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### Early childhood education and care contributes to



## lifelong learning

### Enhancing children's development and well-being and providing a foundation for life-long learning

Child development research strongly supports the idea that ECEC services play an important developmental role in early childhood. If ECEC is high quality, it provides intellectual and social stimulation that promotes cognitive development and social competence. These effects can persist into elementary school to establish a foundation for later success. Research shows that the quality of ECEC services is absolutely critical in determining how developmentally effective they are - that is, whether they enhance "early learning". These benefits of high quality ECEC programs apply to all children (although poor children may derive more benefit) and whether or not the mother is in the paid workforce.

The term "high quality" is shorthand for the characteristics of ECEC programs that go beyond basic health and safety to environments that support children's well-being, development, learning and quality of life. "High quality" ECEC services employ educators/staff who are well educated for their work; have decent working conditions and wages; work with groups of children of manageable size; provide non-didactic, creative, enjoyable, age-appropriate activities for children; ensure consistent adults and peer groups; and offer stable social and physical environments. They are responsive to diverse populations of children and parents, include children with disabilities in a meaningful way; and are adequately supported by infrastructure like regulation and funding.

Participation in high quality ECEC programs helps lay the groundwork for school success, higher education and life-long learning. However, while much of the child development ECEC literature is focused more on the child's value in the future - through language, cognitive, social and emotional development - than on child well-being at the present time, an important complementary idea is that ECEC services play a role in ensuring that children have a good quality of life "here-and-now". This perspective treats childhood as an important phase of life, not merely as a way station to adulthood, and the child as an active, competent learner. This presumes that ECEC programs are an institution for meeting children's own interests outside the private sphere of the family and an important part of children's culture.

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