely on some form of child care because the school day ends between 2:30 and 3:30, which leaves two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half hours of supervision that children will require for parents whose work day ends at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. Therefore, parents of school-age children must consider the different types of school-age care available that will meet their needs and those of their children, and then weigh their options.

Types of school-age programs

When children reach elementary school, parents find themselves either looking for child care for the first time because mothers may have delayed entry into the work force until children entered school, or they may have to find care for their children who are making the transition from preschool day care to school-age care. This process involves making a decision as to what type of child care will be best for the children and the parents.

On-site school-age programs are, as the name implies, located within the school itself. Parents using this form of care tend to be less concerned about a child's arrival at the school-age care program as the child does not have to leave the premises when going from the classroom to the after-school program, and it causes less disruption in the child's schedule (Jacobs, 1998). Other benefits of a program being housed within the school are

access to a variety of host facilities and the opportunity for the students to participate in school-sponsored extracurricular activities (ARA Consulting Group Inc., 1990).

When the school does not house an after-school program or the program does not satisfy the parents' expectations, alternatives must be sought. One option is family child care where up to nine children can be cared for in an individual's home. Transportation has to be arranged for the child, however if the school is within walking distance, there is the possibility of the child being escorted to the home by an adult, or if the child is old enough, he/she may walk to the family day care alone. Family child care provides a home-like atmosphere where a child might be presented with the same opportunities that he/she would receive at home (Click, 1994).

Centre-based programs are also available for school-aged children, but not as widely available as school-based programs (ARA Consulting Group Inc., 1990). There are centres that serve both preschool and school-age children. Parents may find this convenient in that their children can continue to attend the same centre once they reach school-age, and this can be quite an advantage when the parents are satisfied with the quality of the services they received at the preschool level (Click, 1994).

A self-care arrangement (latchkey) is also an option for school-age children depending on their age, maturity, and level of responsibility. Latchkey children are those who go home to an empty house at the end of the school day and let themselves in with their own house key. Until the parents arrive at the end of their workday, they are left to care for themselves (Jacobs et al., 1999). At times, the cost of sending a child to an after-school program is reason enough to opt for self-care, although it may not be the best

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option for the child. This is more likely to be the case in low-income families (Powell, 1987). When communities do not offer any type of formal school-age care, and a parent can not arrange for some other type of care, then self-care or latchkey care may be the only option. When children reach the 10-12 year old age range, they often try to persuade their parents to let them go home alone (Maheux, 1998), as they begin to believe they are too old to be attending day care. Many children do not like the idea of attending day care especially when they reach early adolescence. Without age-appropriate programming, the drop-out rate from after-school programs may be on the rise for older children. This is one of many reasons to examine parental estimates of quality, and could help show whether parents are aware if their children are in programs that provide age-appropriate programming.

Importance of quality

Educators and researchers know that quality plays a crucial role in the lives of young children in all areas of development (i.e., social, emotional and physical), and are aware that poor quality can put children at risk for developmental delays in such areas as language and cognition, and social and emotional adjustment (Scarr, Eisenberg, & Deater-Deckard, 1994). Ignoring the importance of quality means failing to provide children with all the benefits that high quality child care can provide. In order to thoroughly examine quality, researchers in the field have assessed quality from three perspectives. Quality can be measured in terms of global, structural, and human factors. Global assessments take into account the overall quality of the environment; structural assessments include factors such as ratios, group size and qualifications of the educators; and human factors

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are composed of such aspects as teacher warmth, teacher-child interactions, and parent-teacher communication (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Each of these dimensions of quality will have different levels of importance for children's well-being.

Overall quality can be measured by conducting a global assessment, where aspects such as space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning activities, interactions, program structure, and parents and staff are examined (Harms & Clifford, 1980). Although measuring global quality provides pertinent information with regards to ensuring high quality care, a global assessment such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS, Harms & Clifford, 1980) does not provide enough information to assess every dimension of the program features. Structural dimensions of quality must, therefore, be assessed to deal with this issue.

Assessing structural features includes examining the adult-child ratios, group size, and caregiver training. Research shows that better staff: child ratios, small group size and specialized educator training (ECE) are associated with more positive interactions between children and caregivers, more engagement in play, and higher levels of verbal interactions, all of which are deemed to be outcomes of high quality care (Phillips & Howes, 1987). In sum, structural features have an impact on the dynamic environment such as the children's actual experiences, and helping to predict a child's development in the child care setting (Phillips & Howes, 1987).

It has been found in several studies (McCartney, 1984; Phillips et al., 1987) that the overall quality of child care environments contributes positively towards children's social development (e.g., being more considerate and more sociable), and language

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development (Kontos & Stevens, 1985; Phillips et al., 1987). As well, there are certain

variables that distinguish quality of care such as wages, education, and training (Helburn,

Culkin, Morris, Moran, Howes, Phillipsen, Bryant, Clifford, Cryer, Peisner-Feinberg,

Burchinal, Kagan, & Rustici, J. 1995). Children who experience low quality care are at a

higher risk for long-term developmental problems such as poor school skills, apathy, and

a higher level of aggression than children obtaining high quality care (Helburn & Howes,

1996).

Although there is an emphasis on quality and its importance for children's well-

being, the reality is that not all centres meet the standards for high quality care. The

question that follows is, if the centre does not offer high quality care, why would a parent

choose to enroll a child there. One can assume that the majority of parents want to find

the best care for their children, yet it would seem that parents do not always select the

best care option. The literature shows that this may be due to parents' lack of knowledge

about quality care. Although most of the research on the effects of quality have been

conducted at the preschool level, there is some evidence to suggest that quality of care

may have significant developmental outcomes for school-age children as well (Hayes,

Palmer & Zaslow, 1990). As school-age care is the focus of this study, it is necessary to

discuss what quality factors have been found to be important in school-age care programs.

Quality factors in school-age care

There are still many unanswered questions in terms of which quality factors are

important in school-age care. At this time, very few studies have examined the impact of

school-age care quality on developmental outcomes, therefore most of what is known

about quality has been based on research conducted in preschool settings. Because school-age children have different developmental needs than preschool children, it is important to take these differences into consideration when assessing the quality of a school-age program (Jacobs et al., 1998). According to Zigler and Lang (1991), a good after-school program consists of activities that children would consider doing on their own time, out of choice, and organized around the interests of the children. According to recommendations from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), quality programs should include qualified staff who have the opportunity and the desire to grow professionally, a high staff-to-child ratio, competent and efficient administrators, an environment that serves to promote growth and development, high standards for health and safety, and frequent interactions between staff and parents (Zigler & Lang, 1991). A study by Park (1992) indicated that auspice of the program was one of the best predictors of quality in school-age programs, where non-profit centres had better qualified staff who provided a more stimulating and age-appropriate environment than staff in for-profit centres.

A method of determining which quality factors are important in school-age care is to look at assessment tools such as the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS, Harms, Jacobs & White, 1996), or the Assessing School-age Care Quality (ASQ, O'Connor, Harms, Cryer & Wheeler, 1994). The components within each of these scales stipulate the criteria to be examined. Subscales include such factors as human relationships, indoor and outdoor environments, health and safety, activities, and special needs items (O'Connor, Harms, Cryer, & Wheeler, 1994; Harms, Jacobs & White, 1996).

Both scales offer guidelines for assessing high and low quality environments. People

must be trained to use these scales that can be used for research purposes or for

improvement of centre quality. As parents are not usually informed of details concerning

school-age care quality that are provided in such rating scales, they may not be as aware

as experts are as to what high quality school-care consists of. This next section will

therefore examine more closely the extent of parental knowledge of quality.

Parental knowledge of quality

Based on both past and present research on parental knowledge of quality, it

appears that although quality is an important factor for parents to consider when

selecting a child care arrangement (Hofferth, 1991), and many parents are aware of certain

dimensions of quality that are important to them (Barraclough & Smith, 1996), they do

not always select the best quality centres. Part of the problem may be that parents do

not know what criteria they should be using. Most parents seem to know the basic

elements that ensure high quality such as high staff: child ratios and small group sizes,

however they are unaware of other aspects which may only be known to trained

observers or professionals in the educational field; in other words they are not aware of

professional standards of quality. Although parents have been found to value some of the

similar quality criteria as early childhood professionals, they still seem to overestimate

the quality of the centre (Barraclough & Smith, 1996).

A study by Miller (1990) revealed that parents' ratings of centres were much

higher than those scored by professionals using direct observation (Roche & Camasso,

1993). This may be due to parents assessing the centres in terms of what they deemed

1993). This may be due to parents assessing the centres in terms of what they deemed

ideal for their child and not necessarily what the centre actually offered

(Cryer & Burchinal, 1997). When a program is housed in a school, parents may assume

that if the school meets the children's academic needs, the school-age program will meet

their child care needs. Parents are often unaware that the school and school-age program

may not be affiliated, and are not provided with the same services, therefore the quality of

one cannot be based on the quality of the other.

Although parents may not be fully aware of the components of a high quality

school-age program and may be selecting lower quality care, the level of satisfaction that

parents have with their choice of care does not seem to reflect the quality of the

programs.

<u>Satisfaction</u>

Roche and Camasso (1993) reviewed existing literature on parental satisfaction

and found that according to the choice model, which is based on the premise that parents

will select a centre that meets their needs from several stand-points, parents' satisfaction

could be derived from a variety of factors such as: 1) family's structure and resources, 2)

cost of the child care arrangements and alternative arrangements, 3) perceived quality of

arrangement and alternatives, and 4) parental preferences and tastes regarding child care

(Hofferth & Wissoker, 1990; Robins & Spiegelman, 1979; Yaeger, 1979). Satisfaction

may also be derived from factors not directly related to the child care arrangement. The

status of personal relationships and stress levels of mothers have been shown to affect

their overall satisfaction rating of their child care arrangements (Shinn, Galinsky, &

characteristics of care that lead to parental satisfaction still remain to be determined (Sonenstein & Wolf, 1991).

Research seems to suggest that, generally, parents are satisfied with their current child care arrangements regardless of the level of quality (Shinn et al., 1994; Holloway & Fuller, 1992). What would appear to happen when selecting future child care arrangements is that those who were previously satisfied with their child care arrangement continue to choose low quality care, whereas those parents who had experienced dissatisfaction with the centre their child was attending, were able to choose higher quality care (Bradbard et al., 1994). Barraclough and Smith (1996) examined parental satisfaction and its relation to measures of quality. They found that parental satisfaction was quite independent of quality measured by trained observers. Some centres were perceived by researchers to be of distressingly low quality, however, were viewed favourably by parents (Barraclough & Smith, 1996).

Researchers have suggested that it is important to examine which specific characteristics of the child care arrangement are keeping parents' overall satisfaction at a fairly high level (Endsley & Bradbard, 1987; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994). For example, parents might be asked to distinguish which features work as advantages and disadvantages in different types of child care arrangements (Endsley & Bradbard, 1987). As well, it is important to examine which, if any, parental variables play a role in final centre selection, as results from several studies indicate that many of the factors are interrelated. For example socio-economic status (SES) and level of income have been found to have a positive relationship with quality of care (Goelman & Pence, 1987;

Kontos & Fiene, 1987 in Zaslow, 1991), yet other studies have shown middle-class

families to select lower quality care than lower or higher income families, therefore, these

variables still need to be further examined (Whitebook et al., 1989). In order to obtain this

information, selection patterns and criteria must be studied with the intention of

providing a more in-depth understanding of what makes parents content.

Selection of care

When seeking child care, many parents are often uncertain about where to begin

their search process, which may impact upon the quality of the centres they ultimately

choose. What is often found in the literature on child care selection is that parents will

turn to secondhand sources such as the yellow pages, friends or neighbours (Bradbard &

Endsley, 1980; Smith, 1995). Using secondhand sources of information can lead to certain

problems. For a parent who is uninformed about the steps to take when searching for

child care, the yellow pages may seem like a viable option. An attractive advertisement

may be enough to draw the parent's attention, but what most parents do not know is that

advertisers are not obliged to prove that their ads are truthful (Bradbard & Endsley,

1980).

Parents may use firsthand information that would include formal resources such

as referral agencies or resource services (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980). The Ministère de la

Famille et de l'Enfance (MFE), which provides a listing of all licensed day cares in the

province of Québec, would be an example of a formal resource used to find child care.

Licensing offices such as the MFE offer advice and recommendations that could be

helpful, however, as a limitation, these offices are not permitted to provide information

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regarding the quality of these centres, therefore parents are left with the full responsibility of determining whether the quality level is acceptable (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980). A study by Bradbard et al. (1994) showed that even when offered formal resources, parents used these sparingly. Interestingly, in another study on parental selection of child care arrangements, those parents who decided that using a Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) would be beneficial devoted more time to the search process than those parents who opted not to use one (Fuqua & Schieck, 1989). This may indicate that one of the underlying factors behind finding high quality child care is motivation. Parents who take the initiative may be more motivated than parents who are offered resources and do not use them. With the increase of school-based school-age programs, motivation may not be a significant variable to examine in this particular study, yet examining which sources parents consulted could provide insight into why parents may not actually select high quality care. That is, if parents are relying more on unreliable sources (e.g., unqualified to ensure high quality), it may explain parents' selection of low quality centres.

Parents may also rely on a centre's reputation as a basis for selection, however this may not always be enough to ensure high quality care (Bradbard et al., 1994). Centre quality can vary significantly over a short period of time due to factors such as staff turnover or a new administrator. As well, those judging the centre to be reputable may not have examined the essential quality factors and may have overlooked some important elements, therefore parents should not rely solely on reputation when making a decision regarding child care (Bradbard et al., 1994). Even when a parent visits the centre, certain

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problems may not be obvious, as it is very easy at times for the workers to mask some of the problems in the centre when they know a parent is visiting. Attitudes and overt behavior of educators could be affected by the presence of parents, therefore parents may not be observing an educator's usual interaction style.

Parents who rely on expert advice should also be cognizant of the qualifications of these experts. Professionals in various fields may judge a centre to be of high quality, but their status alone may not qualify them as experts in the process of judging child care quality. For example, a pediatrician may be an expert with children in the medical field, but could possibly know very little about the components of high quality child care. For the most part, parents will talk to friends and neighbours and choose centres based on reputation, but as mentioned earlier, those highly recommending a centre may not be examining the essential quality factors and may overlook some important elements (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980).

Although there are resources available to assist in the search for child care, many parents may not even be aware of their existence, which can make the search process even more of a struggle. In order to understand how parents go through such a search process, it is important to understand what criteria they are using, what they value regarding the well-being of their children, and whether their needs as working parents can be accommodated. Concerns associated with selecting school-age care are similar to those associated with the selection of preschool day care. A scenario that can occur is that a parent will find a centre that meets his/her criteria, but certain constraints may exist, such as a waiting list. Other problems that may arise when selecting school-age care are issues

of location, cost, and availability, which can be termed selection criteria. After examining

the avenues parents take when searching for care, one must look at which criteria parents

use to select care in order to determine the factors that play a more important role with

regards to their final decision.

<u>Selection criteria</u>

It would appear that although parents want what is best for their children, they

also hope to find an arrangement that is convenient for them and their children (Anderson,

Nagle, Roberts & Smith, 1981; Holloway & Fuller, 1992; Peterson & Peterson, 1988).

For instance, it is questionable why a parent would want to look elsewhere when a

school-age care program is available on the school site. Off-site child care entails more

travelling and transitions for the child, and convenience and piece of mind may be

compromised. In a study by Bradbard et al. (1994), parents were asked their reasons for

selecting day care for their school-age children and were required to rank these in order of

priority. Health and safety, quality of caregivers, personal-social development of the

child, and educational/academic development of the child were rated as the highest

priorities, whereas the child's physical development, hours of operation, and location and

cost were not ranked as important. Similarly in another study by Widdows and Powell

(1990), when parents were asked to identify factors that influenced their choice of care,

location and cost were also ranked as low priority (Hofferth, 1991). What is interesting

to note is that although location and cost were ranked as low priority, it may be that these

very factors have a much larger effect on the final decision than findings indicated.

Factors such as location, hours of operation, physical features, and dependability of child

care arrangements can override the factors viewed by professionals (structural, global and human factors) as important elements of quality child care (Kisker & Maynard, 1991). What will be examined next are several factors that appear to play significant roles in the decision-making process when parents select school-age care. Professionals may advise parents to search carefully for an after-school arrangement, yet for parents, what is easiest may be what they feel is best for them, or they must forego one positive element for another (e.g., pay higher fees for a more conveniently located centre or one that stays open later).

Cost. Although parents report that quality is an important dimension to examine when selecting care, the price of care will often take precedence (Hofferth, 1991). There is a fair amount of literature on the issue of cost showing that parents' choice of care falls in line with their economic situation (Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Miller, 1990; Roche & Camasso, 1993). Cost as a basis for selection can vary among families, locations, and programs (i.e., the cost may vary depending on what the program offers). For families with a substantial income, cost may not be the underlying issue upon which the parents will base their decision, however for a single mother, student, or dual-income family with a low income, cost may, in fact, be the only determining factor. Therefore, it would seem to play a primary role for low SES families.

The issue of cost, therefore, appears to be a varying determinant of selection, that is, the family's SES may determine whether cost is a key element. Hofferth (1991) suggests that although parents do take quality into account when selecting care, cost still takes precedence. Parents who think that cost equals quality may be surprised as to what

they are actually receiving. Parents who pay high fees are not necessarily getting higher quality child care than those paying lower fees (Waite, Leibowitz, & Witzberger, 1991); rather, parents are obtaining low and high quality child care at relatively similar prices (Roche & Camasso, 1993). An extensive study (Lero, 1985) was conducted on how Canadian families make child care choices. Although emphasis was placed on quality factors such as program characteristics, cost emerged as a very important deciding factor, particularly in terms of which centres not to choose. In other words, although parents state that quality factors are important to consider in the selection of a centre, if the cost of a program is not within their means, they are more likely not to consider that centre regardless of the fact that it might be a high quality centre, and they will look for a more affordable alternative (Towell & Tsuji, 1990). It would seem that there are discrepancies between the factors parents state as being important and the factors that influence their decision, namely cost. In a study by Bradbard et al. (1994), parents were asked to rank-order their reasons for selecting a particular school-age care arrangement and cost was last on the list of priorities. Despite existing research indicating that parents do not name cost as a priority, overwhelming evidence points to cost as a major factor in deciding which child care arrangement to select; the higher the price, the less likely a parent is to choose that particular arrangement (Hofferth, 1991; Blau & Robins, 1988, 1989; Yaeger, 1979; Wissoker, 1990). Cost as a basis for selection can, at times, be by-passed because of available subsidies. Many provinces offer subsidies for low income families, and in Quebec, some parents are offered school-age care at $5 per day (exclusive to school-board run programs). This new policy was designed to make child care more affordable for low-

income families, and to motivate mothers on welfare to return to the work force (Rochon, 1997)

Although cost has been shown to have a significant influence on centre selection, convenience also appears to play an important role in child care selection.

Convenience. As location and hours of operation are two variables highly focussed on in this study, they will be discussed independently. Therefore, this section will first address convenience factors other than location and hours of operation, such as transportation, and a discussion of location and hours of operation will follow.

Transportation. When no school-based program is available for children, parents often look for other alternatives, which are convenient for them. Schools may provide bussing for children to an after-school program which may service children from various schools. Parents may choose this particular program because they have no other means of getting their child to another program. Therefore, transportation to an off-site program might provide parents with a sense of comfort. Parents do not have to interrupt their work day, and their child's safety does not have to be compromised. If the centre is within walking distance, then having the children escorted to the centre can also be a comfort issue for parents.

Proximity to workplace. Parents could also choose to send their child to a program located in close proximity to their workplace. This would be convenient for parents who work long hours and who may be rushing from work to pick up their child at the end of the day. Not having to race from the office to the day care can reduce the amount of stress parents are often faced with at the end of their work day.

Homework. Other convenience factors could include homework programs. Some parents may want their children to have the homework completed before they return home because their time is more limited (e.g., preparation for dinner and bedtime).

Location. Having a school-age program located within the school may make parents feel more at ease with the transition between school and child care program hours. Not having the children bussed from one place to another can be much easier on the children, and may help reassure the parents with regards to their children's safety. When parents have to pick up their children at the end of the day, location of the child care program may become a very important factor. Both children and parents are tired after a long day, and having to make that day even longer due to distance that must be travelled, may not be something parents want to impose upon themselves or their children. A school-age program within the child's school can be very convenient and this might be enough to convince parents to select that option. Although location is an important characteristic that influences parents' decisions, hours of operation is another convenience factor that may have a significant impact on selection.

Hours of Operation. There are similar problems in terms of hours of operation. Some centres do not offer before school care, which is essential for parents who begin work early in the morning. If the number of centres with before-school care is limited, then parents may be left with fewer options and may have to choose a centre of lower quality in order to meet the needs of their work schedules, or they might have to resort to self-care.

Thus, convenience factors, particularly location and hours of operation are some of the reasons parents may overlook the criteria to which child care professionals pay close attention for the provision of high quality care. The importance of convenience with respect to after-school care needs to be examined as it may have a larger impact on the parents' decision than previously believed. This may create a concern with respect to quality, as convenience does not ensure quality.

<u>Pressure factors</u>

<u>Stress from daily hassles.</u> Given that the population being studied is parents who are most likely both working, they may already be adding stress to their lives by attempting to balance both work and home responsibilities (e.g., working full-time and fulfilling familial roles), and having to find good child care could amplify that stress. Mothers who are returning to work for the first time since having children experience a significant amount of stress (Tuma, 1982). Not only must they succeed in the workplace, they must also continue to fulfill their role in the home. Finding quality child care with all the possible impediments to quality (e.g., availability, location, & cost) adds to the stress that working mothers experience (Tuma, 1982).

Although the factors mentioned have a significant influence on the actual selection of centres, parental preferences (in terms of characteristics of care) may actually differ from selection criteria.

Parental Preferences

Characteristics of care. A study by Johansen, Leibowitz, and Waite (1996), looked at which child care characteristics were important to parents when making a decision regarding preschool child care arrangements. Data were collected from the fifth follow-up survey of the National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72). It was found that mothers considered educational and developmental attributes to be very important factors when selecting a centre, and that more highly educated mothers had a clearer understanding of what developmentally appropriate child care consisted of and valued it more than less educated mothers.

Some research has shown that parents select preschool child care arrangements based on the caregiver's philosophy more than cost (Pence & Goelman, 1987; Moore, 1980; Feral, 1984). At times, parents only examine one of many factors that are important when selecting a centre, yet there is so much to consider aside from cost and caregiver philosophy. In the best of all worlds, parents would examine each aspect of quality, basing their choice more on an eclectic view of the centre rather than one or two elements. But in reality, it may take only one or two elements to deter parents from selecting a particular centre. A centre may be rated very high in quality, but if the hours, location, and cost do not fit the parents' needs, they might opt to look elsewhere and forego good quality for the sake of the factors that are more important to them.

Although parents' considerations of these factors are very important in their selection of school-age care centres, their attitudes toward school-age care in conjunction

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with convenience factors (cost, location, and hours) might have a stronger influence on the final decision than those just mentioned (i.e., pressure factors, characteristics of care).

Parental attitudes. Parental attitudes regarding school-age care can also be determinants of the quality parents select for their children. As parents may believe that children of elementary school-age are less vulnerable than preschool children to the negative effects of poor quality care, and the amount of time spent in care is much shorter than full-time preschool day care, parents may have a more nonchalant attitude about how important high quality school-age care really is (Bradbard et al., 1994). Some assumptions can be made as to why this is the case with school-age children. The less time a child is cared for by someone other than a parent, the less concerned a parent may be regarding the child's care environment. As school-age care takes place only during a short period of the day where children play with peers, parents may not be very concerned about the content of these programs. Parents may also become less interested in the school-age program than they were in their children's preschool program because their focus may be directed more towards their children's academic performance.

It is always important to remember that there will never be one model of child care that will meet the needs of every family, as every family has different needs and circumstances (Kuiken, 1985; Towell & Tsuji, 1990). Due to the fact that circumstances and needs do vary among families, the choices that parents make may not always concur with what they would state as preferences for their children's care. Actual selection in comparison to parental preferences then needs to be examined.

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Parental preferences versus actual selection

A question that will be considered in this study is why parents believe their children are enrolled in high quality care, when in many cases they are not. An attempt will be made to determine what information parents may be disregarding in their estimation of quality.

Lack of knowledge. Parents do not appear to consider elements of quality as extensively as do child care/child development professionals. The problem appears to be that parents lack information about specific quality criteria (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980). For example, comments obtained from parents revealed that readily available information on quality child care was scarce. Parents also stated that they were unsure about what questions to ask or what aspects to look for when trying to select a high quality centre and, they were unaware that information regarding selection of care even existed (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980). In addition, those parents whose children are attending poor quality centres may have no basis for comparison, that is, they may not have visited any other centres in order to obtain a more complete picture of what good child care consists of and therefore, they may not really be aware of what high quality care is (Barraclough & Smith, 1996).

As previously mentioned, high quality centres are usually in demand and this may result in a long waiting list for enrolment. Therefore, if a parent's need for care is immediate, he/she may elect to enrol his/her child in a centre where space is available. Also, when parents have a limited number of centres of high quality to choose from, they may not always choose the best quality centre and again this could be due, in part, to

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such factors as cost and lack of transportation (Bradbard et al., 1994). A study by

Bradbard, Brown, Endsley, and Readdick (1994) looked at which factors (family status,

selection process, or selection criteria) were associated with selecting better quality

centres. Results from this study provided some important information regarding parents'

search processes. The lack of availability of school-age care seemed to cause a problem,

perhaps suggesting that parents did not have a large enough range of centres from which

to choose care for their children. This also raised some questions that remain unanswered,

such as, when parents have a limited number of centres to choose from, do they always

select the best of options available? Not only are there important underlying reasons

why parents end up selecting lower quality care for their children, there are also issues

that allow parents to keep their children in lower quality centres, denial and guilt are two

of them.

Denial and Guilt. An important reason why children stay in lower quality centres

may not be due to a false perception of quality, but rather denial of the actual situation.

Some parents may be well aware of the problems in their child's centre, however, because

their choices may be limited, they may deny what they know is true in terms of quality in

order not to feel guilty about sending their child to the centre/program. Not only does

guilt play a factor, but parents may be hesitant to reveal to researchers or other parents

that they have selected a centre of lower quality than what would be ideal (Shinn et al.,

1991). Denial and guilt can be the result of forced child care choices in situations such as

when parents have restrictive jobs, low income, little or no access to transportation, and

very little knowledge with regards with what to look for when choosing child care (Gravett, Rogers, & Thompson, 1987).

Conclusion

There appears to be a lack of parental awareness as to what constitutes a high quality child care program. Experts indicate that high quality ratings of child care centres that provide age-appropriate activities suitable for all the children remain essential for the children's well-being. For parents this may not always be enough. Location, cost, availability, and hours of operation could unduly affect their decision when selecting a program, and because not all the variables necessary to make both parent and child content are available, it is important for parents to become advocates for their children. As Shinn et al., (1991) suggested from research conducted on a similar issue at the preschool level, helping parents to understand dimensions of quality and their importance in a child care centre is a crucial starting point in parental education. In addition, because research has shown that there are problems associated with parents' methods of finding care, there is a need for more professional energy to be focused on helping parents make better child care choices (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980).

Although previous research studies have shown that parents are not completely unaware of what constitutes high quality (i.e., the basic components such as ratios) and that some parents do know what to look for in a child care program, parents still select lower quality programs and rate them much higher than do trained observers (Shinn et al., 1991). Despite parents selecting low quality programs, it would appear that they are still highly satisfied with their child care arrangement, which may offer one explanation as to

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why they overestimate quality. The examination of parents' search strategies as well as which criteria they are deeming important when selecting a program might provide answers regarding parents' high satisfaction and overestimation of quality. For example, the issue of location might prove to be a more important factor for parents than quality, which could explain why they remain satisfied with low quality care.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this study is to examine parental perceptions of quality in school-age care programs and compare their ratings of quality with the ratings of trained observers. Typically parents have been shown to give high quality ratings to, and are generally satisfied with, the school-age care programs their children are attending. As parents report that high quality care is important to consider when looking for a program, questions arise as to why they do not always select high quality care. There may not be one answer to this question; rather it may be due to a variety of factors, some within the parents' control and some not.

When an after-school program exists within the child's school, parents may opt for that program without doing a comparative search. Many parents believe that because they have selected a good school for their child (e.g., academics, extra-curricular activities, or facilities), the after-school program will have similar attributes. This, however, is often not the case as many after-school programs operate independently of the school.

Previous research on comparisons between parental perceptions of quality and quality measured by trained observers is very limited (Shinn et al., 1990). At the preschool level such comparisons have shown results similar to what we expect to find

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with school-age care, which is that parents overestimate quality and perhaps even more so than at the preschool level. This may be due to the fact that once children reach school-age, parents may be more focused on their children's academic instruction, as after-school care accounts for only a short period of the day and involves mostly recreational activities.

The first research question that will be addressed is whether or not parents really overestimate the quality of school-age care centres, and if so, we will attempt to determine what elements of quality they fail to consider. As research conducted at the preschool level has shown that generally parents are satisfied with their child care arrangements (Bradbard et al., 1994; Endsley & Bradbard, 1987; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Roche & Camasso, 1993; Sonenstein & Wolf, 1991; Winkelstein, 1981), parents are expected to be quite satisfied with their child care arrangement at the school-age level as well. It is expected that parents will rate the quality of the centre much higher than will trained observers, particularly in lower quality centres.

The second issue to be addressed will be how parents select school-age care for their children, and what criteria they value in their selection. It is expected that parents will state that quality, location, caregiver warmth, and caregiver training are some of the more important factors. It is also expected that although parents may indicate that quality is important, trained observers will not rate the programs parents have chosen as highly as parents do. This may indicate that parental perceptions of quality differ significantly from professionals' view of what constitutes high quality programming.

Given the results of studies regarding parental satisfaction with care arrangements, it seems important to explore what pleases parents about child care and what pleases professionals. Perhaps every single element that trained observers are looking at is not overly important to parents and this may explain why parents assign program higher ratings of quality than do trained observers

It may be important to understand that what parents deem ideal (e.g., located in the school), and what experts believe to be necessary (e.g., good ratios, highly trained staff), are both essential in order to provide high quality care. The fact that perceptions will differ between parents and experts cannot be ignored; what is important to an expert in the field is not always what parents might consider to be important. Both parents and experts have the child's best interest in mind, therefore perceptions and knowledge about quality must be examined from the perspectives of all parties concerned.

The results of this research will hopefully provide information that will help parents become advocates for quality care for their children. Parents may not realize that their children are in lower quality care than they expected for their child, therefore they should be made aware of high quality care constructs. Once parents know what to look for and how to assess quality, they might be better able to ascertain the differences among the various levels of quality and may be more likely to advocate for high quality care in their child's school-age care setting.

Therefore, the hypotheses of this study are, that (1) the majority of the parents will assign high quality ratings even when the centre is rated by trained observers to be one of medium to low quality; (2) given their high quality ratings, they will be highly

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satisfied with the arrangement; (3) despite parents stating that quality is one of the three most important aspects a centre must provide, parents will ultimately select centres that are not of higher quality, and convenience and location could have a stronger influence than quality; 4) it is also expected that because of this influence, parents will not have conducted an extensive search for an after-school arrangement, especially if there was a program located in the school.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were drawn from school-age care programs located in Montreal and Toronto. The centres were randomly selected from listings provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services of Toronto and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, as well as the English School Board of Montreal. Thirty centres were asked to participate and only one classroom per centre was used for this study. An effort was made to select an equal number of classrooms with older children and younger children. This was done in order to ensure that a wide range of parents with different experiences regarding child care would participate in the study. All parents of the classroom selected within each centre were provided with the opportunity to participate in the research project. As the centres were randomly selected and all parents were given the opportunity to participate, it was possible to include a range of participants from various socio-economic backgrounds in this research project.

Sixty-seven parents (M=15, F=52) from 20 school-age care centres (19 from Toronto and 1 from Montreal) completed and returned the questionnaires. Eighty percent of the parents were married, 15% were separated or divorced, and 5% were single. Fathers' education was quite high, as 40% had obtained a graduate degree, 22% an undergraduate degree, 20% a college or CEGEP degree, and 10% had a high school diploma. The same was true for mothers as 35% held a graduate degree, 30% an undergraduate degree, 22%, a college or CEGEP degree and 11% a high school diploma. The mean number of hours that mothers worked per week is 37, ranging from a minimum of 5 hours per week to a maximum of 55. SES was calculated using Hollingshead's Four Factor Index (1975) and revealed that parents were mostly from middle class families (M= 49.22, SD=8.68) with a range from 28 (machine operators and semi-skilled workers) to 66 (major business and professionals). Of the 68 parents, 61% were found to have had previous child care experience.

Procedure

Directors of school-age care programs in Toronto and Montreal were randomly contacted by phone, and asked to participate in a study on school-age care quality. Once consent to participate was given, the researchers visited the centres and conducted a brief interview with the director and one educator. The educator selected to be interviewed was the one who worked in the classroom that was randomly selected to be observed. When more than one educator was working in the classroom, the one chosen to participate was determined first by availability and then the director was relied upon to make the final choice. A quality assessment was conducted using the SACERS (Harms et

al., 1996). The directors were then briefed on the second part of the study, which would require the participation of the parents. When the directors agreed to ask the parents for their participation, they were given packages containing a letter of information with a consent form attached, a Background Information Questionnaire, a Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire, a Parental Selection Questionnaire, and a modified version of the SACERS (Harms et al., 1996). Each package also contained a self-addressed envelope in which the parents would return the information once completed.

Two weeks after all the packages had been distributed, the directors were sent a letter thanking them for collaborating on the research project. Included in the package was a letter addressed to the parents, also thanking them for their participation, and reminding those who had not yet completed and returned the questionnaires, that it would be greatly appreciated if they would do so. Directors were asked to post this letter on their Parent Information Board.

A list of parents who requested a copy of the research results was recorded so that they could be sent a copy once all the data have been received and analyzed. A brief written report indicating general results will be mailed to the directors of all participating centres as well.

Measures

School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS). A quality assessment of all participating centres was conducted using the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS, Harms et al., 1996) which measured the global quality of each centre. The scale consists of 43 items grouped under 7 subscales, which include: Space and

Furnishings, Health and Safety, Activities, Interactions, Program Structure, and Staff Development. The seventh subscale focuses on children with special needs, however for this particular study it was not needed. Scores were given based on a seven-point scale ranging from a minimum of 1 (inadequate), 3 (satisfactory), 5 (good), to 7 (excellent). Items in the scale were selected on the basis of quality indicators which were extensively researched (Albrecht, 1991; O'Connor, 1991; Abbott-Shim & Sibley, 1987; Baillargeon, Betsalel-Presser, Joncas, & Larouche, 1993; Betsalel-Presser & Joncas, 1994; Jacobs, White, Baillargeon, & Betsalel-Presser, 1991; White, 1990; Galambos & Garbarino, 1983; Vandell & Corasaniti, 1988; Vandell, Henderson, & Wilson, 1988) and judged on their developmental appropriateness for school-age children. Internal consistency and inter-rater reliability were assessed to ensure reliability, and were both rated as being good to excellent. Content validity and construct validity were also assessed to ensure the measure's validity, and although more research is needed to determine the level of construct validity, content validity was reported as being excellent.

Interviews were conducted with the director and educator in order to obtain information that was not directly observable (e.g., staff meetings, safety and emergency procedures, as examples). Questions were drawn directly from the SACERS, and the interviews were no longer than half an hour each in length.

Background Information Questionnaire. Parents were first asked to complete a short questionnaire that provided basic demographic information. This questionnaire was a modified version of the Background Information Questionnaire developed by White, Jacobs, and Schliecker (1988), as only basic demographic information was needed. The

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demographic information provided was intended to help determine whether or not certain problems exist within a specific socio-economic group or whether the results were similar across the whole parent population.

Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status. The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (1975) was used to determine parents' socio-economic status. The scale takes into account the education and occupation of both spouses when calculating social status.

Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire. The Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire was designed by extracting elements from a Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire designed by Ferland (1998). Due to a lack of questionnaires addressing parental satisfaction, Ferland (1998) designed her questionnaire based on ideas drawn from several authors' research on quality issues. Research findings based on measurement of quality (Falardeau & Cloutier, 1986; Gagné, 1993; Harms & Clifford, 1980; Jorde-Bloom et al., 1991a; Neugebauer, 1990; Reazor, 1994), parental satisfaction (Jorde-Bloom et al., 1991a), and positive family-child care centre relationships (Falardeau & Cloutier, 1986; Reazor, 1994) were used to develop the questionnaire. As this study is based on a school-age population, only the relevant items were kept to ensure developmental appropriateness.

The questionnaire was composed of 5 sections: a) basic operating features, b) programming, c) physical environment, d) teacher-child relationship, and e) parent-teacher relationship. Parents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with twenty-two different aspects of their current child care arrangement, based on a 5 point Likert type scale, 1 = very dissatisfied, to 5 = very satisfied, and N/A when the item did not apply.

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Parental Selection Questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed on the basis of

previous research findings by Bradbard et al. (1994), regarding parental selection of

school-age care centres. The questions concerned aspects such as why care is needed,

what criteria are important when selecting care, and the procedure followed in order to

find care. Criteria for selection were ranked in order of importance where 1 was the most

important and 9 was the least important. Open-ended questions were also asked

regarding parents' thoughts about children going home alone (i.e., latchkey children) and

their experiences trying to find a centre.

SACERS for Parents. A modified version of SACERS (Harms et al., 1996) was

designed to be used by parents of children attending school-age programs. Modifications

were necessary for several reasons. Parents could not be expected to take two-and-a-half

hours of their time to go into their child's centre and rate the quality of the program. It

was also thought that parents would not want to complete a questionnaire that was too

long, as other questionnaires would need to be answered as well. Therefore it was deemed

appropriate to shorten the SACERS. A number of items were taken into consideration

when deciding which items or descriptors to remove. Some items were reworded in order

to make the questions more comprehensible to parents (as they are sometimes not

familiar with the terminology used in this particular field), however, certain terminology

remained (e.g., some, ample, variety) to determine if parents were able to make

distinctions when assigning scores. Items which parents would definitely not be able to

answer unless they interviewed the director and educator were eliminated from the set of

questions (items # 10, 11, 35, 36, 39, 41, 42, and 43). Examples were items that related to

administrative issues such as staff meetings, staff supervision, and opportunities to meet professional growth. Several items were also combined as a method of reducing the length of the rating scale (e.g., descriptors were condensed). Although only a total of 8 items out of 44 were completely removed from the scale several descriptors were removed. When deciding which descriptors to remove, it was thought that the items parents would probably view as less important than others, would be appropriate choices (e.g., eliminating protection from the elements and keeping space for gross motor). The method for scoring remained the same as the original SACERS, however, an N/A (not applicable) option and a DK (don't know) option had been added for items which parents felt were not applicable, or which they could not answer because they simply could not obtain the information required to be able to answer the question. The instructions were rewritten in order to simplify the complicated scoring procedure used for the SACERS.

RESULTS

The results section begins with a description of the centres and the parents who participated in this research project. Next, parental levels of satisfaction are presented, followed by a comparison between parents' ratings and trained observers ratings of quality. Selection criteria are examined, and finally parents' selection patterns when searching for school-age care are explored.

<u>Descriptive data</u>

A director and one educator from each of the 20 centres were interviewed for the study, except in cases where the director also fulfilled the role of educator, in which case only one interview was conducted.

The educators ranged in age from 23 to 38 years, with a mean age of 30. Ninety percent were female, and 50% were married or living in a common-law arrangement. Sixty percent had at least a two-year college diploma, 15% a three-year college diploma, and 25% an undergraduate degree. Seventy-eight percent of the educators held a relevant ECE degree. Most educators were employed in their position year round (85%), and the mean number of years of experience in the child care field was 8.7 ranging from 0 to 20 years of experience as an educator. The number of years in their current centre ranged from 0 to 14, and 50% of the educators had been working at their current centre for less than a year. The mean number of work hours for the educators was 34 hours per week, and the average salary for the educators in this study was $15.27 an hour, where the lowest paid educator was receiving $10.00 an hour, and the highest paid $20.00 an hour.

The directors ranged in age from 30 to 59 years of age, with a mean age of 40. Ninety-five percent were female, 60% were married, 30% single, and 10% divorced or separated. Thirty-five percent had obtained at least a two-year college diploma; 35% a three-year college diploma; 15% had an undergraduate degree, and 5% a graduate degree. Seventy-seven percent of all the directors had a relevant ECE degree with an average of 10 years of experience (ranging from 2 to 30 years) as a director in a school-age centre. Ninety percent of the directors were employed in their position year round, 65% were

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employed solely to direct the program, whereas 35% fulfilled both the role of director and educator. The number of years they had been employed in their current centre ranged from less than one year to 13 years, with a mean of 5 years. On average, the directors worked 40 hours per week and the mean salary fell between $38,000 and $43,999 (directors were asked to provide a range for their salary as opposed to a specific amount), and 50% of the directors earned above $44,000.

Nineteen non-profit centres located in Metro Toronto, and one non-profit centre located in Montreal were observed as part of this research project. Mean centre size was 56 children, with the total number of children in the centres ranging from 19 to 169 children. The average class size for afternoon groups was 26, with a range of 13 to 55 children who fell between the ages of 5 and 10 years of age. Mean quality ratings of the 20 centres as assessed by trained observers were calculated using the SACERS (Harms et al., 1996) (M = 5.00, SD = .72), where a five indicates "good" quality. Overall means ranged from 3.21 ("minimal" quality) to 6.05 ("good" to "excellent" quality).

Satisfaction and quality of program

Parents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the school-age program their child was attending. Previous research on preschool day care has shown that generally parents are very satisfied with their child care arrangement even when their child is enrolled in a low quality centre. It was expected that parents would be highly satisfied with their current child care arrangement, and that their satisfaction would be independent of the centre quality as rated by trained observers. In order to address this hypothesis, mean overall satisfaction scores were calculated using the Parental Satisfaction

Questionnaire. On average, parents reported being satisfied with the care their children were receiving ($\underline{M}$ = 4.26), with scores ranging from 2.63 (between dissatisfied and somewhat satisfied) and 5.00 (very satisfied). A correlation between parents' satisfaction scores and trained observers' ratings of quality ($\underline{r}$ = .17, $\underline{p}$ > .05) indicated that parents' levels of satisfaction were not significantly related to experts' ratings of school-age care quality. Mean parents' satisfaction scores were also calculated when mean quality ratings were below and above the 50th percentile. Satisfaction levels were high regardless if the centre was below the 50th percentile in quality ($\underline{M}$ = 4.26, $\underline{SD}$ = .55), or above the 50th percentile ($\underline{M}$ = 4.26, $\underline{SD}$ = .47).

In order to determine if parents' satisfaction levels were related to the parents' own ratings of quality, correlations were run on mean satisfaction scores and mean parental ratings of quality. Parents' satisfaction scores were very highly correlated with their own ratings of quality ($\underline{r}$ =.72, $\underline{p}$ < .0001) indicating that perhaps their quality ratings were based on the satisfaction levels.

<u>Comparison of parents' and trained observers' ratings of centre quality</u>

Previous studies, which examined parents' and trained observers' quality ratings of preschool day care centres, found that parents overestimated the quality of care their children received (Cryer & Burchinal, 1987). In the present study it was hypothesized that similar results would emerge for parents' ratings at the school-age level. When parents' and trained observers' scores were compared, it is important to note that trained observers used a *modified* scale, which contained only the same items as the parents' scale (recall that the parents' scale was a simplified version of the original SACERS).

In order to begin examining whether or not parents assigned overall higher quality ratings, parents' mean SACERS scores were calculated (M = 5.12, SD = .96); these scores ranged from 1.25 to 6.61. Trained observers' mean SACERS were also calculated (M=5.15, SD = .85) with means ranging from 3.20 to 6.42. These results showed no significant differences that would suggest parents were assigning higher SACERS scores than were trained observers, p > .05. A correlation was also run between parents' and trained observers' ratings of quality to determine if their scoring patterns were similar. This result also emerged non-significant, p > .05.

To ensure that the overall scores were not masking any important differences on the subscales, a closer examination of the individual subscales was conducted in order to verify if parents' scores would emerge higher in specific areas of quality. The mean scores for parents and trained observers are presented in Table 1. Results showed a significant difference between the parents' and trained observers' subscale scores, t (64) = 4.49, p < .0001, where trained observers' ratings were higher. Significant differences also emerged between parents' and observers' mean scores on the Health and Safety subscale, t (66) = -2.01, p < .05, with parents' ratings higher than those of trained observers'. The results on the Schedule subscale also indicated that parents were rating scores significantly higher than trained observers, t (64) = - 4.71, p < .0001. The Interactions and Activities subscales did not reveal any significant mean differences, p > .05.

Table 1

Descriptives for parents' and the modified SACERS subscales.

Subscale	M	SD
Space and Furnishings [1]		
Parents	4.65	1.21
Modified	5.39	0.75
Health and Safety [2]		
Parents	5.03	1.02
Modified	4.74	0.97
Schedule [3]		
Parents	5.65	1.28
Modified	4.70	1.04
Activities		
Parents	4.99	0.95
Modified	4.78	1.15
Interactions		
Parents	5.72	1.04
Modified	5.98	0.99

[1] $t(64) = -4.49$, $p < .0001$

[2] $t(66) = -2.01$, $p < .05$

[3] $t(64) = -4.71$, $p < .0001$

It was expected that parents' ratings in lower quality centres would be much higher than ratings assigned by trained observers. This difference was not expected to be as great in higher quality centres. To investigate if parents with children who were enrolled in lower quality centres were scoring the quality higher than trained observers, a t-test was conducted between parents' and trained observers' mean ratings of. Table 2 provides mean scores for parents' and trained observers' ratings in both lower and higher quality centres. When trained observers' mean ratings on the modified SACERS were below the 25th percentile ($M < 4.28$, n = 20), parents' mean quality ratings ($M = 5.01$) were significantly higher than trained observers' mean quality ratings ($M = 3.84$), $t (14) = -4.40$, $p < .001$. When trained observers' mean ratings were below the 50th percentile ($M < 5.11$, n=20), parents' mean quality ratings ($M = 4.9$) were again significantly higher than trained observers' mean quality ratings ($M = 4.2$), $t (22) = -2.47$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that for lower quality centres (as rated by trained observers) parents may be *overestimating* the quality of the centres.

Mean differences were also calculated when trained observers' quality scores were equal to or above the 50th percentile ($M > = 5.11$, n = 20). There was a significant difference between the parents' mean score ($M = 5.20$) and trained observers' mean score ($M = 5.69$), $t (41) = 3.64$, $p < .001$, where parents' ratings were lower than those obtained by trained observers. The same analysis was run for observer scores above the 75th percentile ($M >= 5.57$, n = 20). Again, a significant difference emerged between observers' ratings ($M = 5.98$) and parents' ratings ($M = 5.38$), $t (25) = 4.02$,

Table 2

Comparison between parents' and trained observers' average quality ratings in centres of varying quality.

Percentile of Modified SACERS scores	Parents' mean	Trained observers' mean
< 25% [1]	5.01	3.84
< 50% [2]	4.90	4.20
> = 50% [3]	5.20	5.69
> = 75% [4]	5.38	5.98

[1] $t(14) = -4.40$, $p < .001$

[2] $t(22) = -2.47$, $p < .05$

[3] $t(41) = 3.64$, $p < .001$

[4] $t(25) = 4.02$, $p < .0001$

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$\underline{p} < .0001$. These results suggest that in higher quality centres, there is a significant difference between parents' and trained observers' ratings, with parents *underestimating* the quality of the centres.

To examine parents' and trained observers' subscale ratings in the lower and higher quality centres, subscale scores were examined below and above the 50th percentile (refer to Table 3 for subscale scores). A number of significant differences between parents' and trained observers' scores emerged. What is most compelling about these findings is that when mean subscales scores were examined below the 50th percentile, parents' scores emerged *higher* on all the subscales except for Space and Furnishings. When examining the subscale scores above the 50th percentile, all parents' subscale scores emerged *lower* except for the Schedule subscale. These results lend further support to the finding that parents are overestimating quality in lower quality centres, and underestimating quality in higher quality centres.

Parents' selection criteria

Parents were asked to state the criteria that were most important to them when selecting a program. It was expected that parents would rank quality as one of the three most important criteria when looking for and selecting a school-age care centre for their child. It was also expected, however, that there would be no relationship between the actual quality of care their children were receiving (as rated by trained observers) and whether or not the parents stated that quality was one of the three most important criteria for selection. It was expected that at the school-age level, convenience and

Table 3
Comparison between parents' and trained observers' quality ratings on the SACERS
subscales in lower and higher quality centres.

Percentile of Modified SACERS subscale scores	SACERS subscale scores	
	Parents' mean	Trained observers' mean
Health and Safety		
< 50% [1]	4.75	3.92
> 50%	5.26	5.41
Activities		
< 50% [2]	4.79	3.69
> 50% [3]	5.16	5.60
Schedule		
< 50% [4]	5.48	3.74
>50%	5.78	5.44
Space and Furnishings		
< 50%	4.50	4.60
> 50% [5]	4.74	5.90
Interactions		
< 50%	5.18	4.78
> 50% [6]	6.01	6.59

[1] $t(43) = -4.13$, $p < .0001$

[2] $t(27) = -4.34$, $p < .0001$

[3] $t(36) = 3.40$, $p < .05$

[4] $t(27) = -6.28$, $p < .0001$

[5] $t(38) = 6.34$, $p < .0001$

[6] $t(42) = 4.80$, $p < .0001$

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location would be cited more frequently than other criteria (e.g., quality, cost, etc.) as the most important consideration when selecting care. Because it was expected that location and possibly hours of operation as specific convenience factors would be influential criteria, parents were asked to rate these variables independently from other possible convenience factors.

In order to determine how often parents named a selection criterion as number one and how often it appeared as one of the three most important criteria, frequency counts were run on all the variables. Table 4 provides the frequencies for all the selection criteria parents were given to consider. Where the most important selection criterion was concerned, location was cited as the number one criterion 49% of the time, quality was cited as the number one criterion 29% of the time, and other convenience factors were cited as the most important criterion 18% of the time. Upon examining how often the criterion emerged as one of the three most important elements when selecting school-age care, the same order of variables emerged: location (77%), quality (64%), and convenience (60%). Although the literature showed that cost was an important selection criterion for parents, it did not appear to be the case for parents in this study. Only 9% of parents cited cost as their number one selection criterion, and 12% cited cost as one of the three most important selection criterion.

To determine if those parents who emphasized the importance of quality were actually obtaining better quality care for their children, an ANOVA was conducted for trained observers' mean quality ratings of centres as a function of whether or not parents stated that quality was their most important selection criterion. Results showed no

Table 4
Parents' selection criteria for school-age programs.

Number one most important selection criteria	Frequency cited (%)
Location	50
Quality	30
Convenience (other than location or hours of operation)	18
Health and Safety	12
Hours of Operation	10
Cost	9
Reputation	9
Staff Qualifications	9
Wide Age range	0

Top 3 most important selection criteria	Frequency cited (%)
Location	78
Quality	64
Convenience (other than location or hours of operation)	60
Hours of Operation	36
Staff Qualifications	31
Health and Safety	27
Reputation	24
Cost	12
Wide Age range	12

significant group differences, $p > .05$. A correlation was calculated between parents' SES and trained observers' ratings of quality to determine if level of SES was related to the quality of the centres that parents selected. The results showed no relationship between SES and level of quality, $p > .05$, indicating that parents' of higher SES do not necessarily select higher quality care.

<u>Parents' search and selection patterns</u>

Information regarding parents' search patterns was explored. As research on selection of preschool day care services showed that parents often do not know where to look for child care, parents were asked to provide information regarding how they learned about the school-age centre that they had selected for their child. This was done to help determine whether similar search strategies were used when parents were in the process of finding school-age care for their children. Parents were provided with a list of possible sources from which they could choose (e.g., friends, neighbours, newspaper, etc...) as well as the possibility of stating any other sources that were not listed as one of their choices. Parents were asked to select all factors that applied. Table 5 lists the sources that the parents reported having consulted. The two most popular sources parents used were friends (31%) and neighbours (21%).

<u>Parents' search and selection patterns as a function of centre location</u>

This study also examined whether or not the location of a centre (on or off school premises) was related to parents' approach to selecting a school-age care program. When a centre was located within the child's school, it was expected that parents would enrol

Table 5

How parents learned about the centre they selected for their children.

Source	Percentage
Friends	31.0%
Neighbours	21.0%
Community Centre	9.0%
Newspaper	1.50%
Relatives	1.50%
Other	4.50%

their child regardless of the quality, as convenience and location would override quality factors. As such, it was also expected that when a school-age care program was located in the school, parents would be less likely to look at other programs off the school site as compared to parents with children whose schools did not have an on-site centre.

Parents were divided into two groups, those who selected school-based care and those who did not. Information gathered during the visits to the school-age care centres provided the relevant data to form these two groups. When the overall sample was examined, it was found that 66 % of the parents were able to visit other centres before making their final choice, 87 % had visited their chosen centre before enrolling their child, and 25 % of parents encountered difficulties during their search for an after-school program. In order to determine whether or not school-based programs would have an influence on parents' search patterns and final reasons for selection, the two groups (school-based versus not school-based) were examined separately. Eighty-five percent of the parents in the present study had enrolled their children in school-based programs. Parents were asked to state whether or not they had difficulty finding school-age care for their children. Seventy-five percent of the parents in the school-based grouped stated that they did not have difficulty finding care, versus 60% in the non-school-based group. A Chi Square Analysis revealed no significant difference ($p > .05$) between the two groups. As expected, the primary reason cited for parents not having difficulty in the school-based group was because the program was located in their child's school (74%). When parents were asked whether or not they visited other centres for comparison, 66% of the school-based group and 70% of the non-school-based group stated that they had.

Eighty-four percent of the school-based group and 100 % percent of the non-school-based group reported having visited their centre of choice before enrolling their child. Although these differences were not significant based on the Chi Square results ($p > .05$), it is a bit disconcerting to note that 9 of the 47 parents who selected a school-based program reported not having visited their chosen centre before enrolling their child.

DISCUSSION

The results from this study have revealed interesting findings, some that confirm past findings, and others that provide valuable information to consider for future research. This discussion will elaborate on the findings and provide insight into school-age care and issues associated with this type of care.

A comparison between parents' and trained observers' quality ratings

A principal research question addressed in this study was whether parents would rate the quality of the centres higher than would trained observers. Given the findings in previous studies (Cryer & Burchinal, 1987), it was expected that parents' scores would be significantly higher than those of trained observers. The first analysis conducted to determine whether this hypothesis would be supported examined the overall means of both parents' ratings of quality using the SACERS (modified for parents) and trained observers' ratings of quality using the SACERS (modified for trained observers). As shown in the results, there was no significant difference between the means, suggesting that parents and trained observers were rating quality similarly. Parents' and observers' subscale scores were also examined, and only two subscales revealed significantly higher

scores for parents, Health and Safety and Schedule. It can be postulated that parents value these aspect of quality, particularly health and safety and therefore assign ratings according to what they would hope the centre provides in terms of health and safety for their children. Research has shown that this may be the cause of parents' overestimation of quality; that is, parents tend to rate specific aspects of quality based on what they deem ideal for their children as opposed to what the centre actually offers. However, because the overall ratings showed significantly higher parent scores in only two areas, the evidence is not strong enough at this point to conclude that parents are basing their ratings on what they expect the centre to achieve in level of quality, as opposed to what they are actually perceiving. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss why parents' scores were not as high as expected.

This research project was very similar to Cryer and Burchinal's (1997) study, however, in the present study parents' scores were not significantly higher that those of trained observers' One explanation could be that Cryer and Burchinal (1997) had a much larger sample. A larger population for the current study might have provided more variability in the parents' ratings of quality and perhaps a significant difference would have emerged when examining overall mean scores. In some instances, only one parent from a particular centre completed and returned the questionnaire, which can not be viewed as representative sampling.

Another possible explanation for mean scores emerging similarly was the scoring method used. The format and method of scoring the SACERS for parents was the same as the scoring method for the original SACERS. In the Cryer and Burchinal (1997) study,

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the format for parents was completely changed as only positive statements were used. The Cryer and Burchinal (1997) parent rating scale consisted of elements of the ECERS or ITERS beginning with descriptors for ratings of 3 (minimal) or higher. In addition, there were no negative statements provided for the parents (e.g., routine care furnishing is generally in poor repair), which might have led parents to begin scoring on a much higher scale. Parents did indeed rate the centres significantly higher, and this may be due, in large part, to the higher starting point in their parent questionnaire. In the current study however, parents were given the task of completing the SACERS in much the same way that the trained observers did, with both negative and positive statements and including greater detail. This may have helped parents make more fine-tuned distinctions and may have resulted in their assigning more moderate scores as opposed to high scores. Cryer and Burchinal (1997) also state that had parents in their study been given the task of rating the ECERS in its original form, the scores for both parents and observers could have emerged quite similarly.

Although this may explain why parents' and trained observers' mean scores emerged similarly, it was not felt that overall scores truly reflected how parents rated school-age care centres compared with the ratings of trained observers. Therefore, a more in-depth exploration was conducted by examining centres with lower scores versus centres with higher quality scores, and determining how parents rated these centres accordingly.

It was hypothesised that despite children being enrolled in lower quality centres, parents would give higher quality scores to the centre that their children attended. The

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results showed that when parents rated the quality of the lower quality centres, there was indeed a significant difference between parents' and trained observers' ratings of quality, in that parents overestimated the quality of these centres. The literature provides many explanations for this finding. As a professional rating scale was used and parents used the same rating scale with no prior training, parents' lack of knowledge regarding professional standards of quality could account for the discrepancies between parents' and trained observers' ratings of quality. Previous research has shown that lack of knowledge regarding quality factors has contributed to parents' overestimation of quality (Barraclough & Smith, 1996). However, the argument continues regarding whether or not professionals' standards of quality in school-age care are too stringent, or if parents value the same quality standards. The present study did ask parents to indicate the criteria they deemed important in a school-age program, and although quality was one of the criteria, parents were never asked exactly what they considered high quality to be, or better yet, what specific aspects of a centre would make it a high quality centre (e.g., ratios, educator training, and/or activities). Therefore, it is still not clear whether parents are unaware of what constitutes high quality, or that they are simply unable to rate quality in the same way as trained observers. In an attempt to filter out which aspects of quality parents were less able to rate accurately (or as trained observers did), an even closer examination of parents' ratings compared to trained observers' ratings was conducted. This was done in an attempt to show that the areas where parents really overestimated quality were those about which they had little or no information.

In order to obtain a better understanding regarding the aspects of quality in which parents were more inclined to give higher scores, the differences among the five subscales of the SACERS (only those that parents scored), Space and Furnishings, Health and Safety, Activities, Interactions, and Schedule, were examined. Although parents' scores were significantly higher on two of the five subscales (Health and Safety and Schedule), a more in-depth examination was conducted to determine whether there was a more significant difference on all subscales in the lower quality centres.

When mean subscale scores were examined in the lower quality centres, parents' scores on three of the five subscales emerged significantly higher than those of trained observers (Health and Safety, Activities, and Schedule). As mentioned earlier in the discussion, parents may have assigned ratings based on the level of care they hoped their children were getting, as opposed to the level of quality they were actually receiving. An important example would be parents' high ratings on the Health and Safety subscale. Parents may need to convince themselves that their children are attending a centre that meets high quality health and safety standards in order to not feel guilty about sending their children to the centre. Parents might also be assuming that the centre meets certain criteria because they want to believe that they have selected a high quality centre for their children. An interesting point to mention, is that parents' ratings on the Interactions subscale were not significantly higher than those of trained observers. It is presumed that parents would have high expectations regarding the quality of the interactions between the caregivers and their children, however, parents were not overly generous when rating items addressing Interactions. The higher parent ratings on the Activities and Schedule

subscale may be due to parents assuming that all after-school programs offer a wide variety of activities, material, and equipment. Also, as mentioned earlier, parents may not perceive variety and accessibility in the same way as do trained observers, for example what observers perceive as "some" might be perceived as "ample" or a "variety" to parents. Again this raises the issue of whether parents are simply not able to use a professional rating scale without obtaining the same training as observers, or whether it is their lack of knowledge regarding high quality school-age care programs that causes their overestimation of certain quality items.

Search strategies

Parents were asked to provide information regarding which sources they relied on to find school-age care for their children. Research that examined parents' search strategies when seeking preschool day care showed that parents often turn to second-hand sources (e.g., yellow pages, friends, neighbours, etc...) which are not always reliable when seeking referrals regarding quality child care (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Smith, 1995). Not all parents resort to second-hand sources and use more formal methods such as a referral agency (e.g., Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance), however, even in such instances, these referral agencies do not necessarily provide information regarding the quality of the centres (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980). By having parents provide information regarding which sources they turned to when seeking care, it was hoped that this would clarify whether parents were conducting an extensive search for care at the school-age level. As well, it was expected that this information would help explain why parents were selecting low quality care. The results showed that most parents learned

about their centre of choice through friends or neighbours, and perhaps the sources (e.g., friends and neighbours) they relied on did not have the required skills to ascertain whether a centre was one of low or high quality.

As previous studies of preschool daycare have shown that parents rarely consult licensing agencies for advice or recommendations (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980), results from this study which asked parents of school-aged children how they learned about their centre of choice revealed similar information. For the exception of a few parents who stated that they received help from a licensing agency (n = 2), no other parents used the services of a consultant to obtain information or help when looking for a centre. According to Bradbard and Endsley (1980), certain problems can arise when obtaining information from secondhand sources. Parents tend not to question their friends' expertise, which in fact may not be reliable. As the results from this study showed, parents' satisfaction and centre quality were independent of one another. A friend's or neighbour's satisfaction with a child care centre may convince the parent that the centre is one of sufficiently high quality as their attitude may be that if a centre is good enough for their neighbours' child, then it is good enough for their own child, however this may not be the case. Parents tend to rely on the information received from friends or neighbours because they may feel reassured that these are concerned about their own children's well-being as well.

Parental selection of school-age care

The availability of school-based after-school programs seems to have made the search for after-school care less stressful and much easier for parents. In order to better

understand the relationship between school-based programs and parents' search and selection of school-age care, several different aspects regarding parents' search and selection procedures for school-age care were examined. The majority of parents stated that it was not difficult to find a program that met their needs. The demand for school-age care has sparked a growth in the number of programs/spaces, which could explain why only 27% said that they encountered problems. Although there has been an increase in the number of school-based programs, the high demand for this type of care results in waiting lists, which appears to be problematic for parents, as this was the number one reason for parents having difficulty during their search (13%). There also seems to be a preference among parents for school-based care, because this type of care alleviates a number of problems for parents. As such, parents stated that having access to a school-based program was the prevailing reason for not encountering difficulties (45%).

Research on parents' selection and search patterns for preschool day care revealed that not all parents actually visited their chosen centre before enrolling their child. It was also shown that parents did not always consider other options aside from the centre they selected (Bogat & Gensheimer, 1986; Bradbard et al., 1983; Holloway & Fuller, 1992). Similar results emerged in the present study, for example, 34% of parents did not consider any other option, and although the majority of the parents claimed to have visited the centre, it still remains a concern that some parents did not (13%). In order to explore what the implications were for this finding, a comparison between school-based and non-school-based programs was conducted.

To determine the level of impact school-based programs had on parents' search patterns and selection procedures, parents in both the school-based and non-school-based group were asked a series of questions related to these issues. Two questions were examined, first whether or not the parents considered other options aside from the program of choice, and second, whether they visited their chosen centre before enrolling their child. Surprisingly, Chi Square Analyses showed no significant differences between the groups in terms of whether or not they visited other centres, however, when asked whether they visited their current centre before enrolling their child, all the parents in the non-school-based group stated that they had, whereas 16.1% (n = 9) of the school-based group reported not having visited at all.

These results offer interesting insight into how location can influence parents' decisions with regard to child care selection at the school-age level. Judging from parents' search patterns, it would appear that school-based child care provides a sense of security for parents' regarding the care their children are receiving. If it can be assumed that parents feel confident about their children's well-being while in the classroom setting, a logical assumption would be that they are likely to feel secure with the school day care, and perhaps they do not question the quality level of the school-based program for this reason. This may explain why some parents do not bother visiting the program and observing it carefully before enrolling their children. They might feel that they have already done their part when visiting the school (e.g., taking a tour, meeting with classroom teachers), and therefore neglect to do the same for the after-school program.

The fact that many parents stated that having access to a school-based program was a salient reason for not encountering difficulties while looking for a program, provides important information about the influence of location. Past research on preschool day care has shown that parents do not always make their final decision based on quality, but rather convenience and location play very influential roles (Anderson et al., 1981; Holloway & Fuller, 1992; Peterson & Peterson, 1986). This may be even more prevalent at the school-age level as school-based programs become more widely available. When a school-based program is available, it seems fairly logical that a parent would choose to send his/her child to that program. Parents may not have the means to send their child to another program, for example, transportation could be a major barrier. It is also less stressful for the child who simply has to walk down the hallway to the day care room.

Convenience Factors

When parents are searching for after-school care, it would appear that convenience continues to play an important role in centre selection as it did at the preschool level, which can result in quality being overlooked (Anderson et al., 1981; Holloway & Fuller, 1992; Peterson & Peterson, 1986). Parents in the present study were asked to rank-order specific selection criteria (convenience, location, cost, quality, caregiver qualifications, etc.). As location was thought to play a significant role in parents' decision-making, they were asked to rank location as well as hours of operation independently from other possible convenience factors.

In this study, location was cited more often than any other criteria, which indicates that at the school-age level it becomes a crucial factor in parents' decision-

making. What causes concern when such results emerge is whether or not parents consider quality at all in their quest for a convenient arrangement. Although parents in this study were not asked to provide explanations to support their reasons for valuing certain selection criteria over others, it is important to discuss various reasons that could contribute to the importance of location for parents at the school-age level. The emphasis parents place on convenience factors could be due to constraints associated with school-age care (e.g., transportation, parents' unavailability during working hours, etc.). Parents may feel that the benefits acquired from a conveniently located centre outweigh possible concerns regarding the quality of the centre. A conveniently located centre, especially a school-based centre means no worries about children being bussed from school to the after-school program, and parents may feel more secure with the ease of transition. Location is not the only convenience factor that influences parents' decisions, and as the results showed, convenience (which would include elements other than location or hours of operation) also emerged in the top three rankings of priority criteria. Although parents were not asked to specify what convenience factors aside from location and hours of operation were important to them, they ranked "convenience factors" independently which shows that although location had the most impact, other convenience factors played a significant role in their decision-making.

Interestingly, as opposed to previous studies that examined parents' search and selection processes (Bradbard et al., 1994; Widdows & Powell, 1990), parents in this study admitted that location was a high priority for choice of care. Parental attitudes towards school-age care could explain why they are not reluctant to admit that

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convenience factors, especially location, are important to them. Their willingness to admit that quality is not a number one priority may be due to the age of the children concerned. Parents may believe that children are less vulnerable to the effects of lower quality once they reach school-age. The short amount of time children spend in these programs on a daily basis may be influential factor. Programs usually run only during a short period of the day where children are often engaged in play with other children, therefore parents may be less concerned with the content or quality of these programs. These issues may contribute to parents being less concerned with the negative effects associated with low quality care (Bradbard et al., 1994). As well, once children start classroom instruction, parents may focus their concerns on how well their children are faring academically and be less concerned with the structure and characteristics of the school-age program. Even when parents stated that quality was a priority when choosing care, results showed no relationship between parents stating that quality was a priority and the quality of the centre selected. The low return rate of parental responses in this study may be an indication that parents' are less concerned or become less involved with day care at the school-age level. Earlier research has suggested that a lower return rate in comparison to return rates of similar studies conducted at the preschool level could be an indication that as children become older, parents focus more on their children's academics and become less implicated with day care related issues (Bradbard et al., 1994).

Satisfaction

Although parents' satisfaction with their current school-age care arrangement was the first hypothesis examined in this study, the factors that were thought to influence

their satisfaction were discussed first, in order to provide a basis for this particular discussion. The first step taken was to examine parents' overall satisfaction levels. As expected, parents' ratings revealed fairly high levels of satisfaction. By correlating satisfaction scores with trained observers' ratings of quality, it was possible to determine whether parents' satisfaction ratings were in concordance with quality ratings. As the results show, there was no relationship between parents' level of satisfaction and observers' measures of quality, in other words the quality of the centre had no bearing on parents' level of satisfaction. When parents' satisfaction was compared between parents who had children enrolled in low versus high quality centres, the results showed no difference in satisfaction levels indicating that even in lower quality centres, parents were very highly satisfied with the care their children were receiving. Although the results confirm what was expected, there is still a need to understand why this is the case. Having examined parents' search patterns and the criteria they deem important when selecting school-age care, convenience of location emerged as a very important topic, which may be the factor that influences parents' satisfaction. Although preschool research has shown that location is important to parents when they select a day care for their child (Sonenstein, 1991), it may become even more important at the school-age level. One of the reasons that this may be the case is that a school-age child's day is split between the time they spend in class and the time spent in the after-school program, whereas at the preschool level, children spend the complete day in the same setting. It is therefore ideal for children at the school-age level to remain on-site as opposed to making their way to an off-site program. Parents' satisfaction with their child's school-age

program may in fact have nothing to do with the program at all, and rather could have everything to do with the program being located in the school.

Other issues thought to contribute to parents' satisfaction are denial or guilt, and lack of knowledge of what constitutes quality. Although this study did not measure parents' levels of guilt, which would lead to the denial of the fact that their child attends a low quality program, it is an issue that needs to be researched further. Lack of knowledge however, may explain why parents' satisfaction levels were high despite low quality ratings, as well as why there were very few correlations between parents' and trained observers' quality ratings. These low correlations raised questions regarding parents' ratings of quality in relation to their satisfaction. One explanation for these results is that, because parents first rated their satisfaction at very high levels, when they came across items in the parents' SACERS that they were uninformed about, they would give a rating based on how satisfied they were, as opposed to admitting that they did not have the information available to provide a rating. It is important to point out that parents had the option of providing a "don't know" rating, however very few parents used this option which was surprising considering they were using a rating scale that required a fair amount of observation regarding details of the centre. Although this explanation is rather speculative and can not be based solely on the data collected, it serves as a springboard for what may be an important issue to examine in future research.

These results raised questions that may be interesting to consider in future studies of satisfaction with school-age care, particularly concerning how location can contribute to parents' satisfaction. Parents of preschool children may not necessarily select day care

out of need, but rather to offer their children the opportunity to interact with other children and develop their social skills before entering elementary school. Parents of preschool children may be more concerned with the quality of the interactions (e.g., nurturing caregivers), and program content (e.g., development of motor skills) than parents of school-age children who, as previously mentioned, may view their children as less vulnerable. As the results showed that parents tend to seek school-age care out of necessity, their hectic schedules combined with parents' feelings that their children are less vulnerable allows location to become very important, thereby satisfying parental needs. When a school-age program is located on the school site it becomes convenient for the parents as well as their children. Therefore, if a program is available in their children's school, parents are inclined to select that option as it meets their needs and relieves them of the stress associated with having to seek other options that are less convenient. Location could also be important when an on-site program is unavailable, where parents may select a program that is either close to their workplace or their home. As the issue of location (other than on-site) was not specifically examined, it would be important to explore this in future research.

Summary

The findings from this study lend some support to the hypothesis that parents overestimate the quality of their children's school-age care centre, however results show that it is in the lower quality centres in particular that parents overestimated quality. Overall, whether a centre was of high or low quality, parents stated that they were highly satisfied with the care their children were receiving. There is also evidence to support the

notion that school-based programs play an important role in parents' decision-making when it comes to selecting a school-age care centre. This influence would appear to instil a feeling of confidence in parents that the school-based program will provide high quality, and therefore they will invest less time into searching and evaluating other programs. Despite support for this study's hypotheses, some limitations were encountered that may have contributed to less significant results than originally anticipated, and which may need to be considered in future research.

Limitations

The first limitation to be discussed is the small sample size. The return rate was much lower than anticipated, as over 500 questionnaires were distributed and only 67 were returned. In order to provide a fair representation of parents' ratings of quality compared with those of trained observers, it was hoped that at least 5 parents per centre would complete and return the questionnaires, however, for many centres, only one or two parents responded. Although a larger sample size may have provided more information in a more representative manner, accurate analyses were still conducted and the results still provided the information we were seeking, but on a much smaller scale.

The second limitation to be discussed relates to the parents' SACERS questionnaire. Initially it was thought best to have parents use the same rating scale as the researchers in order to accurately compare their ratings. The SACERS however, is a fairly long rating scale and because parents were asked to complete other questionnaires as well, it was decided that the SACERS should be shortened where possible. Some items were removed because they were more staff-related and parents would not be able to give

ratings unless they interviewed the staff members. It was thought that the remaining items could be easily assessed by parents, however, the low correlations between parents' and trained observers' overall ratings could indicate that parents may have been guessing or simply randomly assigning scores on items that were more difficult to decide upon. Examples of items would include those that asked parents to rate the physical facility, and accessibility and variety of materials. Observers were trained to distinguish between what might be considered "ample" or "adequate", however parents were not. This may explain why there were so few correlations between the two data sets. Previous studies similar to that of Cryer and Burchinal (1997) had discussed similar limitations such as having parents attempt to rate "abstract facets" of the child care program (e.g., accessibility of materials, physical layout, appropriateness of equipment, etc.). Although for the present study, the SACERS was modified in such a way so that parents were asked to rate items that were obvious to them, a number of "abstract facets" still remained in the questionnaire. Examples would include items such as "space for privacy", "furnishings for routine care", and perhaps as just mentioned, items which asked parents to rate the accessibility and variety of specific aspects of a school-age care centre. Parents may have been more lenient or even more generous on items which they had difficulty assessing. As stated in Cryer and Burchinal's study, having parents and observers rate centres using rating scales based on researched day care issues, is to assume that parents and observers can assess quality features with the same basic knowledge.

Finally, it would have been interesting to explore the issue of school-based programs in more depth. Although the information obtained from this study provided

some insight into the importance of location to parents when selecting school-age care, parents' self-reports of why location is important, and what influence school-based programs have on their decision would have provided more solid explanations.

Suggestions for future research

Although parents' selection processes were explored in this study, the issue of school-based programs was not directly examined, that is, it was not clearly established whether or not parents had the option of selecting a school-based program. Therefore it would be interesting to investigate if, when parents have the option of selecting school-based school-age care, if they consider other options, and derive information directly from the parents regarding why location is such an influential factor when selecting care. Although parents were asked if they considered other options, which provided information regarding their search procedures, there was still a lot of information that could have been obtained to provide more insight into the issue of location. Questions for future studies to consider could include, "Does your child's school have an after-school program?", "Did you feel you needed to consider programs other than the one located in your child's school?", and "What is the likelihood that you would select an off-site program when an school-based program is available?". It might also be interesting to obtain the parents' perspective on whether they view preschool day care differently than school-age day and what issues were important to them at the preschool level that are no longer as important at the school-age level.

As it still seems that parents are unable to evaluate the quality of child care centres in the same way as do trained observers, it would interesting to see how parents

would evaluate quality should they be trained to use an evaluation scale. Not only would this help determine if parents can assign ratings based on actual quality rather than convenience, it would also begin the process of teaching parents to become advocates for quality school-age care. By providing parents with training, they might become more aware of the components of high quality child care that professionals view as important. This might encourage parents to become more involved in the programs whereby they could suggest changes, in order to ensure their children are receiving high quality care, as well as meeting the parents' needs in terms of the convenience factors which they appear to view as important.

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APPENDIX A

Letters of information and consent form

Dear Parents,

We are conducting a research project to explore several issues surrounding school-age care. There is an increasing need to study this area of child care since previous research has focused on the needs and concerns of preschool children, while school-age children's needs have often been overlooked. Through our investigation of school-age care we hope to obtain a picture of the school-age care situation in Toronto. Our goal is to better understand the current situation in school-age care in order to make the interests and needs of school-age children more widely known. As school-age care involves both parents and children, it is our goal to explore it from both perspectives.

There are two parts to the present study, one will require parental participation, and the other that of the children between the ages of 9 and 12 years of age. In order to obtain the pertinent information, parents will be asked to complete a questionnaire pertaining to parental perceptions of school-age care, the process involved in selecting an after-school program, and overall satisfaction. If you are willing to participate in the parental portion of the study, please read and sign the appended consent form. In the children's portion of the study, they will be asked to complete a questionnaire administered by a research assistant in a group setting, this questionnaire will focus on their friendships and satisfaction with the after-school program.

Please be assured that any information provided will be kept strictly confidential and that each participant will be identified by a number and not a name. Results will be reported in terms of overall findings and not individual responses. We would like to remind you that participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are interested in participating in the present study, please complete the enclosed consent forms provided and return with completed questionnaires in the envelope

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provided. Please note that although you are not obliged to consent to both parts of the study, and you are free to select one or the other, it would be of benefit for our research purposes if you and your child (9-12 year olds) would participate in the entire study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Julie Beaumont or Holly Gage at our toll free number: 1-800-766-8032.

If you have agreed to participate in the study we would like to offer you the opportunity to obtain a copy of the research results that will give you information relevant to school-age care. If you would like a copy of the results from either study please fill out the attached form and return it with your questionnaires.

Thank-you for your time and cooperation

Sincerely,

Julie Beaumont	Holly Marie Gage	Ellen Jacobs
M.A Candidate	M.A Candidate	Thesis Supervisor

Dear parents,

I am conducting a research project on school-age care, and I am interested in finding out how parents feel about their current child care arrangements. Parents want to select the best child care arrangement possible, and in order to help parents make the best choice, we need your collaboration. Although some parents may have resources available to begin their search (e.g., friends, professionals, and referral agencies), others may be at a loss as to where to start. In order to help parents begin their search with confidence we would like to know which strategies you used to select care, how satisfied you are with the arrangement, and your perceptions of the program your children are currently attending. By examining the methods you have used, it will be possible for us to determine useful strategies and to detect problems that parents have experienced. This might lead us to effective ways for parents to overcome problems encountered during their search for care.

Your participation will require answering three questionnaires. The first deals with demographic information; the second will determine the steps you took during the selection process, and your thoughts on before and after-school care; the third will help us determine your satisfaction with your current arrangement. Then you will be asked to examine several aspects of school-age care and provide us with your perceptions.

Should you wish to participate in this study, please fill out the consent form, complete the questionnaires and return them to the educator. If you would like a copy of the research results please provide us with your mailing address in the space provided.

Thank-you for you time and cooperation,

Julie Beaumont   Ellen Jacobs

M.A. Candidate   Thesis Supervisor

CONSENT FORM

This is to state that I have read the letter of information and agree to participate in **The Parent Study of School-Age Care** being conducted by Julie Beaumont, graduate student of Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec. I am also aware that I can withdraw my participation at any time and that all information obtained from my participation will be kept strictly confidential.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

N.B. This sheet will be detached and kept separate from any other information that you provide to us. For all other information, you will be assigned a participant number and all references will be made according to this number, in order to ensure your confidentiality.

I would like to obtain a copy of the research results once the study is completed _____

No, I would not like a copy of the research results _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

Province _____

Postal Code _____

APPENDIX B

School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996)

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7
41. Opportunities for professional growth	• No orientation or in-service training provided for staff.		• Some orientation for new staff including emergency, safety, and health procedures. • Some in-service training provided.		• Thorough orientation provided for new staff members including interaction with children and parents, discipline methods, appropriate activities. • In-service training provided regularly on site (Ex: guest speakers, films, and videos). • Some professional resource materials available on premises (Ex: books, magazines, or other materials on child development and activities for school-age care).		• Support available for director/program leader or staff members to attend courses, conferences, or workshops (Ex: release time, travel costs, conference fees). • Good professional library containing current materials on a variety of school-age child care subjects available on premises.
42. Staff meetings	• No staff meetings.		• Staff meetings held at least every three months to address administrative concerns.		• Regular monthly staff meetings including staff development activities.		• Staff meetings include planned opportunities for staff to share new professional ideas and materials with one another.
43. Supervision and evaluation of staff	• No supervision provided for staff. • No feedback or evaluation provided about staff performance.		• Some supervision provided for staff (Ex: director observes informally; observation done in case of complaint). • Some feedback about performance provided.		• Annual supervisory observation. • Written evaluation shared with staff.		• Staff participate in self-evaluation. • Staff can request help and guidance from supervisor.

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APPENDIX C

Background Information Questionnaire (White, Jacobs, & Schliecker, 1988)

Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ)

1) Gender (Please circle)

      Female
      Male

2) What is your marital status? (Please circle)

    a) single/never married

    b) married/common law

    c) separated/divorced

    d) widowed

3)   **3) What are the languages spoken at home ?(Please circle all that apply)**

    a) English

    b) French

    c) Spanish

    d) Italian

    e) other (please specify): _____

4) What is the mother's highest degree completed ?

    a) high school

    b) CEGEP/College

    c) undergraduate degree

    d) graduate degree

    e) none

5) What is the father's highest degree completed ?

    a) high school

    b) CEGEP/College

    c) undergraduate degree

    d) graduate degree

    e) none

6) What is mother's current occupation ?   _____

7) How many hours does mother work per week? _____

8) What is father's current occupation ?   _____

9) How many hours does father work per week?   _____

APPENDIX D

Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire (Ferland, 1988)

Parental Satisfaction Questionnaire

We would like to know about your level of satisfaction with various aspects of the program.

Please circle the number that best corresponds to each statement where:
1=very dissatisfied
2=dissatisfied
3=somewhat satisfied
4=satisfied
5=very satisfied

	very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
Basic operating features					
a) Hours of operation	1	2	3	4	5
b) Fees	1	2	3	4	5
c) Available financial support (e.g., 5$/day, subsidies)	1	2	3	4	5
d) Policies and procedures	1	2	3	4	5
Programming					
a) Activities are age-appropriate	1	2	3	4	5
b) There are a variety of activities to meet the needs and interests of the different age groups	1	2	3	4	5
c) Activities cover all aspects of development (i.e., emotional, intellectual, physical, and social)	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Environment					
a) Ample indoor space	1	2	3	4	5
b) Ample outdoor space	1	2	3	4	5
c) Supplies and equipment	1	2	3	4	5
d) Cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
e) Comfort and attractiveness	1	2	3	4	5

Teacher- child relationship

	very dissatisfied	dissatisfied	somewhat satisfied	satisfied	very satisfied
a) Amount of attention	1	2	3	4	5
b) Quality of teacher's verbal communication	1	2	3	4	5
c) Mutual respect of thoughts and ideas	1	2	3	4	5
d) Encouragement given to child to participate	1	2	3	4	5
e) Ability to meet the needs of the child	1	2	3	4	5

Parent-teacher relationship

a) Availability for discussions	1	2	3	4	5
b) Genuineness	1	2	3	4	5
c) Respectfulness	1	2	3	4	5
d) Communicates with parent on a regular basis	1	2	3	4	5
e) Encourages parent participation and involvement	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E

Parental Selection Questionnaire (Beaumont, 2000)

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Parental Selection

1. You have selected after school care for your child because:
    (Check all that apply)

    a) You work during the after-school hours   ____
    b) Your child enjoys organized activities   ____
    c) Your child's friends attend the program   ____
    d) Other   _____

2. What were the most important factors for you to consider when deciding on an after-school arrangement for your child. (Please number according to order of importance, 1 being most important, 9 being least important)

    Cost   ____
    Location   ____
    Convenience   ____
    Quality   ____
    Reputation   ____
    Health/Safety   ____
    Hours of operation   ____
    Staff qualifications   ____
    Wide age range   ____
    (e.g., center could accommodate older and younger siblings)
    Other   _____

3. Did you have a chance to visit other centers? Yes_____   No_____

    If yes, how many? _____

4. Was finding a centre for your child a difficult endeavour? Please state why or why not.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

5. Did you visit this center before enrolling your child? _____ Yes   _____ No
    If yes, how many times? _____

    If no, why not? _____

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

6. Have you used other child care arrangements aside from an after-school program?
_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please list the types of arrangements used (e.g., home sitter, family daycare, friend's house)

Arrangement	Dates
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. How did you learn about this center?

a) Friends _____
b) Neighbours _____
c) Relatives _____
d) Newspaper _____
e) Community Center _____
f) Other _____ Please specify: _____

8. Have you considered the possibility of letting your child go home alone after school?

Yes _____ No _____

9. What are your thoughts concerning children going home alone after school? (e.g., do you feel that supervised care is necessary until a child reaches high school, when are children ready?)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX F

SACERS for Parents (Beaumont, 2000)

In order to obtain an accurate measure of your perceptions of your child's school-age care centre, please read the following instructions before proceeding with the completion of the questionnaire.

Giving odd-numbered scores of 1-3-5-7

- For each question always begin with the items under 1 (inadequate). If any item under that heading is true for your child's centre, then do not move forward and give it a score of 1 (inadequate).

- If the items under 1 (inadequate) do not apply then you may move up to 3 (satisfactory). If your child's centre meets all the requirements of 3 (satisfactory), then move forward to 5 (good)

- Again in order to give a score of 5 (good), your child's centre must meet all the requirements of the items. If this is true the move forward to 7 (excellent).

- A score of 7 (excellent) means that all the descriptions in 5 (good) and 7 (excellent) have been met.

Giving even-numbered scores of 2-4-6

- To obtain a score of 2, none of the items in 1 (inadequate) must apply to the centre, and at least half of those in 3 (satisfactory) must be true.

- To obtain a score of 4, all the items in 3 (satisfactory) must be true and at least half of those in 5 (good) must be true.

- To obtain a score of 6, all the items in 5 (good) must be true, and at least half the items in 7 (excellent) must be true.

If you are uncertain about the existence or presence of any of the items please indicate this in the N/A column by putting D/K (don't know)

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact me at **848-7999**.

SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

Item	Inadequate 1 2	Minimal 3 4	Good 5 6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
1. Indoor space	insufficient space	•Sufficient indoor space	•Ample indoor space	•Space is attractive and pleasing (Ex: Light, open, airy feeling).	—	—
2. Space for gross motor activities	•No outdoor or indoor space for gross motor activities.	•Some space available outdoors or indoors for gross motor play on a daily basis.	•Ample space outdoors and some space indoors available daily (Ex: Gym, yard).	•Ample, and varying space, well used both indoors and outdoors	—	—
3. Space for privacy	•No possibility to be alone	•Some private space available that can be supervised	•Space set aside with protection from intrusion and easy to supervise	•Private space where child can select activities and materials and is easy to supervise	—	—
4. Room arrangement	• No interest centers	•At least one interest center.	•Three or more interest centers defined and conveniently equipped	•Centers selected to provide a variety of learning experiences	—	—
4a). When doing homework is part of program	• no separate area to do homework	• separate area available for homework or other quiet study.	•Quiet area, appropriately furnished	•quiet homework area, references, library open, computer	—	—
5. Furnishings for routine care (Eating, nap, storage of child's possessions).	•Insufficient number of basic furnishings	•Sufficient number of routine care furnishings.	•Routine care furnishings are appropriately sized	•Excellent upkeep of all routine care furnishings	—	—
6. Furnishings for learning and recreational activities (e.g., Tables and chairs, easel or art table)	•Insufficient number of basic furnishings for learning and recreation.	•Sufficient number of basic furnishings for learning and recreational activities	• Furnishings appropriately sized, accessible, and well maintained.	•Full range of learning and recreational activity furnishings used regularly	—	—

Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
7. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort	•No upholstered furniture, cushions or rugs		•Some "softness" in environment		•Softness regularly accessible to children		•Planned cozy area plus "softness"	—	—
8. Furnishings for gross motor activities (e.g., jungle gym, slide, swing set)	•No stationary gross motor equipment indoors or outdoors.		•Some appropriate stationary gross motor equipment in good repair		•Variety of stationary gross motor equipment readily available.		•Equipment is imaginative, flexible, and frequently rearranged	—	—
9. Access to host facilities	•No play space dedicated to the exclusive use of the program		•Some dedicated space		•School- age child care has ample dedicated space, can arrange for exclusive use of a number of shared facilities		•Daily use of a number of shared facilities.	—	—

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
10. Health policy	•No written health policy concerning what to do if a child gets sick. •No health records for children.		•Written policy for isolating sick children and notifying parents. •Records of immunization and other health information kept for each child.		•Written health policy given to parents. •Medication given only with written permission		•Medical consultant available	—	—

Item	Inadequate 1 2	Minimal 3 4	Good 5 6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
11. Health Practices	•No area set aside for sick child. •No staff to monitor sick child. •Parents not contacted when child is ill. •No posting of allergies	•Area set aside for sick child •Children's allergies posted for staff use. •Parents contacted when child is sick	•Child is isolated in a separate room when sick. •Proper health precautions taken •Children taught about health practices	•Staff provide feedback to parents about child's physical and mental health •Staff assist parents to meet children's health needs	—	—
12. Emergency and safety policy	•No written emergency procedures	•Written safety and emergency procedures. •All staff trained in safety and emergency procedures. •fire safety inspection passed •Emergency information for each child is accessible	•At least one person with current first aid certificate, including CPR, present at all times. in the facility.	•All regular staff have current first aid certificates, including CPR.	—	—
13. Safety Practice	•Safety problems indoors •Hazards present in outdoor area •No telephone accessible. •No first aid kit accessible.	•No safety problems indoors or outdoors. •Phone accessible •Emergency procedures posted. •First aid supplies •Emergency numbers posted •Parents informed about accidents.	•Staff make frequent inspections of grounds, facilities and equipment for potential hazards, and safety hazards are eliminated or dealt with. •Children taught safety rules.	•Environment planned to avoid safety problems •Safety information shared with parents	—	—

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Item	Inadequate 1 2	Minimal 3 4	Good 5 6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
14. Attendance	•Parents are not required to notify staff when their child will be late or absent. •Attendance is not recorded.	•Parents of children attending day care are asked to call the staff if their child will be late or absent. •Attendance is recorded.	•Center has communication system so that parents can leave messages concerning their child's absence.	•Staff discuss attendance problems with parents and work together to achieve regular attendance.	—	—
15. Departure	•No clearly defined departure procedure. • Parents are not required to come into the facility and indicate that the child is leaving for the day. •No check out procedures	• Parents are required to come into the facility and sign the child out. •Parents are required to notify staff of alternate arrangements	•Only parents or other persons authorized by parents may call for child.	•Staff have discussed with children proper and safe departure and travel behavior, staff involved in departure procedures.	—	—
16. Meals/snacks	•Meals/snacks not appropriately timed for children ,do not meet Canada Food Guide requirements.	•Meals/snacks eaten on a regular schedule. •Meals and snacks meet Canada Food Guide requirements. •Children's allergies considered •Food eaten under sanitary conditions.	•Staff member(s) provide social environment during snacks. •Small group size at tables permits conversation.	•Eating time is planned as a learning experience and discussion time. •Information shared with parents about nutritional value of foods and children's eating habits.	—	—

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Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
17. Personal hygiene	•Little attention paid to personal hygiene by staff and children •Tissues, paper towels, soap and water not accessible. •Bathrooms are not clean.		•Some attention paid to personal hygiene. •Tissues, paper towels, soap and water are accessible. •Bathrooms are clean		•Hand washing is part of daily routine before eating, after messy activities, outdoor play, and toileting. •Staff periodically check bathroom cleanliness and supplies		•Personal hygiene is part of educational program to promote good health care habits. •Children are taught not to share personal items such as combs, or food and drink.	___	___

ACTIVITIES

Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
18. Arts and Crafts (e.g., materials: drawing and painting materials, glue, scissors, collage, embroidery, weaving, clay, play dough, origami, jewelry making materials)	•Few art materials available, not accessible for children to use as a free choice activity.		•Some materials accessible for free choice daily.		•Variety of materials accessible for free choice daily.		•Opportunity to learn new skills and complete long range projects (Ex: Sculpting, pottery, embroidery).	___	___
19. Music and movement	•No provisions made for music/movement activities		•Some provisions for musical experiences weekly		•Music activities available as a free choice		•Music or movement instruction provided weekly as either individual or group activity	___	___

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Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
20. Blocks and construction Examples of materials: Blocks of various shapes and sizes, Lego, Lincoln Logs	•No construction materials.		•Some construction materials accessible as a free choice activity weekly.		•Some construction materials accessible daily.		•Variety of construction materials accessible daily.		
21. Drama/Theater Examples of materials: dress up clothes, costumes, props, puppets.	•No materials provided for pretend play or drama.		•Some pretend and drama props accessible.		•Variety of props which support many roles and situations		•Pictures, stories, trips used to enrich dramatic play ideas. •Opportunities for developing drama/theatre productions		
22. Language/reading activities Examples of materials: Books, dictionaries, encyclopedia, story records, picture lotto, other picture card games, language games such as Pictionary, crossword puzzles, Junior Scrabble.	•No materials present to enhance the development of language/reading skills.		•Some materials accessible to enhance the development of language/reading skills		•Many books and age appropriate language games accessible to the children on a daily basis •Staff is responsive •Children encouraged to use reading/writing in practical situations		•Staff take children to library to borrow books on a weekly basis. •Children are encouraged to bring favorite books from home to share with the other children. •Staff helps children write their own stories, poems and newspaper.		

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Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
23. Math/reasoning activities Examples of materials: Puzzles, number games, dominoes, Veritec, board games, Chess, Checkers, Veritec, board games	•No age appropriate games or activities accessible to encourage math/reasoning.		•Some age appropriate math/reasoning games and activities accessible on a daily basis.		•Variety of age appropriate math/reasoning games and activities accessible for free choice daily.		•Math/reasoning games and activities coded for difficulty and introduced when children are ready	||	||
24. Science/nature activities Examples of equipment and materials: Aquarium, terrarium, measuring tools, magnifying glass, magnets, plants and pets, science books.	•No equipment or materials are available for science or nature activities.		•Some equipment and materials are accessible for science or nature activities		•Variety of science/nature materials accessible daily.		•Staff extends children's interests and introduces new concepts •Field trips to stimulate interest in science, nature	||	||
25. Cultural awareness	•No ethnic, linguistic, gender role, cultural or racial variety in materials •Staff display stereotyped or biased approach to children.		•Some ethnic, linguistic, gender role, cultural, or racial variety in materials •Staff display no stereotyped or biased approach to children.		•Many multicultural materials available which reflect the diversity of peoples. •Staff displays non-biased approach to activities		•Staff plan activities to broaden children's cultural awareness •Holidays are celebrated from many religions and cultures, encouraging acceptance and understanding of differences.	||	||

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Item	Inadequate 1 2	Minimal 3 4	Good 5 6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
INTERACTIONS						
26. Greeting/ departing	•Greeting of children is often neglected. •No plans made to integrate children into ongoing activities when they arrive at the center at the end of their school day. (Ex: Older children arrive later than K children and disrupt their activity.)	•Acknowledgment of children's arrival and departure is inconsistent).	•Plans made to ensure warm greeting, integration, and organized departure for all children. •Staff members take responsibility for greeting, integration, and departure of children.	•Staff use arrival and/or departure as information sharing time to relate warmly to parents and others responsible for children.	—	—
27. Staff-child interactions	•Staff are not responsive to or not involved with children •Interactions are unpleasant	•Staff respond inconsistently •Staff favor or dislike particular children.	•Staff usually respond to children in a warm, supportive manner. •Staff show respect for children	•Warm, nurturing environment •Staff support autonomous behavior in children). •Mutual respect exists among staff and children.	—	—
28. Staff-child communication	•Staff-child communication is used primarily to control children's behavior and manage routines. •Children's talk not encouraged.	•Staff initiate brief conversations •Limited response by staff to child initiated conversations and questions.	•Staff child conversations are frequent. •Children are asked "why, how, what if" questions which require longer, more complex answers.	•Staff make effort to talk with each child •Teacher verbally expands on ideas presented by children	—	—
29. Staff supervision of children	•No supervision of children in activity areas during play and routines.	•Some supervision of children in activity areas	•Careful supervision of all children adjusted appropriately for different ages and abilities	•Staff talk to children about ideas related to their play and help elaborate and extend the activity.	—	—

Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
30. Discipline	•Program does not have guidelines for discipline practices. •Discipline is either too strict or too lax. •Harsh discipline techniques are used		•Program has policy that harsh discipline is never used. •Expectations for behavior are appropriate for each age group.		•Staff use non-punitive discipline methods		•Parents are notified of program's discipline policy in writing. •Staff seeks advice from consultant concerning behavior problems.	|	|
31. Peer Interactions	•Little or no positive peer interaction •Peer interaction not encouraged		•Staff deal with negative peer interactions •Peer interactions encouraged		•Peer interactions usually positive •Staff models good social skills •Staff help children develop appropriate social behavior with peers		•Children demonstrate good social problem solving skills and positive social behavior •Staff serve as sounding board and extend children's problem solving skills.	|	|
32. Interactions between staff and parents **Resources for parents:** Parent handbook, newsletters, bulletin board, parent conferences, scheduled parent group meetings, parenting materials.	•No sharing of information between parents and staff		•Parent and staff share minimal information		•Parents made fully aware of program policies and practices		•Information provided on parenting, health care, sports and cultural activities for families. •Parents involved in decision making roles	|	|

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Item	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7	Score	N/A
33. Schedule	•No basic daily routine that is familiar to children •Schedule is either too rigid, leaving no time for individual interests, or too chaotic with many disruptions.		•Basic daily routine exists that is familiar to children •Written schedule is posted in center. •At least one indoor and one outdoor activity period is scheduled daily.		Flexibility is possible within the schedule (Ex: Longer outdoor play period in good weather). •Several activities which meet the needs of different age group are available each day. •A variety of activities go on at the same time, some planned and some spontaneous.		•Smooth transitions between activities (Ex: Materials ready for next activities before current activities end). •Field trips and special activities scheduled (Ex: Program takes advantage of special community events).	—	—
34. Free Choice	•No opportunity for free choice in the schedule		•Some opportunity for free choice in schedule		•For most of the day, children may choose from a wide variety of age appropriate games, materials and activities.		•Children encouraged to develop and extend activities which are of interest to them.	—	—
35. Use of community resources	•Community resources not used.		•Some use made of community resources (Ex: Visits to parks and playgrounds).		•Regularly scheduled use of recreational and cultural community resources.		•Value of trips enhanced by advanced preparation (Ex: Children and staff read and discuss background material to make trip more meaningful). •Children's interests are taken into consideration when trips are planned.	—	—

APPENDIX G

Director and Educator Interviews

School-Age Care Project: Director's Questionnaire

Centre ID: _____   **Director ID:**
_____

a) Have you read the letter of information? Give director a copy. Any questions?
b) Review confidentiality, volunteer (ethical issues)

What is the highest grade you have completed? (check only the highest)

High School	*University*	
	Undergraduate	Master's
___No high school	___Less than one year	___Less than one year
___Some high school	___Some courses	___Some courses
___High school diploma	___Obtained degree	___Obtained degree

What was your field of study in your highest degree obtained? (e.g., Early Childhood Education, Special Education, Recreation, Training) _____

Are you currently enrolled in a college/CEGEP or university program?   Yes___
No___

If yes, specify program

_____

Describe: scholastic training you received, if any, in the field of school-age care.

_____

_____

What are your experiences working with after school care?

a) as a director at this school	____years
b) as a director in another centre	____years
c) as an educator at this school	____years
d) as an educator in another centre	____years
e) other (specify) _____	____years

Are you exclusively a Director, or do you also take responsibility for a class? That is, are your responsibilities specifically administrative or are you also in charge of a specific group of children?

_____

_____

_____

Is your school-age care program affiliated with some other program (e.g., on the school premises, part of a preschool daycare, part of a community centre)?

Yes___ No___   If yes, please specify_____

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Is your centre:

       non-profit_____   or   commercial/ for-profit_____? (check one)

How many children are enrolled at your centre?

       full-time   ____
       part-time   ____
       other   ____

What is the monthly fee that parents pay (if parents pay on a different basis, e.g., per hour/per day, or just for the lunch program, please specify)?

_____

_____

_____

How many educators are working in your centre?

____Educators   ____Assistant educators   ____Volunteers
(in charge of a   (under supervision of an   (unpaid position)
group of children)   educator)

Do you have replacement staff when a staff member calls in sick?___Yes   ___No

How many staff members (volunteers, assistant educators, educators) have left in the past 12 months?   ____

Reason for leaving: ____ Maternity leave
(Indicate the number of staff who   ____ Sick leave
left for each of the following reasons)   ____ Promotion
                                      ____ Low enrollment/laid off
                                      ____ Left for personal reasons
                                      ____ Left for professional reasons
                                      ____ Fired
                                      ____ Don't know
                                  Other_____

Directors at school-age care centres can work early morning before school hours, mornings during school hours (around (9:00 - noon), lunchtimes, early afternoons (around 1:00 - 3:00), late afternoons (around 3:00 - 6:00), and evenings.

What are your working hours?

       Monday   _____
       Tuesday   _____
       Wednesday   _____
       Thursday   _____
       Friday   _____
       Saturday   _____

How many months of the year are you employed in your position?
       _____ year around (12 months)
       _____ school year only (9-10 months)
       _____ other (specify) _____

_____ 7,999 or less   _____ 26,000-31,999
_____ 8,000-13,999   _____ 32,000-37,999
_____ 14,000-19,999   _____ 38,000-43,999
_____ 20,000-25,999   _____ 44,000 and over

How would you define your relationship with the administrator of your centre? (e.g., principal/ administrator of a community centre)

_____I am not in a school setting
_____excellent
_____good
_____neutral
_____indifferent, distant
_____rather tense
Any additional comments?

_____

_____

(a) What agency is responsible for licensing your centre?

_____

(b) How often is your centre visited for monitoring purposes by the licensing/ regulatory agency?_____

(c) Are you notified about the visit in advance? _____Yes _____No

What is your age: _____ (years)

What is your marital status?

_____ single/never married   _____ divorced/separated
_____ married/common-law   _____ widowed

Center ID: _____   Educator ID:

_____

a) Have you read letter of info? Give educator a copy. Any questions?
b) Review confidentiality, volunteer (ethical issues).

What is your current job position in the school-age care program?

____ Volunteer (unpaid position, specify job e.g., sports coach, music
          instructor, teacher's aid)
____ Assistant educator: under the supervision of an educator
____ Educator: in charge of a group of children, (perhaps with some staff
          supervisory responsibilities)
____ Educator / Director : in charge of a group of children plus full administrative
          duties
____ Director: full administrative duties exclusively

How long have you been working in your current centre?   _____yrs

How long have you been working in the child care field?   _____yrs

Do you plan on staying in the field, specifically working with after school-age care?

If no, do you have any other career
interests?_____

What is the highest grade of formal education you have completed? (check only the highest)

High School	*College or CEGEP*	*University*
___No high school	___Less than one year	Undergraduate
___Some high school	___One year	___Less than one year
___High school diploma	___Two years	___Some courses
	___Three years	___Obtained degree
		Master's
		___Less than one year
		___Some courses
		___Obtained degree

What was your field of study in your highest degree obtained?
(e.g., Early Childhood Education, Special Education, Recreation)

_____

In terms of school-age care, what type of academic training have you received? (e.g.,
completed courses)

_____

Are you currently or have you previously been enrolled in any courses or workshops to
further your education in school-age care? (e.g., college or university, workshops, in-service
training..., please specify)

a) Yes _____

b) No _____

Staff working at school-age care centres can be there early morning before school hours, mornings during school hours (around (9:00 - noon), lunchtimes, early afternoons (around 1:00 -3:00), late afternoons (around 3:00 - 6:00), and evenings.

What are your working hours with school-age children?

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Do you have another job? _____

Is it paid? _____

What is the size of the group you typically care for:
    In the morning_____   At lunch_____   In the afternoon_____

What is the number of staff working with your group?
    In the morning_____   At lunch_____   In the afternoon_____

What is the age range of the children you care for?   ____-____

How are school-age children in your center grouped into classes?
                                        a) grouped by age   ___Yes ___No
                                        b) grouped by grade   ___Yes ___No

                                        c) mixed groupings   ___Yes ___No
                                            explain_____

                                        d) other_____
                                            (e.g., delayed children in lower class)

What is your annual salary **before taxes**? _____
        (Use the following salary ranges if they are unwilling to give us their exact salary)
        ____ 7,999 or less   ____ 26,000-31,999
        ____ 8,000-13,999   ____ 32,000-37,999
        ____ 14,000-19,999   ____ 38,000-43,999
        ____ 20,000-25,999   ____ 44,000 and over

What is your gross hourly wage? _____

Are you unionized? Yes _____   No _____
How many months of the year are you employed in your position?

How many months of the year are you employed in your position?

_____ year round (12 months)

_____ school year only (9-10 months)

_____ other (specify) _____

What working conditions and benefits do you have?

___Paid preparation and planning time   ___Paid release time for training(e.g., courses,
___Paid sick leave   workshops)
___Annual paid vacation   ___Compensation for overtime
___Retirement/ pension plan
___Dental plan   ___On-sit training

What is your age: _____(years)

What is your marital status?

___single/ never married   ___divorced/separated

___married/ common-law   ___widowed

(Gender   Male_____   Female_____

Would you say that today is a typical day to be observing the program?

Let's get into aspects about your centre now...