



Brief & to the Point

Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership

Issue Brief No. 9 October 2002

What is the relationship between child care directors and quality?

State requirements for child care administrators

Wisconsin licensing rules specify that a child care center “administrator” must have one year of experience as a manager or satisfactory completion of a course in business or program administration, and one year of experience as a center director.¹ Directors of licensed centers are also required to participate in 25 hours of continuing education each year. Wisconsin is among only five states that require specific administrative training for child care center administrators or directors.²

Wisconsin also requires that all child care administrators and directors submit their initial educational credentials to *The Registry*, the state’s child care professional recognition system. Child care administrators who choose to exceed state minimum requirements can complete Wisconsin’s 18-credit professional credential for child care administrators. Since 1998, approximately 250 individuals have earned the administrator credential. Membership in the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) and the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators’ Association (WCCAA) provides further indication that directors seek to advance as child care professionals.

Management skills of child care administrators

Operating a small business requires leadership skills as well as the ability to effectively manage people, facilities, and finances. Child care centers that serve 70 or more children often manage annual budgets of \$500,000, placing them firmly within the Small Business Administration definition of “small business” or “micro business.”³ Administrators of early childhood education programs have an additional challenge in that their “product” includes preparation of learning environments for the vulnerable population of young children.

Personnel management. In a recent report on the Wisconsin child care workforce we estimated that nearly 12,000 early childhood teachers leave their centers each year and must be replaced.⁴ Using a rough ratio of 12,000 annual teacher replacements for Wisconsin’s 2,500 licensed centers, we estimate that center directors must advertise for, interview, and hire an average of nearly five teachers each year – a task that complicates the work of day-to-day management. A center turnover rate of 10 percent raises costs by nearly 7 percent, due to searching for, hiring, and training new staff.⁵ If hiring costs are estimated at \$1,500 per teacher replacement, the statewide total cost to centers could be \$18 million, a figure three times greater than the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood[®] Wisconsin budget.

Facilities and finance management. Child care directors certainly benefit from thorough grounding in child development and early childhood education. However, skills in personnel management, knowledge of physical space, and fiscal responsibility have been found to be even higher priorities.⁶ In particular, understanding of wage and hour laws, health and safety provisions, long range planning, and financial prowess for management of subsidy payments represent key talents of effective administrators. Taken together with knowledge of adult learning and skills in “customer service,” the subtlety of working in any setting with young children and their families requires “systems thinking,” the fifth discipline required of successful businesses.⁷

Questions answered by this Issue Brief:

- *Who directs Wisconsin child care programs?*
- *How do the programs led by well-qualified and less-qualified directors differ?*



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Wisconsin Data

Directors of 326 randomly-selected group child care centers completed questionnaires describing their centers and 256 of these directors also completed questionnaires describing their background characteristics and beliefs about children. In this *Brief*, we relate characteristics of directors with characteristics of 817 teachers in those centers.

A profile of Wisconsin child care directors

A profile of Wisconsin child care directors relative to teachers in their centers indicates that directors are three times more likely to have a college degree than are teachers. Not surprisingly, almost 100 percent of directors have more than 3 years of experience in early childhood education (Figure 9.1).

Along a continuum of professional development, 3/4 of directors in our sample have their credentials listed on *The Registry*, 2/3 were members of a professional child care association, 1/3 had an administrator credential, and 1/6 provide leadership for an accredited center (Figure 9.2).

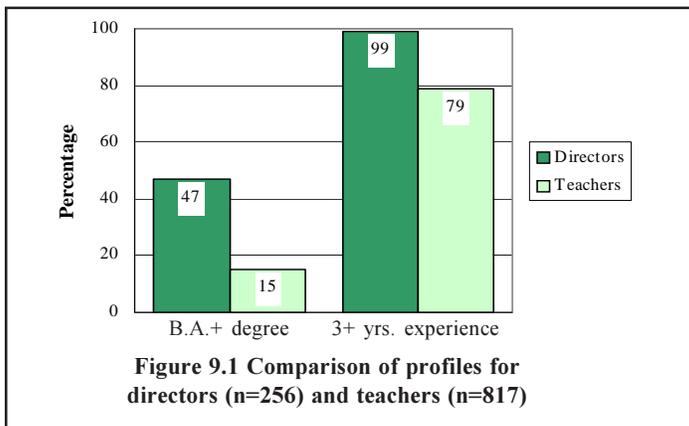


Figure 9.1 Comparison of profiles for directors (n=256) and teachers (n=817)

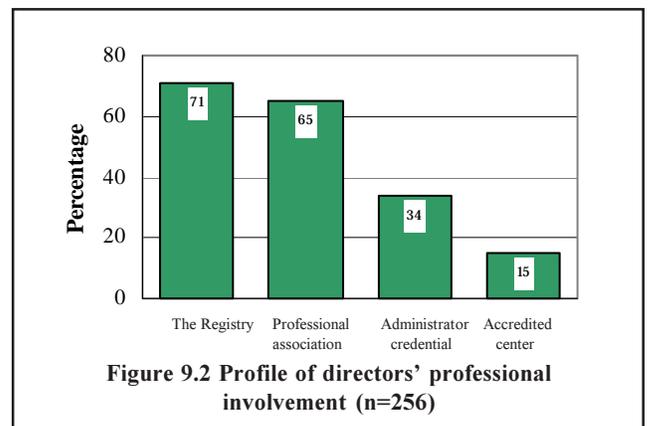


Figure 9.2 Profile of directors' professional involvement (n=256)

The power of director qualifications

One might predict that child care administrators with stronger qualifications would work in higher quality centers than child care administrators with weaker qualifications. To test this assumption, we compared center characteristics for two groups of directors. "Most qualified" directors (n= 35) included those with (a) at least a bachelor's degree, (b) professional early childhood training, and (c) at least 6 years of child care experience. "Least qualified" directors (n=41) met none of these criteria.

Comparison of center/director characteristics

"Most qualified" directors earned almost 50 percent higher salaries, had more child-centered beliefs, worked in larger centers, had a smaller percentage of children on subsidy, and had staff turnover rates that were 40 percent lower than at centers run by "least qualified" directors (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1. Characteristics of "most qualified" and "least qualified" directors and their centers.

Director/Center Characteristics	Most qualified Directors (n = 35)	Least qualified Directors (n = 41)
Director salary	\$32,000	\$22,000
Director beliefs	Child-centered	Adult-centered
Center enrollment	90 children	66 children
Percent of children on subsidy	18%	32%
Staff annual turnover rate	30%	51%

Comparison of teacher characteristics

Teachers with more education, more child care experience, and higher wages were more likely to be found in centers led by "most qualified" directors than in centers led by "least qualified" directors. (Figure 9.3).

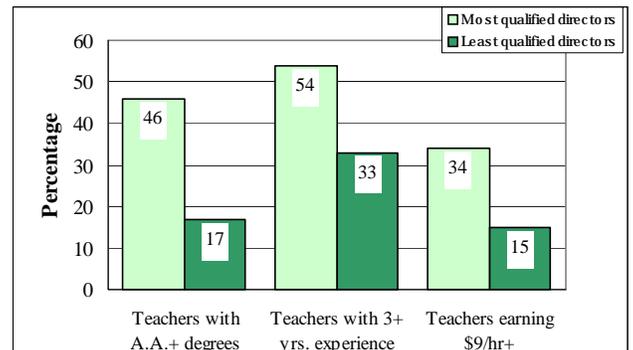
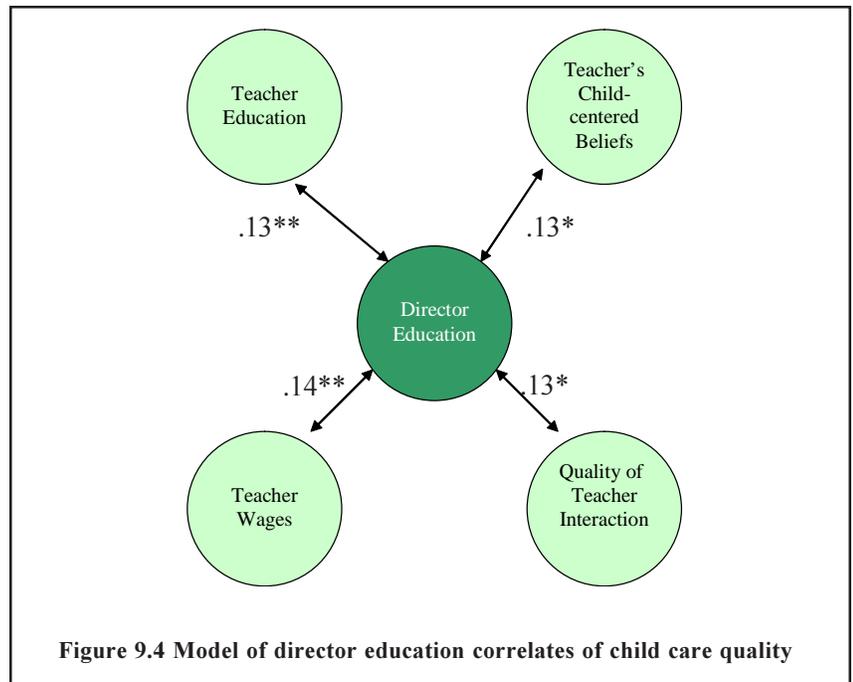


Figure 9.3 Teacher characteristics in centers with most qualified (n=35) and least qualified directors (n=41)

How are center directors a key to quality?

Results of our survey of randomly-selected child care program directors and teachers provide support for the model presented in Figure 9.4. Significant correlations indicate that the education of the child care director is related to teacher characteristics (education and wages), teacher beliefs about children, and teachers' interactions with children (more stars indicate stronger relationships). Although we can not be certain about the direction of effects, the knowledge and skills of the director have considerable impact on child care quality. Through their selection of qualified staff, their commitment to teachers' compensation, and their ongoing program of staff training, directors play an important role in enhancing the quality of teachers' child-centered beliefs about children as well as their daily interactions with children in their care.



Policy Implications

Our research indicates that child care centers with highly qualified directors tend to hire and retain highly qualified teachers who share the directors' child-centered beliefs. A broad body of research shows the link between these teacher characteristics and high quality care. However, only 12% of the random sample of directors we studied met our criteria for "most qualified." These findings lead us to consider ways Wisconsin could increase the qualifications of child care directors, who may be key to building high quality child care.

- 1. Strengthen regulation.** The basic licensing qualifications for child care directors in Wisconsin have not increased significantly over the past 20 years. Our research suggests that it might be prudent to examine the licensing regulations that set the qualifications for child care administrators. Raising the regulatory floor could help reduce the number of marginally qualified directors and help encourage higher qualifications and leadership.
- 2. Focus on professional development for child care directors.** While Wisconsin has significant initiatives to attract, develop, and retain child care center staff and family child care providers, public policy and private initiatives could focus more specifically on child care directors, through continuing education, fiscal incentives to meet high standards, and other methods. Wisconsin has a strong administrator credential program. Efforts to increase and retain directors with that credential could be a focus of new initiatives or adjustments of current programs, such as the child care scholarship and bonus program.

End Note: The next *Issue Brief* will examine characteristics of nationally accredited early care and education programs.

References

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5. Powell, I. and Cosgrove, J. (1991). Quality and cost in early childhood education. Journal of Human Resources, 27, 472-493.
6. Billman, J. (1995). Child care program directors: What skills do they need? Results of a statewide survey. Early Childhood Education Journal, 23, 63-70.
7. Senge, P. (1990). The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization. New York: Doubleday.



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Issue Brief #9:

What is the relationship between child care directors and quality?

University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX), Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Office of Child Care, and Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network have joined in partnership to assess the quality of child care for low-income children.

Leaders in the Research Partnership include Mary Roach, Diane Adams, and Dave Riley (UW-Extension), David Edie (formerly of Department of Workforce Development), and Jane Penner-Hoppe (Child Care Resource & Referral Network). Data collectors include staff from Wisconsin CCR&R agencies. Data analyses are conducted by UW-Extension staff: Diana Durant, Bong-Woon Ha, George Hagenauer and Dong Min Kim. "Brief & to the Point" is produced by Deb Zeman.

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Facts at a Glance:

The Wisconsin child care system

- The system includes approximately 10,000 regulated child care programs and providers.
- Centers and family child care homes are licensed by Department of Health & Family Services.
- Family child care homes are certified by Department of Workforce Development.
- The 2002- 2003 subsidy budget is \$306 million.
- Approximately 47,000 children receive a subsidy each month.
- The annual turnover rate for child care teachers is just over 40%.
- The average wage of a child care center teacher is \$8/hour.
- 229 centers are accredited by NAEYC and 21 family child care homes are accredited by NAFCC.
- There are 276 Head Start programs serving about 14,000 children .

We are grateful to the child care programs and providers who enthusiastically responded to our research requests, and we dedicate our findings to the young children in Wisconsin who depend upon high quality child care for their "good beginnings."



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