

BRINGING FAMILIES TOGETHER:

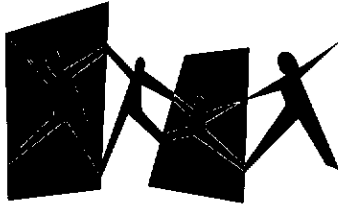
A GUIDE TO PARENT
COOPERATIVES

by
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Center for Cooperatives, University of California



Bringing Families Together



A Guide to Parent Cooperatives

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Center for Cooperatives
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*For the mothers closest to my heart,
my grandmother, Mary Vina Farley,
my mother, Joan Lillian Archer,
and my sister, Paula Suzanne Archer Ramsum*

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Preface

I started this book a long time ago. Even when other projects pushed it to the back shelf, it remained high on my priority list. I believe that cooperatives have something special to contribute to contemporary families, and I hope that *Bringing Families Together* lends support to that belief and provides some basic information to encourage their proliferation.

A number of years back the National Cooperative Business Association picked an impressive logo for cooperatives to use during co-op month — *Cooperatives: Meeting People's Needs*. That slogan is not only short and catchy — it's accurate. Child care is certainly a need in contemporary society.

Employed parents need to have their children cared for while they're at work. Families with one parent remaining at home to care for the children benefit from part-day preschool programs. But child care is more than a custodial service that permits parents to work. It's also a family support service.

Today's families need all the support they can get. We hear about the degeneration of the family. The number of single-parent families is growing. Parents in both single-parent and dual-headed households are working longer hours, struggling in many cases just to maintain the standard of living they were raised with. Families are increasingly disjointed and lack a regular time to congregate. Family mealtime is on the decline. In fact, even the incidence of families gathering around the same television set is diminishing!

Additional contemporary family characteristics signal a need for support systems. Shrinking family size and the decline of extended family linkages have reduced the chances for families to be closely connected to children of varying ages and to observe the intricacies of parent-child relationships. The opportunity to gain these observations outside the family is also decreasing. Fewer social occasions involve mixed generations. Events are often age-specific "child events" or "adult events." For mostly economic reasons, it even appears that more

weddings are excluding children. The geographic separation between work and home has grown with the mushrooming of suburbs and commuting. People move more frequently. Neighbors often barely know each other. This isn't surprising, given that many people enter their homes through a garage door that is raised with an automatic opener.

What all of this means is that parents have few experiential opportunities to learn about age-appropriate child behaviors. In the extreme, unrealistic expectations of children are linked to child abuse and neglect. But even for families where violence is unlikely, parents are often unsure of their parenting and of what to expect from their children.

I believe that cooperatives offer unique opportunities to strengthen family bonds. When parents volunteer in the cooperative, they observe other children near their own child's age. They see that annoying behaviors like whining, nose picking, tempers, and never-ending questions are common. They observe the reactions of teachers to such behaviors and how children respond. They interact with other parents and have the opportunity to share stories and experiences. They observe the interactions of other parents and children. The cooperative encourages the formation of family-to-family friendships that can last well beyond the co-op years.

Children get to know the parents of their playmates. They have many opportunities to closely observe the myriad personalities of adults and widen their social experiences with children at the same time. They benefit from the parent-teacher interactions that permit a smoother transition from school to home.

Understandably, there is no panacea for all families. My enthusiasm for cooperatives isn't meant to under-recognize the variety of valuable programs for children. I doubt that many people today will claim that only one approach works for every family. However, cooperatives are often misunderstood or ignored when program options are considered. I hope, even in a very small way, to change that.

I am indebted to the organizations and people who made this endeavor possible. First, this project was made financially possible with funds from a USDA Rural Cooperative Development grant and from funds provided by my employer, the Center for Cooperatives at the University of California.

Graduate students Heather Kohler Flynn and Liz Esper assisted me with literature searches and reviews. Graduate student Susan Gilbreath helped analyze survey data and completed telephone surveys for fundraising ideas. Liz Esper and I learned together about the intricacies of developing parent cooperatives as we traveled rural California on several cooperative development projects.

I am grateful to the many people who read and offered comments on draft versions of the manuscript. Karen Spatz, USDA Business and Cooperative Specialist, offered extensive helpful comments and encouragement. Audrey Malan, Executive Director of Cooperation Works, Anne Reynolds, Assistant Director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, and Dr. E. G. Nadeau, Director of Research, Planning, and Development for Cooperative Development Services, all offered invaluable suggestions for the section on how to start a cooperative.

Dr. Lilian G. Katz, Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois and Co-Director of ERIC/EECE (and former co-op parent and director), provided me with enthusiasm, encouragement, and helpful critique on a draft of the book. I received helpful comments on the manuscript from Heidi Inouye-Steiner, President, and Marjorie Bohn, Historian, for the California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, and from Lucy Stofle Anderson, Director of Telegraph Hill Parent Participation Nursery School. Kathy Ems, Executive Director of Parent Cooperative Preschools of Oregon and Vice-President of Parent Cooperative Preschools International, and Dr. E. Ann Eddowes, Advisor to Parent Cooperative Preschools International, contributed helpful advice and stories that extended my California emphasis to other areas.

I am particularly indebted to my longtime mentor and friend Dr. Dorothy Hewes, Professor Emeritus of San Diego State University (and former co-op parent and director). Dorothy began writing to me soon after I began employment with the Center for Cooperatives in 1990. Over the years she sent me newspaper and magazine clippings, letters, and cards. We spoke over the telephone and met at conferences. Words can never describe how much her correspondence, collegiality, and friendship have meant to me. She provided invaluable critique and unending encouragement on this manuscript, as she has in other endeavors over the years.

I appreciate the skillful editing and layout expertise of Mary Rodgers, and the artistic cover design provided by Marianne Post. Jonathan Barker, Communications Assistant with the Center, was always ready to help me with computer glitches, copy editing, and publishing coordination. Brad J. Caftel, Legal Program Manager for The National Economic Development and Law Center, skillfully reviewed and made technical changes to the sample bylaws.

No one, besides me, has had to endure more conversation, or read more early drafts of this manuscript, than my best friend and husband, Norm Coontz. His skillful word slashing on early drafts was invaluable, but his patience and support made finishing this manuscript possible. I also wish to thank my children — Jonathan, Jason, Megan, and Krystal — for their support and encouragement and for putting up with late dinners, mother absence, and much discussion about cooperatives.



INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE FOR PARENT CO-OPS

The union of family and school life is the indispensable requisite of education ... if indeed men are ever to free themselves from the oppressive burden and emptiness of merely extraneously communicated knowledge heaped up in memory.

Friedrich Froebel, 1826

Bringing Families Together was written to inform readers from a variety of backgrounds and interests about parent cooperatives. Because of varying interests, it is anticipated that some readers are likely to skim over sections that provide more detail than they need. The book introduces parent cooperatives, clarifies how they are organized and operated, and discusses the unique features that set them apart from other child care and enrichment programs. With this knowledge, parent cooperatives should be on the list of viable options when programs for children are evaluated, developed, and funded.

Bringing Families Together begins by describing how parent cooperatives can effectively expand quality child care services for families. A historical overview places the emergence of parent cooperatives within the growth of other forms of child care and preschool programs for young children. After laying the groundwork and distinguishing parent cooperatives from other types of child care cooperatives, a step-by-step description of the processes involved in starting one is presented, followed by a discussion of the elements essential to their operation.

Parent cooperatives are parent-governed, non-profit, child care and enrichment programs for children. Parents with children enrolled in the program are members of the cooperative. Members elect a board of directors that establishes policies and hires qualified staff to run the cooperative's day-to-day operations. Besides their role in governance, parents may also assist in the classroom, organize fundraising events, and be involved in other support activities.

Historical Overview of Parent Cooperatives

New professional ideas and theories about children and education that emerged in the early 20th century were influenced by 19th century theorists. Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi contributed ideas about the importance of the individual and experiential learning. His theories lay the foundation for Friedrich Froebel's work and the concept of kindergarten. Froebel's students brought kindergarten from Germany to the United States and the rest of the world. His students brought with them Froebel's educational beliefs, including the importance of mothers and other family members in education. Margaret and Rachel McMillan in England, and Maria Montessori in Italy, called attention to the importance of the preschool years, especially for children of the poor.¹

It was the impassioned work of these and other pioneers of early education that stimulated the birth of parent cooperatives. One of the first parent cooperative nursery schools in the United States was started in 1916 by a group of twelve mothers who were married to faculty members at the University of Chicago.² These women wanted parent education for themselves, nursery school education for their children, as well as child-free time to participate in volunteer Red Cross work.

In California, the development of parent cooperatives was rapid. Katharine Whiteside Taylor founded the Children's Community in Berkeley in 1927. Dr. Taylor is now recognized as the inspiration of the parent participation nursery school movement. Her concern for the education of young children and the involvement of their parents highlights the importance of families working and learning together in the educational process. Taylor and others worried about the possible degeneration of extended family networks. Nuclear families and women in particular were increasingly isolated from associations and ties with other families. Cooperative preschools provided an opportunity for women and children to form family-like relationships with one another in a setting of reciprocal learning.³

1. Coontz, 1992c.

2. Although the Chicago Parent Cooperative Nursery School is typically cited as the first parent cooperative, Dorothy Hewes found and documented evidence that there were probably other, less publicized, cooperatives established before it. See Hewes, 1998, pp. 38-39.

3. Taylor, 1981.

The idea of parent cooperative preschools took hold. As the movement grew, support organizations were formed to facilitate communication among parent cooperatives. Councils were formed at city, state, and regional levels. In 1948, the first statewide parent cooperative council was formed — the California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools. By 1953, New Jersey and Michigan had state councils, and the first multi-region council included Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The cooperative approach also spread outside the U.S., where the proliferation of parent cooperatives included the development of associations and councils in Canada, New Zealand, and Europe. In 1960, Dr. Taylor founded the American Council of Cooperative Preschools; in 1964, the name was changed to Parent Cooperative Preschools International (PCPI).⁴

By the mid-1960s, parent cooperative programs were increasingly recognized and integrated into professional associations. The National Association of Nursery Education (NANE, later changed to the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC]) had a Cooperative Committee and sponsored pre-conference events for parent cooperatives. Parent cooperatives also influenced social programs. The highly regarded parent-participation component of Head Start, a federally funded early childhood education program for low-income families initiated in 1964, is a legacy of the cooperative preschool movement.⁵

Contemporary Families and the Parent Cooperative Model

Since the 1970s, concern for the status of contemporary families has extended beyond academia into popular media, politics, and social movements. The topic of family well-being is now a staple for many radio and television talk shows. Nevertheless, popular culture often ignores the fact that families are a microcosm of larger social changes.

As families sought to maintain financial stability amidst changing economic conditions, mothers with young children entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers. By 2000, 73.5% of all American mothers were working outside the home. The growth in the numbers of employed mothers has been significant among mothers with preschool-aged children, particularly among women with infants. In 2000, just over

4. Hewes, 1998, pp. 84, 238–241. See also Stevenson and Allen, 1998.

5. Hymes, 1991, pp. 386–387. See also Zigler and Muenchow, 1992.

55% of mothers with infants under 1 year were in the labor force, nearly double the 1976 level (the year these statistics were first included in census records).⁶

Economic strains, changing social values, and other factors contributed to an increase in the divorce rate.⁷ These factors, along with a complex intermixing of increased social acceptance of divorce, single-parenting, and alternative family forms, necessitated a change to the institutional reference term of *families* from the previous custom of referring to *the family*.⁸ Social controversy around the state of American families fueled right-wing "pro-family" movements, as well as increased attention from social scientists, the media, and social critics.

Concerns about the effects of these changes for children transformed over the years. In the 1970s and 1980s debates focused on the effects of out-of-home care on children. These concerns intensified the number of studies of the criteria of quality in child care. The 1980s brought new vocabulary to these issues — "latchkey children" and "electronic babysitter" were among them.

Meanwhile, the less personal social relationships and intensified division of work and family life that early sociologist Emil Durkheim and others described as inherent to more urbanized society also influenced families.⁹ Debates and concerns over spending "quality time" with children emerged in the 1970s and transformed to "family time" in the 1990s and 2000s. Family life is becoming so fragmented that most contemporary families rarely eat their meals together.¹⁰

Debates on the implications of these changing family social patterns have taken some interesting twists and turns. When the federal social assistance program, *Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC), was abolished in 1997 and a gradual transition began for its replacement, *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families* (TANF), little attention was paid to the significant ideological assumptions involved in the shift. AFDC was founded on the idea that young children are best cared for at home by a parent, while TANF is fueled by the assumption that it is more important for parents to be in the workplace.

6. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

7. Lamanna and Riedmann, 1993.

8. See, for example, National Center for Health Statistics, 1998.

9. Durkheim, 1954; Mintz and Kellogg, 1985; Shorter, 1975.

10. Evers, 1995.

Solutions to problems facing changing families that have been suggested in the popular press and by politicians have frequently been polemic. In 1998, Judith Rich Harris was a hot topic in the press for her assertions that how parents rear a child has little long-term effect on the child's personality, intelligence, or mental health. Harris' main point is that peer groups exert greater influence than parents do.¹¹ Around the same time, then-Attorney General Janet Reno argued that family and community relationships have an absolutely crucial influence on these characteristics of children. In speeches presented from 1994 to 1998 (and even as recently as 2001), Reno asserted that the best antidotes for juvenile delinquency and crime were preventive measures that require that we re-weave the fabric of society around children.¹²

In many ways, parent cooperatives address concerns expressed by these diverse positions on the role of families. They are self-help organizations that organize a support community for children that



Toddler class at UPNS in Los Angeles, California

11. Harris, 1998. In written correspondence between Dorothy Hewes and Judith Harris, Harris suggests that cooperatives present an opportunity for parents to influence the peers of their children.

12. Reno, 1995, 1997.

FEATURE 1**UPNS: PROUD TO BE A CO-OP**

"I like it that my mommy comes (to school with me)," asserts 5½ year old Emani Singleton. Her statement pretty much sums up the sentiments of parents, children, and staff at University Parents Nursery School (UPNS) in Los Angeles.

UPNS is a full-day cooperative child care center on property owned by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) located about 3 miles from the campus. Children stay here while their parents work or attend classes. The 81 member-families of UPNS want to be intimately involved with their children's out-of-home experiences. They participate in setting school policies, spend 8 hours a month working in the classroom, and 3 hours per quarter assisting with school maintenance. In exchange, members get a unique, enriching program, and save money too.

"I came (to UPNS) because it's a co-op. I like how parents are so involved and how parents and teachers work together," says Emani's mother, Carmen Singleton. Bridget Peistrup joined the co-op because "I wanted to be involved in my daughters preschool My daughter likes to be here."

Program director, Rachel Graves began her tenure with UPNS as a teacher more than 10 years ago. She became the school's director in 1995. Rachel worked in traditional child care programs before coming to UPNS. "The difference is like night and day," she explains. "Here parents are more concerned about their children; I love the parent help and support."

Even once-apprehensive teachers laud the positives of the parent co-op. Teacher Donna Turner explains: "I have been doing this work for 28 years, but this is my first co-op. In the beginning I thought it would be awkward. I was surprised to find that I like the co-op. Parents bring a lot to the program. I get a lot of support, and I can see how it benefits the children."

But University Parents' Nursery School hasn't been without problems. When the university began tearing down the student housing surrounding their previous site more than 6 years ago, the school found itself stranded in a field of construction. Problems were confounded by the fact that the university restricted the school's service to university affiliates. Membership declined, and the school was forced

to spend its meager savings to pay teacher salaries. "We were living on the edge," explains director Rachel Graves.

The troubles pushed the co-op governing board into seriously evaluating their program. Board members convinced the university to allow non-affiliates into the program. The co-op adjusted its fee structure, simplified and computerized the payment and accounting system, and eventually moved into their new building. Once the new housing was built, the school once again found itself nestled among student housing. With an updated computer system and a modern building, UPNS is thriving.

Today, even competition doesn't seem to bother UPNS. They share their building with two other child care centers. The co-op play yard is steps away from that of another child care center. Parents visiting the three programs have very immediate options, so members choose the co-op for distinct reasons.

includes teachers and parents. As parents participate in these programs, they are empowered to be focused and thoughtful about parenting. Noted child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner recognized that no 1- or 2-year preschool program can make lasting improvements in any child's development unless the program helps parents become the agents of change, reinforcing positive changes in the child long after the formal program's conclusion.¹³

Parents in cooperative programs are encouraged to improve their parenting skills by observing interactions between children and the teacher(s). They interact with other parents, share stories, and build important support relationships. Parents also observe children similar in age to their own and learn about child development. While creating community networks that support families, they also gain a fundamental service — child care.

Although contemporary cooperatives resemble their 1950s counterparts in parent governance and community building, many have changed to accommodate evolving member needs. Taylor, in the 1981 edition of her classic book, *Parents and Children Learn Together*, recognizes the need for changes. She considers strategies like allowing participation substitutes (such as grandparents) and offering extended

13. Zigler and Muenchow, 1992, p. 101.

day programs to accommodate employed and single parents. She discusses the importance of the participation of fathers in their children's programs. Consistent with her earlier books (and perhaps with more passion) she stresses the invaluable contribution cooperatives provide to families in offering "a family of families" to members. The benefits of support, community, and sharing are positive influences for children and adults alike.

Parent cooperatives have not experienced the growth in numbers one might expect given their history and the tremendous expansion of child care and child enrichment programs in general. Their prominence and integration within NAEYC and other professional associations have sharply diminished. Cooperative programs are not well integrated into formal organizations that provide local information about community programs.

There are no comprehensive studies that can reveal the true nature and impact of the changes in parent cooperatives over time. Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that there has been minimal growth. Survey responses from California parent cooperatives in 1991 and 1998 revealed that the number of parent cooperatives in California remained roughly the same.¹⁴ Although new cooperatives have developed, they have replaced those that have closed.

Parent cooperatives have an infrastructure of regional, state, and national associations; many date back a half-century or more. Most are staffed entirely by volunteers and have minimal budgets. Compared to other associations with those characteristics, parent cooperative associations have functioned exceptionally well. Parent Cooperative Preschools International boasts members from 27 American states, broad memberships in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada, and member organizations in Australia and Great Britain. Members include cooperative councils and associations, parent cooperative programs, and individuals.¹⁵ In Sweden, nearly two-thirds of private, non-profit child care centers are cooperatives.¹⁶ They share a similar message — parent cooperatives are *families-first* organizations that place priority on the roles of parenthood and early childhood education, as well as the quality of programs for children.

14. Coontz, Lang, and Spatz, 1999; Gawn, Coontz, and Bandy, 1991.

15. PCPI, 2002.

16. Pestoff, 1995.

Within This Book

This introduction briefly describes child care issues and the emergence of cooperative preschools within the evolution of social changes. "Features," interspersed throughout the book provide co-op examples or in-depth information relevant to the chapter in which they appear.

Chapter 2, "A Closer Look at Cooperative Models for Child Care," begins by placing parent cooperatives into the broader realm of cooperative enterprise. It proceeds to present six cooperative models for creating child care services and provides examples.

Chapter 3, "The Case for Cooperative Child Care," focuses on parent cooperatives. Quality measures are discussed and their relationship to cooperative programs is analyzed. The benefits, as well as potential challenges, of parent involvement are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how parent cooperatives can be used as tools for economic development.

The processes involved in starting a parent cooperative are explained in detail in Chapter 4, "Steps to Starting a Parent Co-op." Features in this chapter provide examples and elaborate on such topics as creating a feasibility study, elements of a business plan, conducting meetings, and board governance.

Chapter 5, "Operating the Co-op," includes a hands-on overview of operating a cooperative, focusing on the roles of the board of directors and membership. It covers ways that cooperatives can reach out to employed parents, the importance of integrating into the professional community, and ongoing public relations. The chapter concludes with sample evaluations and a discussion of common issues and troubleshooting.

Chapter 6, "Final Words," is a summary chapter, followed by an Appendix that includes sample documents and discusses issues that are pertinent to cooperatives.





A CLOSER LOOK AT COOPERATIVE MODELS OF CHILD CARE

Why do parents choose co-ops? "I think they would say that a cooperative nursery school is one way of getting a good nursery education for your child and an amazing way of getting some very pleasing experiences for yourself! Having been a part of a co-op, I would go along with them."

James L. Hymes, Ed.D.¹
Past President of NAEYC and author of numerous books

A cooperative is a democratically controlled business organized to meet the mutual needs of members. This chapter begins by placing child care cooperatives in the larger context of cooperative enterprises. The discussion then focuses on reviewing the distinctive characteristics of a number of cooperative models for child care.

Cooperative Principles

Child care cooperatives share a distinctive business structure. The cooperative business model is used all over the world for many purposes in a wide variety of settings. The cooperative as a form of business began during the Industrial Revolution as a useful way to promote the interests of less powerful members of society. Workers, consumers, farmers, artisans, and others found that they could accomplish more collectively than they could individually.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is an association of cooperative businesses, scholars, and leaders dedicated to promoting and supporting this unique business form. ICA periodically reviews and revises a set of cooperative principles that were first developed over a century and a half ago. The principles are developed to help different types of cooperative businesses all over the world operate optimally. The principles briefly presented below outline those revised by the ICA in 1996.

1. Hymes, undated, p. 2.

- **Voluntary and open membership.** Cooperative membership is voluntary (it is based on choice, not coercion). The cooperative is open to all persons able to use its services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.
- **Democratic member control.** The cooperative is governed democratically, generally on the basis of one vote per member. Decision-making power is based on membership rather than shares owned.
- **Member economic participation.** Members contribute equitably, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. Members who choose to invest more money in the cooperative do not increase their decision-making power.
- **Autonomy and independence.** Cooperatives are autonomous (not government controlled), self-help organizations controlled by their members.
- **Education, training, and information.** Cooperatives keep members informed and provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of the cooperative.
- **Cooperation among cooperatives.** Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen all types of cooperative businesses by cooperation with one another.
- **Concern for community.** While focusing on members' needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

Each type of child care cooperative described in this section can structure its practices and policies to adhere to the ICA cooperative principles.

Child Care Programs and Cooperatives

It is hard to argue against the notion that child care is a contemporary and an enduring necessity when one considers that nearly three-quarters of American mothers are in the workforce.² Economic conditions make it difficult for most families to live on one income, and contemporary U.S. welfare programs are focused on encouraging or requiring the employment of parents, rather than providing financial assistance to help one parent stay home to care for children.

2. 73.5%. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

A necessity as important and personal as child care cannot be met with a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Parents desire child care that is affordable and convenient, that accommodates their work schedule, and meshes with their values. Yet, they often find it difficult to secure child care that meets these criteria as well as quality standards for early care and education. Indeed, rampant shortages in many regions of the country make finding child care that meets even some of these criteria difficult.³

Cooperative models expand the options for affordable, quality child care for families. Although the focus of this book is on the parent-model cooperative, there are at least five cooperative models that offer viable alternatives to traditional approaches to addressing contemporary child care needs.

All cooperative models are non-profit, democratic, member-controlled programs for children. The distinct differences among the various models of cooperative child care can be explained by their member focus. For example, the members of parent and babysitting cooperatives are parents, so policies and decisions center around their needs. On the other hand, the needs of workers dominate in the worker and family home child care cooperative models, making issues like wages and working conditions more of a priority.

Parent Cooperative

The *Parent Cooperative* is the most common form of cooperative program for children. It provides center-based care and enrichment programs for member-families. The parent-elected board of directors sets policy and hires and oversees the program director. The program director is an expert in early childhood education who runs the day-to-day operation of the center and usually hires and supervises other staff. Parent-members gain an affordable, family-focused program that incorporates their input and involvement.

Parent cooperatives, also known as *parent participation nursery schools (PPNS)*, date back to the early 1900s. Traditional parent participation nursery schools are designed as enrichment, not child care, programs. The programs last anywhere from 6 to 15 hours per week. Parent involvement in the classroom contributes to the quality of the program and also cuts down on operational expenses. Parent education

3. M.Cubed, 2002; Moss, 2001; Helburn and Howes, 1996.

FEATURE 2

**PARENT COOPERATIVE CHILD CARE:
HILLTOP NURSERY SCHOOL**

Down a long, steep Los Angeles street, nestled among the trees of a park, is Hilltop Nursery School. At Hilltop, children tend to the serious business of learning about the world while pretending to be superheroes, firefighters, and moms or dads. Hilltop's nurturing teachers and parents help children learn trust, respect, and compassion by example. When the children serve themselves juice, feed the preschool's fish, or cuddle the rabbit, they learn responsibility. And throughout this process, children learn that they are important, that they can make things happen, and they feel the security of being a member of a family of families.

In a cooperative like Hilltop, teachers and parents team up to create a child care program that benefits the entire family. A visitor observes Ichizo's mom helping preschoolers Juliet, Marlana, and Michael make collages. Outside in the pre-kindergarten group, Willie's father and Hernandez's mother are helping teachers with a lesson on numbers. Later in the day, Zoe's father and members of his band create tunes that move children and adults to dance and sing.

Dori Atlantes, a parent of two Hilltop children, speaks with passion about the co-op:

What I like best about Hilltop is that you get to know the whole family. You are involved with other parents in a lot of ways — meetings, participating in the care, cleaning up the school during certain times of the year. You get to know not only the child but also the entire family. My best friends are those that I met at Hilltop.⁴

Hilltop's beginnings date back to 1951 when the nursery school had an enrollment of 20 children and operated for a few morning hours in a nearby park. The co-op owned several sheds where they stored toys and craft supplies. When it rained, the program met in a nearby church. Most of the families involved with Hilltop in those days were two-parent families with a full-time homemaker. In some very basic ways, the 1950s Hilltop resembles the contemporary Hilltop: the preschool provides enrichment activities for children, parenting classes for mom and dad, and networking opportunities for families. But in other ways, Hilltop has changed dramatically.

4. Coontz, 1994.

Today, Hilltop serves 44 children, is open from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and offers an array of child care schedules to fit the needs of employed parents. According to Mary Kelly, who was director-teacher at Hilltop for over 25 years: "families at Hilltop today are more diverse — ethnically, racially, economically — than they were in the past."

Hilltop is also recognized as a quality child care center. It is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Mary Kelly found the process of accreditation important. "The process was very open. Through self study and reflecting on what you're doing, the process helps you improve and make positive changes in your program in a nonpunitive way." She became so enthused by the NAEYC accreditation process that she became an evaluator and helped review other child care programs for accreditation.



A co-op dad and his band delight children, staff, and participating parents at Hilltop Nursery School in Los Angeles.

is integral to the model. Because of the limited hours of care and significant parent participation requirements, traditional parent participation nursery schools tend to attract families with one parent who has a flexible or part-time work schedule or is at home full-time.

A growing number of traditional PPNS programs modify or offer options to their programs so that they can accommodate employed parents. Many offer "after nursery school" child care that extends

the program hours for busy parents. Some allow grandparents or nannies to complete the parent participation requirements or offer participation options that can be completed during the evening or weekend. Other programs offer members the option to reduce their parent participation requirements by paying an increased fee.

Some parent cooperatives are designing their programs for employed parents. These cooperatives adapt the traditional PPNS model to address the child care needs of parents who are in the workforce. Although many aspects are identical to parent participation nursery schools, programs designed for working parents usually differ in significant ways; they offer full-day child care, more staff are hired, and the parent participation requirements, and sometimes the parent education requirements, are significantly reduced.

The parent cooperative model is well-established. The program has a high likelihood of meeting the needs of parents because parents make policy decisions that include operating hours and cost of care. The combination of non-profit status and parent participation contributes to a cost-effective, high-quality program for children. The parental involvement in cooperative programs contributes to long-term positive outcomes for children and for families.⁵

Babysitting Cooperatives

Parents are also the members and decision makers in the *Babysitting Cooperative*. The purpose of the cooperative is to exchange babysitting services with one another so member-parents can enjoy an evening out or be assured of care for their child during an occasional business trip.

Babysitting usually takes place in members' homes, and no money is exchanged. The cooperative can include a small group of three or four families or include more than a hundred families. A babysitting cooperative can be organized in a variety of ways, but at its core is the traditional cooperative principle: the cooperative is owned and controlled by the members so its organization fundamentally reflects the ideals, needs, and values of its members.

The backbone of the babysitting cooperative is a system of recording to ensure equitable exchanges. Some co-ops use coupons, others utilize a point system. One point or coupon is awarded for each hour a parent baby-sits a child, and one is deducted for each hour a parent leaves

5. Phillips, 1987; Powell, 1989; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999.

their child in another member's care. The secretary, who rotates among the membership at 1- to 3-month intervals, keeps a running total of each member's points.⁶

Most cooperatives establish bylaws or regulations that govern the mechanics of operation, as well as the child care itself. These regulations help the co-op run smoothly and ensure that parents in the group share a similar child care philosophy.

Co-ops do not require that members agree to all babysitting requests. Individual members do not "have to" sit when it is inconvenient for them, watch children whom they don't feel comfortable with, or leave their child with a parent they may have a problem with. Members do have incentives for sitting — when they sit for another family they are earning points that they can "spend" when they need a sitter.

Babysitting cooperatives can be organized through a variety of sources, including employee groups, neighborhood groups, places of worship, child care centers, or childbirth classes. Communities with child care resource and referral programs may get help identifying existing programs in their community, or gain assistance with recruiting members to start a new co-op.

In most regions, traditional babysitting cooperatives are considered informal care that is exempt from licensure. However, under some conditions, a license might be required. For this reason, it is important to check with your regional licensing entity so that members know when licensing is appropriate.

Although babysitting cooperatives are generated by mutual child care needs, it is common for the membership to become an important social group for all those involved. Members of babysitting cooperatives often form strong bonds that last beyond essential babysitting years.

Child Care Worker Cooperative

A Child Care Worker Cooperative is owned by the director, teachers, and sometimes classroom aides. Worker-owners may hire nonmember employees.⁷ By combining their energy, capital, and skills, worker-

6. For a detailed discussion of bookkeeping, sample bylaws, and other useful information, see Terwillinger Meyers, 1976.

7. It is common for worker cooperatives to have a probationary ("employee") period of 3 to 12 months before a member candidate becomes a co-op member. Employees are also hired to work when a teacher is sick or on leave. For details on starting a worker cooperative, see Hansen, Coontz, and Malon, 2000.

members gain steady employment and income, participate in decisions that affect their workplace, and share the business profits made from their investment and labor.

Much has been written about the low wages and benefits for people employed in child care.⁸ This model seeks to address wage and benefit issues by focusing on the workers. Higher wage structures for teachers can have a positive effect on the care of children because it can reduce teacher turnover and give children more continuity of care, attract highly qualified caregivers, and encourage job satisfaction through rewarding the valuable contribution that caregivers provide.⁹

Worker cooperatives are unique as cooperatives and as businesses. Child care workers participate directly in decisions that affect them in their workplace as well as those that determine the growth and success of the business. Through their ownership and control, the worker-members receive a fair share of the profits and control over the way their work is organized, performed, and managed.

Sometimes child care worker cooperatives contract with a consortium of businesses, or a public or private entity, to provide child care. In this case, the contracting entities may be represented on a separate board of directors that provides guidance and makes program-wide policy decisions. Workers make decisions about the structure of work and day-to-day operations of the center.

The worker cooperative may include outside members on the board of directors to encourage communication and gain many of the positive elements of the parent model. Outside members on the board of directors can include parents or representatives of related agencies.

The worker cooperative may be organized by democratically electing a board of directors to represent the members, or as a collective, where all members act as a board and utilize consensus decision making. The worker-members also decide upon authority and wage structures. Authority can be structured hierarchically or, in a collective, pay and authority may be more egalitarian. Collectives typically make decisions by unanimous support, or by a predefined supermajority. Most cooperatives make decisions by a majority vote, and each member has one vote.

8. Whitebook, et al., 2001

9. Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips, 1990; Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

FEATURE 3**CHILD CARE WORKER COOPERATIVE: CHILDSPACE**

Childspace Cooperative Development Institute supports the development of worker-owned child care centers. The project began in 1988 with the development of a worker-owned center in Philadelphia. The first program was then replicated to include a total of five cooperatives — two in Philadelphia, one in Denver, one in Seattle, and another in Richmond, California. Childspace offers on-the-job training and management assistance and leaves governance and other issues to the independent cooperative.

Childspace programs are unique because they involve the participation of workers and a board of community members and parents. A non-profit child care center is established with a board of directors composed of community representatives, parents, and teachers from the center. The board contracts with the cooperative to provide staffing for the center. This arrangement provides worker representation on the board and encourages participation from all stakeholders in the child care program.

The program in Richmond, Magic Years, serves workers in a government building in the heart of the city. All workers, from program director to teaching aides, are invited to become co-owners.

"Many people in this field are in low-wage jobs, and sometimes they come into it thinking that their opinions don't matter," says Kate Ashbey, former Magic Years program director.¹⁰ But at Magic Years, all workers have the opportunity to join the co-op after working there for 1 year. They join by buying \$5 worth of stock, then making \$5 weekly contributions up to a total of \$250. During good financial years, they receive dividends.

After training about cooperative principles and center operations, co-op members help develop the center's policies by serving as voting members of the Magic Years board of directors. Board members' educational levels and confidence vary widely, says Ashbey, so running effective meetings requires carefully addressing "a lot of different hierarchies."¹¹

Not all staff members choose to join the co-op, but all workers help make decisions about programs. At staff meetings, workers

10. Shiohita, 1999.

11. Ibid.

discuss what's going well and what could make their jobs easier. Some employees take a while to become comfortable participating, but Ashbey says she's seen some workers flourish in Magic Years' environment. One teaching aide, for example, who "never spoke up at meetings," now leads the afternoon staffing team, works as a Worthy Wage organizer, and plans to join the co-op.

Magic Years offers above-average pay and benefits for their staff. Still, the pay for teachers and aides in child care is low. Despite these benefits, the center is "not escaping the turnover problem," Ashbey says. The pay, she says, "still can't even compete with the pink-collar ghetto."

Childspace in Seattle is working to help raise the wages of all community teachers. They led a well-executed but unsuccessful campaign to unionize workers.

Family Child Care Home Provider Cooperative

In a *Family Child Care Home Provider Cooperative* each provider remains a separate business, but decides on key elements that member-homes share in common for marketing purposes, such as accreditation, experience, special training, or reliable service. Decisions concerning the cooperative are made democratically by the family provider members. The discussion that follows uses the typical marketing cooperative model and adapts it to the special circumstances of family home child care providers.¹²

Considering the complex dilemmas of child care shortages and high unemployment, family child care offers substantial community benefits. Family child care creates jobs that can allow parents of young children to contribute to family income while remaining at home to care for their own young children.¹³ This form of care can also engender community connections that benefit both children and parents.¹⁴

At the same time, the low wages, long hours, fluctuating client base, and limited opportunity for benefits such as sick leave or vacation contribute to provider burnout and turnover. Family care providers can address these issues by forming a cooperative.

12. For information on starting a marketing cooperative, see Zimbelman, Coontz, and Malan, 2000.

13. Stokley and Lessard, 1995.

14. Beach, 1997; see also King, 1995.

The first and most obvious benefits gained from the cooperative can be achieved through joint marketing. Each family day care home remains a separate business, but shares a business name for marketing purposes and decides on key elements to hold in common. The co-op can gain recognition with the regional child care resource and referral agency, local employers, and community members, and may even bid for contracts with employers or other businesses. Joint marketing can increase clientele, or allow the provider to be more selective in clientele, so that s/he can have a client base with consistent, overlapping hours of care. This can translate into better working conditions, increased income, and business stability.

The cooperative can also provide useful business support services for family homes. A network of back-up care can allow providers the opportunity to take a sick day or vacation without worrying about losing clients. Members can share meal plans, develop procedures, and share business paperwork, such as client agreements and forms. They can create their own toy lending library. Members also leverage buying power through bulk purchases of supplies, equipment, food items, and insurance. Individual members, or the cooperative as a whole, may specialize in particular types of care or offer enhanced programs.

The cooperative can also address another downside of being a family child care home provider: isolation. Family child care providers often have little interaction with other adults. The cooperative can create a support network of other providers and, more importantly, a forum for ongoing education and exchange of ideas.

Family child care is a well-recognized, practical, and valuable child care option for parents. Because of the costs associated with child care centers, the sheer lack of center care in rural and other areas, and because of the potential for a more home-like setting, many parents and child advocates prefer family child care homes. Low-income families, and rural families in particular, are more likely to utilize family child care homes than center-based child care. Family child care homes tend to be more affordable, their location is often more convenient, and they may be better able to satisfy parents' specific cultural or child-rearing objectives.¹⁵ A primary disadvantage with family child care home arrangements is the uncertain quality of the care because it is difficult to monitor, and problems with the relatively high turnover of providers.

15. Stokley and Lessard, 1995.

The disadvantages of family child care arrangements can be addressed by the cooperative, to the benefit of clients of child care — children, parents, and employers of parents. The increased visibility of the cooperative and the consistent standards of care established by members can minimize problems with quality and monitoring. The cooperatives' standards can weed out fly-by-night homes and retain and reward stable, well-trained providers. The member benefits gained by the cooperative foster more reliable and long-term services.

Family Child Care Networks — But No Co-ops?

Although various types of networks of family child care homes can be found throughout the United States, no family child care home cooperatives could be identified for this book. Networks of family child care providers are not cooperatives, but they do serve as working examples of the service potential of a cooperative.

One southern California employer organized and monitors a network of family child care homes for its employees.¹⁶ Requirements for network homes surpass those required by Community Care Licensing. Network homes undergo a more intense inspection and increased quality standards established by the company. Home providers are required to attend special training sessions and monthly meetings. As a result, employees are assured that homes meet defined standards, quality, and reliability. Network providers gain some of the benefits associated with the cooperative.

The employer coordinated a successful program because a person was employed to implement it. The recruitment, monitoring, and organizing involved with the network are expensive and time consuming to administer.

A cooperative has the potential to accomplish the same goals as this employer while maximizing the benefits to the providers. Clients can indirectly reap the added, associated benefits. The need for a program administrator could be eliminated or significantly reduced in a cooperative because members could share many of the tasks.

Cooperative organization of family child care homes is difficult because of the very nature of the work they do. Providers tend to be independent and relatively isolated. Often they have children in their care for long hours, making meetings outside their home difficult. Many

16. The employer recently negotiated to transfer coordination of the network to a regional public entity.

child care providers don't see themselves making a long-term commitment to the business.

Cooperative membership would appeal to those providers who see the job as a career path, want to maximize their business potential, and see the benefits of cooperating.

Employer-Assisted Cooperative Child Care

Social and economic trends that bring mothers into the workforce also impact employers. A demand for reliable, skilled labor has led many industries to consider benefits such as child care to lure desirable employees. Although still relatively rare, employer-assisted on-site or near-site child care can be found among progressive companies. Employers that offer child care and other family-friendly policies and programs improve staff recruitment and retention, reduce absenteeism, and increase job satisfaction and company loyalty.¹⁷

Employer-assisted child care programs are most successful when they meet employee needs and are accepted by both employers and employees. The demographics of the employee population as well as an assessment of employee needs must be taken into account when developing workplace child care. These needs vary from company to company. Cooperative child care programs can provide innovative options for meeting these needs.

Two fundamental cooperative models have proven useful in the workplace: the employee model and the consortium model. Both models offer effective use of resources, and democratic member control of the program helps ensure user satisfaction and overall program success.

The Parent/Employee Model

In the employee cooperative model, parents who share the same employer, or group of employers, form a cooperative to meet their child care needs. In most respects, the employee model is identical to the parent model that is the focus of this book. The cooperative staffs the child care center with professionals, and parents make policy decisions through a democratically elected board of directors. Often a representative of management will also sit on the board.

Parents are able to save on some costs through participation. Participation is easier when the child care facility is located at or near the worksite. Cooperative members fulfill their participation

17. Friedman, 2001.

FEATURE 4**PARENT/EMPLOYEE MODEL: GEOKIDS**

GeoKids is an employee-model cooperative child care center located on the work complex of the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, California. When parent-employees first brought the idea to management in 1983, they received a very lukewarm response. At that time, on-site child care was still a fairly new idea. Founding member Debra Trimble explains how they responded to the initial reaction of management: "We realized ... that this was a scientific organization and in order to convince management, we had to do it in a rational non-emotional way. So we set out about it as if it was a research project and our goal was to answer every conceivable question that a manager could come up with before they asked it. And that's why it took so long."¹⁸

The child care organizing committee conducted a worksite child care needs survey and found that 40% of current employees required child care at that time. However, looking ahead, the survey found that over the upcoming 5 years a full 70% of employees anticipated a need for child care. The organizing group calculated start-up and operational costs, and used all of the information gathered to develop a detailed proposal that was submitted to management.

Parent efforts paid off — in 1987 GeoKids opened its doors. The co-op has been a high-profile success story ever since. The center constructed a new facility in 1998 that has a capacity to serve 68 children, ages 3 months through 5 years. Geological Survey employees are given priority enrollment in the center, but membership is also open to community members. Employees from other businesses in the work complex often make up 40 to 50% of the members. Other employers in the complex have made contributions to the co-op. The co-op reaches out to employees with lower incomes through a special scholarship program.

Parents have a large range of optional care schedules and related fees to choose from. Depending on the number of hours the child is at the center, parents contribute "co-op hours," which include helping with the care of children and other support activities. Several times each year, parents participate in "workdays" (usually Saturdays) that include jobs like weeding, painting, making minor repairs, and sprucing up the building and grounds. Parents also participate in

18. *The ABC's of Cooperative Child Care*, 2002.

4 hours of training per year. Each fall, parents must complete a child-development training that directly relates to their child's age. After that, parents can choose from a variety of training sessions that focus on child-related topics that interest parents, such as sleep issues, potty training, bedwetting, or discipline.

A father of a toddler relates his reason for choosing to be a member of GeoKids: "The real advantage to me is that my office is just two minutes' walk away from the center. Because it's a cooperative, we have a good knowledge of all the teachers and the other parents; we know their children and they know us, and we are real resources to each other."¹⁹

A parent-elected board of directors governs the cooperative. Board composition includes parents as well as an employer representative and the program director. The board is responsible for policy development, finance, annual and strategic planning, and fundraising. The program director implements policies set by the board, hires and supervises staff, and manages day-to-day operations of the child care center.

requirements by choosing from jobs like bookkeeping, facility and grounds maintenance, classroom materials preparation, or even supervising children during lunch so that staff can take a break. Time commitments tend to be a limited amount of job-hours per month.

The Consortium Model

In the consortium model, three or more companies form a cooperative to provide child care benefits for their employees. This provides a way for smaller companies, or those with a relatively small parent population, to provide cost-effective child care services. Consortium programs have proven to be quite successful for many companies. Some consortia start their own child care centers, while others contract with an established center or network of licensed family day care homes.

Employers, non-profit organizations, public agencies, or other entities may choose to form a *Child Care Consortium* so that they can jointly share the costs, risks, and benefits of a child care program for their employees or clients. The governing board represents the member organizations and oversees the child care program. Program representatives each have one vote.

19. Ibid.

FEATURE 5**CONSORTIUM MODEL:****THE WESTERN NEW YORK FAMILY CARE CONSORTIUM**

Members of the Western New York Family Care Consortium (WNYFCC) include five large automotive, manufacturing, and related corporations, and union representatives. The consortium was launched in 1996 to respond to the diverse child care needs of parents working for consortium companies. Each member-company has a representative on the board, and the four companies with unions also include a union representative. Each board member has one vote. Board decisions focus on policy development and long-range planning.

The consortium contracts with The Synergy Group, a consultant management group based in Buffalo, New York. Synergy develops, plans, and implements an impressive array of child care programs for the consortium. Services include contracts with child care centers that care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Programs for school-age children include before- and after-school care, and special theme-based programs for holidays and summer breaks. Parents with nontraditional work hours can take advantage of the evening care program. Child care programs for mildly ill children and emergency back-up care are also available.

All of the WNYFCC programs are open to members of the community, although employees of member companies are given priority and a 15% discount on program fees. Employees of member companies are also eligible for extended resources and referral services, such as assistance in identifying child care during the evening.

There are a number of advantages to the consortium model of child care. Consortium members are able to cut down on costs by sharing services. Resources as well as liabilities and other costs are shared, limiting responsibility for any one company or organization. It can also provide a way for large employers or other organizations to "try out" the child care benefit or expand an existing program.

The consortium can help businesses with varying or nontraditional hours recruit and retain employees. The child care service can reduce employee absenteeism by offering the program to mildly ill children.

Although there are benefits to consortium programs, they are difficult to organize and maintain. First, many consortium programs are joint projects of potentially competing entities. An example is a group of hospitals that attempted to form a consortium to provide needed child care for nurses and other medical staff. The hospitals were suffering serious staffing problems related to child care. The organizing process was stymied by struggles among members of the organizing group. Although they shared a need, the hospitals were also competitors. They competed for business and they competed for staff. This situation generated mistrust and a tendency to withhold information. As a result, the cooperative was not formed and none of the hospitals acquired the child care they needed.

During the formation of a child care consortium, a number of strategies can be employed to anticipate and avoid potential conflicts. Securing executive-level support for child care, and including representatives with decision-making authority at organizing meetings can keep the organizing process moving. Limiting the initial organizing group to less than five employers or organizations can maximize trust because participants will get to know each other.

Child care consortia can benefit from incorporating both public and private sectors into the membership. Non-profit organizations may have access to more diverse funding streams, and private sectors often have useful flexibility.

Although it may add a layer of competing interests, including employees or client representatives in the organizing process and on the board can reap benefits for the center. Such participation helps to ensure that the program that is developed meets the needs of parent-employees.

The success of organizing a child care consortium can be enhanced by having an experienced, committed consultant facilitate the process. According to child care consultant Madeline Fried:

Putting together a consortium is a very challenging proposition. You have to have uniformity of goals; everybody has to be on the same wavelength and that takes a while But, once everybody is together it's a very powerful mechanism for bringing child care to the workplace as well as to the community.²⁰

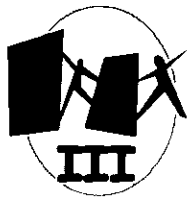
20. *The ABC's of Cooperative Child Care*, 2002.

Conclusion

Cooperatives designed to provide care and enrichment programs for children utilize a governance and business structure with a long history of success in a wide variety of industries throughout the world. Principles established by the International Cooperative Alliance are designed to provide guidance and to help cooperatives operate effectively and efficiently.

Each cooperative child care model discussed in this chapter — the parent cooperative, babysitting cooperative, child care worker cooperative, family home child care provider cooperative, employee model, and the consortium model — shares in common a democratic governance structure. The distinctive difference in each model involves structuring the services provided by the cooperative to best serve the membership base. The concerns of parent consumers take precedence in the parent and babysitting cooperatives. Workers are the focal point in the worker model and the family home child care provider model. In the consortium, and to some extent the employee model, the members are businesses, so the needs of member-businesses predominate.

The remainder of *Bringing Families Together* focuses on the parent cooperative model. Much of this information also applies to other types of cooperatives.



THE CASE FOR PARENT COOPERATIVES

Our gross national product ... counts air pollution and cigarette advertising It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for those who break them It counts napalm and the cost of a nuclear warhead, and armored cars for police But it doesn't allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play It measures neither wit nor courage, neither wisdom nor learning, neither compassion In short it measures everything, except that which makes life worthwhile.

Robert F. Kennedy
March 18, 1968

This chapter examines parent cooperatives from an academic perspective. It discusses what the research says about quality child care and aspects integral to parent cooperatives. There is no discussion on the impact of child care per se on children, or on comparing its merits and deficits relative to care by a parent who is not in the labor force and cares for the home and child(ren) full time.

What Research Says about Quality Child Care

The quality of child care received is associated with short- and long-term outcomes for children. Children in high-quality child care are more likely than children in other types of care to be emotionally secure and self confident, and to exhibit control over their behavior. Children in high-quality child care are also more cognitively advanced. In fact, quality care produces lasting effects — it is associated with better grades in school, reduced chance of involvement with the criminal justice system, and decreased chance of dropping out of school.¹

A great deal of research and published information on what constitutes high-quality child care and how quality issues impact children receiving care have been amassed over the past quarter century. Researchers involved in child development and related fields have identified the primary components of quality child care as low child-

1. Helburn and Howes, 1996. See also Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993.

to-adult ratios, small group size, and caregiver characteristics that include training and education.² These components interact to produce positive effects. Group size and ratios, for example, influence the work environments of caregivers. A positive work environment and adequate wages combine to retain teachers and reduce caregiver turnover. Caregiver turnover is another important dimension of quality because it affects the continuity of care for children. Young children form tight bonds with their caregivers and feel secure when they have the opportunity to develop a consistent relationship with them.³

Many of these quality characteristics are reflected in child care licensing requirements. With the exception of federal programs (like Head Start), most child care is regulated at the state level.⁴ Licensing regulates a variety of elements intrinsic to child care. Capacity and ratio requirements vary by the child's age. Facility and grounds requirements are often defined in terms of square footage per child; other building specifications, such as fixtures, equipment, and related items, are also regulated. Safety procedures, fire and water clearances, and insurance are also specified in licensing requirements. Directors, teachers, aides, and other child care personnel must meet minimum qualifications for education and experience, and often criminal arrest clearances are necessary for anyone working directly with children. Licensing establishes a threshold of minimum standards, so being licensed doesn't necessarily ensure quality, and regulations can vary widely from state to state.⁵

With the goal of improving quality standards and consumer information, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) implemented a child care accreditation system in 1985. Accreditation may be an effective strategy for helping parents and others identify quality child care. NAEYC and the American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics (APHA/AAP) publish recommendations for group size and child-to-adult ratios. These standards are displayed in Table A.⁶

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2. Some sources distinguish these as "structural characteristics." See, for example, Helburn and Howes, 1996, and Vandell and Wolfe, 2000.
 3. Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips, 1990; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 1999.
 4. States usually establish minimum regulations, and some counties and cities impose additional or more stringent regulations. See, for example, Groginsky, et al., 1999. Sometimes, certain types of cooperative arrangements and programs are exempt from licensure.
 5. National Center for Early Development and Learning, 2002.
 6. National Association for the Education of Young Children; 1998, p. 47; American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics, 1997.

Table A. Group Size and Staff-Child Ratios
 Recommendations of NAEYC* and APHA/AAP,[†]
 and Operating Ratios of California Parent Cooperatives

Age of Children	Maximum Number of Children per Group		Staff-Child Ratio		
	NAEYC	APHA/AAP	NAEYC	APHA/AAP	Operating Ratio CA Parent Co-ops ⁷
0-12 months	6-8	6	1:3-1:4	1:3	NA [‡]
12-24 months	6-8	6	1:3-1:4	1:4	1:3
2 year olds (25-30 months)	8-12	8	1:4-1:6	1:4	1:3
2½ year olds (31-35 months)	10-14	10	1:5-1:7	1:5	1:3
3 years	14-20	14	1:7-1:10	1:7	1:4
4-5 years	16-20	16	1:8-1:10	1:8	1:5
Kindergartners	20-24	16	1:10-1:12	1:8	NA
6-8 years	20-30	NA	1:10-1:15	NA	NA
9-12 years	24-30	NA	1:12-1:15	NA	NA

* NAEYC – National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998.

[†] APHA/AAP – American Public Health Association/American Academy of Pediatrics, 1997.

[‡] NA – Not applicable.

Group Size

The overall size of the group of children being cared for is an important predictor of quality of care.

Smaller groups (12 or fewer preschoolers) foster more positive interactions between caregivers and children, as well as among children. Children in smaller groups are better behaved, more sociable and cooperative, engage in more elaborate play, and are more talkative. Children cared for in large groups (20-26 preschoolers) experience less social stimulation and responsiveness, and are less sociable and less cooperative with strangers. Large groups also affect interactions with caregivers — children receive less individual attention, and caregivers are more restrictive. Children in large groups are less cooperative, more hostile, more antisocial, talk less, cry more, engage

7. Coontz, 1992a; Coontz, Lang, and Spatz, 1999 includes information on survey population; however, a collection of data gathered on ratios is unpublished. Overall, 193 of 255 California parent co-ops responded to survey; 183 responded to questions pertaining to ratios.

in aimless wandering, and earn lower scores on tests of social competency.⁸

Child-Adult Ratios

The number of children per caregiver is another crucial predictor of child care quality. Children in care with lower child-to-adult ratios are more likely to imitate adult behavior, engage in more verbal interaction and play, and are compliant and exhibit higher levels of self-control. Low child-to-adult ratios are important predictors for meaningful child and caregiver interactions.⁹

In the *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study*, an expansive study designed to track the effects of quality child care over time, the quality of the relationship between child care teacher and child is a dimension with powerful and lasting effects. In measuring effects from preschool to second grade, children with closer teacher-to-child relationships before kindergarten had better thinking skills, language ability, and math skills. They were also more social, and had better classroom skills and fewer problem behaviors.¹⁰

Caregiver Education, Training, and Turnover

Caregiver characteristics affect the quality of child care. Caregivers with education and training in early childhood education are more responsive to children and provide care that is appropriate to the child's age. Children in their care exhibit more cooperative behavior and have higher levels of language skills and general knowledge.¹¹

When care is tracked across ages and types of care, positive caregiving is more likely when the child-to-adult ratio and group size are smaller, and when the caregiver is more educated, holds more child-centered beliefs about childrearing, and has more experience in child care.¹²

Consistency of the caregiver also influences outcomes for children in care. The national annual turnover rate for child care teaching staff has hovered above 30% for over a decade.¹³ This turnover rate is

8. Ruopp, et al., 1979; Hayes, Palmer, and Zaslow, 1990; Howes and Rubenstein, 1985; Child Care Resource and Research Unit, 1996. A few studies counter this with some positive effects in larger groups: see Blau, 1997.

9. Studer, 1992; Howes, 1983; Ruopp, et al., 1979.

10. Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 1999.

11. Child Care Resource and Research Unit, 1996.

12. Cryer, 1999; Frede, 1995.

13. Whitebook, et al., 2001; Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

problematic considering the importance of forming attachments when children are young. Children in child care centers with higher staff turnover are more aggressive and spend less time engaging socially with peers and more time aimlessly wandering about. They also score lower on vocabulary tests than children in centers with more stable staff.¹⁴

Child care staff are typically underpaid and often feel undervalued and unrecognized for the work they do.¹⁵ At the same time, child care teachers participating in the *National Child Care Staffing Study* report high levels of satisfaction with day-to-day aspects of their work. They enjoy participating in the growth and development of children, and appreciate the autonomy involved with their work and the interactions they have with colleagues. The same study found that the primary cause of staff turnover is low wages.¹⁶

A number of circumstances contribute to the low pay of child caregivers. A portion of this has to do with cultural perceptions that devalue the work of women, particularly in jobs that are gender stereotyped like child care. Characteristics of the child care industry also contribute to low wages. Child care is labor-intensive; in fact, staffing costs are the largest expenditure in the child care budget. At the same time, these costs usually need to be generated from parent fees. Families with children under 5 years that use child care devote an average of 10% of their income to child care. This is often the second largest expenditure in a family budget after the rent or mortgage payment. Low-earning families pay an average of 16% of their earnings for child care, and families earning less than the established U.S. poverty level pay an average of 23% of their earnings.¹⁷ Despite this hefty family expense, the funds are usually insufficient to pay the full costs of care.¹⁸ The result is that cuts are made where expenses are highest — wages.

The Cost-Versus-Quality Dilemma

The economics of child care are challenging. The foundation of a "free market" economy is that capitalists identify an opportunity, and then fund, organize, and provide the product or service. When this process works according to plan, consumers obtain a service and have

14. Howes and Hamilton, 1993.

15. Child Development Division, 1999.

16. Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips, 1990.

17. Giannarelli and Barsimantov, 2000.

18. Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

choices that allow them to obtain the best-quality product at the least cost. In exchange for their hard work and capital investment, capitalists profit when they offer a quality product for a fair price. Capitalists offering the best deal (quality and cost) will earn a larger share of the market and will be able to earn the most money. To maximize profit, the capitalist will trim fat, cut costs, and innovate so that s/he is able to offer the best service at the lowest possible price.

Child care is a professional service where there isn't much "fat," and the most effective ways to lower costs also cut into the quality of care for children. For example, strategies to minimize operating costs and maximize profits could include: (1) open an immense center that serves hundreds of children to achieve economies of scale; (2) pay teachers and other caregivers the lowest possible wages and offer little or no benefits; (3) reduce the number of staff hired by operating at ratios that allow the maximum allowable number of children per adult.¹⁹ Substantial costs can be cut with these measures, yet each of these profit-maximizing measures is achieved by reducing the quality of care for children.

The dynamics of these economics explain the finding that non-profit secular child care centers as a whole offer higher quality child care than do for-profit centers. The difference is most stark with chain for-profit centers and in states where licensing standards are low.²⁰ Non-profit centers and for-profit centers differ in how they allocate cost of care. Non-profit centers spend more on labor and food. For-profit centers spend more on facilities and other operating costs.²¹ These findings, of course, are generalized across many programs. In fact, there are countless sole-proprietor child care centers that are of high quality. Often the owners of these businesses choose to be in a business they enjoy rather than make a large profit.²²

In examining the relationship between cost and quality, Helburn and Howes found that the amount parents pay for care is not an accurate measure of the quality of care children are receiving. Centers that operate for longer hours, operate close to capacity, and serve a larger number of children lower their costs of care. Partly because of licensing

19. To be sure, operating costs can also be cut by reducing rent/real estate costs, opening multiple centers, and being frugal with supplies. But relative to the other measures presented, they generally result in minimal savings.

20. Morris, 2000; see also Gelles, 2002.

21. Helburn and Howes, 1996.

22. See, for example, Bushouse, 1999.

regulations and the fact that committed staff often donate labor by working for low wages, there is only about a 10% difference between the cost of mediocre care and the cost of high-quality care.²³

Do Parent Cooperatives Provide Quality Child Care?

Anecdotal evidence from various sources suggests that the care offered at parent cooperatives is high-quality care. Past President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and respected author James L. Hymes comments on the "special gains" for co-op children: "Co-ops usually have more adults present The extra hands and minds can mean greater richness in the co-op program."²⁴

Lilian Katz, Professor Emeritus of early childhood education at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Co-director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, and author of more than one hundred publications says, "... my interest in the profession grew out of 5 years of participation in parent cooperative nursery schools ... to this day I count as deeply valuable much of the experience and insights that I gained during those years with my three children, and especially with their teachers!"²⁵

More specifically, the staff ratios and relatively low turnover of teachers contribute to the quality of care at cooperatives. Results from a 1998 survey of California parent cooperatives suggest that parent cooperatives provide high-quality child care. Although the survey did not ask about group size, questions about ratios and caregivers were included. The survey findings revealed that operating ratios and teacher retention at parent cooperatives exceed national trends.²⁶

The ratio of child to adult is significant to program quality because it is an indicator of the depth of interaction possible between children and adults. As presented in Table A in this chapter, the average operating ratio of responding cooperatives exceeds the recommended ratios for every age group included in the survey. The parent participation in the school contributes to the quality of the program by reducing adult-to-child ratios.

It is important to note that ratio recommendations displayed in Table A specify "staff-to-child" ratios, and parents participating in

23. Helburn and Howes, 1996.

24. Hymes, undated, p. 2.

25. Katz, 1994, p. 2.

26. Coontz, Lang, and Spatz, 1999; (1998 Cooperative Survey – some findings unpublished).

the cooperative are not staff. The point can be argued, however, that parents participating in cooperatives may have as much or more education and experience than "staff" counted in ratios in many states. Although states usually specify education requirements for directors and teachers, requirements for classroom aides are often restricted to age, and perhaps a criminal record clearance.

The 1998 California survey results suggest that the pay and benefits of staff at parent cooperatives are probably above average. Based on the 146 California cooperatives responding to questions about wages, the average hourly wage for program directors or director-teachers was \$18.30. The highest-paid teacher averaged over \$15 per hour, and the average wage of the lowest-paid teacher was over \$12 per hour. A national survey reported by Whitebook and Bellm found that the 1996 median wage for preschool teachers was \$7.80 per hour.²⁷ Although the comparison should not be treated as scientific, the difference is large enough to suggest that wages at California co-ops are probably relatively high.²⁸

In the 1998 survey, 179 California cooperatives responded to questions about staff benefits. Respondents reported that most program directors and director-teachers are paid for holidays and accrue paid sick leave; almost half accrue paid vacation; about a quarter have a retirement plan, and about a third receive health insurance benefits. Although the 2001 report of child care staffing includes data about benefits, the results aren't comparable, because the categories are different.²⁹

The 181 responses to questions about program director and teacher retention revealed that 72% of program directors and director-teachers had worked at the co-op for at least 5 years, and almost three-quarters of these had been employed at the co-op for 10 or more years. Only 2% of program directors and director-teachers had been with the co-op for less than a year. Respondents indicated that 54% of teachers had worked at the co-op for 5 or more years, and more than half of these had been with the co-op for 10 or more years. Fewer than 3% of teachers had been with the co-op for less than a

27. Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

28. Note that the California finding is based on a state, not a national, survey, depicts results as an average rather than a median, and is 2 years more recent than the figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

29. Whitebook et al., 2001.

year. Interesting points of reference (but not statistically valid comparisons) are the national findings reported by Whitebook and Bellm. Their survey of child care centers revealed that 46% of "teaching staff" had been with the co-op for 5 or more years, and fewer than half of these had been with the center for 10 or more years.³⁰

What Research Says about Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in children's out-of-home experiences has long been heralded as positive for both parent and child. Parent participation in a child's preschool program is positively associated with social adjustment and school performance.³¹ For an increasing number of families, employment and other commitments are reducing the time and the common experiences a child and parent share; thus, parent involvement may be more important than ever.³²

The "War on Poverty" and the Head Start program stimulated professional interest in parent involvement. Following his ecological approach to child development, Cornell professor Urie Bronfenbrenner believed that Head Start could only succeed if the program involved the children's parents. Bronfenbrenner's membership on the planning committee for Head Start was the principal reason that his view became embedded in the program.³³

Longitudinal studies of Head Start and of the High Scope/Perry Preschool model showed that quality care and parent involvement combine to have lasting benefits for children. The Perry Preschool project tracked children to adulthood and found that investing funds in early education programs for children actually produces long-term financial savings because it reduces the need for compensatory and criminal justice programs.³⁴

In their detailed evaluation of the effects of parent participation in Head Start, MIDCO Educational Associates found that gains for children and parents were positively linked to the degree that parents were involved with the program. Children and parents gained the most when parents were highly involved with the Head Start program.³⁵

30. Whitebook and Bellm, 1999.

31. Powell, 1989; Rim-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999.

32. This may be particularly true for infants and preschool aged children. See, for example, Bronfenbrenner, 1979, chapters 9-10; Koren, 1990; and Powell, 1989.

33. Zigler and Muenchow, 1992.

34. Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993.

35. MIDCO, 1967.

Examining findings from the MIDCO report, the Coleman Report, and the results from the Perry Preschool study, Zigler and Muenchow reason that the power of parent involvement lies in an interesting interaction of factors. First, they note that a child's school performance is closely related to the amount of control a child senses in the world s/he inhabits. When parents' behavior shows that they can control their own destiny, children come to share that perspective and see themselves as having more control. They report that parent involvement raised the aspirations parents had for their children, which encouraged children to see themselves as capable of meeting them. This cycle and strong parent-child bonds contribute to positive outcomes for children. Zigler illustrates the point with a response a Head Start mother gave him when he asked her what difference Head Start made to her family. She replied: "Well its simple ... When my daughter used to give me pictures she had drawn, I'd think to myself, that's the ugliest picture I've ever seen, and wad it up and toss it in the wastebasket. After she was in Head Start, I'd take the picture, ask her to tell me about it, and post it proudly on the bulletin board."³⁶

Numerous studies on parent involvement were stimulated by Head Start and the Perry Preschool Project. Some found that parent involvement was positively associated with gains in children's IQ scores and school performance. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta summarize the findings:

At the general level there is extensive evidence indicating that children whose parents are more involved in school show higher academic performance and that such involvement contributes to children's achievement, attitudes, and aspirations, even beyond the effects of family socioeconomic status and student ability.³⁷

Educational journals have published scores of studies on the benefits of parent involvement in the schools. These studies show linkages between parent involvement, academic achievement, and adolescent behavior.³⁸

The benefits of parent involvement have become so widely accepted that federal and state laws have been enacted to encourage it. Parent

36. Zigler and Muenchow, 1992, p. 14.

37. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999, p. 427.

38. See, for example, McNeal, 1999; Swick and Broadway, 1997.

involvement is embedded in special education laws and Head Start practices, and is included as a condition of funding for many federally funded programs.³⁹ Some of this legislation is especially useful to parent cooperatives because provisions make it easier for parents to take time off from work to participate in the cooperative. For example, California's "Family School Partnership Act" mandates that employers with 25 or more employees allow parents to use up to 40 hours per year of their vacation, personal, or compensatory time to participate in their children's school or child care activities.⁴⁰

In recognition of the importance of parent involvement, suggested practices for educational as well as poverty elimination and other intervention services for children are that they be "family-focused." This means that they deliver services to the entire family, are flexible so that services respect family culture and diversity, and integrate parents as decision makers. Susan McBride points out the need to distinguish between programs that pay lip service to family involvement and those that truly respect and integrate families in a meaningful way. McBride found that educators and service providers need support and training to implement family-focused services.⁴¹

To fairly report on the literature addressing parent involvement it is important to note that since the late 1990s, many sources have looked more critically at the research on parent involvement. The criticisms call attention to the need to better define parent involvement and the systematic ways that it impacts children. For example, a gap in the literature involves ambiguous and inconsistent definitions of family involvement.⁴² Some critics have questioned whether studies have effectively isolated the effects of parent involvement from other effects, including influence of other adults and other intervention components.⁴³ Most of the critiques point to weaknesses in studies but do not offer evidence to refute studies that herald the importance of parent involvement.⁴⁴

39. McBride, 1999.

40. California Labor Code, Section 230.8, 1995.

41. McBride, 1999; see also Shimoni, 1992.

42. Coleman and Churchill, 1997; Baker and Soden, 1998. For an early critique, see Anselmo, 1977.

43. Baker and Soden, 1998.

44. See also Coleman and Wallinga, 1999-2000.

Parent Involvement in Parent Cooperatives

Parent involvement is inherent to the parent cooperative. As cooperative members, all parents are involved with making key policy decisions that affect their child's out-of-home child care experiences. The program director and teachers, who are trained in early childhood education, run the day-to-day operations of the center. Parent participation and fundraising activities cut overhead costs and bring in sources of revenue. Even parents with schedules that don't allow workday participation are involved with voting, participating in fundraising, attending evening parenting education and related meetings, and contributing support to the program.

Parent involvement in the cooperative encourages communication between the parent and teacher that focuses on the child. The ongoing, simultaneous interaction of parent, child, and teacher has something to offer each member of the triad. Parents are exposed to knowledge about how children develop, problem prevention and discipline strategies, and age-appropriate behavior expectations that encourage more effective parenting. The parent has the opportunity to see how these principles and strategies are implemented by observing the teacher. The arrangement allows parents to ask questions and to "try out" new strategies in a supportive environment. Teachers benefit because they are able to see the practical elements of their own education and develop "hands-on" approaches to sharing this knowledge and experience. They are also able to more fully know each child and his/her individual needs by sharing information with the parent. At the center of the triad is the child, who benefits from the supportive linkages of home and preschool and shares important life experiences with his/her parent.

The involvement of parents in cooperative child care programs varies from program to program. The board of directors of the cooperative usually sets parent-involvement requirements. Involvement usually includes participating in the classroom. Parents who are unable to contribute time to the classroom may be offered alternatives, including contributing administrative or service roles, or having a relative or other caregiver contribute classroom participation. Positive aspects of parent participation in cooperatives include:

- environments that provide sympathetic, responsive support systems for parents and their children;
- opportunities for parent and child development;
- shared parent and child experiences in early education;

- opportunities for parents to interact with one another;
- increased continuity between a child's home and preschool experiences;
- parent education and empowerment;
- reduced operational expenses from contributions of parent participation.

Changing social and familial structures have fueled professional interest in the interaction of parenting and child care. Some researchers suggest that childrearing is increasingly a collaborative endeavor with children moving back and forth — many on a daily basis — between their homes and child care.⁴⁵ Even more widely asserted is the fact that families remain the primary influence on a child. Parent involvement found in cooperative preschool programs can strengthen families and the linkages between home and preschool.

Although the importance of parent involvement is widely accepted, there is scant research documenting the specific impacts of parent involvement and participation in parent cooperatives. Drawing on two studies of toddlers (one in a home-based setting and one in a child care setting), which found that the presence of a parent tends to inhibit social interaction with peers, Smith and Howes designed a similar study with preschoolers in a parent co-op. They found that, when a parent is present, children engage in fewer and less complex peer interactions and that children express more negative emotion. They posit that these results could be interpreted two distinct ways. One perspective is that the presence of a parent is negative because it reduces peer and non-parental adult interaction at preschool. In contrast, the results could also be interpreted as positive. The reduced social interaction with peers is normal because a significant adult is present. Children may express more negative emotion when their parents are present because they feel psychologically comfortable in doing so. Furthermore, parents' presence builds a bridge for children between home and school and facilitates ways for preschool children to work through important socioemotional issues.⁴⁶

When more research is conducted and published about parent co-ops, the findings can be used to improve and enhance programs. For example, parents and teachers in co-op preschools can more clearly

45. Phillips, 1987, p. 11.

46. Smith and Howes, 1994.

FEATURE 6

DOLORES MISSION WOMEN'S COOPERATIVE

Dolores Mission Women's Cooperative was initiated in 1988 to address the child care needs of Latina parishioners of a Los Angeles Catholic Church. Lack of child care kept mothers from seeking employment, taking English classes, or participating in employment training programs. Language barriers that prevented sufficient trust, combined with the financial realities involved with the cost of out-of-home care, limited the child care options for families. Local priests, Fathers Tom Schmolich and Greg Boyle, and a group of women with young children believed that a cooperative could address these problems.

"Father Tom" raised seed money for the cooperative venture by winning \$40,000 on the television game show, "Jeopardy." The community came together to make the endeavor possible. A local architect donated his time to design the child care center. The project was financed with grant funding and community donations of time, skills, and money. Youth and young adults looking for alternatives to gang life were hired to work on the center's construction.

Today, DMWC provides quality early education and child care to thirty preschoolers. There is a feeling of homeyness and comfort when one visits the co-op.

Program director Lupe Avila explains that she trains teachers to directly interact with children rather than stand aside and observe them. She says, "I want teachers that are enthusiastic about their jobs. Teachers are models for parents and children."

Her philosophy is apparent during nap time. Soothing music is played and the lights are dimmed. Children gather with their teacher, who stays with the children. The teacher gently massages the heads and backs of children who prefer it, while those who don't are gently lulled to sleep by the music.

Lupe Avila was among the founding cooperative members. The group was involved in all phases of cooperative development and selected the building's bright exterior colors — autumn gold, red zinger, and Aztec green — because they wanted the center to stand out in the neighborhood and "make everyone feel good."⁴⁷ Lupe earned her certificate in Early Childhood Development from East Los Angeles College, and is now the

47. Chanticleer Films, 1993.

co-op program director. When asked about her involvement with the cooperative she smiles, "I'm proud of myself; I'm proud of all of us."⁴⁸

Lupe worked with other advocates to create a collaboration between DMWC and East Los Angeles College to institute a bilingual, accredited preschool training course for community adults. By 2003, more than 80 adults had earned preschool teacher certificates through the program. Ten percent of the program graduates have received State of California teaching credentials, more than 50% work in child care programs, and nearly all of the graduates are continuing their studies toward higher degrees.⁴⁹

Sylvia Piña and Guille Arreola completed the teaching courses and are employed as teachers at the co-op. When asked the challenging question, "You have completed college courses and you now have jobs that pay you little more than you might earn as a janitor—is it worth it?" each of the women smiles and explains that they are proud of their jobs. They are teachers with meaningful work that they enjoy. Sylvia asserts, "I was given an opportunity to advance in life and I feel very honored to be able to work in a place like this." Guille agrees, "It is a tremendous satisfaction to work here."⁵⁰

Indeed, this pride may contribute to the aspirations of children enrolled in the co-op. Lupe Avila explains that she recalls asking a child new to the co-op, "When you grow up what do you want to be?" The response was a blank stare. After several months at the co-op this same child, out of nowhere, approached Lupe and said, "When I grow up I want to be a doctor."⁵¹

understand what types of influences their presence may promote in the behavior of their child. Whether one chooses the negative or the positive position presented by Smith and Howes, the most significant impact of parent participation is probably not what happens in the preschool classroom. It is more likely that the experience influences parents and children in ways that are more complex and encompassing.

48. Eureka Communities Learning, 2003, p. 1.

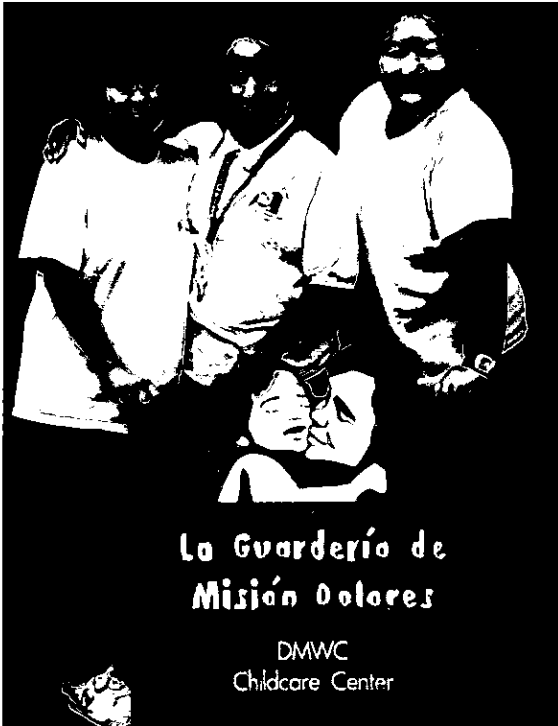
49. Ibid. DMWC has been exploring and experimenting with financial support strategies for program operations. A second site was opened with California Department of Education funds. DMWC adjusted their program to qualify for Head Start funds.

50. Interviews conducted on July 18, 2003 at Dolores Mission in Los Angeles.

51. Ibid.

In the 1950s Beth Stephenson studied the educational contributions of mothers in parent cooperatives for her doctoral dissertation. A summary of her study is published in a booklet by Parent Cooperative Preschools International. Stephenson concludes that:

... good cooperative nursery schools ... do more than they set out to do. They achieve their first objective in providing good education for young children, and for their parents. In addition, they offer valuable experience in group education to all the participants: the teachers, the parents, and the children. It is worth remarking that all nursery schools aim to stress group education for young children at this moment of their reaching out for the first time beyond the family circle to test their powers in the wider community. A cooperative nursery school is just such a community, where the adults most important to the children can live out with them lessons in accepting people and differences.⁵²



Program Director and teachers proudly display the sign for Dolores Mission Women's Cooperative in Los Angeles.

52. Stephenson, 1955, p. 11. Beth Stephenson remained active in parent cooperatives throughout her adult life.

Cooperative Child Care as a Tool for Economic Development

Although parent cooperatives have been primarily a middle-class phenomenon, nothing inherently makes them specific to a particular social class. In fact, a cooperative in posh Bel-Air boasts a membership of the social elite, while several notably successful cooperatives cater to low-income families.

Although quality child care is important to children from all economic groups, for a variety of reasons low-income families are more likely to end up with inferior care. Low-income families are more likely to use unregulated care. The instability and unpredictability of many child care subsidies and cost of care are the primary contributors to this problem.⁵³

Programs at various levels of government aimed at assisting with the cost of child care are underfunded. Most federal subsidies for child care are funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Still, only 15% of eligible families are able to obtain this subsidy. Long waiting lists of qualified families are common in most states.⁵⁴

Funds for quality programs actually save money over time. Karoly and Greenwood make a persuasive case for funding programs for children while they are very young to reap long-term financial savings. Their study examined the longitudinal effects of nine early childhood programs. Their findings show substantial savings are gained over time.⁵⁵

Karoly and Greenwood state that participation in quality child care programs promotes gains in children's emotional and cognitive development, as well as improved parent and child relationships. Improvements in children's educational progress and outcomes result in short-term and long-term academic achievement, fewer referrals to, or reduced time in, special education programs, decreased grade retention, increased high school graduation rates, and decreased crime and delinquency. Positive health indicators, including reduced child abuse and substance abuse, are also seen. The resulting cost savings varied by project. The Perry Preschool study and another project, the Elmira PEIP, yielded the highest savings. The \$12,000 invested in early care for a Perry Preschool child yielded savings of \$25,000. The \$6,000 cost for the Elmira program saves \$24,000.⁵⁶

53. See Beach, 1997; Stokley, 1996; Stockley and Lessard, 1995.

54. Giannarelli and Barsimantov, 2000, p. 1.

55. Karoly and Greenwood, 1998.

56. *Ibid.*

FEATURE 7

FAMILY CONNECTIONS CHILD CENTER

Three-year-old Sergio stands near the gate of the play yard, glancing toward the preschool entrance each time a child arrives. Ten long minutes pass before a 3-year-old girl with bright eyes, wavy dark hair and a beautiful mahogany complexion appears. Sergio's eyes light up as he calls out: "Lydia!" Lydia smiles and they hug and walk, hand in hand, to the play dough table. Nothing is particularly unusual about this scene except that Sergio speaks only Spanish and Lydia speaks only English. "During play, I think all children speak the same language," explains their teacher, Angela Jaime.

The place that makes Sergio and Lydia's friendship possible is a parent cooperative called Family Connections. The center was established in 1993 because of the dedicated work of parents and teachers at Little Hands Preschool in the neighboring town of Belmont and the support of member schools of the San Mateo Council of Parent Participation Preschools. Little Hands Preschool learned of the need for a school that would specifically reach out to low-income families in East Palo Alto and San Mateo. Extensive canvassing of the area led to an offer of free space at a local church. Since the neighboring population was predominately Spanish speaking, they searched for a highly skilled bilingual teacher and found Angela Jaime. Parent-members of Little Hands and neighboring parent co-ops donated new and used toys and books. They spent time painting and repairing the site, soliciting matching donations from community businesses, and establishing grant funding. Within a short time, ten families were enrolled in the program.

The center began and continues to operate as an enrichment program for children and parents that meets several mornings each week. At least one parent (usually mom) attends with the child. While half of the parents assist with curriculum preparation and caring for the children, the other parents participate in adult education classes where they learn about parenting, nutrition, child development, and health. During the next class the parents will exchange places.

The co-op has experienced numerous challenges over the years. They have moved four times. Since becoming the program's second program director, Robin Holcomb has become quite adept at fundraising; even so, the program struggles financially. Although part of Robin's salary is subsidized by the local adult school, the program must generate funds to pay for operating costs and to pay Angela.

When Robin and Angela are asked about the co-op, they say that member-families are its life force. Although most of the parents are able to contribute only nominal funds, they commit their time and services. When furniture was donated to the school, parent-members spent hours preparing and painting it. They take turns bringing snacks from home, cleaning after each session, and preparing for the next day's activities. "Parents like to come and make a difference in their children's lives," explains Angela.

Despite their financial troubles and modest accommodations, visitors notice a special feeling that emanates from Family Connections. The dedication of the program's director and teacher are remarkable. And so is observing parents with diverse cultures and languages working together and learning that they share similar parenting experiences. During circle time, parents and children whose first languages include Spanish, English, and Hmong joyfully sing *De Colores* in Spanish, followed by *The Wheels on the Bus* in English. Later in the morning, a parent teaches the children a popular Latino song-game called *A la Vivora de la Mar* (the game resembles a more complex version of *London Bridges*). During snack time, a Tungun-American parent serves rice and fruit.

Family Connections presents exemplary use of the seventh cooperative principle of concern for community. The efforts of neighboring cooperatives forged its formation and provide continued support, and the co-op's staff and members maintain a program that meets community needs and teaches a new generation the true values of cultural and linguistic diversity.

It is likely that a cooperative child care program could produce even more savings. The savings calculated by the researchers focus only on the children. The benefits in cooperative programs may intensify savings resulting from the effects of parent empowerment.

In her book, *Family Empowerment: One Outcome of Parental Participation in Cooperative Preschool Education*, Katherine Dunlap presents findings from an ethnographic and interview-based study of disenfranchised mothers involved in a parent cooperative. Participating mothers reported that the relationships they developed with the teacher and with other parents replaced feelings of isolation with a sense of belonging. They described themselves as more responsible, better parents, and all around better people. Dunlap attributes this to empowerment:

Through involvement with the family component of this preschool, caregivers acquire cultural capital. Over time, they translate cultural capital into human capital, or economic gain. This process, called empowerment, ultimately strengthens families and neighborhoods.⁵⁷



Circle time at Family Connections in Palo Alto, California.

By the end of the academic year, all but 3 of the 15 cooperative members in Dunlap's study had made significant changes in their lives. Four participants obtained jobs. Dunlap quotes one of the co-op mothers, Martha: "I just got tired of being on welfare I was so glad to get work. I enjoy it. I haven't missed a day since I been there!"⁵⁸

Three co-op participants remained in school. Terry explains that the preschool "was an inspiration. That is why I went to school for my diploma — because I wanted to teach there. Then once I got to school, I learned that there were so many things I can do."⁵⁹

Two of the mothers decided to stay home and care for their children until they enter public school. One of the mothers explains: "I learned a lot of parenting skills. Everybody knows how to have a child, but nobody knows how to go about being a real good parent. I always say, 'The only people you will always have forever is your children.' So I make sure I keep a close bond."⁶⁰

57. Dunlap, 2000, p. 5.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Conclusions

More than 30 years of research focused on child care have produced some disagreements, but mostly a great deal of consistency. There is now little doubt that early childhood experiences are important. That the quality and stability of relationships children experience matter. And that the primary components of quality child care — low child-to-adult ratios, small group size, and caregiver characteristics — are linked to positive outcomes for children. We also know that parent involvement is intricately intertwined with a child's intellectual growth and emotional stability. Despite this knowledge, inadequate, substandard child care is a part of everyday life for many families. Inadequate funding, states with poor minimum standards, parents' lack of knowledge about quality child care, and the financial realities of child care all contribute to the sad fact that these conditions will probably continue.

These realities, along with continuing need for child care, make consideration of quality a necessity. Although more research is necessary, current information and documentation suggest that parent cooperatives address many contemporary child care concerns. Survey data from California suggest that cooperatives maintain exemplary practices on virtually every quality measure. Parent involvement is integral to cooperatives, and parent education and the continuity of care resulting from relatively low teacher turnover and parent involvement enhance quality. Additional costs associated with increased staffing are minimized in a cooperative by parent participation.

Although cooperatives serve families from all income groups, they should not be overlooked as a useful model for economic development. Dunlap's study⁶¹ of mothers in an inner-city preschool cooperative, as well as other examples of cooperatives described in this chapter, suggest that parent cooperatives may be powerful tools for the empowerment of low-income families.

61. Ibid.





STEPS TO STARTING A PARENT CO-OP

When they ... (tell) me with obvious pride that they were "in" a co-op, either as a child, a participating parent, a professional staff member, or a combination of these, it is obvious that they are recalling a unique experience that still has significance, even after thirty or forty years.

Dorothy Hewes, Ph.D., in her preface to
"It's the Camaraderie" A History of Parent Cooperative Preschools

This chapter is specifically focused on the steps involved in starting a parent cooperative. The steps provide an overview of the organizational, legal, and financial considerations crucial to the start-up process.

A parent cooperative is a democratically controlled enterprise organized to meet the mutual needs of parent-members. The focus of the enterprise is service rather than generation of profit. The services include child-focused enrichment, education, and child care programs.

Even though the focus of the cooperative is on the provision of services rather than profit, it is still a business. The most distinctive features of a cooperative are its ownership structure and democratic decision making. Cooperative members are fundamentally the business owners, and each co-owner is entitled to one vote.¹

The business of the co-op is to operate efficiently and provide high quality, affordable services to its member-owners. It demands that the parent members be committed to three key areas: the cooperative structure, quality education and care for children, and business concerns.

Commitment to the cooperative structure builds in education and support mechanisms that respect parental democratic control and

1. In most cases it makes financial sense for a parent cooperative to incorporate as a charitable corporation. In this type of non-profit, ownership is not technically possible since profit cannot be distributed to members, and any assets at dissolution must be allocated to another non-profit. Still, members effectively make decisions and establish policies in virtually the same manner as owners.

provide the board of directors and members with the tools to address quality and business needs. A strong member base is the foundation of a successful cooperative.

Commitment to quality is addressed by establishing research-based standards and by hiring and retaining first-rate staff. Business commitment emphasizes the financial stability of the enterprise. Any funding that cannot be collected from members must be either earned (through various fundraisers) or gained from other resources, such as gifts, grants, or loans.

Organizational Considerations

The process of organizing a parent cooperative begins with an idea that grows as others embrace it and help make it a reality. The idea can originate with parents, child care or community advocates, an employer, or other organization. In each case, the focus is on creating an enterprise that will serve interested parents and their families — during the organizing process these are “prospective members.” Prospective members need to be closely involved in all steps of the organizing process.

The entire group of prospective members can fluctuate, but the development process needs a stable core of five to fifteen leaders — the “steering committee” — to guide the organizing process. Committees formed to handle specific elements of the process can support the steering committee.

The process of organizing a cooperative will be time consuming. Working with others to achieve a common goal can be exhilarating, but it will probably also involve times of frustration. The core organizing group will share a high level of commitment that may not be matched by other interested parents. The work involved in the organizing process will probably not be distributed equally. Some people will let the group down, but others will exceed expectations. If there is sufficient interest in the co-op, the hard, focused work will result in a program that is likely to last for generations.

Summary of Organizing Steps

Although the organizational steps presented here are listed sequentially, in reality, elements of the steps overlap and may be pursued simultaneously.

The steps below are discussed in more detail in the pages that follow. Each step represents a decision point for whether to proceed with organizing the cooperative.

1. Prepare for cooperative development — focus development efforts, gather information and support, assess community needs and interest.
2. Establish a structure to coordinate the organizing process and business research. Clarify group needs and vision.
3. Conduct a feasibility study; obtain baseline information for the business plan.
4. Initiate funding and membership commitments.
5. Prepare and review the business plan.
6. Prepare legal organizing documents.
7. Hold the cooperative's first or *charter meeting*. Elect a board of directors; finalize legal documents.
8. Prepare for business start-up and implement the business plan.
9. Start operations — follow the business plan.



The participation of fathers is becoming common at Children's Community Center in Berkeley, California.

STEP 1. PREPARE FOR COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT — FOCUS DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS, GATHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT, ASSESS COMMUNITY NEEDS AND INTEREST.

Primary Goals

- Plan for effective cooperative development.
- Become better informed about the issues central to starting a child care center.
- Identify resources for assistance.
- Begin to understand community child care needs and parent interest in a cooperative.

Guidelines

This step is initiated by the group introducing the idea for the cooperative — a group of parents or an advocacy/development group.

Focus Development Efforts

The research process and outreach efforts for potential members can be simplified by focusing efforts in terms of age ranges of children to be served, and by focusing outreach geographically or by another unifying association.

It is useful to know the age range of children to be served by the cooperative because child age is closely linked to licensing requirements.² Without being dogmatic or rigid, set age parameters for the children the cooperative will serve. For example, the parameter could be "infant to preschool-aged children," or "school-aged children." This leaves the specific age ranges open, yet simplifies the research related to licensing.

Geographically, the project can reach out to parents in a particular worksite, housing development, or region of the community. Or it may make sense to focus on parents who frequent a particular recreation facility or attend a particular education program. The aim isn't to exclude people but to make outreach efforts workable.

Avoid narrowly defining membership requirements. Although focusing outreach can simplify the process, it can be counterproductive to require that members must be from a particular housing development, neighborhood, or other narrowly defined group. Membership definitions that are exclusionary can leave the cooperative trapped if future

2. If the project is initiated by an advocacy or development group, setting the age parameters may need to be delayed pending information gathered from a child care needs survey.

demographic changes affect the defined area. For example, if the co-op restricted membership to residents of a particular housing development, then years down the road there aren't enough resident children in the right age range, the co-op could be forced into financial problems resulting from under-enrollment. This type of predicament can be avoided by indicating that preference will be given to residents in a particular housing development or workplace. When appropriate, preferences can make it possible to avoid potentially problematic membership requirements.

Begin Gathering Information Central to Starting a Child Care Center

Institute the information collection that will continue through more than half of the cooperative development process. Essentially, each step to starting the cooperative involves deeper and ever-expanding understanding of the basic information gathering initiated in this step.

A most useful source for information is a child care resource and referral agency.³ These agencies offer public information about the child care resources available to the communities they serve. They are found extensively in California and are also common in New York, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina. Almost every state in the nation has at least one. A word of caution however — resource and referral agencies are usually not knowledgeable about the start-up and operation of cooperatives.

Licensing Requirements

Gather information about the requirements for licensing a child care center.⁴ Child care licensing standards are usually established at the state level and monitored regionally. Identify the state entity responsible for licensing (it is often the Department of Social Services or the Department of Education). Some communities establish local standards for child care licensing that are more rigid than state requirements. Licensing usually defines the following minimum standards:

- a. Physical space requirements: usually defined as "per child" inside and outside square footage, fencing, lighting, heating, cooling, ventilation, and plumbing specifications.

3. See, for example, National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), 1993.

4. Recall that licensing establishes minimum acceptable standards. Review chapter 3 for quality standards.

- b. Staff-to-child ratios: vary according to the age of the children, usually expressed in terms of the number of staff/adults per a given number of children.
- c. Staff qualifications: including education, experience, and criminal record clearance.
- d. Health requirements and information: include sanitation procedures and stipulation for records of required immunizations and medical information of enrolled children.
- e. Building-safety regulations: construction requirements that may define the number of exits and fire doors and other safety issues.
- f. Additional licensing topics may include:
 - Record keeping of attendance and daily activities of children
 - Financial procedures
 - Discipline
 - Inspection and isolation of illness
 - Food preparation and nutrition
 - Toiletry/diapering procedures
 - Transportation and field trips

Determine the flexibility of child care licensing standards governing child care facility regulations. For example, in California, there is a special section in the licensing code called "Waivers and Exceptions." This section can be used to address special considerations, such as petitioning to reduce the outdoor square-footage requirements of the child care center by using the square footage of an adjacent park.⁵

Existing Child Care Programs

Begin compiling a list of all community preschool and child care programs serving the co-op's targeted age groups. This list will be added to and incorporated into the Feasibility Plan. In part, existing programs may be viewed as sources of possible competition. Find out as much as possible and create a chart that includes the names of programs, locations, the ages of children served, hours of operation, cost of care, whether the program is full or has a waiting list, as well as anecdotal information such as "excellent reputation," or "Montessori curriculum." Discern the pay range for program directors, teachers, and aides.

If there are other parent cooperatives in the community, establish a connection with them with the intention of establishing a long-term

5. Community Care Licensing Division, 1998, Article 3, Section 101175: Waivers and Exceptions for Program Flexibility.

relationship that may include collaboration to the mutual benefit of each program.

Funding Sources

Start identifying information about possible funding sources for the child care center. This can include public and private grants as well as loans. Pay special attention to local or regional sources of funds, such as a special family endowment.

Potential Sites

Be attentive to possible sites for the program. A program may need to establish a temporary site with plans to build a new building or to move as the program grows. Be alert for sites that previously housed a child care program, rooms at a public school site, places of worship, or even worksite space. Be mindful of licensing standards (particularly square footage requirements) as well as needed renovations when sites are examined for compatibility with a child care program.

Building a new child care center is an excellent way to develop an appealing center that meets licensing standards and is especially designed for the co-op's age group and program needs. However, the cost of new construction is often prohibitive to a new cooperative. If plans and financing allow for new construction, be attentive to zoning requirements and that neighboring businesses or residents don't pose potential problems to a child care center.

Identify Resources for Assistance

Community leaders and support agencies can provide invaluable information and assistance, and they can also become important allies throughout the development process. They can help spread the word about the project. They can write letters of support for grant or loan applications. They may be able to help with recruitment efforts, program fundraising or funding, or provide in-kind assistance to the project.

Identify resources and contact individuals and agencies, and record the names of people you speak to. Note individuals who indicate a special interest and who are particularly committed and helpful. When agencies that can offer assistance are identified, make a connection with a particular person, or persons — work with the person within the agency not just an agency. The following types of organizations can provide assistance and potential support during the organizing process:

- Assistance, advice, and support with cooperative organization may be found from regional preschool or child care co-ops, regional

FEATURE 8**CHILD CARE NEEDS SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS**

When the group initiating cooperative development is an advocacy or development group, or includes just a few parents, increased needs and interest research may be warranted. Completing a child care needs survey and conducting focus groups can clarify child care needs, help determine community interest, and identify parents with interest in the cooperative.

Child Care Needs Survey

Conduct a child care needs survey that focuses on the target population. A sample questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. Use the survey to discern need and interest in a child care program that involves parents. The sample survey doesn't emphasize the cooperative aspect of the program because people often have misperceptions about them that can influence their participation in the survey. The purpose of the initial survey is to obtain a clear understanding of child care needs and parents' interest in being involved in addressing them. Include an open-ended question at the end of the survey inviting people to provide their name and contact information. Include people who provide this information on the cooperative-development mailing list.

A cost-saving strategy for conducting a community-wide child care needs survey is to work with city officials to include the survey in city utility bills. It is usually possible to target a particular zip code or region using this method. The survey can be returned with utility payments. Make sure the survey is only one page (front and back) and a distinctive color so that it is easy to separate from the payment.⁶

Focus Groups

Once a compelling need for child care has been established (through survey results or other methods), focus groups can help to better understand parent interest in a cooperative. A focus group is a facilitated discussion on the topic of cooperative child care that simultaneously shares basic information about the cooperative and helps assess parent interests and concerns. Information specific to conducting a focus group can be found in Appendix 2.

An added advantage to the focus group is that it can be an effective method of recruiting a core parent group. Parents who participate in the

6. This strategy does have drawbacks — including that it probably over-samples homeowners and may neglect renters, particularly those who reside in apartments and similar developments.