

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF ACTIVITIES IN DAY CARE CENTERS FOR CHILDREN, THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract: *Day care centers for children are alternative options for child care and protection, which are mainly under the auspices of the community. It should ensure the quality of care provided to children, whether it is physical health, education or mental health. The main purpose of the work was to increase the involvement of the community in the activities carried out by the day centers for children. To this end, a number of 42 children from two day care centers were asked about the degree of satisfaction related to the activities carried out in the center and about their preferences related to the diversification of these activities. Following the answers received, the community was notified of the children's wishes and an attempt was made to involve them more strongly in order to satisfy these wishes. In the end, the children were again asked about the degree of satisfaction and there was an obvious improvement in these answers. We believe that the community, with all its resources, must be more involved in ensuring a superior quality of care provided to children in day care centers.*

Key words: quality of care; day care centers; degree of satisfaction; activities carried out in the centers; community

1. Introduction

Day care centers are institutions that provide supervision and care for children and young children during the day, especially so that their parents can have a job. Such institutions appeared in France around 1840 and were later established in most European cities and industrial centers in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Day care centers are services that, through the intervention of the community, provide protection and social assistance to the child in difficulty, without the ties with his own family being interrupted. It is a form of protection and social assistance that prevents situations that endanger the safety and development of the child, outside the institutional system of child protection. There are social services, at local level, intended for children in difficulty, their purpose being to prevent the entry of children into the residential protection system. They are based on the involvement of the local community and take into account the respect of the fundamental right of the child to grow up in the family of origin.

The Canadian Society of Pediatrics (2008) argues that to ensure quality care for children in day care, it is necessary to bring together integrative elements such as: a collaborative partnership with families; quality learning environments, a purposeful learning program; a skilled workforce; efficient administrative practices at program level; an efficient infrastructure that includes a vision of an early learning and childcare system; evidence-based government policies and processes, system-level planning and resources; public funding for operating and capital costs.

From their first apparition until now, day care centers have been the subject of research for numerous articles. Thus, some research focuses on the positive and negative effects that time spent in day care centers can have on a child's development and well-being. McClure (2019) states that the arguments for childcare in day care centers are: preparing the child for elementary school; children learn structure and

routine; learn different social skills. The arguments against this care are: children have more colds and diseases; they can learn bad habits from other children; it is sometimes stressful for children. Regarding the increasing possibility of contracting several diseases, Tahoun, Hasab, & El-Nimr (2019) show that children attending day care centers have a high risk of contracting infectious diseases due to several factors, including lack of knowledge in among caregivers on infection prevention and control practices.

Miller (2018) has studied the psychological effects of childcare in day care centers. She argues that the number of hours a child spends in day care affects his or her level of aggression; the more hours there are, the more aggressive he behaves. At the same time, however, children who spend time in day care may be more socially aware than children who do not spend time in day care and that they acquire increased vocabulary skills. In another study, Magher (2018) reports the negative effects of day care on children. It is claimed that studies have shown that placing children in day care can lead to a number of negative effects, such as aggressive behavior and poor social skills.

In the same direction, Bradley and Vandell (2007) argue in their research that children who have entered day care centers early in life and have been in care for 30 or more hours per week are at increased risk for behavioral problems related to stress. The increased risk was more likely if they had difficulty interacting with peers or if they had insensitive parents.

Loeba, Bridgesb, Bassoka et al. (2007) also state that the duration of care in the center matters: the greatest academic benefit is found in those children who start at the age of 2 to 3 years and not at a younger or older age; the negative behavioral effects are greater the younger the age of onset. These models are found on the family income distributions. The intensity of center-based care also matters: more hours a day lead to greater academic benefits, but to increased behavioral consequences.

Shpancer (2016) draws attention to the consensus that emphasizes the quality of care for child development. In studying the quality of day care, his research focused on two areas of interest - structure and process. Structural variables include those environmental conditions of the childcare environment that are more susceptible to regulation, such as the caregiver-child ratio, group size, noise level, and caregiver education. Process variables include dimensions of caregiver-child interaction, such as caregiver sensitivity, responsiveness, and heat, which are less sensitive to regulation. Research has consistently documented the links between the structural and process characteristics of childcare quality and improved child development outcomes, and some of these benefits appear to be maintained in childhood and adolescence later.

The studies of Bernal, Attanasio, Pena et al. (2019) analyzes the differences that appear between care in residential centers and care in day centers related to health and development of Children. They conclude that this impact could be explained by differences in the quality of both services during the transition and report that quality indicators are low in both programs, but are significantly more severe in residential centers compared to community ones.

Families should be able to trust that established institutions such as the government, churches and childcare centers oversee the provision of safe care and education settings for young children (Lewsader, Elicker, 2013). Higher quality leads to more positive and lasting results for children and that there are higher quality effects for children whose incomes are low or minimal.

Previous research on parents' decisions about childcare centers has sought to assess the importance of the different characteristics of the centers by having parents

evaluate them in turn. In an effort to better understand how parents evaluate centers when they need to consider all features of the center simultaneously, as they do in real life, Leslie, Etteson, and Cumsille (2000) surveyed 235 parents who wanted to find a care center for their children. The results indicated that the characteristics of childcare centers that most affect parents' decision-making process vary according to the demographic characteristics of parents. Single mothers take the most costs into account when making decisions, while married mothers consider the child / staff relationship, and married fathers pay relatively equal attention to four factors; cost, convenience, child / staff relationship and operating hours. Other differences were found in parents' decision-making strategies based on parental education and family income.

Research has also been done to determine the effect of spending time in day care centers on subsequent school performance. Peisner-Feinberg (2007) argues that better quality child care is linked to better cognitive and social development for children. While these effects of the quality of child care are in the modest to moderate range, they can be found in the long term. Numerous studies have found short-term effects of the quality of child care on children's cognitive, social and emotional development in preschool. Long-term effects were also found to last in the elementary school years, although fewer longitudinal studies were conducted to examine this issue.

The most numerous studies related to the activities carried out in day care centers for children focus on physical activities. Gubbels et al. (2018) show the importance of the physical environment of childcare in decreasing sedentary behavior and promoting physical activity in very young children in general and vulnerable children in particular. Moderation according to the child's characteristics shows the urgency of forming child care centers that promote physical activity in all children, increasing their efficiency in child care.

Hinkley, Salmon, Crawford et al (2016) tried to determine whether there are differences in the physical activity of preschool children in care centers compared to children cared for at home. Their study identified that children in care centers are significantly less active than those cared for in the family. Few center-based correlates were identified about the physical activity of preschool children. They believe that future research should explore other aspects of the centers, such as what children actually do, and potentially wider influences on children's behaviors, including the social, cultural and political contexts in which the centers operate. Laughlin (2013) also comparatively analyzes the activities of couples caring for day care centers and those caring for relatives (parents, grandparents, or other Russian women). He said that the level of training as well as the interest of those who care for children related to their activities, can have a strong impact on the general well-being of the child.

The relationship between physical activity outside the center and outside the center is also studied by O'Neill, Pfeiffer, Dowda et al (2016) who argue that the physical activity of children in the day center is positively associated with activity outside the center. However, they point out that those children who did not play sports in the center were more active outside of school, a fact that they explain by involving factors related to the child as well as the structure and organization of the group of children.

Some studies also investigate the nature and relationship between the quality of care in the center and the cognitive and social development of children. Child care is a multidimensional phenomenon. Guidance on when a child should be placed in day care and what type of care should be used is complicated due to the multitude of effects on children. Child care experiences interact with home experiences and the child's own characteristics, and research indicates that the quality of child care matters first and foremost (Bradley and Vandell, 2007).

Numerous studies have discovered the short-term effects of the quality of child care on children's cognitive, social and emotional development in preschool. Long-term effects were also found to last in the elementary school years, although fewer longitudinal studies were conducted to examine this issue. Moreover, these results indicate that the influences of child care quality are important for children of all backgrounds. While some studies have found stronger effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (suggesting that this problem may be even more critical for children at higher risk for school failure), the findings indicate that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also influenced by the quality of care (Peisner-Feinberg, 2007)

The evaluation of the quality of care provided to children was also analyzed by Scarr and Eisenberg (1994) who analyzed 363 groups with infants, young children and preschoolers from 120 child care centers. They argue that aspects of childcare quality that can be regulated include the relationship between caregivers and children, group size, teacher training in child development or care, teacher education, the highest salary paid to a teacher in the center, and the center's turnover. Helmerhorst, Fukkink, Riksen-Walraven (2017) examined the effects of a new on-site counseling program developed to improve the overall quality of the child care environment in child care centers for children aged 0 to 4 years. Although the effectiveness of this counseling program has not been proven, it is a first step to use new technologies to increase the quality of care in children's day care centers.

Another research that has studied the quality of care provided by day centers is that of Li, Farkas, Duncan et al. (2013) who compared the effects of high quality and poor-quality care on two age groups: preschool and preschool children. The results indicated that cognitive, linguistic and pre-academic skills before entering school were highest among children who experienced high-quality care in both pre-school and preschool, somewhat lower among children who experienced high quality care in only 1 of these periods and the lowest among children who experienced low quality care in both periods. Regardless of the care received in the pre-school period, high-quality pre-school care was linked to better language outcomes and pre-academic performance at the end of the pre-school period; High quality preschool care, regardless of preschool care, was linked to better memory skills at the end of the preschool period.

High quality early education and childcare for preschoolers improves physical and cognitive outcomes for children and can lead to increased schooling. Preschool education can be seen as an investment (especially for children at risk), and studies show a positive return on that investment. Barriers to high-quality early childhood education include inadequate funding, insufficient staff education, and variable regulation and enforcement (Donoghue, 2017).

2. Research

2.1. Objectives and hypothesis.

The main objective of this study was to increase the quality of care provided by day care centers for children through more intense community involvement. It was appreciated that the community can offer many resources for the diversification of the activities offered by the day centers, to the companies located in the center.

2.2. Studied batch

The study included 42 children from two-day centers in Arad, aged between 7 and 14 years. Of these, 24 were girls and 18 were boys. The duration of attending the center varied between 1 year and 13 years.

2.3. Methods used

The children were asked to rate on a 5-step Likert Scale the activities carried out in the center and to indicate what other activities they would like to participate in. The research lasted for 3 months. After the first data was collected, the community was contacted to see to what extent these wishes could be fulfilled. After the implementation of the new activities, the children were again asked to appreciate their degree of satisfaction with the activities carried out during that period. Their answers were analyzed compared to the first assessment made.

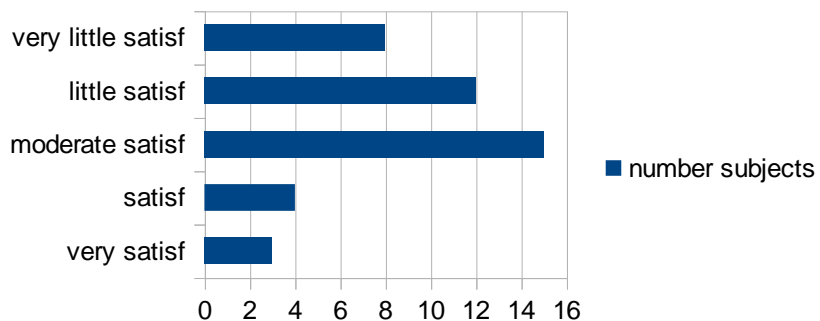
2.4. Results and discussions

The appreciation of the children's degree of satisfaction with the activities in the center is presented in table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. The degree of satisfaction with the activities offered by the center (first appreciation)

Degree of satisfaction	Number subjects
very satisfied	3
satisfied	4
moderate satisfied	15
little satisfied	12
very little satisfied	8

Figure 1. The degree of satisfaction with the activities offered by the center (first appreciation)



It can be seen that most children are moderately satisfied with their activities. In the discussions, all the children claim that the main activity carried out in the center is doing homework. Depending on the time left, I also do other activities such as: drawing, games, walks. Few people are very satisfied with the activities in the center - only 3 children. For them, it is essential to be helped with homework, because they do not always understand what is taught at school and need additional explanations at their level, so they can understand what it is about. A much larger number of children (8 subjects) are very dissatisfied with the activities because they are not very diverse and, in general, the same activities are repeated almost daily.

Ask what other activities the children would like to mention: more trips, more cultural activities (museums, theaters) more social activities. Tinanad took into account these wishes and contacted the local council as well as various individuals and companies that could have helped the day centers to diversify their activities.

Thus, it was possible to obtain the swimming pool twice a week: an instructor took care of the children who did not know how to swim, offering them support and teaching them the basic elements of this type of sport. All the children enthusiastically participated in the swimming lessons.

The management of the puppet theater offered free tickets to four of the performances given by the actors. After the performances, there was a meeting between children and actors, in which the latter shared with the children some of the secrets of their profession. The children could even try to manipulate the dolls and together with the actors to improvise a unique show.

Private companies have offered minibuses for trips to areas of interest in the county. We also contacted 4 guesthouses that offered accommodation and free meals for two trips of two days each. In this way, the children managed to visit tourist areas in the county, enriching their knowledge of history and natural sciences related to the places they visited. In the excursions made in the areas of tourist interest were studied not only the relief forms, but also the characteristics of the flora and fauna from the respective areas. References were also made to the history of the places visited and their evolution over time.

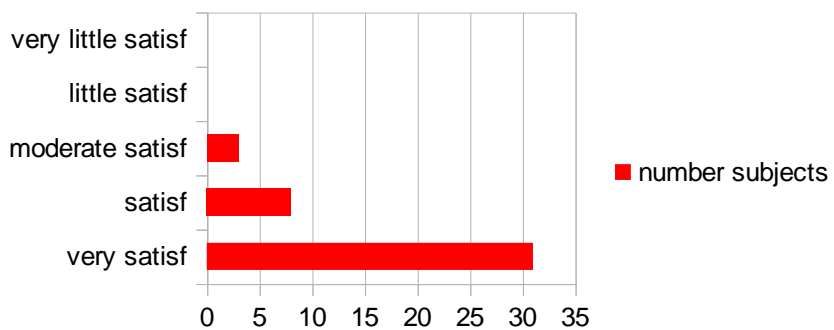
The local council organized two masquerade balls, one for Halloween and the second for her in early December. All the children participated in these events, the only condition that was put was that they make their own costumes. The most successful costumes made by children were awarded (for the first three places a tablet and a pack of books were offered by the local council), and all the other participants received sweets. These rewards stimulated children to increase their creativity in making costumes, but at the same time they led to the development of practical skills related to making them.

The museums in the city offered them free visits accompanied by a guide who gave the children detailed explanations: at the art museum the guide explained to the children the paintings, the techniques for making them by painters, the history of each painting and their importance in within the national heritage. The museum of history and natural sciences was given detailed explanations about each exhibit, emphasizing the details of the places where they were discovered, their historical significance and importance in the development and continuity of the local community. In this way, all the proposed activities contributed not only to the children's recreation, but also to the enrichment of their baggage of information and knowledge in various fields.

After a period of three months, during which these activities took place, the children were asked, again, to appreciate the activities proposed by the center. Their degree of satisfaction with these activities is presented in table 2 and figure 2.

Table 2. The degree of satisfaction with the activities offered by the center (second appreciation)

Degree of satisfaction	Number subjects
very satisfied	31
satisfied	8
moderate satisfied	3
little satisfied	0
very little satisfied	0

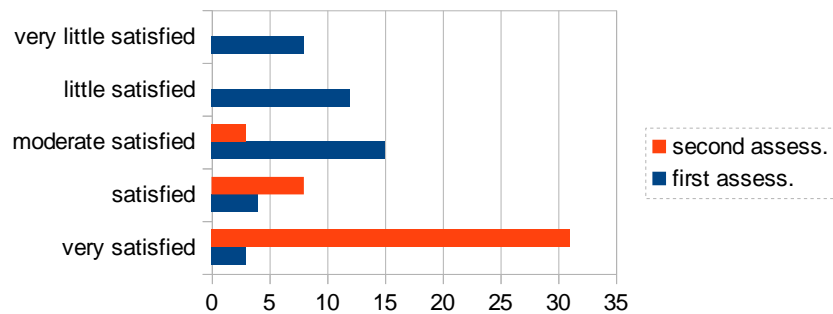
Figure 2. The degree of satisfaction with the activities offered by the center (second appreciation)

It is immediately noticeable from the table and graph that the categories of little satisfied and very little satisfied disappear. Most of the children (31 subjects) were very satisfied with the activities carried out, their diversity and the new information and knowledge they acquired in so many fields. The three subjects who said they were moderately satisfied made this assessment because they wanted even more activities as interesting as the ones they did during this period. In their opinion, such activities should have taken place daily, not just once or twice a week.

In order to be able to better observe the evolution of children's appreciation of the center's activities, we will present in table 3 and figure 3 the two comparative assessments made by children.

Table 3. The degree of satisfaction compared to the two assessments

Degree of satisfaction	First assessment	Second assessment
very satisfied	3	31
satisfied	4	8
moderate satisfied	15	3
little satisfied	12	0
very little satisfied	8	0

Figure 3. The degree of satisfaction compared to the two assessments

It is significant the improvement of the appreciations made by the children on the activities in the day care center after the period of three months in which the community involvement was managed. The day center is an alternative form of community-based child care and protection. So, this community should be encouraged to get more involved in improving the quality of care provided by the day care center. Day care centers should not be limited to an after-school role, for only homework. Of course, these are also important for improving children's school performance. The centers must also take care of the children's recreation activities and that they also have a substantial contribution to the enrichment of the children's knowledge and to the development of some social skills.

Therefore, it was considered that the community can get more involved, also offering opportunities to diversify the activities offered by the center, without this diversification involving excessive expenses for the community. Children must not only do their homework, but they must acquire new and varied knowledge in different fields, they must acquire social skills to behave in the museum, at the theater or on a trip to ensure future full integration and harmonious in society.

3. Conclusions

Research in the literature on the quality of care provided by day care centers for children focuses more on the physical activities carried out in the center. Few studies in the literature mention the effect of cultural activities on the harmonious development of children. The study tried to highlight the fact that the degree of satisfaction of children related to the activities carried out in the day care center can be increased by diversifying the activities offered and the direct involvement of the community. The introduction of cultural activities in the children's program contributes not only to the enrichment of children's knowledge in various fields but also to the improvement of social skills of correct relationship in society and correct behavior in certain public institutions (museums, theaters, pensions, etc.). The stronger and deeper involvement of the local community is essential in ensuring the most varied and diversified cultural activities that will help children to a better future integration in society.

Acknowledgement: *We hereby state that the subjects involved in our research were informed about the voluntary character of participation in this research, about the understanding of information and of that fact that withdrawal from research is possible at any time without negative consequences upon the participant. The research complied with all ethical research standards, the research participants/participants' guardians giving their consent to participate in the research.*

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