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# By a Thread: How Child Care Centers Hold On to Teachers, How Teachers Build Lasting Careers

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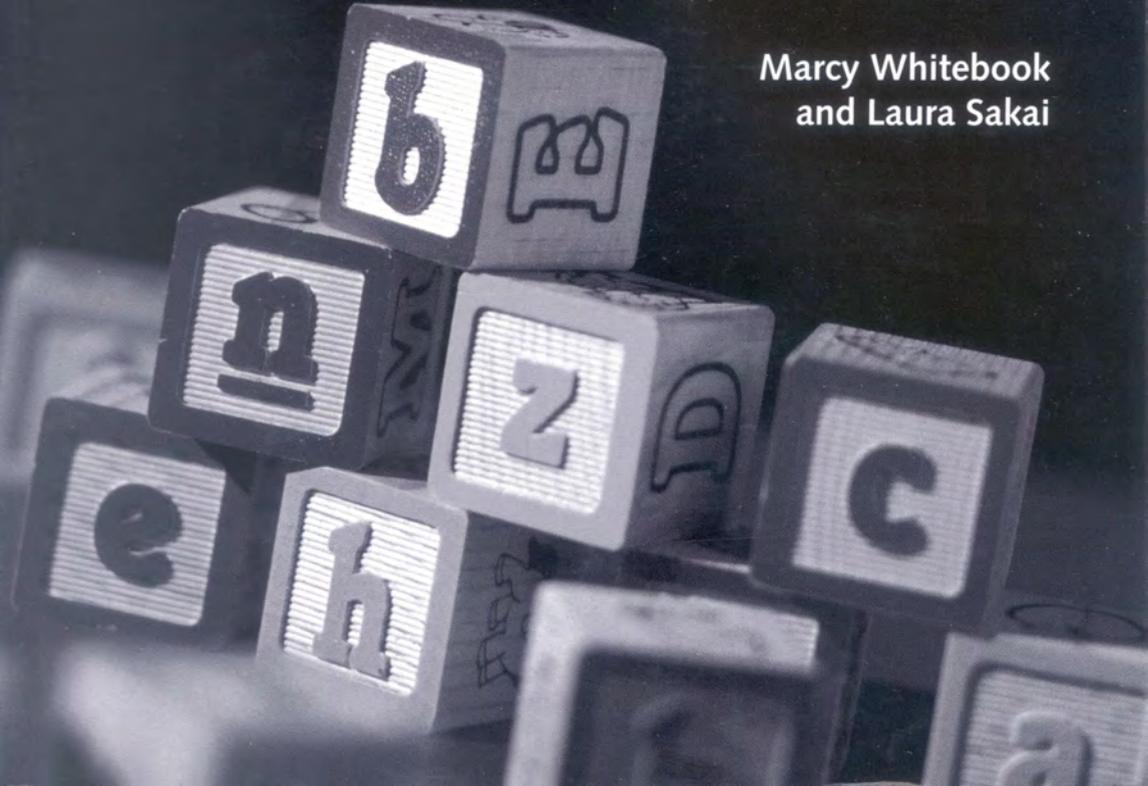
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# BY A THREAD

A black and white photograph of a hand reaching down from the top right towards a stack of alphabet blocks. The hand is positioned as if about to pick up or place a block. The background is dark and textured.

How Child Care Centers Hold On to Teachers,  
How Teachers Build Lasting Careers

Marcy Whitebook  
and Laura Sakai

A stack of wooden alphabet blocks. The top block shows the letter 'b' and a drawing of a house. Below it are blocks with 'n', 'z', 'e', 'h', and 'c'. Other blocks with letters like 'a' and 'd' are visible in the background. The blocks are arranged in a slightly haphazard stack, with some overlapping.

# **By a Thread**



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Marcy Whitebook  
and  
Laura Sakai

2004

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

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# **Part I**

## **Staff Departures and Center Quality**



# 1

## **An Overview of the U.S. Child Care Industry**

### **A GROWING DEMAND**

The demand for child care services has been steadily increasing over the last few decades as a result of demographic trends, public policies, and emerging scientific inquiry about brain development and early learning. On the demographic side, the number of mothers of preschool children in the workforce increased from 12 percent shortly after the end of World War II to 65 percent at the turn of the century (U.S. House of Representatives 2000). Similar increases have occurred among mothers of school-age children. From 2002 through 2010, the rate of labor force participation among women ages 25 to 54 is projected to increase moderately from 77.7 to 80.4 percent, resulting in a further decrease in the number of women who can provide full-time care for their children at home (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002). In addition, the number of single-parent families has nearly tripled since 1950, and these families are most often headed by women who are their households' sole sources of income and are consumers of child care services (Field and Casper 2000). Demand for child care services has also increased in response to the work requirements and time limits mandated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, as parents leaving welfare and entering training programs or the workforce seek care for their young children.

As a result of these changes, most U.S. children under five (61 percent, as of 1999) spend time on a regular basis each week in nonparental care (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000); this includes 52 percent of one-year-olds and 82 percent of four-year-olds (Lombardi 2003). These children can be found in a variety of arrangements while their parents are at work. Twenty-eight percent attend child care centers, 14 percent attend a home-based child care program, 27 percent are cared for by

another parent, 27 percent are cared for by other relatives, and only 4 percent are cared for by a nanny or babysitter. Average time in child care varies as well, with 39 percent of children under five attending some form of child care 35 hours or more per week (Urban Institute 2002).

Converging with these demographic and policy shifts, the demand for quality child care is driven by a steadily expanding body of knowledge that links brain development to early environments, and school readiness and later success to positive preschool experiences (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Prior to the age of five, the human brain grows more than at any other period of life, and developmental opportunities missed in these years can seldom be retrieved (Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children 1994). The public is slowly connecting the enormous capacity for learning prior to kindergarten with the realization that the majority of preschoolers are in nonparental care regardless of their parents' participation in the labor force. This recognition highlights the importance of the quality of early care and education services, as well as issues of affordability and availability.

## **A GROWING INDUSTRY**

The increase in the demand for nonparental care has stimulated rapid growth in child care services. In 1975, the U.S.-licensed child care industry comprised 30,000 child care centers and 81,000 homes (Abt Associates 1975). According to the Washington-based Children's Foundation (2002b), the number of regulated family child care homes increased from nearly 200,000 in 1988 to over 300,000 in 2002; regulated child care centers increased from approximately 86,000 in 1991 to over 116,000 in 2003. The unregulated market, the size of which is unknown, also continues to play an important role in the industry, particularly since the late 1980s, when public subsidy dollars began to support this form of child care. Accompanying the growth of services in centers and homes has been a large increase in associations and businesses providing products, training, and other support to child care businesses.

Child care services are supplied by establishments with different structures of ownership. The industry includes nonprofit, for-profit, and publicly operated centers, as well as self-employed family child care providers. Among these child care centers, slightly less than half are operated on a for-profit basis, with large chains constituting about a quarter of the for-profit market. Nonprofit child care centers are operated by community agencies, hospitals, colleges and universities, or religious institutions, as well as public schools or agencies. Religious institutions operate approximately one in six child care centers. The market is also segmented to some extent, with submarkets targeting different groups of consumers. In most states, for example, publicly operated centers serve children of low-income and at-risk families, while many nonprofit and for-profit centers target other groups, such as children of low- to moderate-income families, or nonsubsidized, middle- to upper-income families. In addition to center-based services, families can choose licensed, legally license-exempt, or illegally operating home-based services, or provide care themselves.

With the exception of federally operated programs such as Head Start and various programs on military bases, there is no federal oversight of child care services. Each state defines which establishments and providers must be regulated; the level of monitoring and enforcement; health, safety, and other program standards (including ratios of adults to children); and the qualifications for staff. Home-based establishments are considered large if they serve more than six or eight children, while centers can serve as many as a few hundred. Typically, however, midsize child care centers serve less than 100 and more than 50 children (Neugebauer 2000).

Public investment at all levels of government has also mushroomed, with federal and state spending now at about \$20 billion per year (Helburn and Bergmann 2002). The lion's share of these public dollars comes from the federal government, either in the form of tax credits for those families who pay income tax (dependent care or flexible spending accounts), or as subsidy vouchers to cover the cost of child care for low-income families. Still, child care is the only educational service relying so heavily on parents to foot the bill, with parent fees accounting for 60 percent of the national expenditure on child care, government funds accounting for 39 percent, and employer support for only 1 percent. By contrast, parents contribute only about one-

fourth of higher education costs, with government and philanthropy assuming the remaining balance (Mitchell, Stoney, and Dichter 2001). Child care costs can consume anywhere from 6 to 23 percent of a family budget (Giannarelli and Barsimantov 2000). In urban communities, child care costs exceed those of tuition at most public universities (Schulman 2000).

## **AN EXPANDING AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

The child care workforce is diverse both within and across settings. According to the Center for the Child Care Workforce and the Human Services Policy Center (2002), of the 2.3 million individuals paid to care for children ages 0–5 in the United States in a given week, approximately 550,000 adults are working in center-based settings, including private and public child care centers, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs. Another 650,000 provide family child care. An even larger number, 804,000, are paid relatives, and 298,000 are paid non-relatives other than those working in centers or family child care programs, such as nannies.

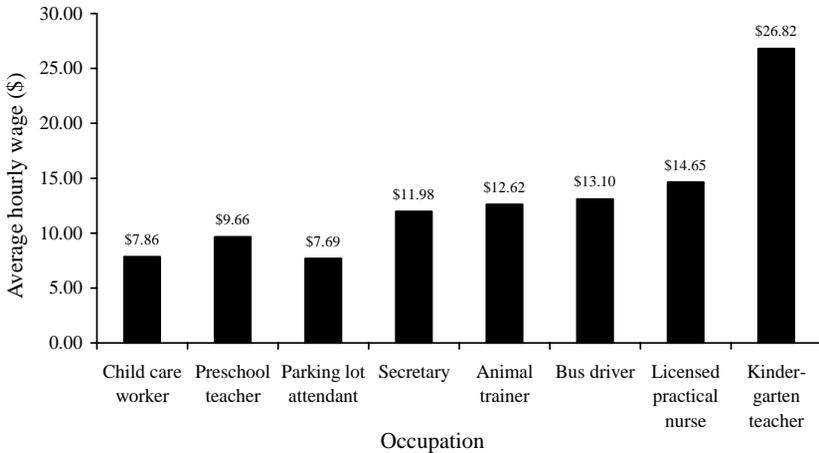
There are no national regulations governing who can work with young children. As of 2002, nearly half of the states required no pre-service or ongoing education for center-based teachers, and 14 states required none for directors of centers (Children's Foundation 2002a,b). Home-based provider qualifications are typically lower than those in centers; 18 states require no training at all, or no more than six clock hours per year. In 19 states, most family child care providers are exempt from any licensing, and thus do not have to meet any training requirements. In California, where the study described in this monograph took place, two sets of regulations establish qualifications for teaching and administrative staff of child care centers. The more rigorous requirements are reserved for those centers holding a contract with the State Department of Education; considered high by national standards, these require only 24 units of college-level work in early childhood education, and 16 general education units. In contrast to public school teachers, child care teachers and directors are typically not required to acquire an individual license or certificate, although some

states and national organizations now recommend extending the K–12 requirement (that all teachers have a bachelor’s degree and certification) to those offering publicly financed preschool services for three- and four-year-olds. New Jersey, New York, and Texas, among other states, require such BA-level certification for teachers in public preschools, but not for teachers in other child care center programs (Bellm et al. 2002).

Due to the variety of settings, regulations, and qualifications, as well as informal expectations set by different establishments, those who constitute the child care workforce differ from one another both within and across settings in terms of educational background and other demographic characteristics. A recent study of one county in California, for example, found that 32 percent of teachers had completed a bachelor’s degree, but a similar number of teachers had completed less than 24 units of early childhood education (Whitebook et al. 2002, 2003).

Low wages are typical across the industry, as shown in Figure 1.1. Child care teachers earn far less than other educational workers and many service workers. Only a few categories of workers, such as fast

**Figure 1.1 Child Care Workforce Earnings in Perspective**



SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002). Adapted with permission from the Center for the Child Care Workforce, based on the *Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Program Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

food cooks and ushers, earn less than child care workers. Regardless of the age group served, low pay and lack of prestige affect many teachers' decisions to leave their jobs, and discourage many from entering the occupation at all, but these issues are intensified for the child care workforce. Even when they have training and education comparable to that of elementary school teachers, child care teachers earn approximately half as much, work a longer year, and are far less likely to receive such benefits as fully paid health care coverage or a pension. Further, they are seldom viewed as professionals, even by teachers of older children (Whitebook and Bellm 1999). The majority of regulated child care teachers and providers do not belong to either a professional organization or a union (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990; Whitebook 2002), and, as described in Chapter 8, there are particular challenges to congregating this group of workers on their own behalf.

As a result of these job conditions, high rates of turnover in the child care industry are not surprising. At 30 percent a year, they are similar to those of fast food workers (34 percent) and animal caretakers, such as dog groomers (27 percent). Employment instability among child care workers not only exceeds that of public school teachers, but is four times higher than that of registered nurses (7 percent) and three times higher than that of social workers and hairdressers (11 percent) (Whitebook and Bellm 1999).

Given the strong impact of the quality of early environments on children's development, the combination of uneven professional development, low wages, and high turnover in the child care field is particularly problematic. A 1994 Carnegie Corporation of New York report offered compelling evidence about the long-lasting influence of early environments on brain development in the first years of life, underscoring growing concern about the skills and consistency of many child care teachers and providers (Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children 1994). The chair of the National Research Council Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Dr. Jack Shonkoff of Brandeis University, posed a question to Congress in 2002 about the gap between the current understanding of child development and public policy related to the child care workforce:

How can the recently enacted No Child Left Behind Act emphasize the need for stronger performance standards and financial incentives to attract bright and highly motivated teachers, while we simultaneously tolerate large percentages of inadequately trained and poorly compensated providers of early child care and education who have an important influence on the foundations of school readiness? (Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, February 12, 2002, p. 3)

## **AN IMPERFECT MARKET**

In the last several years, there has been an unlikely convergence of opinion among doctors, psychologists, early childhood leaders, economists, and business leaders that the child care market does not sufficiently meet the needs of children or their parents (Lombardi 2003). Why doesn't the child care market work? Several economists have turned their attention to this problem in recent years (Blau 2001; Helburn and Bergman 2002; Heckman 1999; Helburn et al. 1995; Morris 1999). While not necessarily agreeing on the solution to child care problems in the United States, they identify similar dynamics at play. At the most basic level, child care revenues mostly come from parent fees, and most parents are limited in how much they can pay. In the context of a mixed and segmented market, parents have a variety of choices that increase the competitive pressure on fees. And because child care is a labor-intensive industry, this pressure on fees impacts the earnings of those providing care. Even though the price of child care—from a family's perspective—is high, what parents can afford does not necessarily cover the true cost of care, and this results in insufficient wages for staff, particularly if the center or home is also expecting to generate a profit (Willer 1990). In addition, there are insufficient public resources to provide subsidies to all families who qualify for them.

Economists Suzanne Helburn and Suzanne Bergmann (2002) explain that consumer choice and competition are not reliable forces for creating acceptable quality child care for all who need it.

There is no guarantee that a low-wage family will have a relative who can be pressed into service, or under our present policies, that there is a vacancy in a local subsidized center. The invisible hand of market competition does not miraculously create services of acceptable quality suitable to every family budget. (p. 161)

Helburn and Bergmann argue that good quality child care should not be considered a luxury item that some children can or should go without, but rather, that all children should have access to it. Yet parents as consumers often have what economists refer to as an “agency problem,” facing two conflicting sets of needs when they choose child care: those of their children for quality care, and their own needs for convenience, reliability, and affordability. The child care market further suffers from the fact that parents are often poorly informed about the full range of possibilities when purchasing child care, and that the sellers of services are better informed about service quality than the consumers.

Families, of course, are not the sole beneficiaries of child care. Many believe that child care should be subsidized not only as a “merit good” (a matter of equity or fairness), particularly for low-income families, but also as a public good—one that minimizes later risk in children’s lives, and also serves the long-term interest of U.S. productivity by helping to produce more successful students and workers. According to Joan Lombardi (2003), former Child Care Bureau Director for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

Historically, paying for child care has been seen as a private burden, not a public responsibility. It was assumed that market forces would produce what consumers need at a price they could pay if they had the right information to make informed choices. However, the reliance on market forces alone has failed children, families, and providers who service them . . . . The market failure perpetuates itself because the demand for high quality is too low; therefore compensation remains low, and the more qualified staff seek other jobs . . . . From this economic perspective, the clear evidence of market failure in quality child care indicates a need for public-sector intervention. Since the quality of child care affects school readiness and later school achievement, such intervention is justified as a means to ensure equal opportunity, particularly for low-income families. (pp. 6–7)

We are slowly moving away from such outdated notions of child care as a charity, an income support to the poor, an emergency response (as in the Great Depression and World War II), or as a link to welfare, and toward a view of the early years as a vitally important time when a great deal of learning and development unfolds. Yet, as we describe in the following chapters, child care in the United States today, even among a group of relatively high-quality programs used by primarily middle-income families, faces many challenges when it comes to maintaining a skilled and stable workforce and improving and sustaining quality. Teachers and directors who remain in these programs often do so at considerable economic, personal, and professional expense. Many others abandon the field, despite high levels of skill and considerable investment in their training and education, because they can no longer economically afford to care for young children. Lombardi (2003) notes:

What began as an uncompensated support, provided by relatives and close friends or through charitable institutions, increasingly has evolved into a paid service purchased in the marketplace . . . . In the twenty-first century, we need to usher in a third phase, one that recognizes that child care is a public good with long-term implications for children. Our current system of financing is outdated and underfunded, shortchanging both children and families. Any serious education debate, or concern with the stability and well-being of families, has to squarely face and embrace this issue. (p. 166)



## 2

# Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

## Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994–2000

All industries wrestle with employee turnover. Depending on the type of product or service it provides and the wage level of its employees, every business will tend to characterize a certain level of turnover as normal and acceptable. But while employers generally expect more turnover in low-wage industries, it is problematic to tolerate high turnover in a human service business such as a child care center, where turnover has been linked to compromised developmental outcomes for children, low-quality services, and poorer prospects for program survival (Helburn 1995; Howes and Hamilton 1993; Howes, Phillips, and Whitebook 1992; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990, 1993, 1998).

A great deal of change occurs in child care centers every day, not all of which involves staffing. Children come and go as their families move or change jobs, or as they “graduate” to elementary school. Changes also occur among support staff who do not work closely with children. The most disruptive and potentially troubling form of turnover in child care centers involves the departure of teaching staff, and of directors who provide center leadership. There are three main types of turnover among teaching staff and directors in a child care setting:

- 1) Job turnover occurs when a teacher or director leaves a child care center, but does not necessarily leave the child care field. Job turnover may be involuntary, in the case of a dismissal, or voluntary, as when a teacher or director leaves a center for a better-paying job or in response to a pregnancy or family move. Concern about staff instability in child care centers generally concerns voluntary job turnover.
- 2) Position turnover occurs when a teacher moves to a different classroom within a center, or when a teacher or a director moves to a different site within an agency, resulting from a promotion or perhaps a desire to work with another age group of children. In

this instance, the teacher or director continues her employment with the center or agency, but in a new role. Position turnover also happens frequently when agencies expand, adding new classrooms or sites to an existing program. Position turnover is typically viewed as positive for the individual or even the agency, although it may still involve some disruption for children, families, and other staff members.

- 3) Occupational turnover occurs when a teacher or director leaves a job at a center and also departs from the child care field. The consequences of job turnover are felt most directly in centers when directors and coworkers struggle to meet required adult:child ratios in response to a staff departure. The effects of occupational turnover surface clearly when there is a shortage of qualified candidates for a job opening, and when it takes a long time to hire a new teacher or director.

This chapter focuses primarily on job turnover among teaching and administrative staff within child care centers. We have measured job turnover in two different ways. Annual or year-to-year turnover refers to the number of staff who have left their centers within a one-year period. Data are reported here for the year preceding our last round of data collection, 1999–2000. Staff stability rates track a particular group of staff members over a several-year period, and provide information about the percentage of staff members employed at one point in time who remained at their centers at a later point. In this monograph, we report information about the percentage of staff members employed in 1996 who had remained at their jobs in 2000. Staff stability rates differ somewhat from multi-year turnover, as they do not include information about turnover among new hires over the four-year period. A multi-year turnover rate would capture the stability rate plus the percentage of new hires who came and went each year. Part Two of this monograph will look more closely at position and occupational turnover by examining the individual characteristics of those who left their child care centers or changed positions within them. In this sample, occupational turnover was quite common, while position turnover was limited.

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH TURNOVER FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS**

Job turnover—calculated in this study by determining the percentage of staff members who cease their employment within a year or other specified period—discourages the development and maintenance of consistent relationships between children and their caregivers. The rate of turnover among teaching staff influences the quality of care that centers provide, and affects children’s social-emotional and language development. In the most recent large-scale studies of child care, higher turnover rates among staff were linked to lower-quality services, which have been repeatedly shown to have negative developmental consequences for children (Helburn 1995; Kontos, Howes, Shinn, and Galinsky 1995; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). Although children’s relationships with teachers differ in intensity and form from those with their parents or other primary caregivers, psychologists increasingly recognize that teachers play an important role as available, responsive adults who can help children build an internal image of the world as safe and of themselves as valuable persons. Children are more likely to be securely attached to their teachers if they attend classrooms in which teachers are highly responsive and involved with them, rather than harsh or detached. Teachers with these qualities are more likely to be found in programs with low turnover rates (Anderson et al. 1981; Goossens and van Ijzendoorn 1991; Howes and Hamilton 1992).

Specifically, in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990), centers with higher turnover rates were characterized by classrooms with less developmentally appropriate environments and activities, and teaching staff in these programs interacted less sensitively and appropriately with children. Higher staff turnover was also linked with poor developmental outcomes for children, including more time spent aimlessly wandering the classroom and lower vocabulary test scores (Howes, Phillips, and Whitebook 1992; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990).

Helburn and her colleagues also demonstrated a link between turnover and quality in the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers study (1995), using the same measures of quality as the

National Child Care Staffing Study and the current study (Harms and Clifford 1980; Arnett 1989). Centers with staff turnover rates of 10 percent or less per year were rated significantly higher in a combined measure of quality that included structural features (e.g., adult:child ratios, group size, and staff characteristics) and process variables (e.g., interactions between adults and children) than those centers with higher turnover. This same relationship appears to hold in family child care. In a study of family and relative care, Kontos and colleagues (1995) found that home-based providers who continued to offer care a year after the initial observation were initially rated as higher in global quality.

The Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study also found that children attending higher-quality programs, which were associated with lower turnover rates, had more advanced language and pre-math skills (Helburn 1995). Further, these children displayed more positive attitudes toward their child care situation and more positive self-concepts, engaged in better relations with their teachers, and demonstrated more advanced social behavior. The effects of program quality were evident for children from all backgrounds, but children of low-income families were particularly influenced by the quality of their child care arrangements (Helburn 1995). The impact of child care quality persisted into elementary school, with children who attended higher-quality programs performing better on a variety of academic and social measures. Teacher background and stability predicted child care quality at the time of the initial observations (Howes 1995; Phillipsen et al. 1997).

Researchers have also focused attention on the significant role that directors play in building and sustaining high-quality child care programs. They have identified the important contribution that directors make to teaching staff retention, and at the same time have noted growing turnover among this sector of the child care workforce (Bloom 1996b; Burton et al. 1994; Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997). According to the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes study (Helburn 1995), higher-quality programs employed directors with longer tenure at their centers, more years of formal early childhood training, and more prior experience in child care programs. In higher-quality programs, directors received higher ratings from their staff for their organizational and leadership skills, knowledge of curriculum, and community involvement and participation.

High levels of turnover can also place the continued operation of a child care center in jeopardy. Nine years after the original National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990), 30 percent of the original sample of 226 centers had closed.<sup>1</sup> These centers, as a group, had reported much higher levels of staff turnover when the original data were collected in 1988 (54 percent turnover) than the centers that remained open in 1997 (38 percent). In the centers that later closed, 41 percent of the teaching staff had been on the job for a year or less in 1988, versus 28 percent in centers that remained open (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990, 1998).

Lastly, our findings suggest that turnover itself breeds further turnover. Working in a climate where coworkers are constantly coming and going makes the already challenging job of creating a well-functioning environment for children even harder. As with any team process, it takes time and effort to establish the level of communication between teachers that is necessary for creating and maintaining a smoothly operating classroom. When other teaching staff leave, particularly those with whom a teacher has worked closely, it deeply affects her day-to-day experience and ultimately, perhaps, her decision to remain in her current position.

## **A PROFILE OF CENTERS IN OUR SAMPLE**

Child care centers throughout the country report difficulty recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified personnel (Center for the Child Care Workforce 2002). The centers in our sample were no exception to this pattern. Located in the San Francisco Bay area, they operated in an economic climate in which the cost of living was high, decent paying jobs were plentiful, and preschool teachers and directors with four-year college degrees had new opportunities for elementary school teaching jobs because of class-size reduction.

Our examination focused on the 75 centers in our sample that participated in all three phases of our study: 1994, 1996, and 2000. (See the appendix for a detailed description of the sample.) These centers were midsized, serving 72 children on average. Sixty-five percent were located in middle-income areas. Centers also served an ethnically and

linguistically diverse group of families; teaching staff reported that, on average, 39 percent of the children in their classrooms were children of color, and nearly half of the classrooms included children whose home languages were not English.

Most of the centers in our sample (73 percent,  $n=55$ ) were operated on a nonprofit basis. Three for-profit and 3 nonprofit centers were sponsored by a business or corporation; 15 nonprofit centers were sponsored by a church or religious group; 8 were government-sponsored centers exclusively serving children of low-income families; and the remaining centers were local community nonprofit programs. Approximately three-quarters (78 percent) of operating funds for the centers came from parent fees. Apart from the 8 government-sponsored programs, centers derived only a small portion of their revenue from public subsidies.

Nationally, less than a quarter of child care centers are rated high in quality, and as many as one-sixth have been rated as harmful to children (Helburn 1995). Using the same rating system as Helburn and colleagues, however, we found that 53 percent of the centers in our sample were rated as “good” in overall quality at the time of our visit in 2000, and none were rated as “poor” in quality. Our findings from this sample of relatively high-quality centers, therefore, may not be representative of teaching and administrative staff in other communities, or among centers that represent a greater range in quality. Because higher-quality programs are associated with higher wages, lower turnover, and better-qualified staff, we would expect turnover in our sample to be lower than would be found in most communities.

We collected data on salaries, training, and educational background for all teaching staff employed at the centers at each data collection point. These data provide a detailed picture of the entire teaching workforce of 75 child care centers in 2000, including 435 teachers (66 percent), 182 assistant teachers (28 percent), and 42 teacher-directors (6 percent). These data also allow us to compare the workforce in 2000 to that of 1994 and 1996. Throughout this chapter, the term “teaching staff” will include all teachers, assistant teachers, and teacher-directors employed by the centers at the time of our visits. We collected similar information about earnings, training, and educational background for all center directors.

In comparison to state requirements, which range from a minimum of 12 units to 24 units of college-level early childhood education plus 16 general college units, the entire 2000 cohort of teaching staff were well-trained and well-educated (see Table 2.1). Thirty-seven percent of teaching staff held a bachelor's degree or higher and had completed at least some training in early childhood education. These were somewhat higher levels of education than were reported in the most recent national child care teaching staff data, which are nearly a decade old (Helburn 1995). The 75 directors we interviewed in 2000 were also well-educated and well-trained in early childhood education. Approximately three-quarters of the directors (77 percent) had completed a four-year degree; approximately one-half (49 percent) had post-baccalaureate coursework or degrees in early childhood education; and 71 percent had participated in a supervised practicum to prepare for work with young children. On average, directors had worked at their centers for slightly more than 8 years ( $SD=7.08$ ;  $n=69$ ), and had been employed in the field of early care and education for approximately 18 years ( $SD=7.87$ ;  $n=70$ ). Over 90 percent had previously worked as child care teachers, for an average of 11 years ( $SD=6.95$ ;  $n=63$ ).

Wages varied among the centers but were low overall (see Table 2.2). On average, teachers earned \$13.52 per hour, or a full-time equivalent salary of \$24,606 annually. This translates to two-thirds of a self-sufficiency wage<sup>2</sup> for an adult with a young child living in these communities. Fifty percent of teachers and assistant teachers earned less than \$11.75 per hour, and 96 percent of teachers and assistants earned less than \$20.00 per hour. The average public school salary in California—\$46,326, based on a 10-month year (American Federation of Teachers 2001)—is nearly twice as high as that of the child care teachers in our sample. While they were better paid than teaching staff, directors also earned notably low wages, considering their impressive levels of experience and training. On average, directors earned \$20.07 per hour, with 54 percent earning less than \$20.00 an hour, and 99 percent earning less than \$34.00 per hour. With an average work schedule of 36 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, the full-time equivalent salary for directors in 2000 was \$37,571. The recommended statewide *starting* salary for elementary school teachers in California is \$38,000 for a 10-month year (American Federation of Teachers 2001).

**Table 2.1 College-Level Educational Attainment of Teaching Staff and Directors**

	Percentage of staff			
	24 or fewer early childhood education (ECE) credits	24+ credits of ECE plus certification	BA in other field, less than 24 ECE credits	BA in other field with at least 24 credits ECE or certification/BA in ECE
Teachers	31.9	28.9	1.6	37.6
Assistant teachers	60.9	12.5	2.7	23.9
Teacher-directors	19.0	19.0	2.4	59.6
All teaching staff	39.1	23.7	2.0	35.2
Directors	9.5	13.5	9.5	67.5

NOTE:  $n=436$  teachers, 184 assistants, 42 teacher-directors, and 74 directors.  
SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

**Table 2.2 Current Wages of Teaching Staff and Directors**

	Mean (\$)	Standard deviation	Range
Teachers	13.52	4.75	6.00–48.30
Assistant teachers	9.35	2.10	6.00–15.00
Teacher-directors	17.21	4.89	8.00–28.75
All teaching staff	12.63	4.74	6.00–48.30
Directors	20.07	6.67	6.67–46.00

NOTE:  $n=408$  teachers, 169 assistants, 42 teacher-directors, 619 all teaching staff, and 72 directors.  
SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

## THE DIMENSIONS OF JOB TURNOVER IN CHILD CARE CENTERS

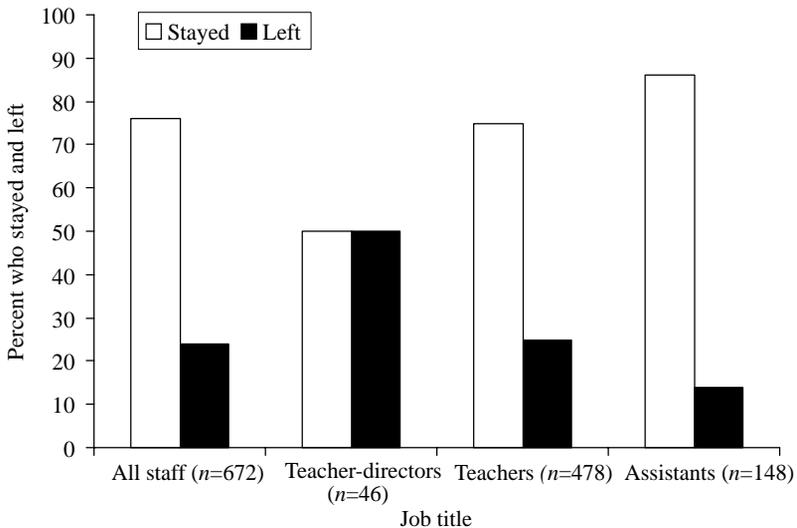
Among this sample of relatively high-quality programs, staff stability was moderate when compared to other industries which pay similarly low wages, but high when compared to other educational jobs, as detailed in Chapter 1 (Whitebook and Bellm 1999). Three-quarters (76 percent) of all teaching staff employed in the centers in 1996 and 82

percent of those employed in 1994 were no longer employed at the centers in 2000 (see Figure 2.1).

We used Chi-square analyses to examine staff stability (i.e., staff who left or stayed at their centers) based on job title (i.e., teacher, assistant teacher, teacher-director). A chi-square analysis compares the observed and expected frequency for two or more samples. Between 1996 and 2000, assistant teachers were more likely to leave than were all other staff, and teachers were more likely to leave than were teacher-directors.<sup>3</sup>

Year-to-year turnover and the inability to replace staff further contribute to instability. Average turnover rates between 1999 and 2000, for example, were 30 percent for all teaching staff (32 percent for teachers and 39 percent for assistant teachers). Although turnover data were not collected in all of the intervening years, it is probably reasonable to assume that similar rates of staff departure had also occurred each year from 1996 to 1999. Rates of one-year turnover between 1999 and 2000 varied considerably among centers in the sample, as shown in

**Figure 2.1 Stability Rates of All Teaching Staff, 1996–2000**



NOTE: Stability rate here refers to the number of staff employed at a center in 1996 who left by 2000.

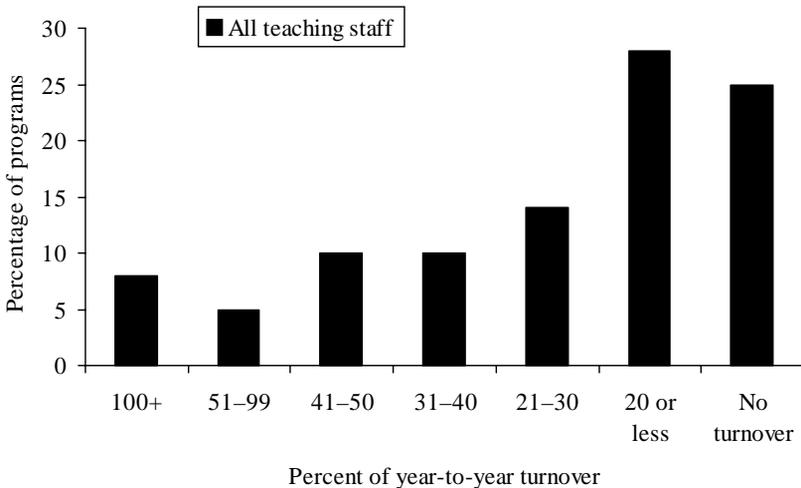
SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

Figure 2.2. One-quarter of programs reported no turnover, and one-third reported more than 30 percent turnover for the previous year. Six centers reported 100 percent or greater turnover of assistant teachers, and nine reported 100 percent or greater turnover of teachers between 1999 and 2000.

More than half of child care centers reporting teaching staff turnover during 1999–2000 (56 percent) did not succeed in replacing all the staff they had lost. Seven percent of centers were unable to replace any of the teachers who had left, 26 percent were able to replace only half or fewer, and 23 percent replaced 51 to 99 percent of the staff they had lost.

Directors also frequently left their jobs. Forty percent ( $n=30$ ) of the centers participating in 1996 had a new director in 2000, and two-thirds of these centers ( $n=20$ ) reported having had two or more directors in those four years. Between 1994 and 2000, 51 percent ( $n=38$ ) of the centers had new directors. While directors as a group were more stable than teaching staff, the impact of their departure on center operations

**Figure 2.2 Percentage of Programs with Different Rates of One-Year Turnover, 1999–2000**



NOTE:  $n=75$  centers.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

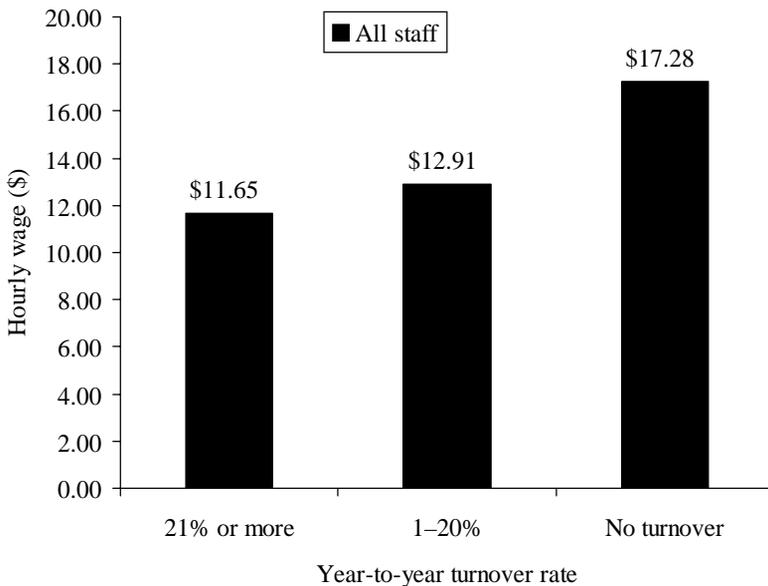
and staff morale was potentially as disruptive, since their function within a center is to provide overall leadership and guidance. Their turnover rates were sufficiently high to contribute to instability in the child care industry.

## CENTER CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH TURNOVER

### The Role of Wages

Do centers that pay higher wages have lower overall teaching staff turnover than do centers that pay less? To answer this question, we used analysis of variance to test for differences among sample means, with mean wages as the dependent variable and year-to-year turnover

**Figure 2.3 Wages in 2000 for All Teaching Staff by Center Year-to-Year Turnover Rates**



NOTE:  $n=73$  centers.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

as the independent variable. We found that centers that experienced no annual staff turnover paid significantly higher wages than centers that did experience turnover, whether the turnover was moderate (1–20 percent) or high (21 percent or higher). (See Figure 2.3.)

Despite a growing recognition in the field that higher wages contribute to staff stability, compensation for the majority of teaching staff and director positions stagnated between 1996 and 2000. The small number of teaching staff who remained on the job between 1996 and 2000 experienced no increase in salary over the four-year period, when 1996 wages are adjusted to account for inflation. The average hourly wage for teachers in 2000 was \$15.82 (SD=5.52,  $n=110$ ), for example, while the 1996 average wage, in 2000 dollars, was \$16.01 (SD=4.99,  $n=110$ ).

Are centers that pay higher wages better able to retain qualified teachers and directors? We used an independent group *t*-test, a statistic used to examine mean differences between two groups. For this test, wage was the dependent variable and staff who stayed or left was the independent variable. Among all teachers who had completed a bachelor's or graduate degree and specialized training in early childhood education, there were significant wage differences between those who stayed ( $M= \$18.68$  per hour, SD=5.86,  $n=45$ ) and those who left their jobs ( $M=\$15.27$  per hour, SD=5.94,  $n=168$ ).<sup>4</sup> This difference amounted to more than \$6,000 per year for full-time employees. Even experienced child care teachers at the highest level of pay earned at least \$10,000 less per year than the *average* California K–12 teacher with equivalent education, and \$6,000 less per year than *starting* K–12 teachers (American Federation of Teachers 2001).

In order to better explain how wages are determined, we performed multiple regression analyses, with wages as the dependent variable and a variety of center characteristics as independent variables (e.g., for-profit or nonprofit status, percentage of center budget from parent fees, income area in which the center is located, and educational background of center staff). Multiple regression analyses are used to predict which independent variables account for the most variation in the dependent variable. The educational background of center staff was the only variable that accounted for a significant proportion of variance in wages.<sup>5</sup>

Among all teachers working at the centers in 1996, regardless of educational level, those no longer on the job in 2000 earned signifi-

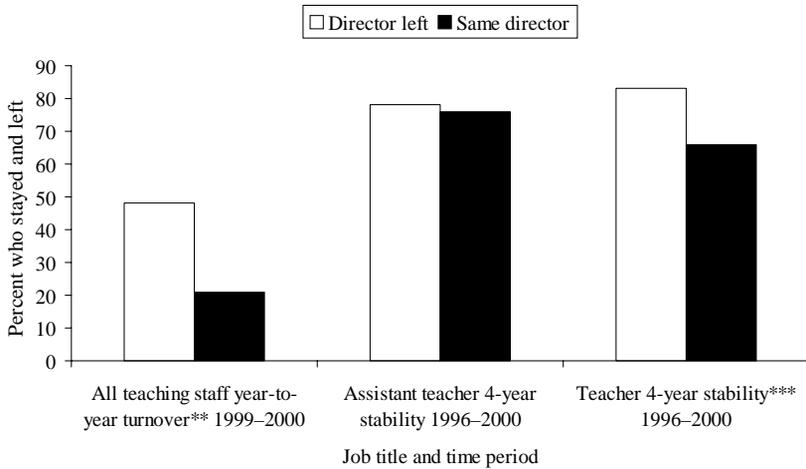
cantly less per hour ( $M=\$10.29$ ,  $SD=3.54$ ,  $n=336$ ) than those who remained ( $M=\$11.83$ ,  $SD=3.67$ ,  $n=117$ ).<sup>6</sup> This difference amounted to approximately \$3,000 per year for full-time employees. We found a similar pattern for all teaching staff and for directors. All teaching staff who left their centers by 2000 earned significantly less per hour ( $M=\$9.79$ ,  $SD=3.40$ ,  $n=484$ ) than those who remained ( $M=\$11.71$ ,  $SD=3.81$ ,  $n=159$ ).<sup>7</sup> Likewise, directors who left their centers by 2000 earned significantly less per hour ( $M=\$14.60$ ,  $SD=3.41$ ,  $n=29$ ) than those who remained ( $M=\$17.60$ ,  $SD=5.41$ ,  $n=43$ ).<sup>8</sup> There were no differences in wage between assistant teachers and teacher-directors who stayed at or left their centers by 2000.

### **Director Stability**

We found that director stability contributed to teacher stability. The loss of the director—the person most responsible for establishing and maintaining the tenor and structure of the work environment—may understandably lead other employees to reconsider their own relationship to the job. We used independent group *t*-tests to determine if there were mean differences in stability and year-to-year turnover (dependent variables) between centers where the director stayed or left (independent variable). Centers that lost directors had higher rates of year-to-year turnover for all teaching staff (1999–2000) and lost more teachers between 1996 and 2000, as shown in Figure 2.4.<sup>9</sup> But staff stability among assistant teachers was not significantly different between centers that lost or retained their directors between 1996 and 2000. Teacher behavior varied by director stability. In centers that had lost their directors, teaching staff were rated as behaving more harshly toward children than teaching staff in centers where the director had not changed.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of the self-perpetuating cycle of instability involved the ways in which director job satisfaction was influenced by teacher instability. Eighty-five percent of directors reported that the ability to do their jobs was negatively affected when staff members left their centers, and 78 percent said that staff turnover negatively affected the overall organization of their programs. Forty-three percent of directors employed at the centers in 2000 reported that turnover among

**Figure 2.4 Staff Stability and Year-to-Year Turnover in Centers Where the Director Stayed or Left**



NOTE: \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;  $n = 75$  centers.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

teaching staff had negatively affected their own career goals; only 21 percent said that they would take a job in another child care center.

Centers that paid higher wages to directors and to teaching staff were better able to retain both categories of workers. We used an independent group *t*-test analysis to determine mean differences in wages (dependent variable) between centers who lost their directors between 1996 and 2000 and centers that retained their directors (independent variable). Even though their qualifications were similar, directors who were no longer on the job in 2000 earned significantly less per hour ( $M = \$14.47$ ,  $SD = 3.33$ ,  $n = 31$ ) in 1996 than those who remained on the job ( $M = \$17.27$  per hour,  $SD = 5.41$ ,  $n = 46$ ).<sup>11</sup> This difference amounted to more than \$5,000 per year for full-time directors. Directors who left also worked in programs that paid lower average wages in 1996 to teachers ( $M = \$12.21$  per hour,  $SD = 2.00$ ,  $n = 28$ ) than centers in which directors remained ( $M = \$14.86$  per hour,  $SD = 6.81$ ,  $n = 42$ ).<sup>12</sup> Wages for assistant teachers, however, were not significantly different between centers that retained or lost their directors.

## **Background Climate versus Turnover Climate in Child Care Centers**

Our finding that better wages significantly influenced whether teachers and directors remained on the job was consistent with previous child care research (Helburn 1995; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). We were also interested in exploring the impact of turnover on who left and who stayed in a center over time. Specifically, we wanted to understand whether overall staff education and training levels, as well as overall teaching staff stability, also influenced whether highly trained teaching staff remained on the job.

The term “background climate” refers to the percentage of teaching staff with high or low educational background levels who are employed in a center. In this study, both directors and teaching staff were categorized based on the level of formal education and early childhood training they had attained. We distinguished between low and high levels of education and training, and almost all staff fell within one of these two categories. With a sample of less-educated and trained teaching staff, high and low backgrounds may be defined differently.

Because of variations in job titles, functions, and preservice requirements across settings, as well as the intertwined relationship between training and formal education, Howes (1995) and others (Cassidy, Vardell, and Buell 1998) have categorized the child care workforce in terms of background levels that combine specialized training at the college level as well as other aspects of teachers’ formal education. In this study, staff with low background levels had 6 to 24 credits of college-level early childhood education training. Staff with high background levels had a bachelor’s degree and at least 24 credits of college-level early childhood training, some type of early childhood certification, or a bachelor’s degree with an advanced early childhood education degree or level of training.

“Turnover climate” generally refers to the overall turnover rate of staff in a center. Drawing on the centers’ census of employed staff, we calculated the overall turnover rate of staff employed at one point in time and no longer employed at the center at a later date (e.g., 1994 to 2000, or 1996 to 2000). Here, turnover climate is measured as the percentage of teaching staff with different high background levels who

leave or remain at a center during a given time period. Directors also reported annual turnover for the period of 1999–2000.

In 1996, we used discriminant function analyses to identify different individual and job characteristics that distinguish among four groups of observed teaching staff:

- highly trained teachers who remained on the job;
- highly trained teachers who left their jobs;
- less-trained teachers who stayed on the job; and
- less-trained teachers who left their jobs.

A discriminant function analysis is used to predict membership in two or more mutually exclusive groups. We tested a series of variables that have been associated in prior research with turnover, and/or have been hypothesized to influence it (Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997). Specifically, we performed a series of discriminant function analyses to determine whether wages, benefits, working conditions, and center characteristics, as well as individual professional and demographic characteristics, distinguished these four groups.

Between 1994 and 1996, we found that highly trained teachers were more likely to leave their jobs if they earned lower wages, worked in a climate with less stability of highly trained coworkers, experienced a change in director, and/or worked with a greater percentage of teaching staff with less than a bachelor's degree and with limited specialized, college-level training in early childhood education (Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997). Our 1996 findings extended previous research by revealing that the characteristics and stability of teaching staff as a whole—as well as the consistency of the director—also influenced whether highly trained teachers remained on the job. In centers where highly skilled staff worked with other highly skilled teachers who remained on the job, they themselves were more likely to stay.

These variables that had been found in 1996 to be significant discriminators of who left and who stayed were again significant in 2000. We also tested a few selected benefits (health coverage, reduced-fee child care, and pensions) and working conditions (paid preparation time) that we hypothesized might influence membership in our groups of highly trained and less-trained teachers who stay or leave their job. These variables were then selected for another discriminant function

analysis (see Table 2.3). In Table 2.3, functions 1 and 2 display a list of coefficients of the discriminant equation. Function 1 accounts for 64 percent of the variance of the four membership groups. Function 2 accounts for 34 percent of the variance after function 1 is accounted for. We found that, for all teaching staff, highly trained teachers were more likely to leave their jobs if they earned lower wages, worked in a climate with less stability of highly trained coworkers, or worked with a greater percentage of teaching staff who did not have a bachelor's degree. Highly trained teaching staff who stayed earned \$3.00 more per hour than highly trained teaching staff who left. Other predictors, such as selected benefits and working conditions, did not distinguish between highly skilled and less-skilled staff who remained or left. Because we had ratings of sensitivity as well as educational background for lead teachers in each observed classroom, we also ran the discriminant function analysis for this group of teachers, classifying them as highly skilled or less skilled depending on whether they scored above or below a 3 in "sensitivity" on the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989). Teachers with sensitivity scores of three or greater were considered highly skilled (range: 1–4); those with scores below three were considered less skilled. This analysis revealed the same pattern, with one exception: in addition to wages and background climate, membership in a professional organization also distinguished between who left and who stayed.

## **CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, 1994–2000**

The high rates of turnover among teaching and administrative staff in our sample between 1994 and 2000, coupled with our finding that the retention of highly trained staff was influenced by the presence of other highly trained staff, led us to explore whether the background climate of child care centers was changing over time. We sought to learn whether the professional preparation of teaching and administrative staff who left was different from that of those who remained, and whether those hired as replacements had greater or less formal education and early childhood training.

**Table 2.3 Discriminant Function Analyses: Predicting Highly and Less-Trained Teaching Staff who Stay or Leave from Wages, Background Climate, and Turnover Climate Variables**

Predictor variables	Correlations of predictor variables with discriminant functions			Groups			
	Function 1	Function 2	Univ. $F^a$	Highly trained	Less-trained	Less-trained	Highly trained
				stay mean (SD)	leave mean (SD)	stay mean (SD)	leave mean (SD)
All teaching staff							
Teaching staff wages	0.76 <sup>b</sup>	-0.05	45.14 <sup>+</sup>	\$15.03 (\$5.24)	\$9.37 (\$3.02)	\$10.84 (\$3.36)	\$11.93 (\$4.68)
Background climate	0.73 <sup>b</sup>	0.51	52.52 <sup>+</sup>	0.55 (0.25)	0.30 (0.23)	0.31 (0.25)	0.52 (0.21)
Turnover climate	0.72 <sup>b</sup>	-0.38	46.99 <sup>+</sup>	0.55 (0.23)	0.30 (0.09)	0.31 (0.12)	0.52 (0.11)
Director turnover	-0.34	0.25	13.23 <sup>+</sup>	0.15 (0.36)	0.51 (0.50)	0.29 (0.45)	0.41 (0.49)

NOTE: <sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.0001$ .

<sup>a</sup> For all teaching staff,  $df = 3, 62$ ;  $n = 633$  teaching staff. Eigenvalue for function 1 = 0.37; canonical  $R$  for function 1 = 0.52.

<sup>b</sup> Denotes largest absolute correlation between each variable and any discriminant function.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

We were particularly interested in these issues, given the widespread recognition that formal education and training are critical for those who work with young children (Morgan et al. 1993). Over the last two decades, a variety of professional development programs have been initiated across the country with the goal of building a more highly skilled early care and education workforce. Few studies have documented the efficacy of these staff education initiatives (Cassidy, Pugh-Hoess, and Buell 1995; Whitebook and Sakai 1995), but there is a wealth of research demonstrating the positive relationship between higher levels of caregiver training and education, better program quality, and positive developmental outcomes for children. This research has led funders and policymakers to generously support professional preparation for child care teachers and providers (Azer, Capraro, and Elliott 1996; Azer and Hanrahan 1998; Elliott and Vestal 1998; Montilla, Twombly, and De Vita 2001; Whitebook and Eichberg 2002).

Between 1996 and 2000, professional preparation was similar among teaching staff in our sample who left and those who stayed, although those who left had less tenure in the field at the time of their departures. Teaching staff and directors who left their centers were no less educated than those who remained.

With respect to educational levels, however, new teaching staff overall were significantly less educated than those they replaced. Among all teaching staff, newcomers had completed fewer years of education and formal early childhood training than those they replaced (see Table 2.4).<sup>13</sup> By contrast, directors were remarkably similar to each other: new directors showed no difference—with respect to education, early childhood training, tenure in the field or in the program, and affiliation with a professional organization—from directors who stayed on their jobs or those who had left.

## **SUMMARY**

Given the well-established relationship between the quality of child care services and the education and training of teachers, this decline in educational background climate in a sample of relatively high-quality child care centers is troubling. Highly trained teaching

**Table 2.4 College-Level Educational Attainment of Teaching Staff and Directors Who Left, Stayed In, or Were New to the 75 Centers in the 2000 Sample**

	Percentage of staff			
	24 or fewer ECE credits	24 or more credits of ECE, plus certification	BA in other field, less than 24 ECE credits	BA in other field, with at least 24 ECE credits or certification, or BA in ECE
<b>Teaching staff:</b>				
<b>LEAVERS</b> All teaching staff in 1996, no longer at their centers in 2000 ( <i>n</i> =626); education at 1996.	38.3	21.1	3.8	36.8
<b>STAYERS</b> All teaching staff in 1996, currently employed at centers in 2000 ( <i>n</i> =155); education at 2000.	22.5	31.3	1.3	45.0
<b>NEWCOMERS</b> All new teaching staff employed at centers in 2000 ( <i>n</i> =502); education at 2000.	44.5	21.3	2.2	32.0
<b>Directors:</b>				
<b>LEAVERS</b> Directors in 1996, no longer at centers in 2000; ( <i>n</i> =27); education at 1996.	8.0	20.0	16.0	56.0
<b>STAYERS</b> Directors in 1996, currently employed at centers in 2000; ( <i>n</i> =44); education at 2000.	9.1	11.4	11.4	68.2
<b>NEWCOMERS</b> New directors employed at centers in 2000; ( <i>n</i> =30); education at 2000.	10.0	16.7	6.7	66.7

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

staff remain at programs that pay better-than-average wages and that retain a greater percentage of other well-trained teachers. Highly skilled teachers are also more likely to remain at programs that retain their directors.

As discussed in the following chapter, the recruitment and retention of highly skilled staff lies at the heart of centers' capacity to improve the quality of the services they offer, and to sustain those improvements over time. Multifaceted benefits can therefore result from paying higher wages: they enable a center to attract and sustain a higher-caliber staffing pool, which itself promotes stability among qualified staff. This dynamic is gradually being acknowledged among policymakers. Since the time of our data collection in 2000, most California counties, including those in this study, have initiated a program supported by public dollars entitled CARES (Compensation and Recognition Encourage Stability), with the explicit two-pronged approach of increasing the education and training of child care personnel, and providing stipends to encourage them to remain on the job. The ultimate goal of these programs is to expand the pool of qualified personnel to work in programs for young children over an extended period of time (Burton et al. 2000).

## Notes

1. According to the Small Business Administration, approximately 4 percent of all businesses close each year, including bankruptcies, failures, and terminations for other reasons (including retirement or relocation). Although these data are for businesses of all sizes, they suggest that child care businesses close or fail at "approximately the same rate" as do other businesses ([www.sbaonline.sba.gov](http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov)).
2. "Self-sufficiency" is a composite variable for teaching staff based on the number and ages of their children, number of adults contributing to (and size of) household income, and self-sufficiency wage in the county in which they live. Teaching staff are classified as self-sufficient if they meet a county-specific standard that ensures the minimum that heads of working families need to meet their basic needs, without public subsidies or private assistance. Self-sufficiency standards (Pearce 2000) were updated for inflation in order to compare them with family incomes for 2000.
3.  $\chi^2(2)=14.63, p<0.001$ .
4.  $t(211)=3.43, p<0.01$ .
5. Twenty-two percent of the variance in wages could be accounted for by the educational background of center staff (adjusted  $R^2=0.22$ ).

6.  $t(196)=3.94, p<0.001$ .
7.  $t(246)=5.82, p<0.001$ .
8.  $t(70)=2.65, p<0.05$ .
9. Teacher stability:  $t(73)=-2.68, p<0.01$ : Centers that lost directors lost more teachers between 1996 and 2000 than centers that retained their director. Centers that lost directors had higher rates of year-to-year turnover for all teaching staff (1999–2000) than centers that retained their teachers:  $t(34)=-2.20, p<0.05$ .
10.  $t(41)=-2.14, p<0.05$ .
11.  $t(75)=2.81, p<0.01$ .
12.  $t(68)=2.00, p<0.05$ .
13.  $t(1126)=3.06, p<0.01$ .

### 3

## **The Role of Staffing in Improving and Sustaining Center Quality**

Over the past 15 years, considerable amounts of public and private funding, as well as teaching and administrative staff time and energy, have been invested in the effort to improve the quality of child care and early education services. Research in the late 1980s and early 1990s showed that the majority of child care centers in the United States were mediocre in quality (Helburn 1995; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). Studies also linked higher-quality child care services with positive developmental outcomes for children, particularly children from low-income families (Helburn 1995). These findings sparked interest among policymakers, business leaders, and early childhood education professionals, and resulted in a variety of strategies to upgrade child care quality.

One of the most popular approaches has been to help programs become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). While not all centers accredited by NAEYC have been rated as high in quality by independent observers, NAEYC-accredited programs, as a group, demonstrate significantly better quality than do nonaccredited programs (Helburn 1995; Whitebook 1996; Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997).

Many of the centers in our sample were working to improve their quality of care by participating in the self-study process that is the first step to becoming accredited by NAEYC. This chapter describes the extent to which centers in our sample were able to improve their quality of care and/or achieve high-quality ratings. We also examine the relationship between staff characteristics, stability and program quality, and the impact of staffing on centers' ability to sustain high-quality services.

We used the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms and Clifford 1980) as the primary outcome measure of observed center quality, along with observed adult:child ratios. This 37-item scale is organized under seven categories: personal care rou-

times; furnishings and displays for children; language-reasoning experience; fine and gross motor activities; creative activities; social development; and adult needs. Individual items are rated from a low of 1 to a high of 7. A rating of 3 on these scales indicates “minimally acceptable quality,” while 5 indicates “good” quality and 7 indicates “excellent quality.”

We also examined teacher sensitivity using the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989). This 26-item scale rates teachers’ sensitivity (e.g., degree of warmth, attentiveness, and engagement), their style (e.g., degree of harshness, and level of punitive and critical interactions), and their detachment (e.g., level of interaction with, interest in, and supervision of children). A score of 1 indicates that a given behavior is “never true,” whereas a score of 4 indicates that the behavior is “often observed.” Higher scores for sensitivity and lower scores for harshness and detachment are therefore considered desirable.

## **IMPROVING CENTER QUALITY**

In 1994, when we first visited the 92 centers in our sample, more than half (55 of 92) were undertaking efforts to become accredited by NAEYC.<sup>1</sup> When we returned to the centers in 1996, 23 had achieved accreditation. We used analysis of variance to examine whether accreditation status in 1994 influenced quality. Centers that became accredited between our first and second visits demonstrated greater improvement in quality as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) than did centers that had unsuccessfully sought accreditation.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, centers that achieved accreditation demonstrated greater increases in ECERS scores and teacher sensitivity as measured by the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989), and had better adult:child ratios than all other centers. (See Table 3.1.)

**Table 3.1 Comparison of Observed Quality among Centers Achieving Accreditation, Centers Seeking Accreditation, and Centers Not Seeking Accreditation in 1994 and 1996**

	1994			1996		
	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
ECERS scores						
Centers achieving accreditation	4.58	0.73	3.19–5.99	5.22*	0.71	3.88–6.41
Centers seeking accreditation	4.38	0.7	3.35–6.24	4.38	0.77	3.30–6.74
Centers not seeking accreditation	4.12	0.68	2.89–5.39	3.99	0.83	2.42–6.28
<i>F</i>	3.22***	Centers achieving accreditation in 1996 had higher ECERS scores in 1994 than centers not seeking accreditation.		17.64***	Centers achieving accreditation had higher ECERS scores in 1996 than centers seeking accreditation (not yet accredited) and centers not seeking accreditation.	
Sensitivity						
Centers achieving accreditation	3.05	0.63	1.63–4.00	3.36	0.56	2.20–4.00
Centers seeking accreditation	3	0.49	1.80–3.80	3.02	0.5	1.85–4.00
Centers not seeking accreditation	3.02	0.56	1.90–4.00	2.95	0.47	1.90–4.00

(continued)

**Table 3.1 (continued)**

	1994			1996		
	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
<i>F</i>		Not significant		4.99***	Centers achieving accreditation had better sensitivity scores in 1996 than centers seeking accreditation (not yet accredited) and centers not seeking accreditation.	
Harshness						
Centers achieving accreditation	1.33	0.47	1.00–2.96	1.30	0.41	1.00–2.67
Centers seeking accreditation	1.41	0.48	1.00–2.85	1.50	0.49	1.00–3.11
Centers not seeking accreditation	1.57	0.58	1.00–2.89	1.55	0.59	1.00–3.44
<i>F</i>		Not significant			Not significant	
Detachment						
Centers achieving accreditation	1.46	0.54	1.00–2.33	1.50	0.66	1.00–3.75
Centers seeking accreditation	1.48	0.46	1.00–2.50	1.59	0.49	1.00–2.75
Centers not seeking accreditation	1.52	0.50	1.00–3.00	1.66	0.52	1.00–3.00
<i>F</i>		Not significant			Not significant	

Observed ratio <sup>a</sup>						
Centers achieving accreditation	0.20	0.07	0.12–0.35	0.21	0.80	0.10–0.42
Centers seeking accreditation	0.17	0.06	0.09–0.27	0.18	0.07	0.09–0.40
Centers not seeking accreditation	0.15	0.06	0.04–0.34	0.16	0.06	0.08–0.33
<i>F</i>	4.14**	Centers achieving accreditation had better observed ratios in 1994 than centers not seeking accreditation.		3.69**	Centers achieving accreditation had better observed ratios in 1996 than centers seeking accreditation (not yet accredited) and centers not seeking accreditation.	

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NOTE: For centers achieving accreditation,  $n=23$ ; for centers seeking accreditation,  $n=32$ ; and for centers not seeking accreditation,  $n=37$ .  
 \*\* $p<0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p<0.01$ .

<sup>a</sup> For observed ratios, lower percentages indicate more children cared for by each adult.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

## ACHIEVING HIGH-QUALITY RATINGS

A score of 5 or better on the ECERS is considered indicative of good-quality care. Although programs that became NAEYC-accredited were more likely to have improved in quality, and none were rated as poor in quality, not all achieved high-quality ratings. In 1996, 39 percent of accredited programs were rated as mediocre, scoring below a 5 on the ECERS. Thus, although NAEYC-accredited programs as a group were significantly higher in quality, NAEYC accreditation was not a guarantee of high-quality care.

We used multiple regression to determine the amount of influence that various predictors (independent variables) have on the outcome measure (dependent variable). In this case, we addressed the question of what predicted high-quality centers, with ECERS scores as the dependent variable (see Table 3.2). In predicting quality, we examined the role played by the independent variables of auspice (for-profit or nonprofit status), and income levels in the community where centers operated. Income emerged as a significant predictor of quality, with centers in high-income areas providing higher quality care than centers in middle- and low-income areas. Auspice was not a predictor of quality. Next, we examined four additional independent variables: 1) wages

**Table 3.2 Multiple Regression Predicting Quality in 1996 from Control Variables, Characteristics of the Center, and Accreditation**

Predictor variable	Adjusted $R^2$	Beta	SE/B <sup>a</sup>	<i>t</i>
Control variable	0.06**			
Auspice		0.19	0.23	1.91
Income		-0.20	0.18	-2.15**
Center characteristics	0.25 <sup>+</sup>			
Wages of all teaching staff		0.42	0.03	3.54***
Turnover climate		0.22	0.30	2.13**
Background climate		-0.07	-0.13	-0.53
Accreditation	0.42***	-0.42	0.22	-4.61***

NOTE: Data calculated from a total sample of 92 centers. \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ;

<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>a</sup> Standard error of Beta.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

for all teaching staff; 2) the “background climate” of centers, based on levels of formal education and specialized early childhood training for all teaching staff;<sup>3</sup> 3) center “turnover climate,” based on the percentage of highly trained teaching staff who remained on the job; and 4) accreditation status of the center. High-quality centers were characterized by location in high-income areas, higher teacher and director wages, retention of well-qualified teachers, and NAEYC accreditation status.

### **BARRIERS TO IMPROVING QUALITY: BASELINE QUALITY AND STAFF STABILITY**

Having found that centers that achieved accreditation—as compared to those that sought but did not gain it—showed measurable improvements in quality, we investigated what prevented centers from achieving NAEYC accreditation. We first explored whether there were substantial differences in baseline quality between those that succeeded at accreditation and those that did not.

As a group, centers that achieved accreditation began the self-study process with mediocre classroom ratings (defined as below a score of 5 on the ECERS; see Table 3.1). Only one-fourth were rated as good or better in quality, compared to 14 percent of the centers in the sample not undertaking accreditation. Centers that had already achieved a certain baseline of quality, however, were more likely to achieve NAEYC accreditation in 1996. Centers that achieved accreditation in 1996 received higher overall classroom quality scores than did other centers, and staffed their classrooms with better adult:child ratios than did the centers not seeking accreditation.

In interviews with directors, other researchers have identified high levels of staff turnover as a major reason why centers falter in the self-study phase and do not become accredited (Talley 1997; Bloom 1996b). The directors in our study likewise reported that staff instability was a major impediment to achieving accreditation and upgrading services. Combined with our finding that centers that retained a greater percentage of highly skilled teachers were significantly more likely to

receive good or better ratings on overall classroom quality, we decided to explore the impact of turnover on efforts to improve quality.

Between our first round of data collection in 1994 and our second round in 1996, we found that all centers in the sample experienced considerable staffing instability. Turnover rates for teaching staff approached or exceeded 50 percent in the 20-month period between our first and second visits. When we used independent group *t*-tests to examine mean differences between centers that achieved accreditation and centers that did not, however, we found that centers achieving accreditation experienced less turnover among all teaching staff between 1994 and 1996 than did centers which sought but failed to become accredited by the time of our 1996 visit. Among all centers seeking accreditation, teaching staff turnover was higher in centers that did not become accredited (63 percent) than in those that were successful (46 percent).<sup>4</sup>

## **SUSTAINING QUALITY: THE ROLE OF TEACHING STAFF BACKGROUND AND STABILITY**

In order to realize a reasonable return on the investment of time and/or money to enhance child care program quality, such improvements must be maintained over time. The dearth of longitudinal research about early care and education programs has resulted in limited assessments of the long-term value of various quality improvement strategies, including NAEYC accreditation. Since centers experiencing lower turnover in 1996 were more likely to succeed at efforts to improve their quality and to achieve high-quality ratings, we wanted to know whether staff stability also had an impact on centers' ability to sustain high-quality ratings over time.

In 1996, we scheduled our second visits shortly after centers had achieved accreditation status. At that time, we were able to assess whether centers had made improvements, but not whether—or for how long—they could maintain them. By the time of our 2000 visits, we were able to assess center characteristics that predict a sustained high level of quality over time. The discussion that follows is based on a subsample of 43 centers, described in the appendix. Longitudinal com-

parisons examining quality in 1996 and 2000 were made for these 43 centers. Using the ECERS and the Caregiver Interaction Scale, we observed two classrooms in each of the 43 centers, or one if the center had only a single classroom.

To address the issue of quality ratings over time, we created a variable for sustained quality as the outcome measure or dependent variable. We grouped centers according to whether they had received an ECERS rating of 5 or greater (defined as good quality) at the 1996 and 2000 visits, or a rating of less than 5 (defined as mediocre quality). Scores of 3 or below on the ECERS are considered poor quality, and none of the centers in our sample were rated as poor in quality. Centers in the sample with overall ECERS scores of 5 or higher in both 1996 and 2000 were considered, for this study, to have sustained high-quality care. Thirteen of the 43 centers (32 percent) in the subsample of observed programs in 2000 met these criteria. All but two (85 percent) were NAEYC-accredited at both visits, reflecting the larger proportion of high-quality programs among the accredited group.<sup>5</sup>

We used logistic and multiple regression analyses to address questions related to which programs sustained high quality over time. We began by exploring the characteristics of centers that had predicted overall quality in our 1996 sample: accreditation status, income level, higher wages paid to teaching staff, and the retention of highly skilled teachers.

We excluded income level and accreditation status, however, because the reduced size of our observed sample in 2000 limited the number of predictor variables we could test. In addition, these were programs in relatively high-income areas, and centers in our sample were likely to be accredited, providing little variation in the sample for these variables. We focused on wages, staff background, and turnover climate as predictors of sustainable quality.

We performed a logistic regression to determine what variables predicted whether centers were able to sustain a high level of quality over time (dependent variable). Here, sustained quality is a dichotomous variable (sustained or not sustained). We used the following independent variables to predict sustained quality: 1) high background climate (i.e., the percentage of all teaching staff currently working in the center with advanced educational and training backgrounds); 2) turnover climate, defined in this analysis as the percentage of teachers

with high educational background who stayed in the center over the course of the study; 3) whether the director remained on the job over the four-year period; and 4) wages for all teaching staff. (See Table 3.3.)

**Table 3.3 Logistic Regression Predicting Sustained Quality from Center Characteristics (Center Level)**

Predictor variables	Final Beta	Standard error of Beta	Wald <sup>a</sup>
Director turnover	-1.51	0.99	2.31
Turnover climate	1.91	3.21	0.35
Background climate	5.20	2.27	5.27**
Teaching staff wage	-0.17	0.15	1.25

NOTE:  $X^2(4)=10.51$ ; \*\*= $p<0.05$ ;  $n=39$  centers.

<sup>a</sup> The percentage of teachers with a bachelor’s degree or higher and specialized early childhood training predicted 74 percent of centers that sustained or did not sustain quality between 1996 and 2000.

SOURCE: Authors’ calculations.

The presence of a greater proportion of highly trained staff predicted whether centers rated high in quality were able to sustain high-quality ratings over the four years between our second and third visits.

In a center where turnover is high, as described in Chapter 2, and replacement staff are generally less well-trained than those who leave (even in high-quality centers), a program’s success in attracting well-trained teaching staff and keeping them for at least a year or two emerges as critical. As teaching staff and directors comment in Chapter 4, their challenging jobs are made even more so by having to continually train and orient new coworkers. Newcomers with high levels of skill and training, as well as highly trained veteran teachers, become important resources with a significant impact on the quality of services.

If highly trained staff are essential to sustaining child care quality, it becomes critical to understand what draws people to the job and what keeps them there. The proportion of highly trained staff that a center is likely to have at a given time is a function of whom they have been able to attract to their program, as well as whom they have been able to retain.

**Table 3.4 Multiple Regression Predicting the Presence of Highly Trained Staff from Wages and Turnover Climate**

	Adjusted $R^2$	Beta	SE/B <sup>a</sup>	$t$
Predictor variables	0.34 <sup>+</sup>			
Turnover climate		0.43	0.17	3.32***
Teacher wages		0.26	0.01	2.10**
Director turnover		0.08	0.06	0.79

NOTE: Data calculated from a total sample of 70 centers. \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ;  
<sup>+</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>a</sup> Standard error of Beta.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

We used multiple regression to determine which center characteristics would predict the presence of highly trained staff employed at a center in 2000. (See Table 3.4.) Based on findings from other studies and our earlier exploration of these centers, we tested the following characteristics that had previously been associated with the presence of more highly-trained staff: 1) teacher wages; 2) turnover climate, using the variable of the percentage of other highly trained staff who had remained since 1996; and 3) the stability of the director. The percentage of other highly trained staff who had remained on the job, as well as the wages paid by a center, predicted the level of highly trained teaching staff employed in the program. This regression reconfirms the characteristics of programs, identified in Chapter 2, that differentiated whether highly skilled teaching staff stayed at or left their jobs between 1996 and 2000.

## SUMMARY

The ability to facilitate children's development requires stable caregiver/child relationships. Even the most skilled teacher cannot establish a positive relationship with a child unless she is consistently available to nurture the child and build trust. And indeed, more stable providers tend to foster more secure relationships with children in their care, which in turn supports more secure and prosocial behavior by

children (Oppenheim, Sagi, and Lamb 1988). Children who experience more stable child care provider relationships engage in more competent interactions with adults and more advanced peer play (Howes and Hamilton 1992). Aggression increases when children experience frequent changes of providers (Howes and Hamilton 1992, 1993).

Stability in and of itself, however, does not result in skilled caregiving or high-quality programs. Tenure as a child care provider, for example, has not been found consistently to lead to high-quality caregiving (Helburn 1995; Kontos et al. 1995; NICHD 1996; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). Both specialized training in child development and formal education levels, in contrast, have been found consistently to predict high-quality interactions and optimal child development in center-based care. Thus, centers seeking to improve and maintain quality must minimize overall turnover *and* maximize the stability of more skilled members of the workforce. This requires sufficient resources to attract and retain qualified personnel, as well as skillful supervision that identifies and rewards strong members of the team, and helps to assist weaker members in improving or moving on (Whitebook and Bellm 1999).

Between 1994 and 1996, we found that programs with higher staff instability were hampered in their efforts to improve their services and to achieve high-quality ratings. This latest phase of the study in 2000, which permitted us to track centers that had succeeded at accreditation and/or had achieved high levels of quality, suggests that a program's success at sustaining quality requires a team of well-trained teaching staff. Attracting highly skilled staff requires not only better-than-average wages, but also consistency among other highly qualified staff. Only one-third of the programs in this relatively high-quality sample were able to succeed at sustaining a high level of quality over a four-year period.

In the following chapter, teachers and directors share their perceptions of the impact of turnover on center quality. They discuss the day-to-day consequences of staff instability, noting how high rates of turnover and high numbers of untrained staff undermine their efforts to provide the best care for children. They also speak about how low wages fuel staff and director turnover, which in turn begets more instability. At the end of Part 2 of this monograph, we turn to the ways in which communities throughout the nation are addressing the problem

of staff instability. We also recommend strategies to make child care a career that attracts and retains highly qualified teachers and directors—the cornerstone of growth-enhancing services for young children.

## Notes

1. Voluntary accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest professional organization in the early care and education field, is one of the most widely promoted and implemented child care quality enhancement strategies in the United States (Bredenkamp and Glowacki 1996). NAEYC established accreditation in 1986 in response to the lack of national standards for early childhood practice, and to promote efforts to improve quality within child care centers (Galinsky 1990).

NAEYC accredits center-based programs that undergo a quality assessment process (called “self-study”) and that meet standards of program operation identified by NAEYC as indicative of good-quality service (NAEYC 1991, 1998). Self-study provides an opportunity to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the program’s strengths and weaknesses, and to develop a plan to make needed improvements. During the self-study process, centers conduct observations in each classroom, and questionnaires assessing the center are completed by all staff and by parents of all children attending the center (NAEYC 1991). There is only modest emphasis in the self-study process on staff stability or compensation (NAEYC 1998). Accreditation status is conferred for three years, at which time programs are required to undergo a modified self-study process to become reaccredited. (For a further review of the accreditation process, see Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997.)

NAEYC now accredits approximately 8,000 programs throughout the United States, and a similar number are engaged in self-study. In recent years, millions of public and private dollars have been targeted toward helping centers achieve NAEYC accreditation, and 18 states now provide differential reimbursement rates to NAEYC-accredited centers (Gormley and Lucas 2000). Ninety-five percent of child care centers operated by the United States Armed Forces, the largest employer-supported child care effort in the United States, are NAEYC-accredited (National Women’s Law Center 2000). As the number of NAEYC-accredited centers increases, consumer awareness of and reliance on such accreditation as an indicator of quality have also grown. When choosing a program for their children, more and more parents are asking about NAEYC accreditation status, thus rendering it an important marketing device (Bredenkamp and Glowacki 1996).

2.  $F(2,89)=9.18, p<0.001$ .
3. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of how we constructed the “background climate” variable.
4.  $t(58)=2.58, p<0.01$ .

5. Because several centers changed status between 1996 and 2000, our subsample is complex with respect to accreditation status. For example, 2 of the 18 centers accredited in 2000 were not accredited in 1996. Of the 25 nonaccredited centers in 2000, 3 had been accredited in 1996. Because we are interested in the question of sustaining quality in general, and the question of making lasting improvements in accredited programs in particular, our discussion moves between two cohorts of accredited centers: one based on accreditation status in 1996, and the other based on accreditation status in 2000. The group under discussion is indicated in the text.

Of the NAEYC-accredited programs rated high in quality in 1996, two-thirds sustained these ratings. Nearly half of our observed subsample of centers (42 percent) was accredited by NAEYC at the time of our third visit in 2000. Based on their accreditation status in 2000, three-fifths of nonaccredited programs, and slightly more than one-quarter of accredited programs, were rated as mediocre in 2000. Average overall ECERS scores did not change significantly for programs accredited in 1996 and 2000. In 2000, nearly 30 percent of the accredited centers were rated as mediocre in quality.

In 1996, accredited programs were rated higher in quality ( $M=5.22$ ) than non-accredited centers ( $M=4.17$ ), although 39 percent of the accredited programs ( $n=9$ ) received overall mediocre ECERS ratings shortly after becoming accredited in 1996. Seven of these programs were revisited in 2000, one was closed, and another was interviewed only. All seven of the NAEYC-accredited programs that were rated mediocre in quality in 1996 and were revisited continued to be rated as mediocre (below 5 on the ECERS) in 2000. Two of these programs were no longer accredited in 2000.

# 4

## **Turnover and the Quality of Child Care Services**

### **Perspectives of Teachers and Directors**

The teachers and directors interviewed for this study repeatedly drew our attention to the day-to-day impact of turnover and other staffing issues on their child care centers, and in this chapter, several who consented to in-depth interviews in 2002 voice their insights on the subject.

Chapter 2 documented instability among teaching staff and directors in many centers in our sample, describing the particular characteristics of centers that experience higher rates of turnover, including director instability, loss of highly trained teaching staff, and low wages. We also noted the changing profile of the teaching workforce, as new staff with less professional preparation replaced those who had left. Chapter 3 described how turnover contributes to centers' ability to achieve and sustain improvements in the quality of care. In our discussions with teachers and directors, all of these issues surfaced as day-to-day realities that shape their jobs and their decision making about whether or not to continue working in the child care field.

### **TURNOVER AS A CHALLENGE TO ACHIEVING AND MAINTAINING HIGH-QUALITY CARE**

People who work in child care centers describe turnover as “a time sponge,” “an energy drain,” or even “a plague.” Since the various classrooms within a center and the people who staff them are interdependent, the loss of a teacher in one classroom can also impact staffing in others. Nicole, a woman in her early thirties with a decade of experience in the early care and education field, currently works in an

NAEYC-accredited center that serves university faculty and staff. Although it has been rated high in quality, Nicole's center is not immune to turnover problems: between 1999 and 2000, a quarter of the teaching staff left their jobs. We asked her to describe what occurs in her center when a teacher leaves:

You start having teachers pulled from your classroom to go help out because this other classroom is short. My classroom is in that position now where we are down an afternoon teacher; we often have to borrow somebody to get us through the last part of the day. It's frustrating. You are trying to keep things moving and follow your regular schedule, but then somebody needs a teacher for two hours, and so that means you can't do small groups or you have to come inside and start lunch early. Even if the turnover is not in your own classroom, you have to be able to bend and compromise what you are doing to benefit the center as a whole. It's demoralizing, too, when people keep leaving, because you constantly get that sense of being left behind.

Dolores, 53, has been a teacher for almost two decades. She changed centers between our second and third visits (1996 and 2000), but has not escaped staffing problems. Her new center experienced a turnover rate of 50 percent in the previous year. When asked about the impact of turnover, she focused on how being short staffed leads to disruption in the children's routines:

Many times we had to take kids from the class without a teacher into our group. It's hard when you don't have the same kids every day, and it affected everybody there. It was hard to even take time off, because we were always short a teacher.

Judy, a teacher in her mid forties, works in a program that improved its quality between 1994 and 1996 but could not maintain it, partly due to turnover. Observed quality in the center was noticeably lower in 2000 than in 1996. In the previous year alone, 35 percent of the teaching staff had left. We asked Judy to talk about how the quality of her center had been affected by staff instability:

It got to the point where I didn't want to put up another sign that said somebody was leaving, because it got embarrassing. Every room had at least one person leave and some had two or three. It really surprised me that the parents stayed, because—and maybe it wasn't obvious to them—the quality of care was just awful.

There was a lack of professionalism, there wasn't conversation going on with the children, things were being smoothed over. Normally, if there were a conflict, we'd try and help the kids talk about it and talk it out. Instead we would just say, 'Give the toy to them.' The painting easel didn't get used for three weeks because no one could be bothered to put it out. It's messy and we need to stand there while children are painting.

Other teachers with whom we spoke noted that it became very difficult to set up properly for lunch and naptime, and that they avoided elaborate cooking and science projects. Perhaps most disturbingly, they found themselves, in one teacher's words, "spending less time talking with children because we were busy training new teachers," even when children became insecure in response to a teacher departure and needed more attention.

## **TURNOVER BEGETS TURNOVER**

Our findings indicated that skilled teaching staff were more likely to remain in centers where other skilled teaching staff and the director also stayed. Both Judy and Nicole spoke about the contagious nature of turnover, in which teacher or director departures beget more of the same. Judy reported, "A couple of teachers left because we all ended up doing extra hours above our regular shift, and they got fed up. It made a difference on morale." In Nicole's case, a very well-liked director had recently left the center:

We are very sad about this. It's a close-knit center, so it's hard to have our leader, our matriarch, taken away. We've already had two teachers leave. They were thinking about making changes anyway, and our director leaving was the push that they needed. We have a program coordinator who is now our acting director. In one sense, that helps keep the continuity, but it doesn't make up for the fact that we don't have somebody to turn to, to support us. And the acting director can no longer function as the coordinator, so that affects us. There is still a hole that needs to be filled.

Directors also spoke candidly about the ways in which staffing shortages affected their ability to do their jobs. They mentioned cover-

age problems arising from staff turnover and illness, which required them to be in the classroom and prevented them from attending to other administrative duties. They discussed how turnover often led them to hire teachers from their substitute list, so that when substitutes were needed because of staff illness, none were available.

Once a theater arts teacher, Martina immigrated to the United States 11 years ago from the former Soviet Union. When we met her in 1994, she was a teacher; by 2000, she had changed centers and become a director. She loves working with children and families, but has been ambivalent about her current position ever since she accepted the job more than two years ago:

Every week we have three or four teachers to replace because of illness, and we have no pool of reliable substitutes just to keep our ratios up; the assistant director fills in; I fill in; the parent services coordinator fills in. But it's tremendously stressful. And the quality of care for the children goes down. I spend about a quarter of my time in the classroom, covering for unfilled positions.

In addition to coverage problems, turnover can mean additional work to train and orient new staff, deterioration of staff working conditions and relationships, and ultimately, a decline in the quality of care provided. Comments on this subject included the following: "Two people end up doing one person's job because new staff or substitutes need to be shadowed." "There are more children per teacher, less personal time, more overtime." "We end up focusing on how to get through today rather than lesson planning."

## **A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED STAFF**

Concern about the lack of an available pool of qualified teacher replacements was another common theme in directors' and teachers' comments. Participants were asked about differences between the training and supervision needs of replacement and former staff.

Sofia has worked in the field of early care and education continuously for 12 years, most recently as a director. She described how, at previous workplaces, staffing problems constantly frustrated her attempts to maintain mandated teacher:child ratios, forcing her to com-

promise her own high standards for the quality of teaching staff. In her current job at an infant–toddler center, her ability to maintain those standards is a major factor in choosing to stay:

What happens in large centers is you need warm bodies, and that pushes you to make bad hires. I've had to put up with stuff because I was desperate for staff. I don't think I had one day when I was fully staffed. So I decided to stop that trend and I said, no, we will not be fully enrolled until I can find qualified people, and then we ended up having an opening in every classroom. We were operating at a loss, so eventually the auditor agreed with my assessment that if we were losing money, it wasn't working, and they decided to close that center. Now I'm at this center, which is smaller, and I have the luxury of covering myself if somebody leaves, for as long as six months if I have to. But without my current competent staff, I would think about leaving the field in a heartbeat.

Now working as a therapist, Corinne directed her family-owned child care center for many years. It closed during the course of the study, largely due to staffing problems. Although she raised salaries substantially, her center's pay scale remained too low to attract sufficiently qualified staff. She and her mother finally decided to call it quits:

You have to hire somebody that is less skilled; you have to meet your ratios. It is just a downward spiral. It's not good for the kids, it's not good for the staff, because [the new teachers'] skill level, their level of functioning, is lower. I would expect that the other adults can work around it, but it's not good for the kids.

Martina has also had to adapt to the changing characteristics of the teacher pool and its impact on her role in the child care center:

I am a perfectionist. I have very high standards for how I want the center to be: how it looks, how the teachers do their jobs, how we work with parents. But I've had to back up and be patient and bring people along in an understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. It means that all of us spend a lot of time training new people. I've had to compromise my standards of what I know is best for children. It's not that teachers are bad; they're inexperienced.

When we asked Martina whether the teachers who had left her center were generally better trained than the people who had replaced them, she underscored the scarcity of highly skilled teaching staff, anticipating the long-term negative consequences of the current situation:

Where are the young people, the talented people who will take over when the people who are at the director, assistant director, and head teacher level finally leave their positions?

## **THE ROLE OF WAGES**

Virtually everyone to whom we spoke believed that low wages were driving these staffing difficulties. In 2000, all current and former teaching staff and directors were asked, “If the President of the United States were to ask you what one thing the government could do to reduce staff turnover in child care programs, what would you recommend?” Better pay topped the list of suggestions made by staff in all positions. Recognizing that many families in their centers were unable to pay more for their children’s care and education, however, most teachers and directors believed that government subsidies were required in order to improve child care jobs and services.

When we asked Martina what she might have done to keep her most qualified staff, she spoke about the challenge, particularly in high-cost-of-living areas, of attracting well-qualified teachers to the child care field when there are better-paying opportunities to teach older children:

When young and talented people get their BAs, they leave to get better pay or move to a more affordable area. I talked to a preschool teacher at another site who has a friend who teaches kindergarten. She told me, ‘I have exactly the same education and the same responsibilities as my friend who teaches kindergarten, but I make \$17.00 per hour and she makes \$25.00.’

For well-educated and single teachers like Nicole, low pay poses painful choices. Although she has invested in a college degree and specialized early childhood education training, her days in a child care center are probably numbered:

I have lived this battle for the last five years. I struggle because I work two jobs, part-time at a bookstore as well as full-time at the center. I love my child care job. I have friends who have ‘better’ jobs than I have—they are doctors and lawyers and businesspeople—and some of them hate or are bored by their jobs. I feel very fortunate to have work that I really enjoy, but there is a reality aspect. I’m single, I’m not independently wealthy, I’m Afro-American, and if I want to prepare for my old age, I need to make more money. I need to do some things differently because I need to start thinking about my future. Every year when the end of the year approaches, I begin to question myself. Do I start sending out resumes? Am I really going to leave?

Dolores is middle-aged and married. Were it not for her husband’s pay and benefits, which enable her to continue working in child care, Dolores says that she would not have entered the field:

To be honest with you, I see these young girls starting out in the child care teaching field today, and I could almost say, ‘Do you realize what you’re doing? You’re spending a lot of time getting into a field that’s not going to offer you anything in the long term.’ And I really hate to say that, because teachers are needed. If I had been a single parent when I started, I definitely would have said, ‘No, I can’t do this. I have to go somewhere where I can make money and make sure I have medical coverage for my kids.’ That would have been my priority.

## SUMMARY

Pervasive instability among child care center staff is both a response to and a reflection of problems that result from limited resources—a state of affairs endemic to the child care industry. Even in this sample of high-quality programs, teachers and directors are leaving at a high rate, with serious consequences for the quality of services available to children and families.

As discussed in the second half of this monograph, the departure of trained teachers and directors from the field is more a reflection of dissatisfaction with low compensation and status, and the ensuing burdens on their family lives, than with the work of caring for young children,

which most find challenging and rewarding. Those who remain in child care, as well as those who have left, remain strikingly positive about the nature of the work itself, suggesting that investments in improving the pay and working conditions of child care staff would yield high returns. With funding to support better pay and working conditions, child care programs could more easily recruit and retain the qualified, committed employees who are the cornerstone of high-quality services for young children.

## **Part II**

# **The Experience of Child Care Employment**



# 5

## **Who Leaves? Who Stays? Who Joins?**

### **Changing Characteristics of the Child Care Workforce**

While many people, including policymakers, practitioners, and parents, lament the “revolving door” in child care employment, there has been limited research to date that could inform solutions to this pressing social problem. Thus far, we know little about whether child care center staff who leave their jobs also leave the child care field, and about how they differ from those who remain on the job or those who replace them.

Part I of this monograph identified the changing professional characteristics of the teaching and administrative workforce in the child care centers in our sample, and the program characteristics associated with staff retention and turnover. Part II focuses on teaching staff and directors as individuals, drawing upon a subgroup of the sample centers’ workforce whom we interviewed in 1996 and 2000. As described in the Appendix, we collected information about professional background, family structure, and demographic characteristics, and solicited opinions about job-related issues through one-on-one interviews with directors and teaching staff employed at the centers in 1996 and 2000, as well as with others who had been employed in 1996 but had left by 2000.

These data offer a unique long-term view of a sizeable group of teaching and administrative staff. We were able to explore individual differences among teaching and administrative staff who stayed (68 teaching staff and 45 directors) and those who left (81 teaching staff and 26 directors), and to compare teaching and administrative staff in 1996 with those who were new to the centers in 2000 (75 teaching staff and 30 directors) along several personal and professional dimensions

(see Table 5.1). We were also able to assess the extent to which staff who left their 1996 jobs remained in the child care field, and to look more closely at issues of job satisfaction and psychological and social well-being among teaching staff and directors employed at the 43 centers we visited in 2000. This examination includes 117 teaching staff (75 who joined the study in 2000 and 42 interviewed in 1996) who remained as teaching staff in their centers in 2000. (Measures used for these assessments are described in the appendix.) It is important to remember that our sample includes many centers that were accredited and/or rated high in quality. Our findings, therefore, may not be representative of teaching and administrative staff in other communities or among centers representing a greater range in quality.

More than a decade has passed since the National Child Care Staffing Study conducted a follow-up interview with teaching staff employed at 225 child care centers in five cities (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). The follow-up calls in that study occurred six months after an initial interview, and revealed that teaching staff who had left their centers had earned lower wages, had shorter tenure in the field of child care, and had completed less specialized child-related training than teaching staff who remained on the job. Staff who had left exhibited less positive interactions with children and often worked in

**Table 5.1 Number of Current and Former Teaching and Administrative Staff Interviewed in 2000**

	Employed at the centers in 1996, no longer working at centers in 2000. Interviewed by phone in 2000.	Employed at the centers in 1996, and continuing to work at the centers in 2000. Interviewed in person or by phone in 2000.	New to the centers since 1996. Interviewed in person in 2002.	Total
Teaching staff	81	68 <sup>a</sup>	75	224
Directors	26	45	30	101

<sup>a</sup> In 2000, observations and interviews took place at only 43 of the original centers that participated in 1996 ( $n=75$ ). Interviews only were conducted at the remaining centers ( $n=32$ ). Sixty-eight staff seen in 1996 were also seen in 2000. Of these 68 staff members, 26 were employed at the interviewed-only centers and 42 were employed at the observed centers, as described in the appendix.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

lower-quality programs. Their replacements also had completed less formal education and child-related training, and were rated as less sensitive in their interactions with children than those who remained at the sample centers. A quarter of the teaching staff who had left their jobs were found to no longer work in the early childhood field. Of those who had left their jobs but remained in child care teaching, nearly three-quarters had found better-paying child care jobs. Regrettably, the researchers were unable to assess these trends for a more extended period; subsequent follow-ups to that study collected information only about center characteristics, rather than data about individual teaching staff or directors (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1993, 1998).

The current study stands as the only longitudinal study of center teaching staff or directors in the years since the first National Child Care Staffing Study follow-up, and is the first assessment of the differences in demographic characteristics between newly employed directors and those whom they replaced.

## **WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS**

### **Teaching Staff**

#### **Professional preparation and demographic characteristics**

Characteristics were divided across similarly sized groups of staff who no longer worked in their 1996 centers (36 percent), those who continued to work at their 1996 centers (30 percent), and those new to the centers in the sample since 1996 (34 percent). (See Table 5.1.) Among those working at centers in 2000, 69 percent were teachers, 20 percent were assistant teachers, and 11 percent were teacher-directors. Among those no longer working at their centers, 72 percent had been teachers, 18 percent had been assistant teachers, and 10 percent had been teacher-directors when they were interviewed in 1996.

Nearly all of the current and former teaching staff interviewed in 2000 were women (97 percent). Most were in their forties, with an average age of 42 years ( $SD=11.01$ ,  $n=223$ ; see Table 5.2). Two-thirds (66 percent) were Caucasian. Between one-quarter and one-third reported that they spoke a language in addition to English fluently and/

**Table 5.2 Demographic Characteristics of Teaching Staff: Leavers, Stayers, and Newcomers**

	Leavers <sup>a</sup>	Stayers <sup>b</sup>	Newcomers <sup>c</sup>
Female (%)	97	93	99
Caucasian (%)	71	68	57
Average age in 2000	42	47	38
Living with partner or married in 2000 (%)	70	71	56
Median annual household income range (\$)	50,000–59,999	50,000–59,999	30,000–39,999
Meeting self-sufficiency income for family size (%)	71	68	NA
Holding second job in 1996 (%)	24	22	NA
Holding second job in 2000 (%)	24	24	21
Previous or current recipient of public assistance (%)	17	24	23
Communicates in additional language besides English (%)	19	24	NA
Fluent in additional language besides English (%)	24	41	NA
Speaks to children in language other than English (%)	NA	33	27
Speaks to parents in language other than English (%)	NA	12	28

<sup>a</sup> 1996 observed teaching staff, no longer at the center in 2000.

<sup>b</sup> 1996 observed teaching staff, currently at phoned or observed centers in 2000.

<sup>c</sup> Teaching staff who joined observed centers after the 1996 visit.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

or used it to communicate with parents of children in their classrooms. Two-thirds were married or living with a partner (66 percent). Approximately 53 percent were parents with one child on average, typically of school age or older. Teaching staff median household incomes ranged from \$50,000 to \$59,999 per year. Nearly a quarter (23 percent in 1996 and 22 percent in 2000) held a second job to supplement their child care income. Twenty-one percent of teaching staff had a history of receiving public support, such as subsidized child care, food stamps, or AFDC or TANF payments.

In part because we tended to interview and observe lead teachers in the classrooms, the teaching staff in this subsample were somewhat better educated than the full complement of teaching staff in their cen-

ters. Nearly half had completed a bachelor's degree, and over half (58 percent) had participated in a supervised practicum experience (student teaching) as part of their formal training. In contrast, the most recent national data, which is nearly a decade old, found that only a quarter of teaching staff had obtained a bachelor's degree (Helburn 1995). On average, teaching staff had been employed at their current jobs for 4.5 years ( $SD=4.45$ ,  $n=145$ ), and in the field for 10 years ( $SD=5.93$ ,  $n=145$ ), as of 1996.

### **Job satisfaction and psychological and social well-being**

As described in the Appendix, we used written self-report measures to assess staff perceptions of job rewards and concerns (Marshall and Barnett 1992) and the work environment (Bloom 1996a), as well as depressive symptoms (Radloff 1977), self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach 1989), social support (Sarason et al. 1983), and stress (Linn 1985). Teaching staff assessments of the positive and negative aspects of their work environments varied with respect to economic and parental status. We used independent group *t*-tests to examine relations between demographic and psychological measures. Teaching staff who lived in households that did not meet the economic self-sufficiency standard for their community (Pearce 2000) reported more job concerns ( $M=2.03$ ,  $SD=0.64$ ,  $n=25$ ) than teachers who lived in households that did ( $M=1.72$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ,  $n=78$ ).<sup>1</sup> Teachers whose own children were five years old or younger also reported fewer job rewards ( $M=2.76$ ,  $SD=0.74$ ,  $n=17$ ) than did teachers whose own children were older ( $M=3.19$ ,  $SD=0.54$ ,  $n=39$ ).<sup>2</sup>

Family structure and economic well-being also influenced staff reports of perceived stress (Linn 1985). As a group, teaching staff reported moderate levels of stress. Those who were single reported higher levels of overall, or "global," stress ( $M=5.2$ ,  $SD=2.53$ ,  $n=38$ ) than those who were married or living with a partner ( $M=3.8$ ,  $SD=2.43$ ,  $n=66$ ).<sup>3</sup> Teaching staff who lived in households not meeting economic self-sufficiency reported higher levels of global stress ( $M=5.75$ ,  $SD=2.45$ ,  $n=24$ ) than those who lived in more economically secure situations ( $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=2.43$ ,  $n=77$ ).<sup>4</sup>

On a self-report measure of depressive symptoms (Radloff 1977), a score at or above a cutoff of 16 indicates symptoms consistent with diagnostic criteria for depression (scores range from 0 to 60). The

mean score for teaching staff was 12.56 (SD=8.52,  $n=95$ ), and for directors this score was 11.33 (SD=8.03  $n=31$ ). Thirty-three percent of teaching staff and 29 percent of directors reported 16 or more depressive symptoms. Nearly a third of teaching staff (31 percent) reported a rate of depressive symptoms consistent with the diagnostic criteria for depression. This rate is one-and-a-half times greater than the rate of clinical depression found in the general population (Comstock and Helsing 1975), and is consistent with yearly prevalence rates of depressive symptoms of 6 to 30 percent reported in other community studies of women and depression (Research Forum on Children, Families and the New Federalism 2001). It is also consistent with non-experimental studies of depressive symptoms in low-income populations, especially among mothers with young children (Ahluwalia et al. 2001). As is true for the greater population, low income was correlated with higher rates of depression among these child care teaching staff. We found that teaching staff who earned less ( $M=\$12.70$  per hour,  $SD=3.66$ ,  $n=71$ ) were more likely to meet the criteria for depression than teaching staff who earned more ( $M=\$14.83$  per hour,  $SD=5.31$ ,  $n=34$ ).<sup>5</sup>

Despite the relatively large number reporting symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of depression, participants reported high levels of self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965; Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach 1989). There were no differences among subgroups of staff with respect to self-esteem, suggesting that those who work with young children generally feel good about their skills, feel useful, and are proud of their accomplishments.

Social support has been found to moderate the effects of negative life events by enhancing the ability to cope with stress, and has been linked to physical and emotional well-being and better work performance (Sarason et al. 1983; Sarason et al. 1996). Teaching staff reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of support they received from family members and from other social relationships available to them outside of work.

## **Directors**

As a group, directors had achieved even higher levels of education than teaching staff; three-quarters had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The directors were also very well trained in early childhood

education. Approximately half (49 percent) had post-baccalaureate coursework or degrees in early childhood education. On average, directors had worked at their centers slightly more than 8 years ( $SD=7.08$ ,  $n=69$ ), and had been employed in the field of early care and education for approximately 18 years ( $SD=7.87$ ,  $n=70$ ). More than 90 percent had previously worked as child care teachers for an average of more than 10 years.

Nearly all of the directors employed in 2000 were women (92 percent), and were in their forties, with an average age of 47. The vast majority (83 percent) were Caucasian. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) were married or living with a partner; their median household income ranged between \$65,000 and \$85,000 per year. Compared to teaching staff, directors were more likely to be Caucasian, older, and living in more affluent households. Chi-square analyses found that directors working at the centers in 2000 (12 percent) were less likely to hold a second job than their teaching staff (24 percent).<sup>6</sup>

There was little variation among directors with respect to job satisfaction, stress, or psychological and social well-being. We used independent group *t*-tests to compare teaching staff and directors on these measures. Directors in our sample reported levels of stress, depressive symptoms, and self-esteem similar to those of their teaching staff. Teachers, however, reported having significantly fewer support opportunities available to them than did directors.<sup>7</sup> Directors also reported greater job rewards<sup>8</sup> and assessed their workplaces to be healthier organizations, as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Survey (Bloom 1996a)<sup>9</sup> than did teaching staff.

## Summary

This subsample of teaching staff was composed predominantly of women in their mid- to late-childbearing years, from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who were moderately or well educated. Many were parents, typically of school-age children. Most lived in families with moderate incomes; a sizeable group, however, struggled to meet their families' basic economic needs, and reported higher levels of stress, a greater number of job concerns, and more depressive symptoms than the general population. Those with young children of their own also reported more concerns about their jobs. Compared to

teaching staff, directors tended to be older and more financially secure, and assessed their work environments more positively than teachers did. Overall, both teaching and administrative staff saw themselves as well-supported in their personal relationships, and felt good about their contribution to their communities. Of note, however, was the sizeable number of both administrative and teaching staff who reported high levels of depressive symptoms.

## **PROFESSIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LEAVERS AND STAYERS**

### **Teaching Staff**

We used independent group *t*-tests and chi-square analyses to explore differences between staff who left and those who remained at their centers between 1996 and 2000. Along both professional and demographic dimensions, we found few differences among teachers who left or stayed. The primary exception was related to compensation levels. As documented in Chapter 2, those who left their jobs earned less on average than those who stayed, across all educational levels and job titles.

Teachers who remained at centers were remarkably similar to teachers who had left with respect to professional preparation and affiliation, and whether or not they had completed a practicum in early childhood education. Like the teaching staff in the National Child Care Staffing Study, teaching staff in this study who left their jobs were, as a group, less experienced than those who remained.<sup>10</sup> As of 1996, those who left had worked in the field for an average of 8.82 years ( $SD=5.94$ ,  $n=77$ ) and at their centers for 3.44 years ( $SD=3.73$ ,  $n=77$ ), compared to an average of 11.5 years ( $SD=5.63$ ,  $n=68$ ) in the field and 5.77 years ( $SD=4.89$ ,  $n=68$ ) at their centers for those who stayed.

Demographically, teaching staff who stayed on the job and those who left were remarkably similar (see Table 5.2). With respect to gender, ethnicity, cohabitation status, parental status, and household income, there were no differences between these two groups of teaching staff. Teaching staff who left their jobs were younger, on average

( $M=42$  years old,  $SD=11.43$ ,  $n=79$ ), than those who stayed ( $M=47$  years old,  $SD=8.35$ ,  $n=68$ ),<sup>11</sup> which may in part account for why their tenure in the field was shorter and why their earnings were lower.

## **Directors**

We used independent group *t*-tests and chi-square analyses to examine differences among directors who left and those that stayed at their centers between 1996 and 2000. With the exception of earnings from their jobs, directors who left or remained at their centers were remarkably similar to one another with respect to education levels, professional preparation, affiliation with a professional organization, and tenure in the field and at their current center. There were no significant differences between directors who left and those who stayed with respect to such demographic characteristics as age, gender, cohabitation status, median household income, or history of receiving public support. Directors who left their programs, however, were more likely to be people of color than those who remained.<sup>12</sup> Thirty-three percent of directors who left their programs, compared with 7 percent of directors who remained, were people of color.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWCOMERS**

### **Teaching Staff**

Among the full complement of teaching staff described in Chapter 2, those who were new to their centers had completed less formal education and training than those who had left their jobs or had remained at their centers. We used independent group *t*-tests and chi-square analyses to examine differences among newcomers and the staff they replaced on a variety of dimensions. Among the subsample interviewed in 2000, those who were new to their centers did not differ with respect to educational background from those who had been on the job, in part because the subsample was better educated overall than the full complement of staff at the centers. As described below, however, newcomers in the subsample differed from those they replaced along several demographic dimensions.

As might be expected, teaching staff hired after 1996 were younger (38 versus 42 years old on average; new staff:  $SD=11.35$ ,  $n=74$ ; staff who left:  $SD=11.43$ ,  $n=79$ )<sup>13</sup> and marginally less likely to be married or living with a partner than those they had replaced ( $p=0.06$ ; see Table 5.2).

New teachers lived in households with significantly lower annual earnings than their predecessors. The median household income for new teachers was \$30,000–\$39,000 per year, compared to \$50,000–\$59,000 per year for those who left.<sup>14</sup> In 2000, 87 percent of teachers who had been on the job since 1996 lived in households that met or exceeded the self-sufficiency wage for a family the same size in their county. Significantly fewer new teachers (68 percent) met this standard.<sup>15</sup> The lower household incomes of new staff may be a reflection of their younger age. Nonetheless, their lower incomes heighten the challenges of living solely on a child care income, and are not likely to promote their longevity at their jobs or in the child care field. With respect to history of receiving public assistance or whether they currently held a second job, new teachers did not differ from those they replaced or from their colleagues who continued to work at the centers. Logistic regression with 2000 status (stayers, leavers, and newcomers) as the dependent variable and demographic data as the independent variables (age, household income, ethnicity, gender, marital status) revealed that none of these demographic variables as a group could distinguish who left from who was new to the center.

## Directors

The professional and demographic profiles of directors who recently entered their programs was remarkably similar to those who had left or had remained on the job. Replacement directors were more likely to be people of color.<sup>16</sup> Thirty-three percent of new directors, compared with 7 percent of directors that remained at the centers, were people of color. As might be expected, new directors were significantly younger ( $M=42$ ,  $SD=10.13$ ,  $n=29$ ) than former directors ( $M=49$ ,  $SD=10.21$ ,  $n=44$ ).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the emerging workforce of teaching and administrative staff is younger, and a sizeable number of new teaching staff are less edu-

cated, than their predecessors, and they are more economically vulnerable, as a group.

## WHERE DO DIRECTORS AND TEACHERS GO WHEN THEY LEAVE?

When teaching staff left their centers, only 42 percent went to work in other child care centers. An additional 12 percent were still working in settings associated with young children—either as elementary school teachers, family child care providers, or nannies—when we contacted them in 2000, as shown in Table 5.3. Although more teaching staff left the child care field in this study than in the National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS) (49 percent versus 25 percent), it is important to remember that the NCCSS tracked teaching staff for only six months, whereas this study contacted teachers after four years. Many former teachers had made more than one job change in the intervening period, but we do not know whether some switched to other jobs in child care before leaving the field.

**Table 5.3 Where Do Teachers Go?**

Current status	Percent
Teacher at different child care center	42.0
Non-child-related work	21.0
Not currently employed, at home with children	15.0
Elementary school teacher	7.0
Family child care provider	4.0
Full-time student	4.0
Other child care agency, such as resource and referral	2.5
Retired	2.5
Nanny	1.0
Director at a different child care center	1.0

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

Many child care programs throughout California lament the loss of teaching staff to elementary school jobs. Seven percent of the former

teaching staff we contacted were currently working in this capacity, but we do not know whether the former teachers we could not locate had made different career choices than those we were able to reach. Given the high proportion of former teachers with bachelor's degrees, it is quite possible that some had sought employment in elementary schools. Current directors reported that the new state policy to reduce class sizes in elementary schools had contributed to many teachers leaving their programs between 1999 and 2000 for public school K-3 teaching jobs.

Although former teaching staff cited insufficient wages as the main reason for their own decision to leave, they also identified other attractive features of their new jobs in addition to higher pay. Those working in elementary schools found the autonomy and shorter hours appealing. Teachers no longer in the child care field were working in a wide variety of occupations, including the high-tech industry, retail, and other human services. Several had started their own businesses. Some wanted to be their own boss. Others sought better pay and benefits. Still others had made their choices because of family considerations or because they "fell into a good situation." We used independent group *t*-tests to explore differences between teaching staff who left the field for jobs outside the child care field and to those who had accepted new child care jobs. On average, those working in non-child care-related industries earned significantly higher wages ( $M=\$18.40$  per hour;  $SD=8.71$ ,  $n=22$ ) than those who had accepted new child care jobs ( $M=14.24$  per hour,  $SD=4.72$ ,  $n=38$ ).<sup>18</sup>

Almost a third of those who had left to work in a different child care center did so because their original center had closed. Others said they wouldn't have made the change if they had been paid more, or if they had received more support from the administration in the form of a promotion, more autonomy, or more input into decision-making at their previous center. On average, these teachers were not earning more than their colleagues who had remained at the centers. Only those who left the field were earning significantly more per hour.

Teachers continuing to work in child care were asked whether they planned to remain in child care, and why or why not. Of those working at observed centers, 60 percent planned to remain. When asked why, they most frequently mentioned the children and their enjoyment of and belief in the work. Only two teachers said they would stay because

they didn't feel they had other options. Those planning to leave cited a need for more money, desire for a change, or professional advancement, retirement, or family issues, among other reasons. Among those with college degrees, several mentioned the desire to become an elementary school teacher.

We also examined whether a job promotion may have accounted for the high percentage of staff who left their current positions. Unfortunately, in the case of assistant teachers, extremely high turnover prevented us from looking at this question very closely: of 192 assistants employed in centers in our 1996 sample, 171 had left by our visit in 2000 (89 percent), 14 remained as assistant teachers, and 7 had changed their job titles (6 to become teachers, and 1 to become a director). There were no differences in educational attainment between those who remained as assistant teachers and those who were promoted. There were also no differences in educational attainment between those who were promoted and those who were new to their centers in 2000.

Thirty-nine percent of directors who left their 1996 jobs had accepted positions as directors or assistant directors at different programs, and 11 percent were employed in child care agencies such as resource and referral or as teachers in other centers. The remainder were either retired or deceased (18 percent), staying at home with children (18 percent), or employed in non-child care-related fields (14 percent). Retirement among these child care directors, like that of K-12 teachers, is not the primary cause for attrition of the workforce. Estimates place attrition due to retirement among K-12 teachers at approximately one-third of all job changes, compared to less than one-fifth of these administrative staff (Ingersoll 2001).

## **SUMMARY**

In 2002, nearly \$100 million in public funds were spent on professional development opportunities for California child care teaching and administrative staff (California Children and Families Commission 2003; California Department of Education 2003). Despite such levels of investment, however, many teachers are leaving child care employ-

ment for better-paying jobs, and only half of the teaching staff in this study who had left their jobs continued to work in settings with young children. Equally (if not more) troubling is the fact that their replacements were not as well educated or trained for this work. New staff were also more economically vulnerable, which could exacerbate the difficulty of living on low wages.

Child care staffing problems are all but confined to teaching staff. Directors are leaving their jobs and the child care field at a disturbing rate as well, at least in part because of low wages and runaway turnover among staff. While child care centers appear to be attracting well-qualified replacements for directors who leave, many well-qualified administrators are also leaving the field of early childhood education.

Our findings also raise concerns about the high levels of depressive symptoms reported among child care teaching and administrative staff. It is generally agreed that psychological depression interferes with optimal functioning, both within the workplace and within the family. Adults who suffer from major depression or exhibit depressive symptoms often have difficulty in the labor market, although in some instances employment can ameliorate these conditions. Children of mothers who are depressed are at greater risk for poor developmental outcomes than children whose mothers do not suffer from depression (Ahluwalia et al. 2001). Further research is needed to understand whether—and how—depression among child care workers affects the children in their care and/or their overall job performance.

The fact that we found no differences in depressive symptoms among staff who live in families meeting self-sufficiency and those living in poorer households, but did find differences related to wages from child care employment, suggests that low earnings from their jobs may undermine well-being even for people who live in middle- or higher-income families. As discussed in the next chapter, this may be a function of the impact of low wages and other aspects of child care employment on family relationships.

In Chapter 6, we explore the ways in which teachers and directors balance the demands and conditions of their jobs with the economic and emotional needs of their families, particularly as these relate to their decisions to leave or stay in the child care field.

## Notes

1.  $t(101)=2.19, p<0.05$ .
2.  $t(54)=2.46, p<0.05$ .
3.  $t(89)=3.23, p<0.01$ .
4.  $t(99)=3.21, p<0.01$ .
5.  $t(103)=2.11, p<0.05$ .
6.  $\chi^2(1)=3.79, p<0.05$ .
7.  $t(134)=-2.39, p<0.05$ .
8.  $t(135)=-3.16, p<0.05$ .
9.  $t(114)=-4.12, p<0.001$ .
10. Teaching staff in this study who left their jobs had, as a group, less tenure (years) in the child care field ( $t(143)=2.78, p<0.01$ ) and less tenure (years) at their centers ( $t(124)=3.19, p<0.01$ ) than teaching staff still employed at their centers in 2000.
11.  $t(110)=2.71, p<0.01$ .
12.  $\chi^2(1)=5.68, p<0.05$ .
13.  $t(153)=-2.05, p<0.05$ .
14.  $t(147)=-2.85, p<0.01$ .
15.  $\chi^2(1)=5.47, p<0.05$ .
16.  $\chi^2(1)=8.93, p<0.01$ .
17.  $t(71)=2.88, p<0.01$ .
18.  $t(28)=-2.07, p<0.05$ .



## 6

# Work and Family Issues as Factors in Career Decisions

Child care workers provide crucial support to parents of young children, many of whom are among the working poor or are struggling to become self-sufficient. Seldom do we consider that child care teachers and directors are often working parents themselves, many with their own tenuous hold on self-sufficiency. Like other women and men in the labor force, they struggle to balance many competing personal and professional demands.

In this chapter, the reflections of individual teachers and directors provide insight into their varying decisions about whether or not to continue working in child care, and the ways in which they have coped with the often competing demands of job and family. We draw upon interviews conducted in 2000, as well as in-depth interviews conducted in 2002 with a small group of staff who shared their personal experiences in greater detail.

A growing literature is studying the links between work and family life (Lambert 1990; Barnett 1998). Much of it focuses on the effects of work life on family functioning, with less attention to the effects of family life on work, or more importantly, the interrelatedness of these spheres (Barnett and Hyde 2001). Our sketches of the personal and professional lives of child care teachers and directors in this and the following chapter suggest the bidirectional nature of family and professional concerns, as individuals decide whether or not to continue working with young children.

### **PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL CAREER DECISIONS**

In 2000, we asked all teaching staff who were no longer at their 1996 centers why they had left their jobs. Most commonly, they said that they had left for better pay and benefits. The following comments

were typical: “Health benefits were promised when I was hired; I left a year later without them.” “Teachers leave because they aren’t paid enough. That’s why I left, too. My current job is not as emotionally or psychologically satisfying as teaching, but it is satisfying enough and the money is much better.”

Some teachers mentioned leaving because of poor work relationships: “The director refused to fire someone who should have been fired, so I left.” “The new company that took over didn’t include teachers in the decision-making process.” Many reported that the stress over the departures of coworkers and directors contributed to their decisions to leave: “We went through four directors. It was too much.” “I was extremely stressed. Often new teachers were immature, had serious problems, or had no early childhood training. It was not easy to get along with them.”

Directors left their jobs for a variety of reasons, many of which echoed those of teaching staff. As might be expected, given the high levels of turnover and the shortage of trained staff, the challenges of running a program under these circumstances played a part in directors’ decisions to step down, and perhaps in their decisions to leave the field altogether:

The morale of the staff went down because there were more untrained teachers, and that resulted in conflict between those with more and less training. I had no substitutes to call on, and so I could never take time off. I routinely worked 12 hours a day! I didn’t feel like I was doing a good job.

For a few, the desire to work directly with children, rather than as an administrator, was something that could not really be changed: “I just missed being with kids.”

We identified a self-perpetuating cycle in child care centers: those that paid lower salaries had higher turnover, and staff who experienced more turnover at their centers were more likely to leave their jobs. Yet we did not identify a threshold of instability that triggered turnover, which led us to explore other dynamics in addition to pay that could have contributed to staff decisions to leave their jobs. In Chapter 2, we reported workplace characteristics (pay, high turnover among well-trained staff, and director instability) that differentiated teaching staff who stayed from those who left. Our analyses for testing the personal,

professional, or demographic characteristics that might discriminate between teaching staff who left and those who stayed did not yield any significant results.

During our interviews in 2000 and 2002, however, staff repeatedly called our attention to the complex balance between work and family needs, suggesting that individuals reach a breaking point wherein the sacrifices required for working in a child care center become too great. Some had changed jobs several times or had left the field altogether; some stayed for a longer time, but finally left because the lack of career mobility became an issue. By contrast, a few had made this profession work for them and their families despite the odds, and we wanted to know why.

Consider Teresa and Jessica, two women in their twenties who, like others who left child care teaching jobs, were younger than the average teacher in the centers we studied. Although people often think that working in a child care center is a “natural” job for mothers of young children, both Teresa and Jessica reevaluated their commitments to child care teaching as they settled into the responsibilities of parenthood. Teresa, the divorced parent of a four-year-old daughter, began her child care career 10 years earlier, volunteering in a campus child care center when she started college. She later took a part-time paid position at the center and discovered that she was interested in pursuing early childhood education as a career. After eight years in the campus center and progressing to a lead teacher position, however, she realized that she would have no opportunity anytime soon for an increase in responsibility, authority, or pay in that setting. Teresa regretted having to leave such a collegial environment: “I think that is one of the reasons I stayed there so long, because of the motivation I had from the director; she encouraged us to really be creative.”

Jessica began babysitting when she was 10, and took her first paid child care position while still in high school. She characterized herself as always having had an affinity for children. After graduation, she took early childhood education classes in the evening and continued to work in child care centers for the next seven years. She then decided to return to school, and during the past succeeding years got married and gave birth to her first child. Until recently, she and her partner were living with Jessica’s parents to make ends meet. “The pay was fine for me when I was a teenager, but having to support a family or pay rent in this

area, there's no way; I couldn't do it. Just a couple of weeks ago, I talked to the director at my old center, who was a co-teacher when I worked there, and she asked, 'Jessica, do you want to work here again?' And I said, 'Well, what's the most you could pay?' It just wasn't enough, which was too bad. That's the only thing that kept me from going back."

Both Teresa and Jessica, like many who leave center teaching, managed to secure new positions that utilized their experience in child care. Teresa went to work in a county agency providing child care information and referrals to families, a role in which she feels her effectiveness is greatly enhanced by her teaching background. Jessica decided initially to go to school full time, and became a nanny because it allowed her greater scheduling flexibility while she completed her degree. Now she is working as a nanny for mothers with newborns because it offers new challenges, pays much better, and enables her to care more easily for her own child.

Molly is in her late thirties, nearly 10 years older than Teresa and Jessica. She left child care teaching because it conflicted with her family's needs. After college, she worked as an escrow officer for seven years until she became alienated from the business climate and the personal pressures of the job. In her late twenties, she decided to take child development classes at a local community college with the goal of preparing to raise the children she and her husband planned to have. Instead, she discovered the profession of early childhood education, which she found to be intellectually stimulating and socially important. She worked as a teacher on a full-time or part-time basis at various centers over eight years, until the birth of her second child. At that point, parenting and teaching demanded more energy than she had, and the low pay was causing stress in her relationship with her husband, partly because it could no longer cover child care costs for their own two children. She left the field with reluctance, hoping that her family situation would allow her to return someday:

All my salary went to child care bills. I can't tell you how many arguments my husband and I have had over how little I was paid, and how wealthy the families were whose children I was taking care of. [In his mind,] I was subsidizing these families who make five times as much as we make together . . . It really strained our relationship. He felt frustrated and resentful. He resented the night

meetings and the planning. I found I could not ask him, in good faith, to do child care for me while I did preparation for class or prepared my presentation for parent night. Also, I got phone calls [at home] if people had questions, and I had Saturday meetings. Another reason why I chose not to work in child care is the sick policy. When I was sick or my children were sick, there were no substitutes available. This wasn't like, 'Somebody is going to miss getting their teeth cleaned because there isn't a hygienist around.' No, they physically need my body there.

Two of the teachers with whom we spoke in depth in 2002, and who had remained at their centers, showed how some teachers balance the tensions between home and family life, often by enlisting the support of other family members to facilitate their careers. Patty, in her early thirties, was the mother of a 16-month-old son. She had known since her junior year of high school, when she participated in a child care practicum, that she wanted a career working with children. She majored in social sciences in college, with the intention of getting her credentials to teach kindergarten. Immediately after graduation, however, she accepted a teaching assignment with three- and four-year-olds and liked it so much that she never went back for certification. She worked in private and public child care centers over the next nine years, some poorly run and incompatible with her teaching philosophy, and others that supported her professional growth. Five years ago, she accepted an afternoon position in a state-funded child development center operated by the local school district, to get a "foot in the door" for a job with better wages and benefits. As soon as she could, she applied for a pre-kindergarten teaching position with the school district, which pays the highest early childhood wages in her community, nearly comparable with K-12 teaching. Her son was cared for alternately by her parents, her sister, and her husband during the week, and thus she didn't face the high child care bills that challenged Molly and Teresa. She was very satisfied with her work, pay, and benefits, and expected to be doing this work for the foreseeable future.

When her third child began preschool, Shirley had been out of the workforce for nearly nine years, and family finances dictated that she begin to bring in a small income. She asked the preschool director if she could help out in the classroom, thinking that she could use the experience as a stepping stone back into the workforce. She discovered

that the skills she had developed in parenting were good preparation for teaching young children, and that the work was interesting and rewarding in ways she hadn't imagined. After a year of assisting in the classroom, she went back to school to study early childhood education. Having worked at the same center for 10 years, Shirley was now a veteran, mentoring newer teachers and providing continuity of care during periods of staff turnover. Although her husband told her she no longer needed to work, he accepted that Shirley would remain in early childhood education because of the professional satisfaction the work offered. Because her income was not the mainstay of her family's budget, the tensions she faced between work and family had less to do with economics, and more with managing stress and the competing demands for her time and attention:

What really got to my husband at first was all the work and the stress that I was going through, with so many different teachers coming and going. I was taking on the entire program and making sure it was consistent no matter who was in with me, and taking work home with me, and he didn't think it was necessary; it was competing with 'his' time.

Although they had remained at their centers between 1996 and 2000, two other women we spoke with at length in 2002 revealed the tenuous nature of their attachment to their jobs. Currently in her mid-fifties, Barbara first discovered her passion for working with children right after graduation from high school, when she was assigned to work in a child care center on an Israeli kibbutz. An experienced teacher noticed Barbara's talent for working with young children and recommended that she consider early childhood teaching as a career. Although she periodically took time out over the next 30 years to work in the entertainment industry and children's theater, to travel, and to raise her daughter, she was always drawn back to teaching. She has worked in both private and public centers with a range of philosophies, with poor and wealthy children, and with competent and incompetent administrators. What kept her in the field, in spite of low wages and benefits, was the challenge of helping young children grow and develop into capable, caring people. But her recent divorce underscored the economic strains inherent in her decision to work with children and its implications for her relationship with her own child:

At this time in my life I'm a single parent. My daughter is 12. Trying to survive in this very high-priced community, on a preschool teacher's wage, is hard . . . and I work full time, and make a pretty good salary for this industry. I know I could be making it better some other way. My parents had to help me with the downpayment on this place when I split with my husband. It was the only way we could stay in a two-bedroom. Thus far, we're surviving, but it's only been a year. I'd like a little more [money], but that's what I've got and I'm okay with it. But it's a large issue [between] me and my daughter. There's a lot of animosity and tension about how little money we have.

While parents of very young children seemed to have a difficult time remaining in the child care field (often because of their own child care costs), parents of older children, such as Barbara, helped us to see the competing emotional and energy demands of child care employment and family life. Martina, 45, a teacher in 1996 who became the director of a new center, also raised these issues:

This is the biggest challenge in my life, how to share myself equally between my job and my family. I have two children and a husband and I never have time for myself. All my life that I've been teaching, I have guilt in front of my own children and my husband, that I give so much of myself to other people's children while I am at school. A lot of days when I get home, I am tired and drained, and I just want peace and quiet. But my grown-up boy still waits for me, and my husband wants to talk, too. I've done so much talking to so many people throughout the day that I don't want to talk any more. My family has always supported what I've been doing; my husband used to teach, back in my country, so he helps. My husband has spent a lot of time, much more than myself, with our children. I have two really good children; they saw a positive example of their mother working, always doing the right things. My boys are 18 and 19 now, and I am still asking, 'What about me? What about when to find time [for] what I like to do?'

When we spoke to center director Regina in 2002, a woman in her late twenties without children who lives with a partner, she had just made a major career decision, in part to ease tensions in her personal and professional life. She had given notice at her center, a privately owned program licensed for 66 children, because paperwork and other

administrative tasks left her no time to spend with teachers and children, or with her partner at home. She had accepted a position as a director of a larger but better-funded center licensed for 136 children, hoping that it would be easier to manage because it had better resources. She had begun in the field 11 years ago during her senior year of high school, working as a teacher assistant in a child care training program. After eight years, during which she completed her associate degree in early childhood education by attending evening classes, she felt burnt out and tried office work, but missed the meaningful challenges of helping children and their families. If teaching had paid the same as the director position, Regina would have considered going back into the classroom. The move from her current center was wrenching for her because of the separation from those children and families, but remaining where she was had created a great deal of tension at home:

I think I get paid well—my boyfriend doesn't think I do. He doesn't think it's enough . . . . He makes \$25 to \$30 an hour doing construction. He thinks I should, too, because of what I do and what I have to deal with; he thinks I should be getting paid about the same as him. But I don't; there is just no way. And I've tried to explain that to him but he doesn't understand why . . . . I tell him that's just the industry. It depends on how much money is being brought in; that kind of correlates with how much they are going to pay you. And it's killing me right now because the kids at the center are saying, 'Why do you have to go, why are you leaving? Stay here with us.' And that breaks my heart. So I just told my boyfriend, you know what, I'm making this change, and if I'm happy, I'm going to stay there no matter what.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has examined how teachers and directors in our study sample weighed their families' needs when making decisions about whether or not to remain in child care employment. The emotional demands of the work, coupled with its economic stresses, were often major contributors to turnover. Those who were able to balance the demands of their child care jobs with their family needs were often less

dependent on their child care earnings to survive economically, nor did they generally have young children at home for whom they had to arrange child care coverage. Even when it conflicted with their own needs for attention, family members of teachers and directors often recognized the importance of child care work, but sometimes only after considerable struggle.

At one of our focus groups in 2002, a veteran teacher of many years said, “Of course, we need you to tell why we leave our jobs. But I don’t really think anything will change unless people learn why we stay. Please be sure to talk about that in your book, too.” The next chapter turns to the aspects of child care jobs that draw people to the work and compel them to stay, and examines what might attract many who have left the field back to working with young children, if they could “afford to care.”



## 7

# Rewards and Stresses of Child Care Work

This chapter draws again on interviews conducted in 2000 with teaching staff and administrators who were employed at the same child care centers in 1996 and 2000, and with many who had left their 1996 jobs. In 2002, data were augmented by focus group discussions with teachers and administrators, and by in-depth interviews with 13 teachers and directors who were selected from the subsample to represent a range of demographic characteristics, career paths, and current job status.

Some of those we interviewed entered the field fully expecting their work with young children to be interesting and satisfying, and consciously intending to make a career of it. They characterized the profession as one to which they “naturally gravitated” or were “always drawn”; some even referred to early childhood education as “a calling.” By contrast, others expressed some surprise at mid career to find themselves veterans in this field, after entering the work somewhat by chance and discovering unexpectedly that it offered many rewards. We found that, just as there are multiple reasons for staff turnover in the child care field, there are also certain reasons for longevity—chief among them, that the work itself is compelling to many people, a source of satisfaction and fulfillment that can sometimes offset the lack of material rewards.

### **THE REWARDS OF WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

Many teachers and directors we interviewed enjoyed the daily challenges of making their programs effective for, and responsive to, each child in their care. A common theme was that this work called upon their professional knowledge and skills to discover each child’s personality, ways of learning, emotional needs, and social behavior.

Barbara, a 20-year veteran who had worked at the same center for six years when we interviewed her in 2000, touched on this theme:

Each child is a riddle; we have to figure out where they are coming from, what they are needing, and what they are trying to tell us, so that we can help them express those needs in appropriate ways.

Teachers and directors also described their role in laying the foundation for the social and cognitive learning that children would need in later schooling and throughout their lives as rewarding. They often expressed satisfaction in knowing that they had helped children get a better start in school than might have been the case without their intervention, especially in the case of children facing difficult learning or developmental challenges. Dolores, an 18-year veteran who planned to stay in early childhood education until she retired, described her work with one troubled boy:

[He] had a hard time separating from his mom. He would get down on the floor and kick and hit with his fists and go under the table. He talked baby talk, although he was already four years old. I told his mom that when she brought him to school, she had to leave right away. ‘Say goodbye,’ I told her. ‘Tell him you are coming back, but leave right away and don’t hang on.’ I also think he needed a lot of praise for what he did, and I recognized that. By the end of the year, he was a completely different child, but I had worked hard with him. It doesn’t happen overnight, and I don’t think everybody has the knack for it, either.

But it is not only the challenging children who engage and inspire these teachers, as indicated by other statements from the interviews: “I love the wonderment of children’s faces when they discover something.” “When a child looks up after days of working on something and says, ‘I did it. I can write a letter,’ it makes it all worthwhile.” “Having shy children become relaxed and communicative with us and other children is priceless.” Nicole, a teacher who was considering leaving her job for economic reasons, spoke about watching children discover how the world works and master new tasks:

The thing that keeps me there is that I just love it. I really do get excited about seeing how the kids respond to things. I got these bubble wands, [and] pulled them out for the first time with a small

group of children, and it was hilarious watching them figure out how to use them. I demonstrated and tried to explain that you don't suck, you blow. A few kids got it right off the bat but a few really struggled. Their faces would get all crinkled up and they'd run into the bathroom to spit out the soapy water. But by the end of small group, they were all blowing bubbles very contentedly. I love watching that learning process.

Teachers and directors also talked about the personal rewards of developing close relationships with children. "The kids love me and they show it," one said. "They look forward to seeing me every day." Molly, a former teacher, described these relationships as rewarding even when they were difficult:

Children demand an intimacy from you that adults don't. For me it is an exploration of my personal self. To constantly be challenging yourself on that personal level is exciting—and it's a lot of work, mentally and emotionally. There is nothing like having a four-year-old call you [an obscene name] because you won't push him on a swing, and having to keep it together and say, 'I hear you're really mad at me, and that's okay. But it's not okay to call me names.' It brought me an awareness of [that child's] life. At that moment, he felt so comfortable with me that he shared the ugliest part of his life. He had heard his mother called that . . . His mother was 14 when she had him. He had been kicked out of another preschool. He needed to know that when he called me [an obscene name] it wasn't okay, but I was still going to be there. He needed to know that I would show up when I said I would. And it's that sharing of ourselves which is hard and rewarding.

Directors—most of whom had previously worked as teachers—frequently talked about direct contact with children as a continued source of professional motivation and satisfaction. They considered time spent with individual children as essential to keeping their jobs balanced and rewarding. Regina had left the field for a brief period, and this helped her gain perspective on how important working with children was to her sense of job satisfaction:

I needed a change or some kind of break, because I just wasn't enjoying it any more for some reason. I got a job as a secretary for a year. For the first few months, I loved it; I had peace and quiet in an office, and I got to talk to adults all day. After six months, I

couldn't take it anymore. I was missing the children; I would go home from work and I would feel like I had accomplished nothing. I was bored; I started thinking about the kids that I used to teach, and wondering how they were doing, and wishing that I hadn't made that switch. I was missing the satisfaction I got from seeing them learn. I knew this was where I was meant to be, but if I hadn't taken that break, I would never have realized it.

Regina explained that even as a director, where much of her day was taken up with finances, scheduling, meeting with parents, and training staff, the children remained the touchstone for her sense of accomplishment. The variety of her tasks was also a source of satisfaction:

I am doing something different every day. I don't know what I'm going to come across. My favorite part of the day is when the kids get out of school. If I'm in the office, they'll come and hang out and tell me about their day. Or I go around and see what they are doing in their small groups. Yesterday, we watched videos of previous years, when they were younger. Just being able to do that with the kids, that's what keeps me going.

## **COLLEAGUES AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT OR STRESS**

While teachers and directors almost universally cited the rewards of working with children as a fundamental aspect of job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues provoked a more mixed response. As described in Chapter 3, we found that teachers were more likely to remain in their jobs when, in addition to earning higher-than-average wages, they worked with a higher percentage of well-trained teaching staff who also remained in their jobs. To the extent that job stability is an indicator of job satisfaction, working with skilled and stable colleagues would appear to be closely associated with teacher job satisfaction. Interview responses supported many aspects of the connection between the quality of collegial relations, job satisfaction, and the decision to remain in the field.

Teachers and directors both described the presence of skilled colleagues as a source of job satisfaction, but their responses sometimes

differed based on the particularities of their roles and responsibilities. Teachers often addressed the ways in which skilled colleagues contributed to the continuity of care for individual children and the smooth operation of daily routines. Not surprisingly, directors more often described job satisfaction in connection with the broader impact of staff skills and stability on program quality, and the proportion of administrative time and effort that had to be dedicated to recruiting or training new staff.

Providing high-quality care to groups of young children requires teamwork among teaching staff. In interview responses, many teachers attributed job satisfaction to long-term working relationships that had shaped their staff into a coordinated and effective team: “I like the camaraderie with coworkers. We’re a well-oiled machine; we can anticipate each other’s needs.” “It felt like a family, and we helped one another to grow professionally. I could have an idea about curriculum, and my team teacher would think of something totally different. Together, we would have this incredible classroom. It was just amazing teaching in that kind of situation.”

Further, a stable core of skilled, experienced staff members who knew the children, families, curriculum, and daily routines often served as models and mentors for less experienced staff, further promoting staff stability. Dolores, a teacher for 18 years, was explicit in her appreciation of colleagues with long-term experience:

There are times when I talk to other teachers I’m close with and ask them, ‘have you had a situation like this, and how did you handle it?’ We have some younger gals now, but they haven’t got the experience yet. So it’s been the older ones who have been in the field awhile and have experienced different [situations] that I go to. They are good support.

Nicole, a veteran teacher whose professional role included serving as a mentor to less-experienced staff, especially valued problem solving with colleagues:

We all work together, and we have a staff room where we take our breaks and talk. And we share families. Some families have more than one child [at the center], so we talk about our experiences, share our thoughts, and give each other ideas when we are trying to figure out how to approach a situation.

Often, teachers we interviewed attributed effective teamwork to a shared teaching philosophy and an intimate knowledge of one another's professional strengths and weaknesses. Teachers and directors also spoke about becoming so attuned to one another that, even if one teacher had a serious classroom issue to deal with, the children's daily routine moved forward without interruption because other staff members automatically filled in. Martina, the former teacher who was now a director, talked about how collegial relationships helped staff regain a collective approach to the work during a difficult time in one program's history:

I remember that one day, an experienced teacher raised her voice to a child, and it made us all realize that the stress was really taking a toll on us and affecting the quality of care we were giving the children. So we met together to discuss how we were going to handle it, so that we were providing good care for the children. [After that,] we worked very well together. We never counted how many times we had done certain tasks like cleanup. If one person needed a break, another person just stepped in.

In other centers, the lack of collegiality that resulted from staffing shortages, poor program administration, or differences in teaching philosophy among staff caused low job satisfaction, which fueled turnover. Jessica, a former teacher who had become a nanny for newborns, recalled a negative experience:

The school was supposedly one of the better schools; it was accredited. But all of the teachers were in competition [with one another] and jealous. And the care for the children was really bad. There was no abuse or anything like that, but there wasn't a mission or a goal to improve these children's lives and give them the best care. There were some good teachers there, but they weren't given the opportunity to get better and grow. Their skills weren't appreciated.

Although some teachers and directors identified negative interactions with coworkers as a major source of job dissatisfaction, a few spoke about how problems with other teachers forced them to make *positive* changes. Although Jessica was no longer teaching, the growth she experienced through working out problems with coworkers remained with her as a positive lesson gained from working in child care:

What I experienced working through differences with co-teachers was that we can learn from our differences. I worked with a wonderful teacher, but for some reason, at that particular time in my life, I felt like my way was right. And it was hard for me to open up and hear her way, or her ideas. And when I finally did, I realized her way works, too. I saw that we all can contribute through our differences.

Sofia, the director of an infant–toddler center for six years, reflected upon the process she went through to learn how to work closely with a diverse group of colleagues:

We work with infants and have one teacher, an associate, an assistant, and an aide in the classroom. Salaries are based on job title, but in the end, whether I'm in there replacing an aide or a teacher, we all wipe noses, we all change diapers, we all wash dishes, we all fold laundry. There is a lot of custodial work that goes with this job, especially with this age group, and I think the system is set up in a bad way to create those kinds of tensions and hierarchies. At the end of the day, yes, I may have more training, but maybe that kid likes you better. So we all need to be equal, and it should be more of a team teaching approach. I think I was guilty, when I was a teacher, of being kind of snobbish. After all these years of experience, I can value what different people bring to the job.

Several people spoke about how important it is for a director to be able not only to facilitate relationships among coworkers, but also to assist adults in their own learning processes. Sofia described how her former director, Verna, helped her shape her own directing style:

Verna's style, her personality, could lead you to where she wanted you to go, but in a really gentle, subtle way, [so] that you never in any way felt criticized. I feel like I made a thousand mistakes, but I never once felt that she felt that. That is a pretty amazing thing for a supervisor, and so I think about really being positive with my staff, and how you get such good results when you are positive with people.

Teresa, now a director, also recalled the director who shaped her own style:

She was always so motivating; if children couldn't do something and got frustrated, she was there to say, 'I know you can do it, and let's try a different way and see if it works.' And also with the

staff, really encouraging [us] to grow professionally, giving us resources and ideas about what we could do, helping us to plan curriculum, and getting us to try different ways, too, to see if they worked.

While the children came first in teachers' and directors' assessments of job satisfaction, it also requires considerable skill to work effectively with adults—both coworkers and parents—and more often than not, such skill is learned on the job rather than in professional courses. Several directors observed that the same conditions that encourage children to learn—a relaxed and supportive environment, with chances to experiment and make mistakes—work equally well for adults.

## **CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AS A REWARD OR STRESS**

Teachers and directors were also divided in their opinions regarding whether cultural and linguistic diversity among staff and families was a source of professional rewards or stress. The group of centers in our sample represented the high degree of diversity that is characteristic of many California communities (Chang, Muckelray, and Pulido-Tobiassen 1996; Chang and Sakai 1993). Approximately two-fifths of the children in center classrooms were children of color. Nearly half of the classrooms had children who spoke a home language other than English. Slightly more than a quarter of teaching staff who were working in the centers in 2000 and were interviewed reported that parents had difficulty communicating with staff because of language barriers. All observed classrooms with children who spoke English had teachers who spoke English. However, 44 percent of classrooms had Spanish-speaking children, and only half of those classrooms were staffed by at least one Spanish-speaking teacher. Nearly half (49 percent) of the classrooms had Chinese-speaking children, but only seven percent of those classrooms had a Chinese-speaking staff member.

In general, when teachers and directors felt that there were sufficient program resources to address the cultural and language diversity within a center, they viewed diversity as rewarding and enriching for

children and staff. Teresa, who was bilingual in Spanish and English, and had left teaching to work as a resource counselor for families of young children, even described diversity as a motivation for pursuing early care and education as a career:

There was one little boy who was monolingual. He came to us around age two-and-a-half. I grew attached to him because I was bilingual and able to speak his language, Spanish. His mom tended to come to me more with questions she had about his development and growth. So I was able to learn a lot about his home life, as well as school, and to really talk with him, bond with him, and get close. When he graduated from the center at about four-and-a-half, he was speaking perfect English. I think it had a lot to do with the collaboration we had within the classroom among all the teachers, to make sure that he was a part of everything that was happening, and not excluded just because he couldn't understand [English]. So he was the one who really pushed the button for me wanting to get into the field and work with children, because I feel there are a lot of kids in his situation. I felt that I was able to make an impact on his life.

On the other hand, when staff felt that they were overextended and stressed by job responsibilities, cultural or linguistic diversity was more likely to be perceived as an added source of professional frustration and worry. Patty, who had taught for nine years when we interviewed her, noted that cultural and language differences had played a role in her decision to leave a poorly run program operated by a school district:

There was a difference [between the morning and afternoon staff] in philosophy, so children had no consistency during the day. The three morning teachers would leave, and then we would come in, so we never got to talk to one another to see how the morning went. There were notes, but not enough conversation. The head teacher in the morning was from another culture, too, and when we did talk, I often had trouble understanding her. Her philosophy [of teaching] was also different, [our] teaching styles were different, and I didn't see much happiness among [the children].

Only a quarter of teaching staff interviewed in 2000 felt that they had sufficient opportunities to discuss cultural differences among staff, and only a third felt that there were sufficient opportunities to discuss

cultural differences among staff and families. In our 2002 focus groups and in-depth interviews with teachers and directors, several noted cultural tensions or differences between themselves, coworkers, and families, but seldom did they have a conscious, planned strategy for dealing with such issues. Difficulty communicating with parents was common, either due to language barriers or to cultural assumptions, and many relied on whomever they could find to serve as a translator. A director in one of the focus groups related her experience:

A lot of our parents are from China, Japan, Korea and India, and have never been in this country before. It's hard for them to adjust, and sometimes it's hard for us to understand what they want. It takes patience. We also try to get the parents to share some things about their cultures. We have one little boy who is Sikh. I thought at first that he was a girl, but I got to know the parents and their culture, and why they didn't cut their hair. I'm Chinese, but I don't speak Cantonese. Last year I had a grandparent who would drop off her granddaughter and speak Cantonese. The first time she met me, she had a fit because I couldn't understand her. Luckily, [there was a] mother who spoke English and Cantonese.

Teresa, who directed a preschool for 60 children, recognized that language barriers limited her relationships with families:

A lot of the parents do not speak English. Some of them cannot read or write English. And some of the children come speaking only Spanish. I think the good thing about that is that English-speaking children are learning Spanish. I am very lucky because I have two Spanish-speaking staff, and that helps tremendously. For me to communicate with parents—I speak Portuguese, so I kind of understand it, and I took Spanish, but I can't speak it fluently—I can get by. The difficult part is I feel like I don't get that relationship with the parents because I can't really talk to them as much.

Patty worked in a subsidized state preschool that served children from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds. She clearly was at a loss for how to navigate through some of the cultural barriers she encountered, particularly when talking with a child's parents led to unintended consequences:

I have one [East] Indian boy. He's having a difficult time listening to other children and the teachers, and now he's been hitting and spitting. I mentioned that to his mom last week, that we would have to work out a plan, and she came back today—they were planning to visit India in the beginning of February—and she said she may just leave him there with the grandparents so that he can go to school, because there is corporal punishment—'because he doesn't listen to you, and he's not listening to us at home,' she explained. I don't know what to do.

Many teachers and directors noted the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in their classrooms over the past few years, and expressed a desire to incorporate this diversity into the curriculum for the benefit of all the children, families, and staff. Although several spoke of positive classroom or center experiences involving diverse cultures or languages, they often did not have the resources available to create these experiences consistently, and diversity became a source of stress or challenge.

## **INVISIBILITY OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Even when they felt confident about their professional knowledge and skills in the work setting, teachers and directors often felt that these competencies, and the intellectual and emotional challenges and rewards of working with young children, were “invisible” to family, friends, and associates outside the profession, and sometimes even to the parents of the children in their programs. Although it was not always explicitly stated, a number of teachers and directors strongly inferred that, to be done well, their jobs required specialized knowledge, skills, experience, aptitude, and talent. Molly, who left child care teaching for a combination of family and financial reasons, continued to think of early care and education as stimulating and challenging work:

Child care teaching definitely used my skills, when I think about what I went to college for. I have a physical-cultural anthropology background. A child care center is really a culture of its own, a subculture. It used my skills in everyday dealings with human

beings, especially discovering [children's] family culture and how it fits into our subculture. Also, it really tapped my emotional strengths. I had to open myself up and give up needing to control the world and the environment. If I hadn't, I would have gone crazy working with children.

In one focus group, teachers discussed the skills involved in conducting activities successfully with a large group of young children, and how they responded to parents' comments and attitudes about their work. Dolores, a veteran teacher, talked about the planning and thought that goes on with colleagues "behind the scenes" to insure that activities are well-organized:

Parents are always in awe of how smoothly everything runs and how quiet the room is. We say, 'Well, it doesn't just happen. We have to plan.' Everyone knows where they're going to be at what time of the day, what they're going to be doing, what they're responsible for. If you don't do that sort of planning, everyone becomes confused and it throws the children off. We always explain to the parents that our program is not 'structured,' [in that] the children are free to roam around and do any activity they wish. They have a lot of choices available to them. But *we* the teachers are very structured in what we do and how we present things. We plan so that the children are free to explore at their own pace, whenever they like.

Another veteran teacher described how she explained to others the multifaceted nature of her job skills:

I talk about how I teach social skills and communication to children, and [how I] nurture children, too. That's one of the things preschools should do beyond academics, to teach children how to relate to themselves and others. A lot of times when I talk about being a teacher, I say that you have to be so many different things. Not only are you an educator, you're a child advocate, you're a doctor, you're a psychologist, you're a sociologist, you know about art, you know about science. You have to know all these different areas in order to be a teacher who can teach well.

Asked how she described her work to people outside the early childhood arena, one 20-year veteran of early childhood teaching noted a frequent lack of understanding:

Usually [when] I tell people that I'm a preschool teacher, they say, 'oh really? Great.' They ask me what age I teach, and I say I teach two-year-olds. They say, 'Two! You're a saint! How can you do that?' Then they usually ask, 'Well, what do you teach two-year-olds? What *can* you teach two-year-olds?'

Nicole, a longtime teacher who has worked with children from birth to preschool age, recounted that many people—even some of the parents whose children she teaches—regard work with young children as undesirable:

People have said to me before, 'I would never work with babies, that would be so boring.' And it's not boring. If you don't know [about infants], you think they just cry, and you just change their diapers, and that's it. No, there is a whole lot going on. You get the parents who really know it takes a lot, and some parents will say, 'I don't know how you do what you do; I could never do it.' And then you get the parents who think anybody could do it. [They think that] you could throw anybody into a room [with infants], and as long as there was a warm body in there, it would be fine.

Regina, a former teacher who had been a director for two-and-a-half years when we interviewed her, spoke about how parents often don't understand the learning that takes place in child care programs.

Some [parents] say, 'I want him to learn; I want him to be ready [for school].' One parent pulled her child out because she didn't think we were doing enough. She came to me and said, 'You know what? My husband and I both have bachelor's degrees, and our children are not going to be blue-collar workers. They are going to be this and that.' I was stunned; I couldn't believe she was saying this to me. She said, 'My daughter needs to be learning a lot more, and you aren't teaching her enough.' We were doing the best we could, but because they didn't see a finished product, they thought she wasn't doing anything.

Sometimes the lack of understanding carries with it a lack of respect. Barbara, who had worked in a community-based nonprofit center for six years, took the attitude in stride:

I was at a board meeting, and they were talking about upping the teachers' wages, and somebody asked what my wages were. At that time, I was making nine-something an hour. And a woman

turned around and said, 'You're kidding! I pay my housekeeper ten dollars an hour!' And I told her, 'Now you know what to do on this board. If you value me as much as your housekeeper, then you are going to have to pay me at least as well as your housekeeper.'

Some teachers and directors noted that this lack of understanding can also be found among friends and family. Judy, who had taught for more than 20 years, and had been at her current center for more than 13 years, recounted how a friend complained about having to help out on a weekend, repairing equipment at his children's preschool.

I think it was just a general lack of respect for the people who taught his children, and what their environment was like. And because he was a friend and a nice person, I thought, 'well, if *he* can have that attitude, then so must a lot of others.' People ask, 'What do you do? Oh, preschool teacher? That must be fun.' And you don't want to deny that it's fun, because it *is* fun. But it seems to be one of the few occupations where people say that; nobody would say to my husband, 'Oh, you're a sports writer? That must be fun.' On some level it is fun, but it is very demeaning that they don't see it as work; [to them] it's just playing.

A story related by Nicole indicates that this lack of respect can also have a troubling impact on children:

One year I had a little girl in my class, and you would tell her it's time to go wash your hands, and she would repeat what you said and then walk off in the opposite direction from the bathroom. We didn't know quite what the problem was, but we didn't think it was a matter of intellect. Her teachers in the classroom before had mentioned to the parents that they were concerned about her being able to follow directions, and her comprehension of simple commands. The parents talked to their pediatrician, who said, 'She'll grow out of it, she's fine.' [But] by the time she got to kindergarten, and they finally got her tested, it turned out she had a processing difficulty. Three years prior to kindergarten, the preschool teachers were aware of it, but it wasn't diagnosed because the pediatrician said she would grow out of it. And that wasn't the case.

Many of the teachers and directors with whom we spoke believed that early childhood education must be presented to the public in a

more creative way. Judy discussed the reasons why early childhood education might not be highly valued:

Economists don't really do a great job of explaining how our economy [works], but everybody assumes and accepts that it does. Preschool teachers can't get away with that. I think we could do a lot better at explaining why it's important. It's not like elementary school, where you do all the standardized testing and measure how good the teachers or the schools are. You can't do that with preschool. I think the push that parents have about how the best preschools teach children academics is partly because you can see it, like when a kid learns the alphabet or something concrete. Most people don't understand that at that young age, [academics are] not that important. And you can't test how well your kid can interact and how well they can make choices and how well they can create, but that's the learning that is happening.

## **TEACHERS AND DIRECTORS AS ADVOCATES FOR PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION**

We asked former and current directors and teaching staff, "If the President of the United States were to ask you what *one* thing the government could do to reduce staff turnover in child care programs, what would you recommend?" Although better pay, supported by government funds, topped the list of suggestions made by staff in all positions, they also emphasized the need for greater public understanding of the true nature of child care work:

"People need to realize that preschool teachers aren't just babysitters; I get so much more respect now that I have left and become an elementary school teacher, but I am still doing the same job."

"I would tell the president we must pay teachers what they are worth. Those who take care of young children get practically nothing, while others get so much more. So many great teachers have left for higher pay in other jobs."

"Raise the level of professionalism and tighten the initial requirements so that we will be better respected and get the salaries we deserve."

“Pay teachers better so we can survive and do our jobs. Most teachers who leave the field leave because they don’t make enough money, not because they don’t like the job.”

But although many teachers and directors recognized the need to improve the image of child care work, few were actively involved in advocacy efforts. Approximately 45 percent of teaching staff and 79 percent of directors were members of a professional organization or union when interviewed in 2000. Most belonged to their local affiliates of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which does not typically advocate on behalf of the economic needs of its members (Whitebook 2002). More recently, several unions have shown a greater interest in organizing child care workers, and several groups are attempting to start statewide advocacy organizations to explicitly address better compensation for the child care workforce.

## **SUMMARY**

Despite a lack of economic rewards or high professional prestige, many teachers and directors remain in the early care and education field if they are able to do so, largely because they find the work with colleagues and children rewarding, and also because they believe this work is important to children, families, and society as a whole. Even those who had left child care work often spoke with longing about the satisfaction they had derived from close connections with children and adults at their former centers—a sense of connection that, for many, had not been replicated in their new jobs.

Current and former teaching and administrative staff were asked, “Would you recommend teaching (or administration) in child care as a career?” On balance, teaching staff were strikingly positive about child care work, with only 14 percent of those who were working at their child care centers in 2000 saying they would not recommend child care teaching outright. Three-quarters of those who had left their 1996 jobs, either to work in another center or to seek employment outside the child care field, also recommended child care as a career. Directors were less enthusiastic, with only two-fifths wholeheartedly recommending child care administrative work.

Yet current and former staff often qualified their endorsements of child care employment, acknowledging the challenge and excitement of the work, but cautioning against inadequate pay, benefits, and status. The following comment typifies what we heard:

If you are looking to do some good in the world, then yes, become a child care teacher. It's very enriching. If you are out to make money, then no, I would recommend it only as a second income. I wouldn't recommend it to a child of mine, because you can't survive.

Former and current directors cited the challenging, ever-changing quality of the work, plus the rewards of working with children and families:

Directing requires a diverse set of skills. Life is never dull. Every day is a challenge. I have lots of independence. The job enables me to make a positive contribution to the community.

But most directors were ambivalent about the job, warning that it was not for the faint of heart or for those without other household financial resources:

It's not the right job for some people. They need to be patient, hardworking, and flexible, willing to do whatever [is necessary] to get the job done, because turnover is so high, salaries are low, and parents and children are demanding. I wouldn't recommend it until our society is more respectful and appreciative of the work we do. It is not worth the stress. I wouldn't recommend it unless you are independently wealthy.

Teachers and directors often saw political implications in their professional predicament, and some expressed discouragement with the inattention policymakers and public officials display toward their profession:

In every other country in the world, [teaching] is a much-honored profession. I don't think it is here. I think that whether your program is for-profit, a parent co-op or private, or whatever, we're making a difference in a life of a child. I think we all have the same philosophy that children are to be treated with respect, and that hopefully, when they grow up, it changes the world a little bit, [and] that one dollar invested in child care saves you seven in the long run. We've known that for many years, but we still don't act upon it.



# 8

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### CONCLUSIONS

Nationally, teacher turnover has been found to be two to three times greater in child care programs than in grades K–12 (Center for the Child Care Workforce 2002). The findings reported here provide further evidence that the instability of teaching staff in early education is greater than the teacher retention problems plaguing elementary and secondary schools (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future 2003). The most recent figures suggest that approximately seven percent of public school teachers change schools each year, and a similar number leave the teaching field annually (Ingersoll 2001). In some respects, higher turnover rates in child care are not surprising, given the low wages typically paid in this field, but the consequences of inconsistent caregiving that often result from turnover pose a significant threat to the healthy development of children prior to entry into elementary school (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). While policymakers across the nation have made bold proposals to address the shortage of K–12 teachers, there has been far greater reluctance to make similar investments in the early care and education workforce (Burton et al. 2000; Laurence et al. 2002).

In 1998, for example, California Governor Pete Wilson wrote the following message as he vetoed legislation to establish CARES, a pilot program offering professional development stipends to child care workers as a reward for their education and experience:

While recognizing the important role child care providers play in caring for our children, I do not believe it is appropriate for the State of California to provide wage subsidies or otherwise interfere in the private child care market. This bill would introduce state regulation of wages into a field that is currently controlled by the market, and allow direct wage supplements to private sector employees. This may constitute a gift of public funds.

His successor, Governor Gray Davis, eventually signed a substantially modified \$15 million version of the bill in 2000, but expressed grave concerns about the plan as well:

While turnover in the child care profession may create problems for certain communities in filling vacancies in a timely manner, I am not convinced that this approach is warranted. I am concerned with both introducing direct state subsidies into an occupation or profession which is subject to local market forces as well as establishing a costly new state responsibility that will grow rapidly over time.

Yet shortly thereafter, Governor Davis proposed spending \$55 million to boost starting salaries for credentialed K–12 teachers throughout the state, a measure subsequently passed by the state legislature. His contradictory responses on whether or not to “introduce subsidies” into the early childhood or K–12 workforces apparently reflected an assessment that the public felt very different levels of commitment to addressing the problems of these two groups.

Public will is only one part of the problem. K–12 teachers are better organized and represented by unions and professional organizations, and constitute a more uniform group with respect to qualifications and funding sources. These conditions make it easier to develop and implement policy in K–12 education than in preschool settings, and also to organize the workforce to advocate on its own behalf. Nationwide, less than 5 percent of the child care workforce is unionized, largely due to a combination of daunting organizing challenges:

- The prevalence of small, isolated workplaces makes child care teachers and providers hard to reach and unify.
- Most early care and education programs are still operated by separate, independent agencies, with the major exceptions being for-profit chains, Head Start, and programs run by school districts.
- Since most child care is not publicly subsidized, the potential fall-out of increases in compensation is that these costs will be borne largely by parents, many of whom are already paying high fees.
- Wariness and anti-union sentiments remain common within this workforce. Typical concerns include: Will unions go against my concern for the children and my relationships with families? How

do we choose one union over another, and will we lose our own autonomy and voice within it?

- Many in this workforce are home-based providers without an “employer of record” that can engage in collective bargaining.
- Child care financing and delivery systems are highly complicated, with multiple funding streams and regulatory structures.
- The workforce is highly diverse in terms of settings, educational backgrounds, language, and ethnicity.

Despite these barriers, there has been a modest upsurge in successful unionization activity in child care in the past five years, including center-based teachers in Pennsylvania and Washington state, and Head Start staff throughout the country. In addition, unions in California, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington are becoming more involved in advocacy for public policies that support the early care and education workforce, and are exploring innovative strategies for organizing both center-based and home-based providers (Bellm 2003; Whitebook 2002).

A further policy challenge is that universal, publicly funded services for early education are not mandated as they are for grades K–12, and there are many and varied claims for every public dollar allocated for younger children. Competing policy issues include such questions as: How can more children whose families qualify for income-based subsidies be served? Should public subsidies be expanded to reduce parent costs for middle-income families? Should child care services focus on the custodial care of children, or on education, early literacy, and school readiness? The urgency of building a well-trained, decently compensated, stable workforce of child care teachers and providers often dissipates in the face of such competing questions.

Nonetheless, over the last 30 years, a movement to improve child care jobs and services has grown and matured, and has stimulated broader public awareness and policy discussion of child care staffing problems (Whitebook 2002). Central to policy discussions has been the question of whether child care staffing will be resolved by relying on private sector market forces, or whether an investment of public funds will be required. To date, while there has been minimal discussion of raising parent fees or increasing corporate involvement in child care

funding, a growing number of advocates have argued for a substantial new public investment in services for young children, most recently expressed in widespread calls for universal preschool programs for three- and four-year-olds (Bowman, Donovan, and Burns 2001; Committee on Economic Development 2002; Mitchell, Stoney, and Dichter 2001), or an expanded voucher system to make care affordable for middle- as well as low-income families (Helburn and Bergman 2002).

Proposals for such a public investment continue to vary with regard to educational and training standards for teaching staff; the extent of educational focus of the curriculum; the level of accountability for child outcomes; and funding and delivery mechanisms. Yet there is widespread acknowledgment by a broad spectrum of advocates, policymakers, and consumers, including many in the labor, business, and education communities, that market forces alone will not solve the dual needs for better-paying child care jobs and for more accessible, high-quality child care services (Blau 2001; Bowman, Donovan, and Burns 2001; Helburn and Bergmann 2002; Mitchell Stoney, and Dichter 2001). (Chapter 1 noted the many and varied reasons for market failure in the child care field.)

This view is also reflected in the attitudes of the teachers and directors who participated in our study. When we asked former and current directors and teachers what could be done to reduce turnover in child care programs, they most frequently cited better pay, supported by government funds, and coupled with greater public respect. Eighty-five percent of current directors recommended better salaries, and the remainder suggested better overall funding for programs, greater respect, and higher professional standards. Many thought that increased pay should be linked to higher standards for education and training if—in the words of one interviewee—“we want to change the perception that this field is babysitting, rather than a professional position that deserves better wages.”

The complexity of the current child care delivery system, however, creates many challenges in the search for policy solutions. Some suggest that implementing a system of universally affordable services will necessarily have to precede any comprehensive improvement of child care jobs (Helburn and Bergmann 2002). Because child care services are so decentralized—with multiple funding sources and regulatory systems—and because providers are so diverse with regard to profes-

sional preparation, the location of care, and other demographic characteristics, it is especially difficult to craft and fund policy reforms targeted to improving child care jobs.

Still, the number of individuals and communities engaged in some effort along these lines is rapidly increasing. Until recently, anyone interested in starting a local program to benefit the child care workforce had only a few models to consult. But in the late 1990s, driven in part by each era's robust economy and shortage of trained workers, many states, including California, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin, initiated or expanded state-funded programs focused on building a more skilled and stable child care workforce. In some states, local government entities are also establishing programs. In California, for example, the availability of tobacco tax revenues at the county level, and of other state revenues, has stimulated almost all 58 counties to create some type of program to retain child care workers and encourage their professional development, offering stipends or other incentives based on level of education and tenure. Stipends ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 per year are now available to center-based teachers and directors, as well as to home-based family child care providers in the counties of San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz, where the study described in this monograph was conducted. Dane and other counties in Wisconsin are using "pass-through" federal dollars to support compensation initiatives (Montilla, Twombly, and DeVita 2001; Whitebook and Eichberg 2002). It remains to be seen, however, how well these initiatives will weather the current budget crises in many states.

Since our study findings suggest the importance of monetary rewards for the child care workforce in stemming turnover, retaining well-trained and experienced staff, and helping centers improve and sustain quality, these data point toward the types of policy interventions which are most likely to be successful. Indeed, in preliminary findings of evaluative studies, initiatives that link professional development with financial incentives are showing a lessening of turnover, as well as an increased involvement of participating teachers and providers in their further training and education (Bridges and Carlat 2002; Hamre, Grove, and Louie 2002).

However, while advocates, practitioners, and policymakers have been encouraged by such a variety of new efforts to support the child

care workforce, they also recognize that the centerpiece of many initiatives is to offer stipends—an “add-on” that must be re-applied for annually, rather than a permanent salary increase that teachers and their families can truly depend on. As a result, those concerned about the quality of early care and education services in many states are enlisting support from other public and private sources to design more efficient and lasting mechanisms for upgrading child care workforce compensation (Mitchell, Stoney, and Dichter 2001). Even as the first generation of “compensation initiatives” gets off the ground, advocates and policymakers are beginning to generate more comprehensive proposals for financing the early care and education system, and closing the current gap in wages and professional status between early childhood and K–12 teachers. Many are looking to build support for implementing publicly funded universal preschool as a way to ensure that children enter elementary school ready to learn, as well as a vehicle for streamlining and coordinating the regulation, administration, and financing of all early care and education services—a potential lever for change and quality improvement throughout the system. Preliminary evidence suggests, however, that state-supported pre-kindergarten programs have had mixed success in retaining better qualified and compensated staff (Bellm et al. 2002).

Successful strategies to improve child care jobs and services will require the attention, creativity, and resources of the American public and its leaders. Some economists argue that services for young children, like those for elementary, secondary, and college students, must be seen as a public good, rather than as a service that should be underwritten primarily by individual families (Helburn and Bergmann 2002). Even middle class families cannot afford the cost of elementary, secondary, or college education without public support. In this sample of child care programs serving mostly middle-income families, the high rates of staff turnover fueled by low wages suggest that the same is true for preschool education. The price tag will be steep—some estimate it in the billions of dollars—but ultimately, the investment is likely to yield a positive return (Helburn and Bergmann 2002).

At the heart of the child care staffing dilemma is the fact that parents and child care programs have insufficient resources on their own to attract and retain a skilled and stable workforce (Bellm 1994; Mitchell, Stoney, and Dichter 2001). The staffing challenges in this sample of

relatively high-quality centers suggests that programs with fewer resources face an even more critical situation. In addition, educational reformers have noted other challenges in retaining skilled teachers, apart from securing adequate resources for better compensation. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) has issued a challenge to states, school systems, institutions of higher education, unions, school boards, business leaders, and the federal government to improve teacher retention by at least 50 percent by 2006, and has outlined an ambitious program that addresses school organization, the quality of teacher preparation, accreditation, and licensure, as well as building a professionally rewarding career ladder that includes better pay.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In offering the following three recommendations for action, we echo the suggestions made to us by teaching staff and directors interviewed in this study.

- 1) *Expand the focus of K–12 educational reforms, including those focused on teacher retention, to include the preschool years, and finance them adequately.*

Teacher training institutions, school districts, teachers' unions, and local and state governmental policymakers are assessing the quality of American education and proposing strategies to improve it. Despite strong evidence reinforcing the importance of early learning for later success in school, few of these discussions address children below the age of five. While many states are implementing publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds, these programs are seldom universal, and many do not sufficiently address the qualifications and compensation of teaching staff (Bellm et al. 2002; Schulman, Blank, and Ewen 1999). Educational reformers must understand not only the importance of early learning, but expand the debate to encompass the problems of early childhood education, specifically the

challenges in securing a skilled and stable pool of teachers and providers.

- 2) *Sponsor national legislation that encourages and augments state and local investments to improve compensation, linked to educational attainments, for those who work with young children.*

The child care staffing challenges described in this report are not limited to California. Low wages and high turnover have been identified as barriers to creating and expanding quality child care services nationwide (Center for the Child Care Workforce 2002). This study reinforces previous research documenting the relationship between establishing and sustaining high-quality services and the need for well-educated and stable teaching staff.

To promote the professional development of the child care workforce, and to ensure the capacity of higher education institutions to meet the rising need for such training, an increased investment in the nation's higher education system is also necessary. Yet without additional financial supports for child care practitioners, training and professional development initiatives will be insufficient for retaining qualified staff in the field. A number of states and communities are experimenting with programs that provide stipends, wage increases, or health benefits to child care teachers and/or providers. Many of these are pilot programs available to only a small group of workers, however, or are offered on a short-term basis because local and state funds are insufficient to cover costs for all who work with young children. States require the assistance of the federal government to adequately develop a better-skilled and more stable early care and education workforce.

- 3) *Encourage those working with young children to organize and strengthen their voice for increased pay, improved benefits, and greater access to education and training.*

The teachers and directors interviewed for this study described the serious effects of high turnover and low wages on themselves, their families, and the children in their care. Many who want to continue working with young children find it difficult or impossible to do so, primarily for financial reasons. Increased efforts to unionize this workforce, or to organize child care teachers and

providers as public policy advocates on their own behalf, could go a long way toward changing the current conditions that cause many qualified practitioners to leave this field, and that undermine the consistency and quality of care that young children receive. Parents are also essential allies in any such efforts to improve the quality of services for children and job conditions for child care staff.

Seeking better pay and status for those who care for young children challenges basic assumptions in our society about the importance of caregiving work, the role of mothers of young children in the workforce, the role of government in the delivery of child care services, and the capacity of the private marketplace to address the broader public welfare. It requires a redistribution of social resources, upon which there are many claims. Change of this magnitude takes time, and progress will not be entirely linear. There will be missteps and setbacks along the way that can, and should, inform our efforts (Whitebook 2002). But it is clear that policymakers are unlikely to earnestly address this urgent social need until there is a strong movement of their constituents demanding that they become involved.

It is worth recognizing that it took kindergarten teachers nearly 100 years to become considered the equals of other teachers in the public school system (Beatty 1995). But while it was challenging, their task was made easier because they already worked, for the most part, in the public schools, and were seeking inclusion in a relatively uniform, coherent system of services for which there was widespread public support. Child care workers, by contrast, face an unwieldy, cumbersome, and inefficient mix of services, and find themselves spread across highly diverse settings. In addition, there remains a vocal minority opposed to expanding early childhood services, and considerable ambivalence about child care—even among its consumers. The relatively young, quarter-century-old movement to improve child care jobs faces added challenges. Its success requires the simultaneous building of a larger movement for public investment in services for young children, and the designing and implementing of incremental reforms to improve the compensation and skills of the millions of women and men who provide those services.

Despite all these obstacles, however, the care and education of young children has always carried strong *intrinsic* rewards for its practitioners. It is not only an essential service for families, but it is also a deeply rewarding, meaningful, and enjoyable occupation. The challenge ahead of us is to professionalize and economically upgrade the child care field, increasing its *extrinsic* rewards so that the nation's dedicated and skilled teachers and providers will be able to remain on the job, for the benefit of young children and their families.

# **Appendix**

## **Study Design**

## OVERVIEW

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided support for three rounds of data collection in 1994, 1996, and 2000, in child care centers located in northern California. Classroom observations and interviews with center directors provided information about characteristics of the centers and program quality, as well as qualifications, continuity, and compensation of teaching and administrative staff. The first section of this appendix describes the centers in this sample. In addition, we followed a subsample of teaching staff in these centers who participated in interviews and observations through all three phases of data collection; this subsample is described in the second section. Lastly, with support from the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, we conducted in-depth interviews in 2002 with 13 teachers and directors drawn from the subsample of interviewed and observed teachers and directors; this interview process is described in the final section of this appendix. In addition to information about sample recruitment, selection, and participation, each section of the appendix provides detailed descriptions of the measures and the procedures used for collecting and analyzing data for each of the samples.

Originally, this study was designed to examine NAEYC accreditation as a strategy for improving center-based child care, and to explore the influence of staff qualifications and stability on efforts to improve quality. In 1994 and 1996, we examined the quality of services offered by child care centers seeking NAEYC accreditation and by centers providing services in the same communities but not seeking accreditation. The first visits to centers occurred during the first half of 1994, soon after centers seeking accreditation had begun the self-study process. The second visit to centers occurred either shortly after a center achieved accreditation, or for those centers participating in self-study that did not become accredited and for those not seeking accreditation, within 24 months of the first observation. The average time between the first and second visits for all centers in the study was 1.8 years. The follow-up study in 2000 was designed to assess the impact of staffing difficulties on centers' ability to maintain program quality. Data collection was timed to occur shortly after accredited centers had undergone an accreditation renewal assessment and/or four years after the initial visit for nonaccredited centers. (Accreditation status is conferred for three years, at which time programs are required to undergo a modified self-study process to become reaccredited. See Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997, for a review of the NAEYC accreditation process.) All data for the follow-up study were collected between January and June of 2000.

## DATA COLLECTION IN CHILD CARE CENTERS, 1994, 1996, 2000

### Original Center Sample, 1994–1996

Ninety-two centers comprised the sample in 1994 and 1996. In 1994, we sought centers that were embarking on the accreditation process, as well as similar centers not engaged in that process. That year, local child care resource and referral agencies in three communities—Palo Alto, San Jose, and Santa Cruz—initiated support groups to assist child care centers in the NAEYC accreditation self-study process, and we selected these sites as the target communities for the study.

These communities share certain features, including a mix of high-, middle-, and low-income neighborhoods, and a variety of center-based child care programs operating on a for-profit or nonprofit basis. The centers seeking NAEYC accreditation served varied economic groups, as determined by per capita income for the zip code area in which they were located. We focused on centers that served preschool-age children, defined in this study as those aged at least two-and-a-half years old but not yet in kindergarten. For our comparison group, we sought centers that served children of a similar age and that were located in similar economic areas as the centers seeking accreditation.

### Initial selection of centers

Letters describing the study and its expectations of participants were sent to all recruited centers. Potential participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine center quality rather than to specifically assess the NAEYC accreditation process. Shortly after mailing the letters, we contacted the center directors to ask whether they were willing to participate. Replacement sampling was used to handle refusals for the first round of data collection. (See Table A.1 for center participation and refusal rates in 1994 and 1996.)

**Table A.1 Center Participation and Refusal Rates, 1994 and 1996**

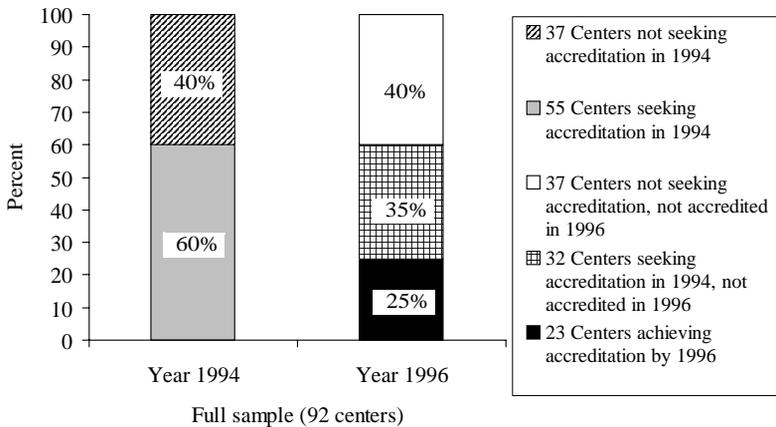
Group	Recruited <i>N</i>	Acceptance	1994	1996	1996	1996
		rate (%)	Observed <i>N</i>	Closed <i>N</i>	Refused <i>N</i>	Observed <i>N</i>
Centers seeking accreditation with support	33	100	33	2	2	29
Centers independently seeking accreditation	66	42	28	2	0	26
Centers not seeking accreditation	106	39	41	2	2	37
Total	205	50	102	6	4	92

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

For our sample, centers seeking NAEYC accreditation were drawn from two sources. First, all 33 centers participating in the accreditation support projects operating in each community were asked to participate in the study if they met the age criteria for children, and these centers all agreed to do so. The majority of these programs operated on a nonprofit basis, and most operated in low- or middle-income neighborhoods. Second, additional centers pursuing accreditation but not involved in the support groups were selected randomly from a master list of all centers in the communities or surrounding areas undergoing the self-study process, made available to us by NAEYC. Forty-two percent of centers ( $n=28$ ) contacted from this list participated in the study in 1994, as shown in Table A.1. The NAEYC list did not provide information about center auspices (i.e., for-profit or nonprofit) or community income level, and thus these criteria could not be used to guide selection. The centers in this group that agreed to participate, however, were similar to the other centers undergoing accreditation. The majority (85 percent) operated on a nonprofit basis and were located in low- or middle-income areas.

To select the remaining centers not seeking accreditation, we obtained a list of centers in the three target communities from the local child care resource and referral agencies, which maintain current records on all licensed child care programs in their service areas. First, we cross-referenced the resource and referral lists and NAEYC lists to generate a pool of centers serving the target area and not involved in the self-study process. Next, we matched the eligible pool of centers to centers undergoing the self-study process according to zip code

**Figure A.1 Description of the Sample, 1994 and 1996**



SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

and auspices. We then used a stratified random sampling strategy to identify a list of centers to recruit. Thirty-nine percent of centers contacted from this list agreed to participate in the study ( $n=41$ ). Most of these centers were located in middle-income areas. Although a majority (59 percent) operated on a nonprofit basis, a greater number of for-profit centers were included in this subsample than in the subsamples of centers seeking accreditation.

### **Attrition analysis, 1994 to 1996**

In 1994, 102 centers were observed. By 1996, 10 of these centers either had closed ( $n=6$ ) or refused to participate in the second round of data collection ( $n=4$ ). These centers did not differ from those that participated in 1994 with respect to auspices, income areas, or hours of operation. However, these centers served fewer children and differed from the final sample of centers along several dimensions associated with quality. They paid lower wages to directors and to observed teaching staff, and reported higher levels of total staff turnover (see Figure A.1).

### **The 2000 Sample**

In 2000, we recontacted all the centers that had participated in 1996 and that were still in operation. Eighty-five percent of the original 92 centers agreed to participate ( $n=75$ ). Participating centers included 20 for-profit and 55 nonprofit centers.

Because limited resources precluded visits at all 75 centers, we selected a subsample of centers to observe. The centers were thus divided into two groups, referred to here as the “observed” centers and the “interviewed-only” centers. All of the centers that had been NAEYC-accredited when we observed them in 1996 were observed again in 2000. All of the centers that were nonaccredited in 1996 were stratified by center auspices and income level, and were selected randomly for the observed or interviewed-only groups. There were no significant differences between observed and interviewed-only centers with respect to center structure, staff wages, annual turnover, or educational background of staff.

### **Observed centers subsample**

Forty-three centers comprised the observed subsample of centers. This group included all but one of the 1996 NAEYC-accredited centers that were open and willing to participate ( $n=19$ ), but only a subsample of centers that were nonaccredited in 1996 ( $n=24$ ). The 24 nonaccredited centers consisted of two types: those that had sought but failed to achieve accreditation between 1994 and 1996, and those that had not sought accreditation.

**Interviewed-only subsample**

Thirty-two centers comprised the interviewed-only group of centers in 2000. Like the observed subsample, this group included centers that had not sought accreditation, or had sought but not achieved accreditation, between 1994 and 1996. One center that was accredited in 1996 declined an on-site observational visit, but was willing to participate in the interview part of the study.

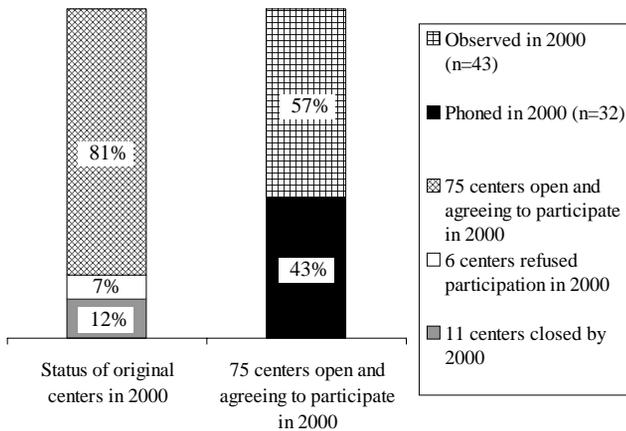
**Attrition analysis, 1996 to 2000**

Seventeen centers (19 percent) that participated in the study in 1994 and 1996 did not participate in 2000. Eleven of these centers had closed (12 percent) and 6 declined to participate in the study (8 percent). (See Figure A.2.) Centers that closed or declined participation did not differ from centers that participated with respect to auspices (for-profit or nonprofit status), center income level (based on census tract records of household income), hours of operation, size, staff and administrator wages, teaching staff turnover, or educational background of staff. Based on 1996 assessments, centers that had closed or that declined participation had received lower overall quality ratings than centers participating in 2000.<sup>1</sup> The 2000 sample, as a result, is somewhat higher in quality than the 1996 sample.

**Selection of Classrooms and Participants**

In 1994 and 1996, observations and interviews were conducted in all 92 centers; two preschool classrooms were visited in each center, unless the center had only one preschool room. In 2000, we visited the same classrooms that we had assessed in 1994 and 1996 in the subsample of observed centers. We visit-

**Figure A.2 Description of the Sample, 2000**



SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

ed a total of 148 classrooms in 1994, 147 classrooms in 1996, and 67 classrooms in 2000. Single-classroom observations occurred at 36 centers in 1994, 37 centers in 1996, and 21 centers in 2000. On return visits in 1996 and 2000, we observed the same classroom we had assessed during the previous visit. In a few cases, teachers who were observed in 1994 or 1996 had changed classrooms, and we observed these teachers in their new settings.

### **Center directors**

We interviewed the director in each center to ensure that a person with an overview of center operations and access to center records could provide details about finances, salaries, staff qualifications, turnover, and related information. Directors provided information about all those employed in teaching staff positions at the centers in 1994 ( $n=728$  staff), 1996 ( $n=672$  staff), and 2000 ( $n=705$  staff).

We also explored the opinions and background of the person with program oversight at all three data collection points. Directors' job definitions varied, depending on the size and structure of the center. In some cases, directors or assistant directors worked in the classroom in addition to performing administrative functions; in others, the director's role involved minimal classroom contact and focused primarily on administrative tasks. In large centers that employed a staff person specifically responsible for financial record keeping, that person was interviewed in addition to the director about salaries, other center expenditures, and sources and amounts of income.

### **Teaching staff**

In 1994, we chose to observe and interview the head or lead teacher in each classroom. Such staff typically set the tone and style for classroom activities and interactions. If a classroom had co-teachers, the teacher who assumed leadership during the visit was selected for the observation, and both teachers were interviewed. If more than one non-lead teacher or assistant teacher worked in the same classroom, we used random sampling to select assistant teachers or teachers. In 1996 and 2000, the same teachers and assistants who participated during the earlier phases of the study were interviewed and/or observed if they were still employed in the center. If new teachers were observed, we followed the same procedures used in 1994 to select them.

### **Measures**

Measures included interviews for directors and teaching staff adapted or developed for the study, as well as two observational instruments routinely used to observe and assess child care center quality and teacher-child interaction: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms and Clifford 1980) and the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989).

## Interviews

The director and teaching staff interviews were adapted from measures used in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). Director interviews requested information about:

- Center characteristics: legal status, fees, number and background of children served, amounts and types of public subsidies,
- Staff and job characteristics: information about experience, educational background, ongoing training, salaries for each member of teaching and administrative staff, and age, ethnicity, working conditions, and benefits for all teaching staff as a group,
- Staff stability: turnover rates for the center as a whole, and tenure for each member of the teaching staff.

Directors were also asked about their own personal characteristics, including:

- Demographic profile and educational background: age, ethnicity, marital status, family configuration, household income, additional employment, and level of formal schooling,
- Professional background and affiliation: specialized early childhood training, professional memberships, and tenure on the job and in the early care and education field,
- Job characteristics: wages, benefits, working conditions, work hours, and expenditures on supplies,
- Job assessment: satisfaction with career opportunities, professional preparation, identified training needs, and recommendations for improving child care services and jobs,
- NAEYC accreditation: assessment of self-study process, obstacles encountered, and impact of accreditation on quality.

## Classroom Observations

We selected the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) for our classroom observations, based on prior research on child care quality and children's experience of care (Helburn 1995; Kontos et al. 1995; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990). The ECERS provides information about appropriate caregiving and activities that occur within a particular classroom. The ECERS comprehensively assesses the day-to-day quality of care. The 37-item ECERS is organized under seven categories: 1) personal care routines; 2) furnishings and displays for children; 3) language-reasoning experience; 4) fine and gross motor activities; 5) creative activities; 6) social development; and 7) adult needs. Individual items are rated from a low of 1 to a high of 7. A rating

of 3 on these scales indicates “minimally acceptable” quality, while 5 indicates “good” quality, and 7 indicates “excellent” quality.

The ECERS and the NAEYC accreditation self-study criteria (known as the Early Childhood Classroom Observation) assess similar aspects of teacher–child interaction, activities, materials, and equipment. A comparison of scoring indicates that good-quality care, as indicated by the ECERS, corresponds to full compliance with a clear majority of NAEYC self-study criteria. We therefore expected that centers accredited by NAEYC would receive ECERS scores of 5 (good) or better. (For a more detailed comparison of the ECERS and the NAEYC accreditation criteria, see Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes 1997.)

To measure adult–child interactions, we selected the Caregiver Interaction Scale, which, in previous large-scale studies, has been found to predict teachers’ engagement with children and children’s language development and security of attachment (Helburn 1995; Howes, Phillips, and Whitebook 1992). The Caregiver Interaction Scale also measures teaching style; it is used to rate a single teacher, in contrast to the ECERS, which is used to rate an entire classroom. The 26-item Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989) rates teachers’ sensitivity (e.g., degree of warmth, attentiveness, and engagement), their style (e.g., degree of harshness, and level of punitive and critical interactions), and their detachment (e.g., level of interaction with, interest in, and supervision of children). A score of 1 indicates that a given behavior is “never true,” whereas a score of 4 indicates that the behavior is “often observed.” Higher scores for sensitivity and lower scores for harshness and detachment are therefore considered desirable.

## **Procedures**

For each round of data collection, we engaged a team comprised of several research assistants with experience in the early childhood field. The entire research team was trained to conduct observations and interviews during a five-day training session followed by several practice visits. Inter-rater reliability was established to a criterion of 85 percent agreement for all observational measures prior to each of the three data collection points. At midpoint, inter-rater reliability was reestablished for all classroom observational measures. Inter-rater reliability exceeded 90 percent in 1994 and 1996, and remained at an 85 percent level of agreement in 2000.

### **Observed centers**

For each of the three rounds of data collection, following the initial phone call to directors, research assistants contacted the directors again by phone to make appointments to collect data at the centers. In each center, data collection began with a two-hour classroom observation. Unless the program only operated in the afternoon, all observations were conducted in the morning. If two

classrooms were observed in one center, observations occurred over two days, scheduled consecutively whenever possible.

Following the observation, the research assistants arranged to interview the teachers, generally during lunch or nap time, sometimes at the end of the day, or if necessary, on another day. The director interviews occurred after the observations, typically in the afternoon on the same day. Every effort was made to accommodate participants' schedules, except that observations always occurred prior to interviews. Director interviews lasted an average of one-and-a-half to two hours. Teaching staff interviews, described below, lasted from half an hour to one hour.

### **Interviewed-only centers, 2000**

During an initial phone call to directors, research assistants made appointments to conduct phone interviews with directors. Directors were informed that staff who were interviewed and observed in 1996 would be contacted.

### **Plan of Analysis**

First, we described each center with respect to structure, observed quality, director and teaching staff background, wages, benefits and working conditions, and caregiver and director stability and turnover. These descriptions were derived both for all teaching staff and for just observed teaching staff, and are identified in the text as such.

We then used *t*-tests, analysis of variance, and chi-squares to compare the professional and demographic characteristics of teaching staff and directors, and to identify the factors associated with the stability and instability of personnel. We used logistic and multiple regression techniques to test hypothesized relations between different center attributes such as sustained quality, positive staffing, and wages, as defined below. We also used discriminant function analyses to predict group membership among those who stayed in or left centers from a set of predictors, such as wages, educational background, household income, and age.

### **Comparison of the Sample with Other Local and National Samples**

#### **1996 sample**

In 1996, we compared our sample with national and local samples of center-based child care programs with regard to center structure, observed quality, teaching staff background, wages, benefits, working conditions, and teaching staff stability and turnover (Burton, Sakai, and Whitebook 1996a,b; Burton, Whitebook, and Sakai 1992; Cost Quality and Child Care Outcomes Study Team 1995).<sup>2</sup> Centers in the original sample were similar in size, income sources, and observed classroom quality when compared to centers in other commu-

nities and across the country. Rates of turnover were similar to those found in other California studies, and somewhat lower than in national reports.

### **2000 sample**

Centers in the 2000 sample were similar in auspice (for-profit or nonprofit status), size, and sources of revenue (parent fees, corporate or public support) to state and national samples. The 2000 sample of centers reflected higher levels of quality than the 1996 sample and/or other centers in the state and nation in several respects. A higher proportion of centers was rated as “good” on the ECERS (53 percent), compared to the 1996 sample (25 percent) and nationally (18 percent). Teachers were also rated as more sensitive, and less harsh and detached, than those observed in the 1996 round of data collection and in national samples using the Caregiver Interaction Scale. Teaching staff had completed somewhat more formal education and specialized early childhood training than staff in national samples (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team 1995). Staff wages were higher than those represented in the national sample, but average for their communities (Burton, Whitebook, and Gerber 2000). Despite having a better-trained workforce, centers in this study faced similar challenges in maintaining stable staffing, as did the vast majority of programs nationwide. By 2000, our sample included many centers that were accredited and/or rated high in quality. Our findings, therefore, may not be representative of teaching staff in other communities or of centers representing a greater range in quality.

## **LONGITUDINAL SAMPLE OF INDIVIDUAL TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, 1994–2000**

Along with examining program quality in a sample of child care centers over a six-year period, this study sought to profile individual child care personnel over time, through interviews with all directors and with a subsample of teaching staff. We explored the demographic, psychological, social, and professional characteristics of those who had left or remained at their jobs over time, as well as those new to the centers in 2000. Among those currently working in centers, we also explored teachers’ and directors’ perceptions of their work, the impact of child care staffing problems on their own work, the organizational environment of their centers, and their psychological well-being, perceived stress, and social support.

Two groups of teaching staff comprised the sample interviewed in 2000. The first group was composed of teachers from the 43 centers observed in 2000, and included new teachers in the observed classrooms, as well as those observed and interviewed in 1994 and/or 1996 who were still employed at one of the 43 centers when we returned for our third visit. For the second group, we

attempted to reach all teaching staff who had been observed in 1996 but were not working at the centers when we observed in 2000. Three categories of staff were included in this group: 1) teachers who were working in the interviewed-only centers; 2) teachers no longer working in the center where they had been employed in 1996; and 3) teachers whose 1996 center had either closed or declined to participate in the 2000 study. We interviewed all of the directors operating centers in 2000, and we also sought to interview directors whom we had interviewed in 1994 or 1996 but who were no longer on the job, or whose centers had closed or declined to participate in the 2000 study.

### **Interviewed Teaching Staff Subsample and Procedures**

Teaching staff interviewed in 1994 who remained at their centers were also interviewed in 1996. Those who left their jobs between our 1994 and 1996 visits were replaced by other teaching staff in the observed classrooms. In 1996, 260 teaching staff members were interviewed. Seventy percent ( $n=182$ ) were teachers, 18 percent ( $n=47$ ) were assistant teachers, and 12 percent ( $n=31$ ) were teacher-directors.

#### **Teaching staff employed at centers in 1996 but not in 2000**

In 1996, we asked the 260 staff members we interviewed to provide information that would enable us to contact them in the future, and all but five provided it. In 2000, we notified these teachers by letter that we would contact them shortly and would need to update their contact information. We also asked them to return a postcard indicating whether they were still employed at the same center as in 1996, and if not, whether they were still working in child care.

For those we did not reach through letters or initial calls, we used such strategies as Internet searches, contacting former coworkers, and working with the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, which routinely locates people through a variety of databases.

We successfully reached 149 of these 260 teaching staff (57 percent) (see Table A.2); of these, 68 were still employed in the same centers as in 1996, and 81 had left those centers. There were no differences between 1996 observed teaching staff that we were able to locate and those we could not find, with respect to their educational background, ethnicity, or partner/marital status in 1996. There were also no differences among the centers in which they worked with regard to staff or director stability or accreditation status. Those we were unable to locate (32 percent) were more likely to have worked in a for-profit center when we visited than those we were able to locate (21 percent).<sup>3</sup> Those we located earned, on average, \$11.28 per hour in 1996, compared to \$10.35 per hour for those we did not locate.<sup>4</sup>

**Table A.2 2000 Status of Teaching Staff Who Participated in 1996**

1996 Sample	2000 Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 260 observed teaching staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42 observed and interviewed teaching staff</li> <li>• 26 interviewed-only teaching staff</li> <li>• 81 teaching staff had left their center; found and interviewed</li> <li>• 111 teaching staff had left their center; not found</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Authors' calculations.

### **Observed and interviewed-only teaching staff characteristics, 2000**

In 2000, we observed and interviewed 117 teaching staff, representing 16 percent of teaching staff employed by the centers at that time. The observed group included 83 teachers (71 percent), 20 assistants (17 percent), and 14 teacher-directors (12 percent). In 2000, the same teachers and assistants who participated in 1996 were interviewed and/or observed if they were still employed in the center. Thirty-six percent of staff had participated in the 1996 study ( $n=42$ ). At observed centers, teacher interviews were conducted only with those teachers we observed during the classroom observation; that is, a subset of all teachers employed at the center. At interviewed-only centers, we interviewed only those teaching staff we had also interviewed in 1996.

This study, therefore, offers a unique long-term view of a sizeable group ( $n=224$ ) of teaching staff:

- those observed and interviewed at the centers in 1996 but no longer working at the centers in 2000, and interviewed by phone ( $n=81$ );
- those observed and interviewed at the centers in 1996 who were continuing to work at the centers in 2000 ( $n=68$ ; 26 from interviewed-only centers and 42 from observed centers); and
- those new to centers since 1996 and observed and interviewed in 2000 ( $n=75$ ).

### **Center Director Longitudinal Sample and Procedures**

Because there is growing concern that child care staffing problems both encompass and are influenced by instability among directors, we also sought to learn more about directors' experience of their jobs, their personal characteristics, and their perceptions of staffing challenges.

We interviewed the director at each participating center in 2000, identifying those who had stayed on the job between 1996 and 2000 as well as those who were new. We also attempted to reach all directors who had been on the job in 1996 but not in 2000, and those whose centers had either closed by 2000

or declined to participate in the study. We conducted similar strategies for contacting directors as for teachers, as well as asking professional organizations to contact directors on our behalf. We successfully reached approximately two-thirds of the directors who had left their jobs (63 percent: 19 of 30), and those from the closed and refused centers (69 percent: 9 of 13).

This investigation stands as the first longitudinal study of child care center administrators. It includes a portrait of the following three groups of directors ( $n=101$ ):

- those employed at the centers in 1996 and 2000 ( $n=45$ );
- those employed at the centers in 1996 but no longer in 2000 ( $n=26$ ); and
- those new to the centers since 1996 ( $n=30$ ).

### **Measures**

Measures included interview protocols for directors and teaching staff adapted or developed for the study. Teaching staff and directors at the observed centers in 2000 were interviewed in person, and all others were interviewed by phone. Teaching staff and directors employed at the centers in 2000 were also asked to complete a packet of written surveys focused on psychological well-being, social stresses, and social support, as well as professional beliefs and assessments of the work environment. Participants were asked to return them by mail within one month to our offices. All participants completing the interview and/or written surveys received a small payment to acknowledge their time and effort.

#### **Phone or in-person interviews**

The director and teaching staff interviews were adapted from measures used in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips 1990) and in earlier phases of data collection. Interviews sought information about current employment, including wages and benefits; professional preparation; demographics and family characteristics, including marital status, age, ethnicity, languages spoken, number of children, previous public assistance history, use of child care services, and household income; and opinions about turnover, training opportunities, professional organizations, and recommendations for policymakers. All interview questions were extensively piloted prior to the interviews.

#### **Written surveys**

The packet of written surveys included well-established measures focusing on self-esteem, depression, stress, social support, teachers' beliefs, and assessment of organizational climate, as described in Table A.3.

**Table A.3 Descriptions of Written Surveys**

Measure	Description	Reliability and validity
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Rosenberg 1965; Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach 1989)	Measures global self-esteem, general satisfaction with life, feelings of worth, and positive attitude. Comprised of 10 Likert scale items answered on a four-point scale from “strongly agree” to “disagree.” Scores range from 10 to 40 (high score=high self-esteem).	Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.88 (Wylie 1974); alpha coefficient of 0.84 for the current study.
The Center for Epidemiologic Studies of Depression, CES-D (Radloff 1977)	Measures current levels of symptomatology that cluster into dimensions consistent with the two major criteria for diagnosis of depression: depressed mood and lack of pleasure or the capacity to experience it. Twenty-item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale from “rarely” or “none of the time” (0) to “most of the time” (3). The possible range of scores is 0–60. A score at or above a cutoff of 16 indicates symptoms consistent with diagnostic criteria for depression.	Alpha coefficient ranging from 0.85 in the general population to 0.90 in a clinical sample (Radloff 1977), as well as high test–retest reliability; alpha coefficient of 0.86 for the current study.
The Global Assessment of Recent Stress (GARS) (Linn 1985)	Measures stress in seven different areas of life, and global environmental stress. The scale consists of eight items answered on a 10-point scale from no stress (0) to extreme stress (9). Stress was assessed in the following areas: job, interpersonal relationships, sickness or injury, financial issues, unusual events, change or lack of change in daily routine, and an overall global assessment of stress.	Alpha coefficient of 0.80 (Linn 1985), as well as good test–retest reliability, both on the seven items and on the overall global rating of stress; alpha coefficient of 0.81 for the current study.

(continued)

**Table A.3 (continued)**

Measure	Description	Reliability and validity
The <i>Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ)</i> (Sarason et al. 1983)	Measures the perceived number of available supports and satisfaction with support in situations in which people might need help or assistance. For this study, a short version of the SSQ was used, which consisted of eight items previously used in other studies of caregiving (Mill and Romano-White 1999). The social support questionnaire yields an overall number and satisfaction scores; scores are averages (i.e., average number of people available to provide support, and average level of satisfaction with support) derived by dividing the sum of both scores by eight, the total number of items.	Alpha coefficient of 0.90 for the number scale and 0.94 for the satisfaction scale in the current study.
The <i>Early Childhood Environment Survey</i> (Bloom 1996a)	Measures perceived quality of a center work climate. The scale is a 20-item self-report questionnaire, with items answered on a six-point Likert scale. Subjects are asked to rate the extent to which they agree with a statement about how often practices occur at the center, from “never” (0) to “always” (5). The scale is obtained by summing responses across all 20 items to create a possible range of scores from 0–100. Higher scores indicate higher levels of staff collaboration, communication, morale, and equity in staff policies.	Alpha coefficient of 0.96 for the current study.
The <i>Job Rewards and Concerns Scale</i> (Marshall and Barnett 1992)	Assesses staff perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of their work environments. Includes a reward and concern scale, and separate scores for each. A shortened version of both scales was used for this study. Each scale consists of eight items, with responses indicated on a four-point scale (1 = “not at all” and 4 = “extremely”). A higher score on the job rewards scale indicates a higher level of work satisfaction. A higher score on the job concerns scale indicates a higher level of work dissatisfaction.	Alpha coefficient of 0.87 for the work rewards scale and 0.88 for the job concerns scale in the current study.

## **Plan of Analysis**

First, we classified staff according to their current employment status in their centers, as well as in the field of early childhood education. We then looked at differences among those who remained on the job and/or in the field and those who had left their centers and/or the field. Thus, we were able to explore differences between teaching staff who stayed and those who left, and to compare the 1996 and 2000 teaching staff workforces.

We then used *t*-tests, analysis of variance, and chi-squares to compare the professional and demographic characteristics of teaching staff and administrative directors, and to identify the factors associated with the stability and instability of personnel. We used logistic and multiple regression techniques to test hypothesized relations between different center attributes such as sustained quality, positive staffing, and wages. We also used discriminant function analysis to predict group membership among those who stayed in or left centers from a set of predictors, including wages, educational background, household income, and age.

## **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, 2002**

### **Sample Selection**

In the summer of 2001, we contacted by letter all teaching staff ( $n=224$ ) who had participated in the 2000 interviews, asking them to return a postcard to our offices indicating their current employment status and whether they would be willing to participate in a group interview with other teaching staff from the study. Forty-seven percent ( $n=106$ ) returned the postcards, and of these, eighty-five percent ( $n=90$ ) indicated their willingness to participate in a discussion group or in-depth interview. In the fall of 2002, we invited a subset of these teachers to one of two evening discussion groups, selecting them to reflect the variety of centers in our 2000 sample with respect to such items as quality, level of turnover, and teacher characteristics including professional preparation and household income. We sought participants who had left the field, who had changed jobs within the field, and who had remained at their original centers. We made a particular effort to recruit teachers of color for this aspect of the study, in order to explore issues of culture and ethnicity in center work environments.

Five teachers participated in the first discussion group, and four participated in the second. From these groups, six were selected for in-depth interviews because they had been especially articulate about their experiences in the field of child care and its impact on their personal lives. Three teachers who could not attend the discussion groups were also invited to participate in in-depth in-

interviews, in order to ensure that this subsample sufficiently captured the diversity of the larger group of teaching staff interviewed in 2000.

A similar strategy, beginning with a letter of inquiry and a return postcard, was used to recruit directors. Fifty percent of directors ( $n=53$  of 101) who had participated in the 2000 interviews returned the postcards, and all were interested in participating in a discussion group or in-depth interview. We scheduled one group meeting in a central location; 15 directors attended, and were divided into two smaller groups. Of these, 3 were selected for in-depth interviews, along with one additional director who was unable to attend the meeting. Two of the 4 directors were still employed at their original centers, 1 was a former teacher who had become a director but had changed centers, and another had left the field.

A total of 13 people participated in the in-depth interviews. Two of the 4 directors were still employed at their original centers, another had left the field, and 1 was a former teacher who had become a director. Nine teachers were interviewed; 6 had remained in the field, and 3 had left. All of those interviewed were women, ranging in age between their late twenties and early fifties, with the majority in their mid thirties to mid forties. The group was diverse ethnically; 6 were white, 4 were Latina, 2 were Asian American, and 1 was African American. Five of the women were single, 2 having been recently divorced, and the others were married or living with a partner. Eight were parents, and of these, 2 had preschool-age children. Five had been providing care in low-income neighborhoods when we first interviewed them, and the others had worked in centers located in middle-income areas. Three worked in centers fully subsidized by the government.

### Measures

We had two overriding goals for the interviews. First, we wanted to detail the career histories of our subjects in order to gain a deeper understanding of the various pathways that teachers and directors follow into and out of child care employment. For this part of our interview, we adapted questions developed and piloted for another project by one of the authors, *Who Leaves? Who Stays? A Longitudinal Study of the Early Care and Education Workforce* (Whitebook et al. Forthcoming).

Second, based on our study's quantitative findings, we had identified a number of themes and related questions for further investigation. These topics included:

- professional identity and self-concept;
- extent of conflicting demands between jobs and family;

- the role of collegial relationships (including supervision) in job satisfaction or dissatisfaction;
- assessment of coworker competence and its impact on job satisfaction; and
- the degree to which language and cultural differences among staff and families impact one's job experience.

We developed specific questions for each topic, and piloted them in the large group interviews. Those questions we judged to be the most effective in tapping the thoughts and feelings of teachers and directors were further refined as necessary, and then used in the in-depth interviews.

### **Procedures**

Discussion groups were used to pilot the interview protocol and to identify potential subjects for the in-depth interviews. All discussion groups lasted between an hour-and-a-half and two hours. In total, nine teachers and four directors participated in in-depth interviews, which averaged an hour-and-a-half. If convenient for the subject, interviews were conducted in person. However, six interviews were conducted by phone. The discussion groups and interviews were conducted by members of the research team who were trained in qualitative methods.

### **Plan of Analysis**

Discussion groups and in-depth interviews were transcribed. All interviews were coded by subject matter and categorized in relation to our quantitative findings and emerging research questions.

### **Notes**

1. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was the observational measure used to assess quality. (See section on measures for a full description of the ECERS). Closed centers and those that declined to participate received lower ECERS scores in 1996 ( $M=4.04$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ) compared to participating centers ( $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ;  $t(90)=-1.98$ ,  $p=0.05$ ).
2. See Whitebook, Sakai, and Howes (1997, pp. 27–35), for a detailed comparison with national and community samples.
3.  $\chi^2(1)=4.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Of those teaching staff who left their centers, those we were unable to locate (32 percent) were more likely to have worked in a for-profit center when we visited than those we were able to locate (21 percent).
4.  $t(255)=1.95$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Of those teaching staff who left their centers, those we located earned an average of \$11.28 per hour in 1996, compared to \$10.35 per hour for those we did not locate.



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## **About the Institute**

The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research is a nonprofit research organization devoted to finding and promoting solutions to employment-related problems at the national, state, and local levels. It is an activity of the W.E. Upjohn Unemployment Trustee Corporation, which was established in 1932 to administer a fund set aside by the late Dr. W.E. Upjohn, founder of The Upjohn Company, to seek ways to counteract the loss of employment income during economic downturns.

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