ABSTRACT: This study examined relationships between behaviors toward children and a variety of caregiver characteristics—formal education, child-oriented attitudes, satisfaction with child care employment, and commitment to the child care field as a career. Detailed narrative descriptions of the behavior of 37 center-based caregivers responsible for groups of three- to five-year-olds were collected and then coded according to the Prescott, Jones, and Kritchevsky (1967) observational system. Caregivers also answered attitude and job satisfaction questionnaires and provided information about their educational background and child-related preparation. Overall findings indicated that, for the most part, caregiver actions stressed “caretaking” as opposed to “educational” functions. However, variations in behavior were related to caregiver characteristics. In contrast to previous research, higher education, as well as child-related preparation, was associated with several qualities of caregiver behavior—decreases in restriction and increases in encouragement, development of children’s verbal skills, and the use of indirect forms of guidance. Education was positively associated with caregiver commitment to child care as a career. Also, career commitment, child-oriented attitudes, job satisfaction, and stimulating but non-directive behaviors toward children were positively correlated with one another. Results are discussed in relation to social policies concerning the preparation and training of child care professionals.

With the dramatic increase beginning in the 1970s of mothers with preschool children entering the labor force, concern over the quality of substitute care experienced by young children, and the consequences of such care for their future development, has also risen. Investigators who have studied factors affecting the quality of child care agree that characteristics of staff members are of overriding importance (Grotberg, Chapman, & Lazar, 1971; Klinzing & Klinzing, 1974; Prescott, Jones, & Kritchevsky, 1972). Although the value of preparing...
competent personnel is recognized by many academicians, child care professionals, and child advocates who are concerned about systems of child care which meet the developmental needs of preschool children, great variability still exists among the states in preparatory requirements for day care personnel. While licensing standards in some states require as much as a bachelors degree with specialization in child development for individuals assuming full teaching responsibility for groups of young children, others demand only that the caregiver be 16 years of age, with no formal academic work or training experiences. Despite amassing evidence in the child development research literature about the crucial impact of experiences during the early years, personnel entry into day care is not specifically and uniformly regulated in the same manner as is professional entry into more formal educational settings serving children of middle childhood, such as the public schools (Peters, Cohen, & McNichol, 1974). Recent survey data indicate that the median level of caregiver educational attainment is 12 years 9 months (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979); a substantial number of day care personnel at all levels have a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment. To go along with these minimal entrance requirements is the widespread public attitude toward day care work as a low status job deserving little economic compensation. Statistics for the mid-1970s show that the mean hourly wage earned by center day care teachers was $3.36, amounting to a full-time annual salary of only $6,989 (Coelen, Glantz, & Calore, 1979, p. 157).

Corresponding to the variation in state licensing requirements for day care personnel is a long-standing controversy in the child care field over the virtues of “training” versus “educating” day care teachers (Peters & Kostelnik, 1981; Spodek, 1977). Current conceptualizations of the necessary preparation for day care personnel vary. On the one hand there are those who believe that formal academic preparation is unnecessary and irrelevant and that effective teaching behaviors which will generalize across children, time, and settings can be defined and then directly and efficiently trained in preservice or inservice personnel (Granger & Gleason, 1981; Jones & Hamby, 1981; Thomson, Holmberg, & Baer, 1978; Ward, 1976; Williams and Ryan, 1976). On the other hand there are those who believe that the effectiveness of any such practical training is heavily dependent on the caregiver's breadth of knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and internalization of child-oriented values and beliefs. From this point of view, practical experiences are effective only in the context of a broad-based formal educational program which serves as the necessary foundation for pragmatic endeavors (Berk & Berson, 1981; Berson & Sherman, 1976).