

*This article was taken from the book Foundations: Early Childhood Education in a Diverse Society.  
This book is used in Red Rocks Community College's Director Qualification program.*

## **Child Care Programs: Should They Be More Like Home or School?**



A classic study conducted by researchers at the Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena looked at the advantages of early childhood programs operated out of homes and small homelike centers. Compared to large school-like programs, children spent far less of their child care day waiting – waiting in lines to use the toilet, to wash their hands, to go outside. In the school-like setting, up to one-fourth of the children's time – two hours out of an eight hour day! Just think of how much time and energy was required of the teachers to keep these children in line.

Decision making was another area of

advantage of the homelike program: Here, children made eighty percent of the decisions about what they wanted to do; in the school-like programs, children made only forty-two percent of the decisions and adults made the rest. Furthermore, it was adults who started and ended activities in the school-like programs, while in the homelike programs, children decided when to initiate an activity, how long to stick with it, and when to go on to something else. In other words, the children were allowed to follow their own interests and place themselves in the home-like setting. Some of the important tasks of childhood are (1) discovering who you are, what you like, and how to make choices and (2) developing a sense of time. These tasks are accomplished better in a homelike setting, where children can practice structuring their own time.

Having an adult close by to “scaffold” learning and to provide resources, input, and guidance is another advantage of homelike programs. The Pacific Oaks research also showed that children had five-times greater one-on-one or shared contact (with two or three children) with an adult. In the school-like programs, children were much more apt to be in groups of ten to twelve children for most of the day. It's not hard to see the implications of children having little privacy, few one-on-one interactions, and very little personal access to adult attention.

Adults were more available in the homelike centers, and they were also more likely to facilitate learning than demand compliance. Adults in the homelike settings were more encouraging and helpful, made more suggestions, and were less demanding. They could afford to be. They were not spending their energy on crowd control but rather on care and education.

Children's behavior also differed markedly in each setting. In the school-like programs, the children tended to interact with adults in a one-way fashion; they spent much more time resisting or responding to adult expectations. In contrast, children in the homelike programs exhibited a greater variety of healthy behaviors: they initiated contact with as well as responded to adults and other children, and they were more likely to be both physically and socially engaged as they gave orders, chose activities, playfully and aggressively intruded on each other, asked for help, and expressed their opinions.

