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### Exploring Children's Need

It is Sunday morning, and like any other, I am getting ready to start teaching my class at the church's nursery. I am about to start singing a song with my toddler students when the nursery door opens and the only thing I hear are the loud screams of Isabella, one of my students. Her mother, Lesbia, is pushing her into the classroom while Isabella tries to make a run for it. She screams, she cries, she even hits her mother's leg in an attempt to leave the classroom. When her mother grabs Isabella by the arm and makes her sit on a yellow chair, Isabella gets up, throws the chair to the floor and screams "I don't want to stay here, I want to go home." As she is saying this you can notice the fury burning in her eyes. I am speechless and my mouth is hanging open. Embarrassed by her daughter's behavior, Lesbia approaches me and says, "I am so sorry, is not that she does not like your class, it is just that she associates it with her day care. She spends around eight hours from Monday to Friday at the day care and I guess she can't handle the idea of spending one more day in another one. Sorry!" All I could ask myself was, "Are day cares that bad that this girl is terrified with the idea of spending one more day at a day care?" I wondered at that moment if sending children to day cares was beneficial or harmful for both parents and their kids.

Is sending children to day cares the best way to raise a child? This issue genuinely perplexes me because everyday more and more children are sent to day cares while their parents spend more time at their work place and less time with their sons and daughters. Many parents miss out on the opportunity of spending meaningful time with their children and so bonds

become weaker. Although I was aware that the number of children attending day cares is increasing rapidly, I didn't know how children can be affected physically, emotionally, and psychologically by this kind of institution. I wanted to find out whether day cares have a positive effect, a negative effect, or a little bit of both on children and to what extend. Is putting children in a day care the best solution? Is it healthy for children to spend so many hours of the day, every day of the week, away from their parents? These are the questions that when answered would reveal if sending children to day cares is the best way to raise children or not.

I began my research by visiting the Hialeah John F. Kennedy Library in order to find helpful books related to my issue. I thought it was going to be easy finding information on how day cares affect children, but it was far from easy. A librarian kindly assisted me by showing me how to look up the books I wanted through the library's database. I was really disappointed and frustrated when I typed the key words "day care effects on children" and there were zero results. The librarian told me that maybe I should try again with different key words. I typed "day care" and hit the search key. This time one book showed up but it was a book that contained the names and addresses of different day cares around the United States; a yellow book for day cares. I thought at that point that I wasn't going to find anything related to my issue. Suddenly I started thinking that I didn't have to go straight to the effect day cares have on children, I thought that first I should focus on what children need to grow up healthy and happy in a safe environment. I thought about researching first how children develop, how they perform best, how they learn more, how they feel, and what they need. I clicked the Search key after I typed the words "children development" and an amazing title of a book appeared on the screen: Creating Caring Children: The First Three Years. When I located the book I discovered other three books that promised to be helpful in my research: The Secret of Happy Children, Your Home is a Learning

Place, and Not my Kid: 21 Steps to Raising a Non-Violent Child. Satisfied, I left the library and took my four books home.

The following day I decided to start reading the books I had gotten at the library. I wanted to know what makes children happy because that's what matters the most. I decided to start reading Steve Biddulph's book The Secret of Happy Children. I wanted to know if the author was a reliable source and so I read his resume in the back of the book. It revealed that Steve Biddulph has been a family psychologist and counselor for over twenty years and that his books are in two million homes around the world. The back cover of the book showed a quote from Choice Magazine Book Club Selection calling this book "the best guide to bringing up children we've have ever seen." It sounded promising. In this book, Steve revealed what is really going on inside children's minds and what parents should do about it. Chapter 2 focuses on what children really want and what they need. Steve explained what children need by telling the readers a story. He wrote that when World War ended in 1945, Europe lay in ruins and thousands of children were left orphans (32). A Swiss doctor was sent to research how these orphan babies were best care for (Biddulph 32). In order to learn what the most successful type of care was, he traveled through Europe and visited different kinds of "orphan-care situations" (Biddulph 32). Some babies were sent to American field hospitals where they were "snug in stainless steel coats, in hygienic wards, getting their four-hourly feeds of special milk formula from crisply uniformed nurses" (Biddulph 33). Half a dozen infants were left in the care of villagers, surrounded by kids, dogs, "in the arms of the village women" (Biddulph 33). These children took their chances on "goats' milk and the communal stewpot" (Biddulph 33). Based on the children's weight, coordination, smiles, and eye contact, the Swiss doctor concluded that "the children in the rough villages were thriving better than their scientifically cared-for counterparts in the hospitals" (Biddulph 33). When I read this I was really surprised, since the

children in the villages didn't receive half the medical attention the babies in the hospitals received. Then, I asked myself this question, 'What did the children in the villages have that the children in the hospitals were missing?' I kept reading and the answer showed up; the Swiss doctor discovered that "babies need love to live" (Biddulph 33). I found this very interesting and perplexing. I already knew that babies needed love and attention to grow up healthy and secure but I didn't know that without it they could die. The Swiss doctor compared the death rates of the children in the field hospitals and those of the children in the villages; the death rate was higher for the children in the hospitals (Biddulph 33). I couldn't believe it! Children in the hospitals who had access to appropriate food and medication were dying more often than those living in the villages without appropriate hygiene or food. I couldn't understand this. What made the difference? "The babies in the villages had more hugs, bounces, and things to see than they knew what to do with and, given reasonable basic care, were thriving" (Biddulph 33). I realized then that the death rate was higher for children in the hospitals because they "had everything but affection and stimulation" (Biddulph 34). This made sense to me. The Swiss doctor added that babies need "skin-to-skin contact, eye contact, and a colorful, lively environment" (Biddulph 34). It was obvious that the children raised by the village women had everything babies need to survive, (according to the Swiss doctor) and that those who were cared for in the hospitals only received medical attention and no love.

From reading this chapter, I concluded that babies need human contact, affection and love in order to live, and that without them, they can easily die. But I was left with this question: Do day cares provide children with love, affection, and enough human contact? Then again, do all parents provide their children with love, affection, and enough human contact? Even though I didn't know the answer to this question I was more inclined to believe that parents are more likely to give their children more love and affection than day cares. I concluded that the majority

of parents are focused on what their children want and need, while most day cares have a person in charge of a group of kids and it is impossible for that one person to meet every child's need of love and affection. Maybe I am old-fashioned or idealistic, but I could not help to think that the love a parent feels for his/her child is the greatest love of all. If there existed a day care where there was a person assigned for every child and each adult would be loving and affectionate with the child assigned; it would be a different story. Then I would be the first one to say that there was a day care that provided children with love, affection, and enough human contact. Since most day cares don't run like this, I would have to say that some babies wouldn't survive the lack of hugs, kisses, and cuddling. I suddenly realized that the more hours and days babies spend in a day care, the more they miss out on love.

Next, I turned to my Sociology book to have a closer look at how day cares affect children. James M. Henslin is the author of the book Sociology: A down-to-Earth Approach. The first page of the book offered a small biography of James M. Henslin. I learned that he "earned his master's and doctorate degrees in sociology at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri" and won a "postdoctoral fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health" (Henslin 1). In the book he included part of his own field research and summaries of case studies, experiments, surveys, and participant observation that were conducted by other people. I focused on chapter 3 which dealt with socialization; the process by which we learn the characteristics of our culture; its norms, values and behavior (82). Henslin referred to day cares as agents of socialization, "individual or groups that affect our self-concept, attitudes, behaviors, or other orientations toward life" (82). Henslin pointed out that researchers published their findings on "1,200 kindergarten children they had studied since they were a month old" (84). According to Henslin, the researchers observed the children many times "both at home and at day care" (84). The children's interaction with their mothers was videotaped and the researchers

made detailed notes on it (Henslin 84). The results caught the media's attention as they caught mine. "Children who spend more time in day care have weaker bonds with their mothers and are less affectionate to them" (Henslin 84). I would have thought that after spending so many hours in day care most children would love to go into their mother's arms in order to make up for the time they were apart. I imagined that children would be desperate to be with their mom after a long day away from her; but this was not the case. I was confused. According to the results of the study, children who spend so much time in day care are "less cooperative with others and more likely to fight and to be mean" (Henslin 84). "By the time they get to kindergarten, they are more likely to talk back to teachers and to disrupt the classroom" (Henslin 84). Here is what I found most interesting: the results "hold true regardless of the quality of the day care, the family's social class, or whether the child is a girl or a boy" (Henslin 84). I did not see this coming. First I thought that if the day care was a private one or if caring people were the ones taking care of children, then the results would vary. Apparently I was wrong because the results won't vary under any circumstances. The study also showed that children who spent more time in day care "scored higher on language tests" (Henslin 85). I was glad to find out that day cares don't only have a negative impact on children; they have a good effect and that is giving children better language skills. The real question was: What is more important, scoring high on language tests or being caring, sensitive children who are cooperative with others? At the end of page 85 Henslin asked himself this question, "Are we producing a generation of smart but mean children?" That was something to think about, and I figured that the answer depends on what kind of person you are, and what you value the most. I decided that being a better person matters more than scoring high on language tests. Then again, many children score high on language tests and they have never been in day care.

After reading that children who attend day cares score higher on language tests, I wanted to know if children who don't attend day cares have the possibility of having great language skills. I was able to find a book titled Your Home Is a Learning Place by Pamela Weinberg. I wanted to learn more about Pamela Weinberg and so I typed her name in Google and pressed the Search key. What I learned was very impressive. She is the co-author of the book City Baby, the "best selling parenting guidebook" (Weinberg). She also runs the weekly "New Mothers' Luncheon on New York's West Side" which has become very helpful for mothers new to child rearing (Weinberg). In her book Your Home Is a Learning Place, Pamela Weinberg explained that children learn all kinds of things from their parents and that parents are children's first teachers (5). She explains that parents only need time and caring in order to be good teachers and that what they teach their children at home can make a big difference when their kids start school (Weinberg 5). This I agree with; I remember that when I started going to school I already knew my colors, the alphabet, how to count, how to write my own name, and even some addition and subtraction since my parents had taught me at home. Pamela encouraged parents to make reading a part of their children's life at home and advised them to treat reading as something fun to do (Weinberg 13). If parents make reading a family activity, before long, children will learn to love it (Weinberg 13). The author states that when parents and children read together they build a close bond and kids learn to enjoy reading (Weinberg 13). This statement made me remember the countless nights my mom and I spent reading together. My mom used to read me a story every night before I went to bed and I used to love it. Even when I didn't know how to read, I found pleasure in looking at the pictures the books had, and as my mom told me the story I visualized it through the pictures. When I learned to read then we both took turns on reading; it was a wonderful experience. The author explains that parents can show support for writing. Pamela recommended parents, "Let your child see you write... kids who see parents write learn

that writing is important” (Weinberg 23). I had not thought about this before; I found it interesting and believed it to be true. Children imitate their parents when they are young because parents are their role models; if children see that their parents write most of the time, eventually they are going to start writing too. It is not that children will start to write words or sentences when they are one or two years old, but they are going to start showing a passion for writing even when this means making lines or circles on a piece of paper. I thought that eventually, children would want to learn how to write their own name and after that, there would be no stopping.

When I read Pamela’s book I thought that if all parents dedicated enough time to helping their children read and write, then their children could score very high on language tests once they were in school because, after all, parents are children’s first teachers. I thought that if parents made time to educate their children with care, then children could excel in every subject once they started school. Something occurred to me that I had never thought about before. Some parents send their children to a day care because they believe that their children will learn something that is going to be useful for school later on. If that’s the only reason they send their children to a day care then, children don’t really have to go because according to Pamela, parents can do the job themselves.

Since I read that children who spent more time at a day care were more likely to be aggressive, the next step in my research was finding out what can make children non-violent. I turned to the book Not my Kid: 21 Steps to Raising a Non-Violent Child by Dr. Mary E. Muscari. The first page of the book showed a picture of Dr. Mary and revealed that she is an Associate Professor at the University of Scranton. She has worked with thousands of children and many of them had challenging problems including violence. She has written two pediatric nursing books, writes articles for scholarly journals and regional newspapers, and writes chapters



for academic textbooks. She earned a Ph.D. in nursing and a postmaster's certificate in psychiatric nursing from Adelphi University. She also earned a master's degree in pediatric nursing from Columbia University, a bachelor's degree from Pace University and a RN from Cochran School of Nursing. When I read this mini biography I couldn't help but think that she is an expert on children. Dr. Muscari reveals that recent animal studies show that "inadequate maternal attention reduces the function of the brain chemical serotonin, a hormone that affects mood" (21). She explains that lack of attention causes "increased aggression and the reduced ability to respond to or give affection" (Muscari 21). This made sense, people who receive love give love, those who don't receive any attention or love cannot give others love or attention because they haven't experienced it themselves. Dr. Muscari explained that the neurobiological studies add yet another factor to the "social, emotional, and spiritual reasons for giving children adequate love, nurturing, attention support and guidance" (21). Without these characteristics, "children cannot develop, learn, cope or be healthy" (Muscari 21). This supported what the Swiss doctor concluded after comparing the children cared for in field hospitals with the children cared for by the village women; children cannot live without love. Dr. Muscari wanted her readers to know that children feel important when parents pay attention to them and demonstrate interest in their activities and efforts (21). She added that children really need attention and they'll do anything to get it, "even it means being disruptive or obnoxious" (Muscari 21). "When children feel rejected or unappreciated, they usually resort to misbehavior which, unfortunately, leads to further rejection" (Muscari 21). This made me remember the struggle I faced with an obnoxious kid named Daniel. I was the teacher at my church's nursery and he was my student. Since it was impossible for me to give all my attention to every child, I usually focused more on the girls and the babies and so that left Daniel out. He started behaving in a horrible way and the more I called his attention the more he misbehaved. When I realized what

was going on I began to pay more attention to him and was more loving with him. It worked out. According to Dr. Muscari, children need parents to provide a loving, warm, caring and respectful home for them in order to learn to respect and care for others (21). I wondered if love is enforced in day cares by the people in charge. Dr. Muscari explained that the best parents can do for their children is to give them as much personal attention as possible and demonstrate affection by kissing and hugging them (22). I asked myself, 'Do children at day cares receive hugs and kisses? Do all children get the personal attention required to grow up?' If the answer is no, then day cares could be raising violent kids. Children need and want their parents' time. I wondered, 'Do children who spend eight hours a day, five days a week in a day care spend enough time with their parents?' Spending time together is a critical part of building families' strength (Muscari 23).

After reading so much about what children need and about the effects that day care can have on children, I was concerned about what are the most critical ages in a child's life. I wanted to find out what are the ages that matter the most, the ages that are critical to define what kind of person a child would be. I wanted to know what is supposed to happen in the different stages of development in a child's life. I turned to the book Creating Caring Children: The First Three Years, hoping to get an answer. The inside cover provided me with information about the authors Diane Carlebach and Beverly Tate. Carlebach is an early childhood specialist and a kindergarten teacher while Tate is the coordinator of the early childhood program in North Campuses. I was convinced they were experts on the subject. Early in the book, Tate and Carlebach stated that the first three years in a child's life are crucial (x). "It is all about the blending of education and health and nurturing in the earliest years" (Carlebach, and Tate x). Chapter 1, beginning on page five, focused on infants. It started by saying that "infants need relationships to meet their basic human needs of attachment and survival" (Carlebach, and Tate).

I wondered what kind of relationships. The answer followed: positive and healthy relationships. According to Carlebach and Tate, positive and healthy relationships give infants a sense of trust and security (5). “Adults who don’t respond appropriately to babies’ cues or signals may create unhealthy and negative relationships” (Carlebach, and Tate 5). I asked myself, do all parents respond appropriately to babies’ cues or signal? Many thoughts started circling my mind. Not all parents who stay at home to take care of their children are good parents. Many of the people who work at day cares are good parents themselves and so they enjoy taking care of other children. Then again, not all parents are bad parents and not everyone who works at a day care taking care of children is a parent or a child lover; which makes this issue very, very complex in my opinion. According to the authors, adults can make positive relationships stronger by engaging infants in conversations, that is, speaking to them in soft tones, talking with them about anything and everything, recognizing and describing the infant’s abundant communication through facial expression, movement and vocalizations (5). It caught my attention how the authors used the word *adults* instead of *parents* which means that this applies to any and every adult who plays a role in any child’s life. Then, I read something that really surprised me. “Making conversations a constant practice not only establishes the caring and security that infants need, but also lays a rich foundation for language, literacy, and later academic success” (Carlebach, and Tate 6). Although this surprised me at first, when I thought about it, I realized that this supported what Pamela Weinberg implied in her book Your Home is a Learning Place. “What parents say and do with their children in the first three years of language learning has an enormous impact on how many languages their children learn and use” (Carlebach, and Tate xi). I would have never guessed this. I thought that sometimes parents don’t realize the power they have to educate their children.

Chapter 2 focused on mobile infants while chapter 3 focused on toddlers. Mobile infants need to feel loved unconditionally (Carlebach, and Tate 44). I remember asking myself, “What does it mean to be loved unconditionally?” I wondered if children who spend most of their early years in day care feel loved unconditionally by the people who take care of them. Toddlers need “a partner in their play and the routines of their daily lives” (Carlebach, and Tate 84). I thought that parents can be partners in their children’s play and daily lives’ routines. Can people who take care of children in a day care be their partners in their daily lives? Maybe some of them can, maybe none of them can.

For the last part of my secondary research I wanted to find articles related to whether mothers should stay at home to take care of their children or send them to a day care. I visited the FIU Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center online to see how other people reacted to this issue. I found two great articles, "Working Mothers Are Harming the Family" by Richard Lowry and “Stay-at-Home Mothers Benefit Families" by Elena Neuman. The first article I read was the one written by Richard Lowry who strongly suggested that mothers who work and send their children to a day care are harmful to their own family and the institution of family in general. A study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) reported that kids in non-maternal care tend to get in lots of fights, are cruel, have an explosive behavior, talk too much, argue a lot, and demand a lot of attention (Lowry). Based on the results of this study, Richard Lowry argued that “society should support women who choose to raise their children full time instead of women who abandon their children to day care providers.” Although I wasn’t sure what Lowry meant when he said that society should “support” stay-at-home mothers, I believed that society should encourage women to raise their children full time at least the first three years of their children’s lives. Elena Neuman stated in her article “Stay-at-Home Mothers Benefit Families" that the number of women who are reconsidering career

choices and leaving the workforce to care for their children at home is increasing. I was pleased to read so. After interviewing several working mothers and experts, Neuman concluded that “a primary reason more mothers are staying home is to ensure the healthy development and well-being of their children.” I was happy to see that at least some mothers care enough about their children’s welfare to put a stop to their careers. I am not saying that all women should do this; only those who truly want to. Maybe some women could cut their working hours to spend more time with their children. Fathers could do the same. If neither parent can do so, there is still the possibility of grandma assuming the responsibility of educating and loving them. Many of the mothers interviewed believed that working outside the home “could cause their children to experience emotional and behavioral problems later in life” (Neuman). I didn’t know if this was true, but I was sure that spending too much time in day care can cause these problems. The findings of 1,200 kindergarten children studied by researchers prove so.

After learning what children need, I have concluded that children are delicate creatures who need all the love, the affection, the attention, and the education possible. What I haven’t learned is if day cares are capable of providing children with each and every one of these requisites. Day cares can have positive and negative effects on children; the question is which of the two weights more.

As I continue with my research, I am not sure what thesis I will use for my final project. I still want to do more research on the positive effects day cares have on children. I feel that I have too much information on the negative effects and not so much on the positive ones. I have talked to three mothers who have agreed to be part of an interview. Two of these mothers have sent their child to a day care while the other one stayed at home full time to take care of her daughter. The interviews are scheduled for next week when all three women will be enjoying their Spring Break. I hope to get a better, more meaningful understanding of what sending or not

sending a child to day care can do to the child. I will also be visiting a day care center where I'll be observing what really goes on in a day care and making detailed notes. Do day cares provide children with everything they need? I hope to explore this issue further before coming up with my final paper

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