

Who is minding the children?



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Choosing a childcare centre is complicated. But thanks to a new study from the Université de Montréal, the selection process may be one-step easier. The findings, published as part of a PhD thesis suggest that childcare workers with a college education provide a better learning environment for the child.



"We concluded that workers who have completed either college or university programs will provide a better learning environment for both *Centres de la petite enfance (CPEs)* and family daycare centres," says Suzanne Manningham, author of the study and a recent doctoral graduate from the Université de Montréal. "We gathered our data from three distinct studies on the topic."

Université de Montréal study correlates caregiver's education with quality of care (Photo: iStockphoto)

CPE versus family daycare centre

In the first study data was obtained from the *Étude longitudinale sur le développement des enfants du Québec*. Manningham analyzed a sample of 1 211 childcare workers. "Those individuals with a specialized education in childcare were more likely to offer tailored educational activities," says Manningham. "However, we concluded that these continuing education programs improved the environment in family daycare centres only but not in CPEs."

This is because workers in CPEs can rely on the support and experience of other workers. In family daycare centres the workers were more isolated. "These educators don't have the luxury of exchanging and relying on others, says Manningham. "Based on these findings, we strongly encourage a specialized education for all workers, but especially for those working in family daycare centres."

Are they sensitive to the child's needs?

The second study evaluated how the sensitivity of the childcare worker factored into the quality of the learning environment. "It's important to take into consideration the personal characteristics of a childcare worker," says Manningham. "Qualities such as the ability to respond swiftly and tenderly to the needs of the children, to detect the specific interests of the children, and offering various ways to communicate play a role. Our findings were clear: the more sensitive the worker the better the learning environment."

Future steps

The third aspect of Manningham's research consisted of setting up an innovative intervention program to increase the expertise of childcare workers. This tailored training brought about significant change in the quality of the learning environment one year later.

Manningham's research was conducted under the supervision of Sylvana Côté, professor at the Université de Montréal Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, and Christa Japel, professor at the UQAM Department of Special Education and Training.

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