UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS TO PARENTS IN PROMOTING THEIR CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Data collected from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) indicate that the percentage of Canadian children aged six months to five years who were in some type of non-parental care increased from 42% to 54% between 1994-1995 and 2002-2003 (Bushnik, 2006). There were also significant shifts in the reported use of certain types of child care arrangements across Canada. From 1994-1995 to 2002-2003, there was a decline in care by a non-relative, but an increase in care by a relative or child care centre. Correspondingly, there has been a great deal of research looking at the effects of non-parental care and child care centres in particular. The results of such research have been mixed, with some studies (e.g. Bates et al., 1994; Belsky, 1990; Haskins, 1985; Vandell & Corasaniti, 1990) suggesting that factors such as long hours of non-parental child care are associated with later socio-emotional difficulties, while other studies have shown positive consequences for social functioning (e.g. Howes, 1988; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997; Vandell, Henderson & Wilson, 1988), and cognitive-linguistic development (e.g. Broberg, Wessels, Lamb & Hwang, 1997; Burchinal et al., 2000; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). These positive consequences seem especially apparent in economically disadvantaged children attending high-quality early intervention programs (e.g. Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal & Ramey, 2001; Reynolds, 2000; Schweinhart, Weikart & Larner, 1986).

The positive outcomes of centre-based child care seem to be dependent on the quality of care that is provided (Andersson, 1989; Rubenstein & Howes (1983; Wessels, Lamb & Hwang, 1996). The components of child care quality include basic health and safety indicators, staffing indicators, structural features of the classroom, characteristics of the caregivers and indicators of the child's interactions and experiences in the child care setting (Sosinsky, Lord & Zigler, 2007). Research has shown that child care centres that follow licensing standards (Pence & Goelman, 1991), have low child-staff ratios (Sosinsky et., 2007: Phillipse, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997) have caregivers with higher staff wages, more experience, formal education and specialized training (Sosinsky et al., 2007; Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien & McCartney, 2002) and have low staff turn-over rates (Phillipsen et al, 1997) tend to offer the caliber of quality child care that promotes healthy child development. Moreover, the presence of three or more secondary attachment figures in a child's life seems to increase children's resiliency and promote mental health (Bowlby, 2007).

As more children are cared for in child care centres, there has been a surge in interest regarding what variables are most important to parents when they make child care decisions for their young children (Rose & Elicker, 2008). Information regarding parents' child care choices has been obtained by asking parents to rate (e.g., Cryer & Burchinal, 1997), rank (e.g., Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 2000), and describe through answers to open-ended questions (e.g. Hertz & Ferguson, 1996) what is important to them in a child care centre. Through such research, a number of variables have been identified by parents as important in determining their choice of child care. These variables include cost, availability, location, flexibility of hours of operation, warm and caring caregivers, caregiver training, type of environment, safety, program goals and ratios and group sizes (e.g. Davis & Connelly, 2005; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Seo, 2003). Some studies have reported that practical factors such as location, cost and hours are more important to parents than quality-related child care characteristics, such as curriculum, child/staff

ratio, training of teachers and teacher's sensitivity) in determining their child care choices (e.g. Johansen, Leibowitz & Waite, 1996; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien & Roy, 2001). Other studies have reported parents citing curriculum (Bogat & Gensheimer, 1986) and a "friendly atmosphere" (Long, Wilson, Kutnik & Telford, 1996) as important in their child care decision-making. In a recent attempt to identify a latent set of constructs underlying parents' values and beliefs regarding optimal child care, Gamble, Ewing and Wilhelm (2009) found that parents' responses could be grouped into five factors which represented "the complexity of parents' views of child care as well their depth of knowledge" (pg. 79). The dimension identified as most important to parents was school readiness, which included program components promoting children's social skills and classroom behaviours associated with success in school settings. Another particularly significant outcome was the emergence of a child-centred orientation factor. This factor was captured through items describing program characteristics that would tailor lessons to a child's abilities, provide freedom to explore, and encourage curiosity and choice. One of the individual items rated by the parents as ''most important'' was encouraging confidence, with over 91% of the parents identifying this as a characteristic that they perceived as significant in a child care setting. Gamble and colleagues suggested that the emergence of this factor represents the depth and complexity of parents' decision-making process when it comes to their children's child care arrangements. However, as this was a newly identified factor, Gamble et al. stressed the need for replication of this finding.

The Current Study

The current study looks at child care factors that are important to parents whose children attend Mothercraft child care centres. Mothercraft is strongly committed to continually assessing all programs within the organization, thus ensuring that these programs are evidence-based and of the highest quality. Programs at Mothercraft are grounded in the following three theoretical frameworks – developmental theory, attachment theory and relational theory. According to developmental theory, human development is a product of the dynamic interaction between genetic and environmental factors. As such, children experience the world in unique ways depending on their specific inborn qualities and experiences. Through keen and sensitive observation of their pupils, Mothercraft teachers are able to tailor their interactions to be respectful and responsive to each child's unique developmental needs. Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of first relationships and how infants' secure attachments to caregivers provide the basis for healthy growth in all domains of development. Caregivers establish secure attachment with children through appropriate, warm, sensitive, and consistent responses to infants' signals and cues. When caregivers serve as secure bases, children feel confident to venture out and explore the world, knowing that there is a safe place to which they can return at any time for comfort and guidance. Through the use of small groups, Mothercraft teachers are able to establish and maintain warm and sensitive interactions with children, thus creating an atmosphere in which children learn how to successfully negotiate the social world. Relational theory postulates that people, institutions and systems grow through relationships with others. In line with relational theory, Mothercraft has created programs with cross departmental activity to engage children and families in services that promote child development.

The current study looks at whether parents whose children are enrolled at Mothercraft value child care factors that align with these three foundational theories. Specifically, the study looks at whether parents value practical factors or more quality-related factors in making decisions regarding their children's child care arrangements. A further goal of the study was to examine whether parents perceive attachment to be an important contributor to healthy child

development. Finally, the study also assessed parents' perception of the importance of research collaboration between child care centres and developmental researchers as well as the importance of child care centres serving as training facilities for early childhood educators in training.

METHOD

Participants. Participants in this study were parents whose children attended one of Mothercraft's three child care centres. The final sample included 32 families from Brookfield Place, 26 families from Eaton Centre and 36 families from Robertson House, thus yielding a response rate of 55%. See Table 1 for a summary of family variables. The highest levels of education for most mothers and fathers were Bachelor's and Master's degrees. See Figure1 and Figure 2 for the complete distribution of highest educational levels for fathers and mothers respectively.

Measure. A survey (Appendix A) was administered to parents in order to assess what factors they considered important for the healthy development of their children. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section consisted of 13 items that pertained to demographic information of the families. The second section consisted of 17 questions that pertained to child care practices, factors that influenced parents' decision to enroll their children with a Mothercraft centre, parents' ranking of the different domains of development, parents' ranking of skills deemed important for school entry, parents' ranking of teacher qualities, parents' understanding and attitudes toward attachment, parents' attitudes toward research and teacher training activities in child care settings and parents' overall satisfaction with Mothercraft's services. The survey included 4 items that allowed for open-ended responses to provide parents with opportunities to elaborate on particular points. A standard Mothercraft consent form was attached to the survey. This consent form included background, purpose, procedure, statement of confidentiality, and risks and benefits associated with the study.

Procedure. Surveys were administered in December of 2009. The director of Mothercraft's Early Childhood Programs provided each Mothercraft centre with a package of surveys. These surveys were given to all parents whose children attended respective centres. Parents who chose to participate were asked to fill out the survey and return it within two weeks. All parents were asked to fill out the consent form before answering the survey. Parents were assured that their participation or non-participation would not affect their child's/children's enrolment in any Mothercraft program and that they had the choice to decline to participate in the study. Parents were told to keep one copy of the consent form for their own records and leave the other copy attached to the survey. Parents were assured that upon receipt of the surveys, the researcher at Mothercraft's Community Data Group who was in charge of the study's data analysis would separate the consent forms from the survey before working with the data in any way. This procedure ensured that responses on the survey could not be identified with individual parents/families. Participating parents dropped off their surveys within the specified two weeks, placing them in boxes at each of the centres. The boxes of surveys were transferred into large envelopes and given to the researcher for data analyses. For one participant family, the copy of the attached consent form was not completed and this survey was excluded from analyses. The final sample consisted of 94 families.

RESULTS

       Prior Non-Parental Care. Fifty-one percent of families reported that their children had been in some form of non-parental care before being enrolled with a Mothercraft Centre. See Figure 3 for a distribution of the types of non-parental care that families used prior to enrolling at Mothercraft. Sixteen percent of families stated that they still used some form of non-parental care. Reasons for doing so included the child being sick, the child care centre being closed and a treat to spend time with grandparents.

       Purposes of Child Care. Parents ranked purposes of child care by importance, such that a rank of 1 indicated "most important" and a rank of 4 indicated "least important". The results showed that parents ranked "child care during the day" as the most important purpose of child care, while "preparing children for school" was ranked least important (see Table 2). Across all centres, 67% of parents ranked "child care during the day" as most important (see Figure 4). Looking at specific centres, 54.8% of parents from Brookfield Place, 75% of parents from Eaton Cente and 72.2% of parents at Robertson House ranked this purpose as most important. Other purposes of child care reported by parents include: convenience of location (near office), stimulation and enjoyment, learning Canadian culture and language, having fun/new experiences, networking, teaching life skills (empathy, cooperation, self-regulation), building confidence in approaching new life experiences, learning more about being a better parent, routine and structure, educational environment leveraging latest techniques in child care, age-appropriate learning, a place where they are loved and nurtured, nurturing and loving caregivers and helping reach developmental potential.

       Factors in Enrolment Decision-Making. Parents rated various factors in terms of their importance in influencing their child care decision-making process. "Educated/trained staff" was ranked as the most important factor in deciding to enroll at a Mothercraft Centre (see Table 3 and Table 4; see Table 5 for a breakdown by centre).

       Domains of Development. Parents ranked the five domains of development in order of importance such that a rank of 1 indicated "most important" and a rank of 5 indicated "least important". The results showed that parents ranked the "Social" domain as most important and the "General knowledge" domain as the least important (see Table 6). However, a number of parents indicated that they considered all domains of development to be important as indicated by the fact that the lowest ranking was still 3.68. Figure 5 shows all parental ranking across the five domains of development. In comparing parents from the different centres, it was found that parents from Robertson House ranked the "Physical" domain as most important (see Table 7).

       Parental Perceptions of Skills that Prepare Children for School. From a selection of 28 options, parents ranked the top five skills that they believed children should have in preparation for school. The results showed that the five top-ranked skills were "self-confidence", "get along with others", communicate clearly", "gross motor skills" and "cope with change" (see Figure 6). These rankings were fairly consistent across centres (see Table 8).

Parental Perceptions of Mothercraft's Ability to Foster Skills for School. Figure 7 shows parents' rating of Mothercraft's ability to help children build important skills in preparation for school. Overall, across the three centres, 67% of sampled parents rated Mothercraft's ability to foster school preparation skills as excellent. There were some differences in parents' ratings across centres as seen in Table 9. For example, 71.9% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place and 73.9% of parents from Eaton Centre rated Mothercraft's ability to foster school preparation skills as excellent, while only 58.3% of parents from Robertson House reported this ability as excellent.

Parental Perceptions of Important Teacher Qualities. Figure 8 shows the five teacher qualities rated as most important by parents. The top five qualities reported were "attentive to child", "loving and sensitive", "encourages confidence", "instills love of learning" and "communicates effectively". Figure 9 shows parents' ratings of their children's teachers in terms of having these top five teacher qualities. Overall, 60.4% of parents rated their child's teacher as having all five of their top-rated qualities. However, there seem to be differences between centres. For example, 71.9% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place rated their child's teacher as having all five of their top-rated teacher qualities, compared to 60.9% of parents from Eaton Centre and 50% of parents from Robertson House.

Parental Perceptions of the Importance of Attachments. As Figure 10 shows, 92.6% of sampled parents perceive attachment to be important in fostering healthy child development. Most common reasons why parents consider attachment to be important in fostering healthy child development include promoting self-confidence, feeling safe and secure, trying new things and exploring and helping children grow. The following is a selection of quotes from parents:

"A sense of security sets the foundation that enables children to explore, grow and learn". (Father from Brookfield Place)

"When a child is secure, they are more likely to feel confident and try and learn new things. Also, they are comfortable asking questions and contributing". (Mother from Robertson House)

"I believe a big part of learning & development has to do with taking risks. When a child feels absolutely secure, he/she can repeatedly and confidently take those types of risks". (Mother from Eaton Centre)

Results also indicate that 84.9% of parents feel that it is important for children to be attached to their teachers (see Figure 11) and 85.1% of parents feel that Mothercraft fosters attachment between children and teachers (see Figure 12). Moreover, 62.8% of parents reported that an environment that fosters attachment was an important factor in deciding to enroll their children at Mothercraft (see Figure 13), although there were some differences between centres (see Table 10). For example, only 53.1% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place considered an environment that fosters attachment to be an important decision-making factor, while 69.2% of parents from Eaton Centre and 66.7% of parents from Robertson House did so.

Parental Perceptions of the Importance of Implementing Practices Based on Research Collaboration. As Figure 14 indicates, 71.3% of parents felt that it was important for centres of

early child development to implement practices based on collaboration with child development researchers. However, there seemed to be differences between centres as indicated in Table 11. For example, 81.3% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place considered such collaboration to be very important, while 61.5% of parents from Eaton Centre and 69.4% of parents from Robertson House did so.

Parental Perceptions of the Importance of Mothercraft Centres Serving as Teacher Training Facilities. As Figure 15 indicates, 52.1% of parents felt that it was important that Mothercraft centres are teaching facilities for early childhood educators in training. However, there seemed to be differences between centres as indicated in Table 12. For example, 68.8% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place perceived child care centres serving as training centres to be very important while 50% of parents from Eaton Centre and 38.9% of parents from Robertson House did so.

Parental Awareness of Services Provided by Mothercraft. As Figure 16 indicates, 16% of parents reported that they were very aware of the wide array of services provided by Mothercraft, while 73.4% reported that they were somewhat aware of these services and 10.6% reported that they were not at all aware of the services provided. When asked whether it was important that Mothercraft offered a wide array of services, 22.8% reported that this was very important, 67.4% reported that this was somewhat important and 9.8% reported that this was unimportant (see Figure 17).

Overall Satisfaction with Mothercraft Centres. Figure 18 indicates that across all three centres, 87.2% of parents reported that they were very satisfied with the services they received from Mothercraft, while 12.8% reported that they were somewhat satisfied. This figure also reveals differences in ratings among centres. For example, 90.6% of sampled parents from Brookfield Place and 92.3% of parents from Eaton Centre reported that they were very satisfied with Mothercraft's services, while 80.6% of parents from Robertson House reported being very satisfied. The following is a selection of quotes from parents:

"*Excellent, warm and loving environment. My son does not struggle with time away from my husband and I – he is confident and expressive. This has a great deal to do with his relationships with his teachers. They are consistent and attentive to his needs. Have an interest in knowing us as a family so we can intertwine our child rearing and approaches, so my son has a consistent approach between home and day care".* (Mother from Brookfield Place)

"*As non-Canadians, we have been thrilled to have found Mothercraft. We don't see them as an institution, but rather as part of our family. It has made the opportunity of full time work for both of us as a possibility and given us peace of mind knowing that our children are safe, loved and being stimulated".* (Mother from Eaton Centre)

I have been at Mothercraft with 3 children over 10 years. Low turnover, a loving and nurturing staff and incredible food have given us the confidence & trust to leave our children with Mothercraft. (Father from Eaton Centre)

The service and care we have received from Mothercraft has always been exceptional. The teachers have a fantastic rapport with the children & parents & they treat the children with the utmost respect. It is obvious that your employees enjoy their work & their working environment. Both of our children have been cared for in the best possible way. We believe that their self-esteem and self-confidence as well as their ability to interact with both children and adults are directly related to the care & education that they received at Mothercraft. (Mother from Robertson House)

Services that Parents would Like Mothercraft to Provide. A complete list of services that parents from the various centres have suggested is presented in Appendix B.

Parents' Preferred Method of Communication. Table 13 presents parents' preferred methods of communication, with 86.2% of parents across all centres reporting e-mail as the best method for Mothercraft staff to communicate information about early childhood learning.

DISCUSSION

The choice of the quality and type of child care is important from a developmental perspective as both parents and policy-makers consider early childhood experiences to be an important determinant of children's long-term educational outcomes (Adams & Rohacek, 2002). Recent studies (e.g. Gamble et al. 2009) have explored characteristics of child care arrangements that parents value and found that what parents identify as important is not distinct from the characteristics that child care professionals would argue as critical for quality care. The current study produced similar findings in that parents whose children attend Mothercraft centres value quality-related factors such as educated and trained staff and warmth of staff more than practical factors such as location and hours of the centres. Furthermore, within quality-related factors, parents value emotion-focused factors such as warmth of staff more than academic factors such as curriculum at this stage of development. Parents also value such emotion-focused qualities in their children's teachers. They clearly value teacher qualities such as being loving, sensitive and attentive to children, encouraging confidence and instilling a love of learning in children more than qualities such as building good lesson plans at this stage in children's development. Similar to Gamble et al. (2009), the current study also found that parents highly valued the encouragement of confidence in children. In their responses to open-ended items, parents specified that they felt that a sense of confidence would allow children to grow in all aspects of development – social, emotional, physical and cognitive. Furthermore, parents felt that attachment relationships were important for children's healthy development and that it was through attachment relationships that children built confidence. In responses to open-ended items in this section of the survey, parents indicated that strong and positive attachments allowed children to feel secure and confident which in turn would allow them to explore and learn about the world, take chances and be open to different kinds of experiences. Thus, parents' responses conveyed that although both social-emotional components and learning components of child care programs are important, the social-emotional components provided a strong foundation for future learning and development in all domains of development. It should be noted that in this sample, while 92.6% of parents felt that parent-child attachment was very important, only 84.9% of parents felt that teacher-child attachment was very important. However, research has shown that teacher-child attachment is very important for healthy child development, especially for children who spend many hours of

the day in child care (Bowlby, 2007). Therefore, it would be useful to convey this information to parents with appropriate evidence from research. It would be also be beneficial to convey to parents the wide array of services provided by Mothercraft as the results of the questionnaire indicated that not all parents were aware of services available to them. Parents also seemed to appreciate the importance of collaboration between developmental researchers and child care centres in promoting healthy child development.

The findings from this study suggest that Mothercraft parents have a fairly coherent view and deep understanding of the critical characteristics of quality child care. Parents go beyond practical factors and are concerned about quality-related factors which will fulfill children's developmental needs and prepare them for school. Furthermore, parents in this study clearly understand the importance of attachment relationships. These findings indicate that parents' attitudes and perceptions regarding factors important for healthy child development align very well with Mothercraft's founding principles.

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Table 1

Summary of Family Variables

	Family (%)	Mother (%)	Father (%)
Household Structure			
Father/Mother	92.6		
Father only	0		
Mother only	3.2		
Other (e.g. joint custody)	4.3		
First Language			
English	81.7		
Other	14		
Bilingual	4.3		
Employment Status			
Full-time		89.4	97.8
Part-time		4.3	2.2
Unemployed		6.4	0
Respondent to Questionnaire		81.9	18.1
Ethnic Background			
Canadian		31.5	41.5
Other		68.5	58.5
Number of Children			
1 child	46.8		
2 children	46.8		
3 children	6.4		
Number of Children at Mothercraft			
1 child	78.7		
2 children	21.3		
Room of Initial Enrolment			
Infant Room	74.7		
Toddler Room	2.2		
Preschool Room	22		
Kindergarten Room	1.1		
Room of Current Enrolment			
Infant Room	13		
Toddler Room	21.7		
Preschool Room	34.8		
Kindergarten Room	30.4		
Mothercraft Centre graduates			
Yes	22.3		
No	77.7		

Table 2

Purposes of child care ranked by importance

	Mean	SD	n
Child care during the day	1.79	1.22	91
Socialize child	2.02	.77	91
Help build basic skills	2.86	.81	91
Prepare children for school	3.55	.83	91

1 = most important; 4 = least important

Table 3

Factors in Enrolment Decision Rated by Importance

	Mean	SD	n
Educated/trained staff	1.04	.21	92
Warmth of staff	1.05	.23	92
Mothercraft's reputation	1.08	.31	92
Experience of staff	1.09	.28	92
Licensed child care	1.09	.28	92
Home cooked meals	1.16	.37	92
Health/safety policies	1.17	.41	92
Child-staff ratio	1.17	.38	92
Learning curriculum	1.19	.42	91
Facility equipment	1.21	.41	92
Hours of operation	1.28	.45	87
Staff turnover	1.34	.50	92
Close to work	1.51	.73	89
Recommended by a friend	1.78	.72	90
Close to home	1.85	.73	89
Area surrounding centre	1.98	.68	91
Waitlist space	2.10	.75	91
Non-profit care	2.18	.75	92
Subsidized	2.71	.56	92

1 = very important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = unimportant

Table 4

Percentages of Parents Rating Various Factors in Terms of Importance

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
Educated/trained staff	95.7%	4.3%	0%
Warmth of staff	94.6%	4.4%	0%
Mothercraft's reputation	93.5%	5.4%	1.1%
Experience of staff	91.3%	8.7%	0%
Licensed child care	91.3%	8.7%	0%
Health/safety policies	83.7%	15.2%	1.1%
Home-cooked meals	83.7%	16.3%	0%
Child-staff ratio	82.6%	17.4%	0%
Learning curriculum	82.4%	16.5%	1.1%
Facility equipment	79.3%	20.7%	0%
Hours of operation	72.4%	27.6%	0%
Staff turnover	67.4%	31.5%	1.1%
Close to work	58.7%	31.5%	9.8%
Recommended by a friend	38.8%	44.4%	16.7%
Close to home	34.8%	44.9%	20.2%
Area surrounding centre	24.2%	53.8%	22%
Waitlist space	23.1%	44%	33%
Non-profit care	20.7%	40.2%	39.1%
Subsidized	5.4%	18.5%	76.1%

Table 5

Percentage of Parents Rating Various Factors as Very Important (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Educated/trained staff	100%	95.8%	91.7%
Warmth of staff	100%	95.8%	88.9%
Mothercraft's reputation	96.9%	91.7%	91.7%
Experience of staff	90.6%	100%	86.1%
Licensed child care	96.9%	91.7%	86.1%
Health/safety policies	84.4%	87.5%	80.6%
Home-cooked meals	84.4%	83.3%	83.3%
Child-staff ratio	75%	87.5%	86.1%
Learning curriculum	84.4%	91.7%	74.3%
Facility equipment	93.8%	70.8%	72.2%
Hours of operation	70%	86.4%	65.7%
Staff turnover	68.8%	75%	61.1%
Close to work	75%	70.8%	36.1%
Recommended by a friend	35.5%	25%	51.4%
Close to home	20%	21.7%	55.6%
Area surrounding centre	25%	4.3%	36.1%
Waitlist space	18.8%	26.1%	25%
Non-profit care	8.8%	33.3%	13.9%
Subsidized	3.1%	12.5%	2.8%

Table 6

Domains of development ranked by importance

	Mean	SD	n
Social	2.26	1.14	92
Emotional	2.40	1.16	92
Physical Health	2.89	1.53	92
Language & Cognitive	3.43	1.32	92
General Knowledge	3.68	1.43	92

1= most important; 5 = least important

Table 7

Percentage of parents ranking domains as most important (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House	All
Social	37.5%	33.3%	30.6%	33.7%
Physical health	28.1%	29.2%	33.3%	30.4%
Emotional	18.8%	29.2%	25%	23.9%
General knowledge	9.4%	16.7%	13.9%	13%
Language & Cognitive	18.8%	8.3%	8.3%	12%

Table 8

Percentage of parents ranking various skills as most important in preparing children for school (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Self-confidence	33.1%	43.5%	37.1%
Get along with others	12.5%	13%	14%
Communicate clearly	3.1%	13%	8.6%
Gross motor skills	3.1%	8.7%	8.6%
Cope with change	9.4%	4.3%	2.9%
Empathy	6.3%	0%	0%
Follow rules	0%	0%	8.6%
Self-control	0%	4.3%	8.6%

Table 9

Parental rating of Mothercraft's ability to foster school preparation skills (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Excellent	71.9%	73.9%	58.3%
Above average	25%	21.7%	36.1%
Below average	3.1%	4.3%	5.6%

Table 10

Parental rating of the importance of an environment that fosters attachment in deciding to enroll children at Mothercraft (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Very important	53.1%	69.2%	66.7%
Somewhat important	46.9%	30.8%	30.6%
Unimportant	0%	0%	2.8%

Table 11

Parental perceptions of the importance of implementing practices based on research collaboration

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Very important	81.3%	61.5%	69.4%
Somewhat important	15.6%	38.5%	30.6%
Unimportant	3.1%	0%	0%

Table 12

Parental rating of the importance of Mothercraft centres serving as teacher training facilities (by centre)

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House
Very important	68.8%	50%	38.9%
Somewhat important	28.1%	46.2%	61.1%
Unimportant	3.1%	3.8%	0%

Table 13

Parents' Preferred Method of Communication

	Brookfield Place	Eaton Centre	Robertson House	All Centres
E-mail	87.5%	73.1%	94.4%	86.2%
Letter sent home	46.9%	65.4%	41.7%	50%
Verbal at pick-up/ drop off	43.8%	46.2%	50%	46.8%
Bulletin board	25%	26.9%	25%	25.5%
Mothercraft website	9.4%	11.5%	5.6%	8.5%

Figure 1. **Father's highest level of education.**
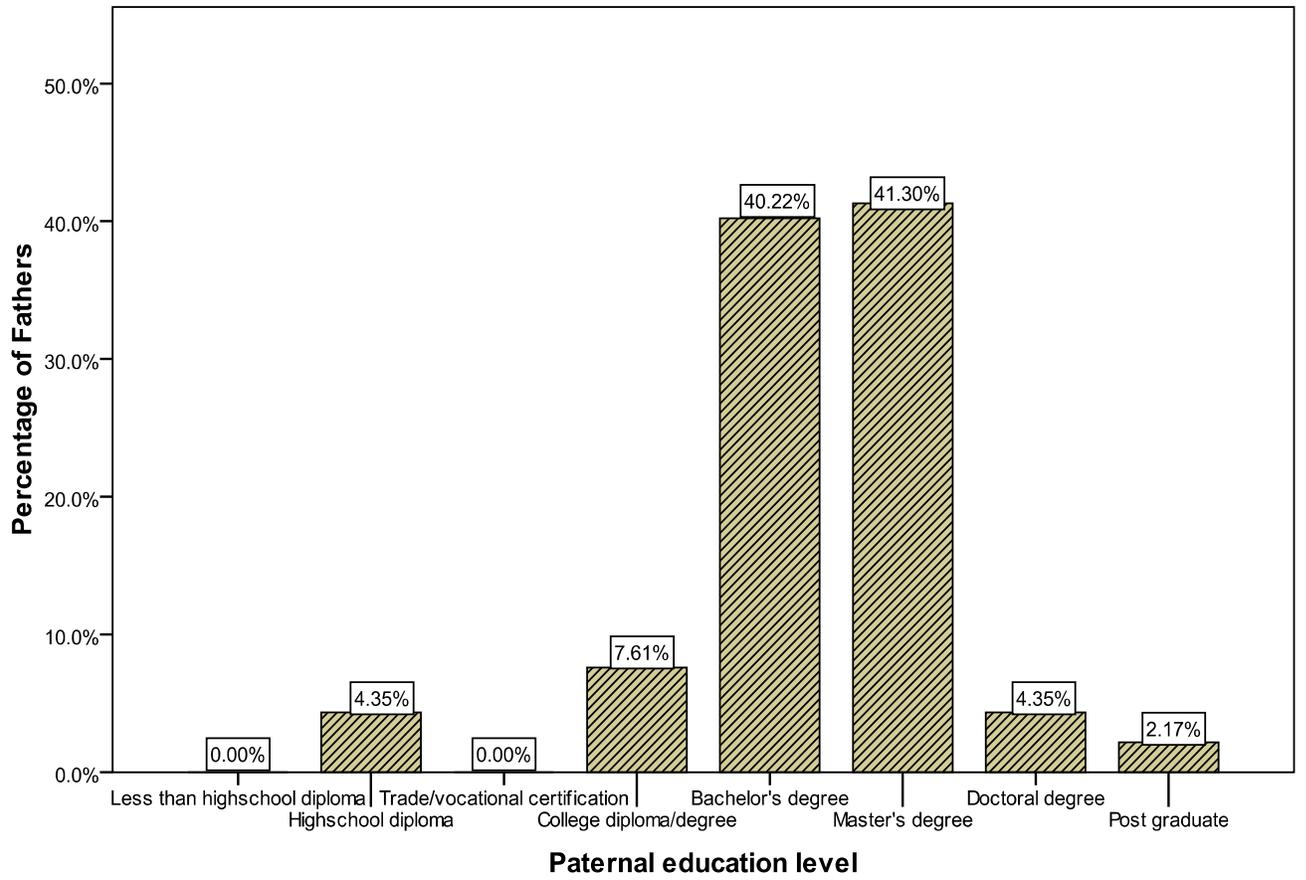
Figure 2. Mothers' highest level of education.
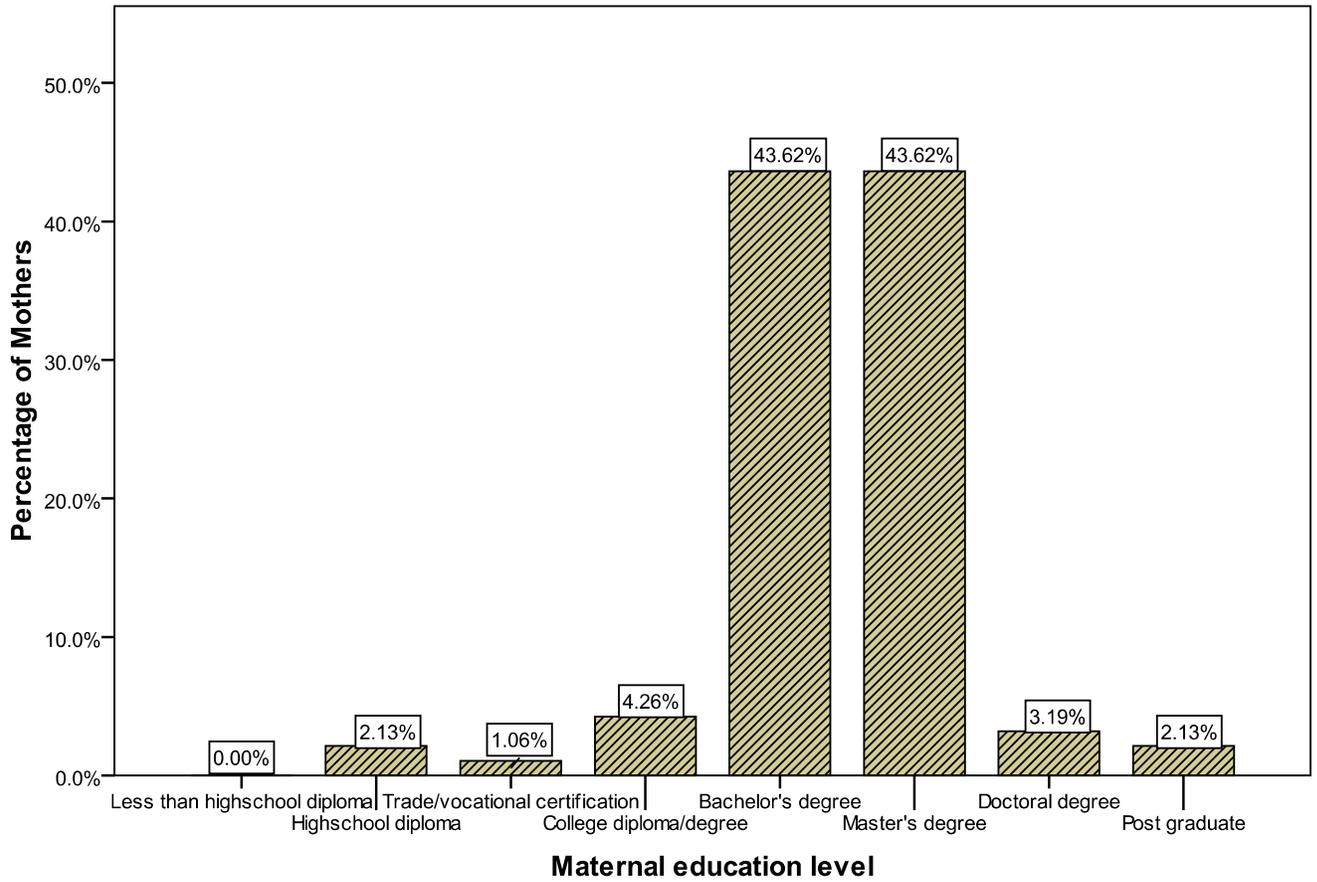
Figure 3. **Types of non-parental care used prior to being enrolled at Mothercraft.**
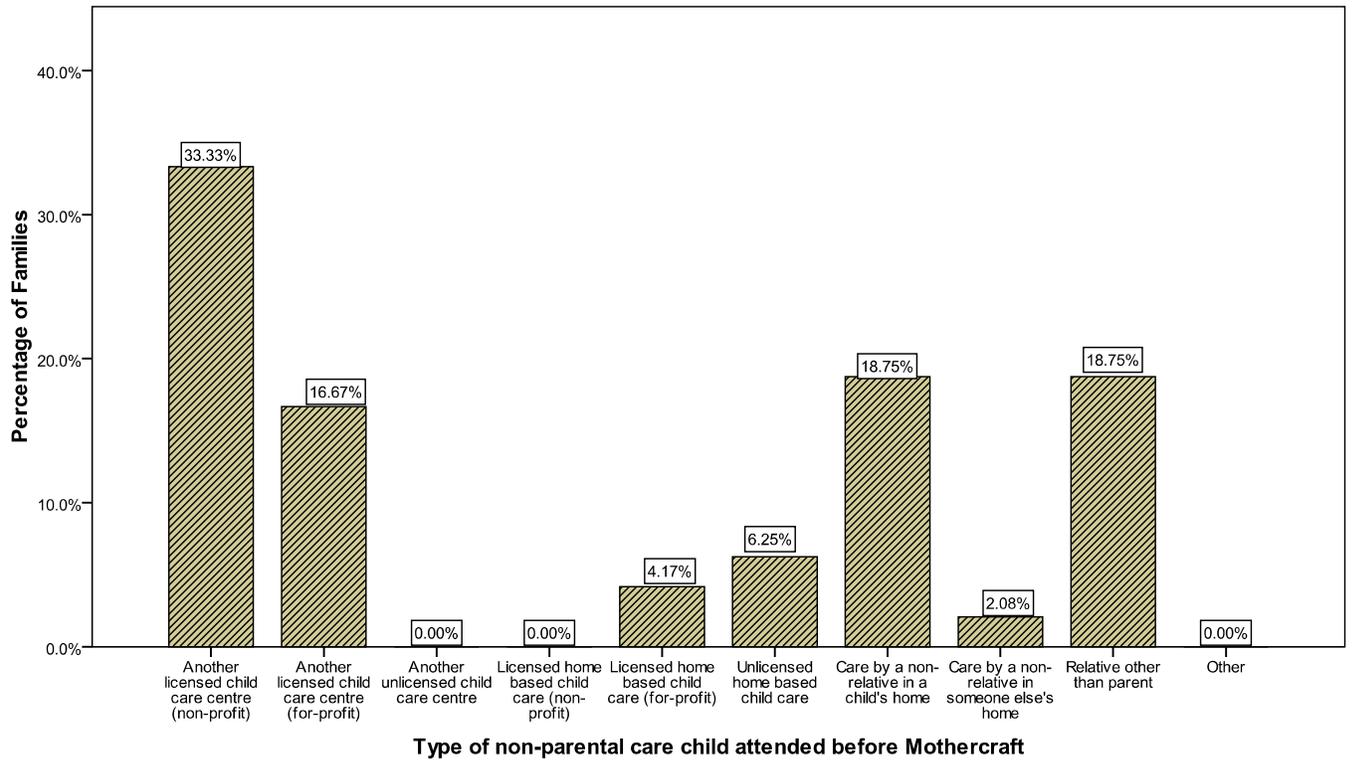
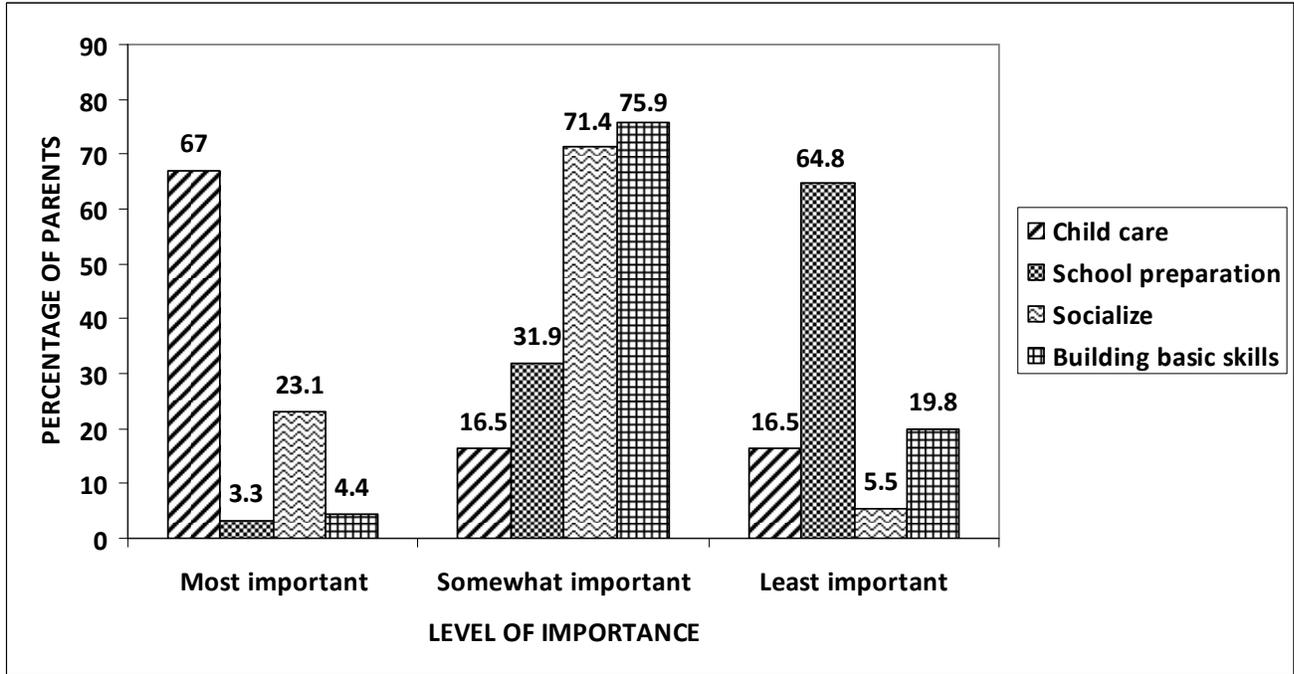*Figure 4.* **Parents ranking various purposes of child care.**

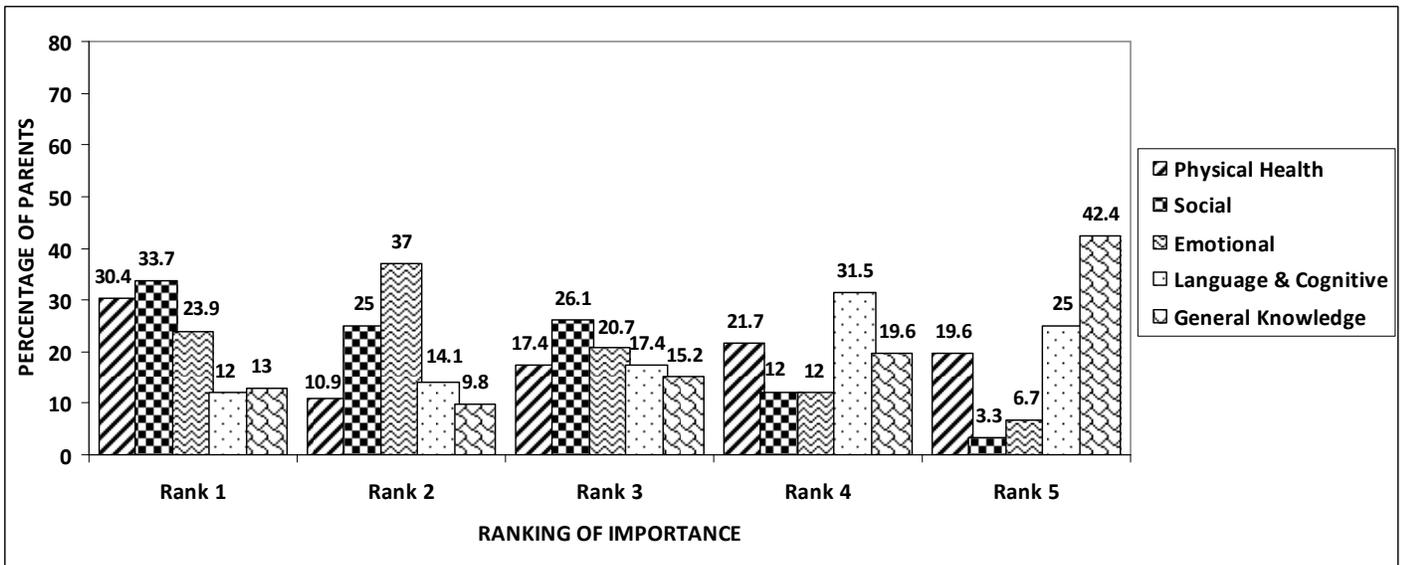*Figure 5.* Parental ranking of the five domains of development.

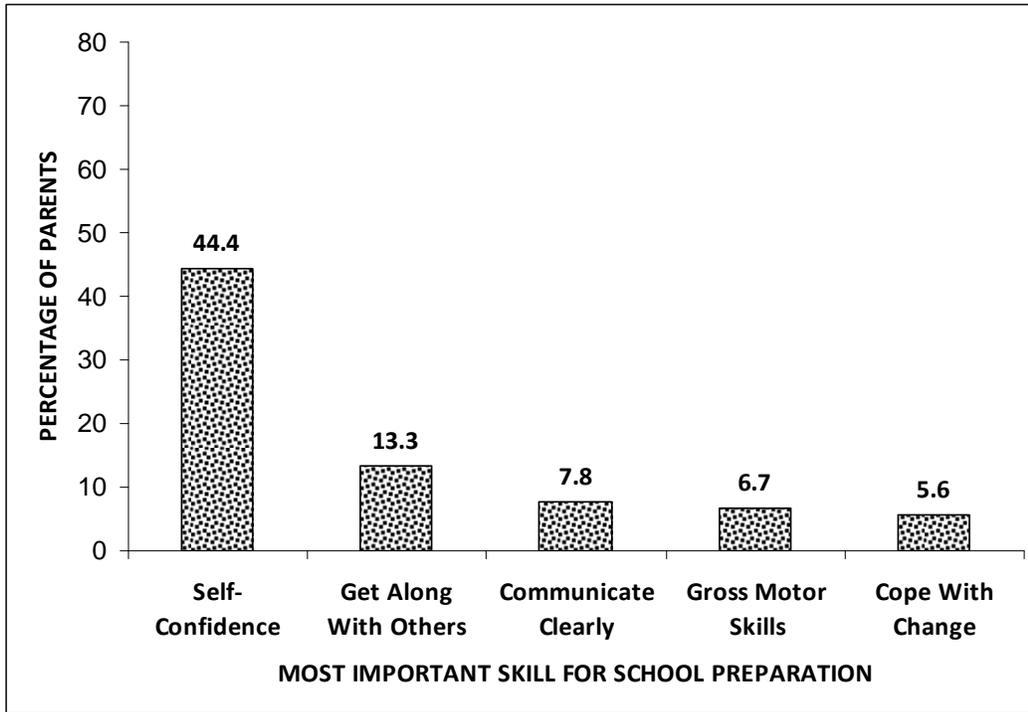*Figure 6.* **Parental ranking of skills perceived to be most important to prepare children for school.**

Figure 7. **Parental rating of Mothercraft's ability to foster school preparation skills.**
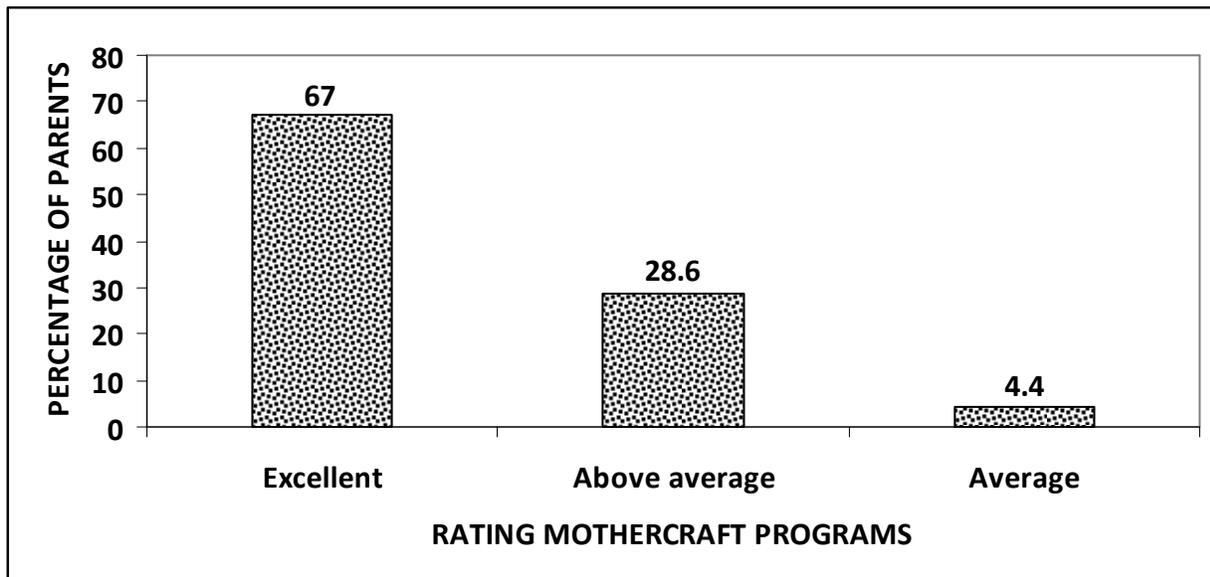
Figure 8. Teacher qualities perceived to be most important to parents.

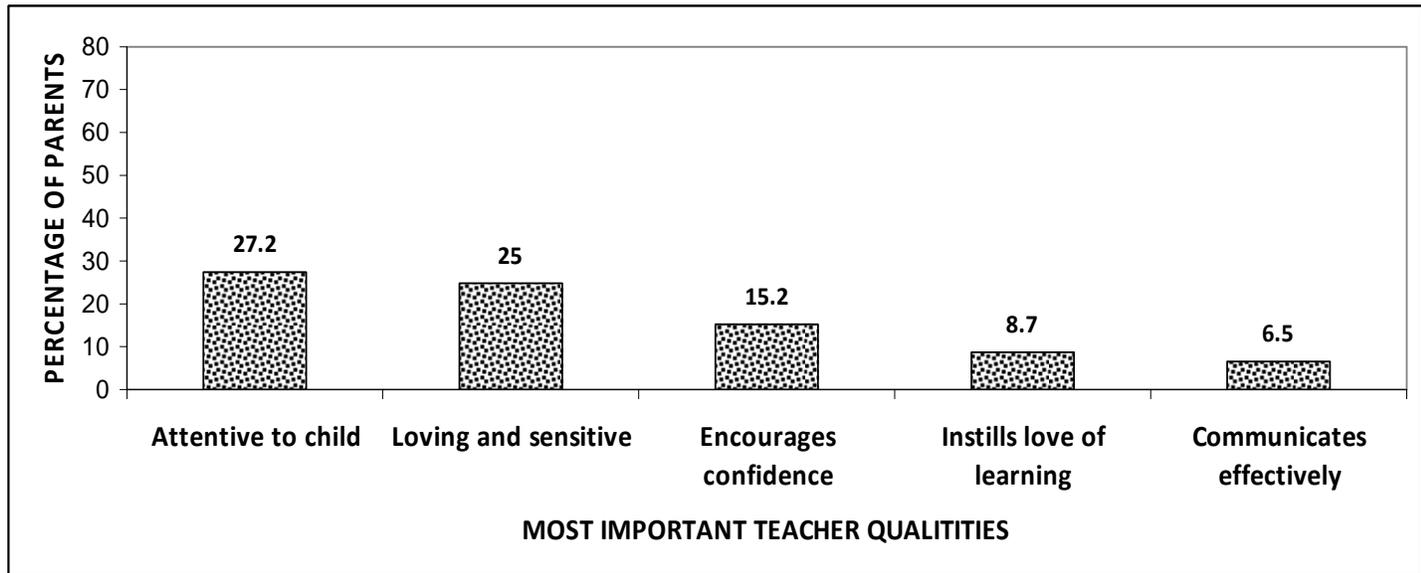*Figure 9*. Parental perceptions of their children's teachers possessing the top five teacher qualities.
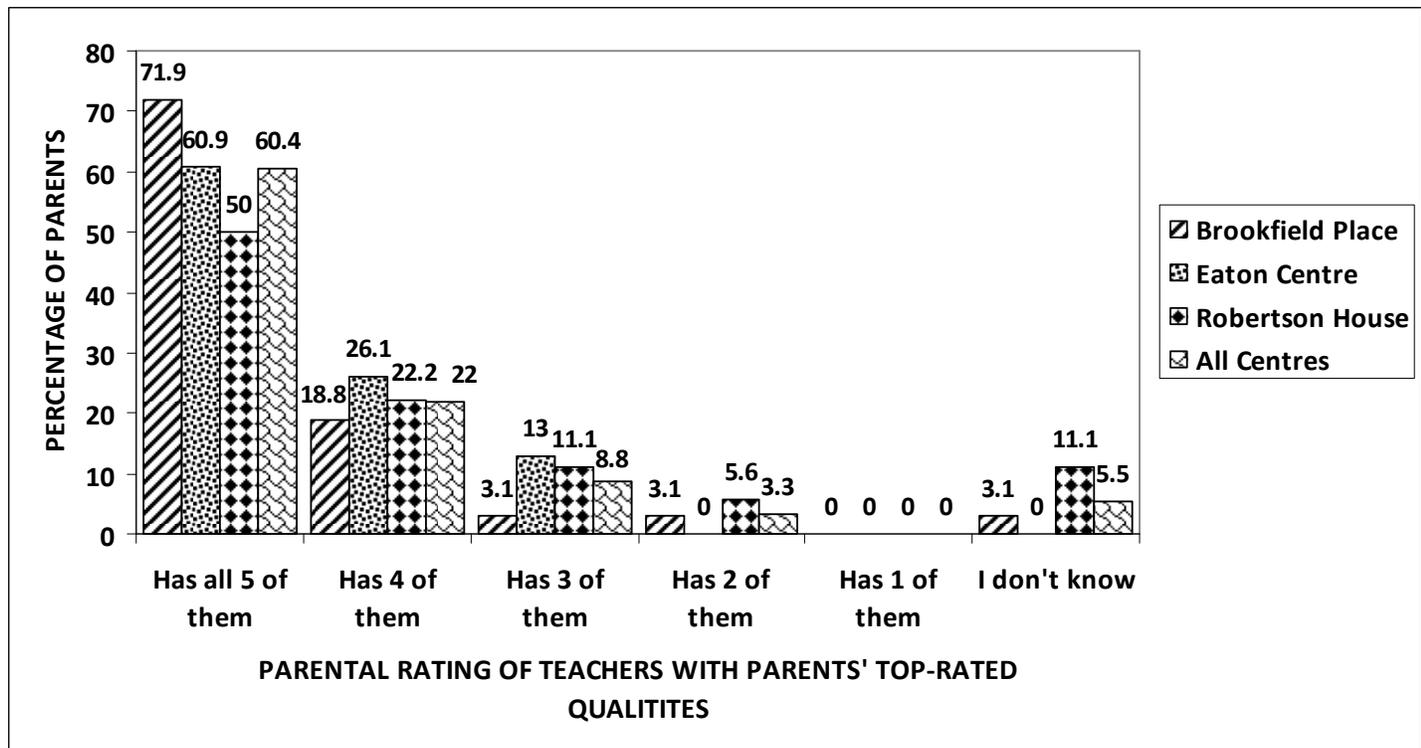
Figure 10. Parents' perception of the importance of attachment for healthy child development.
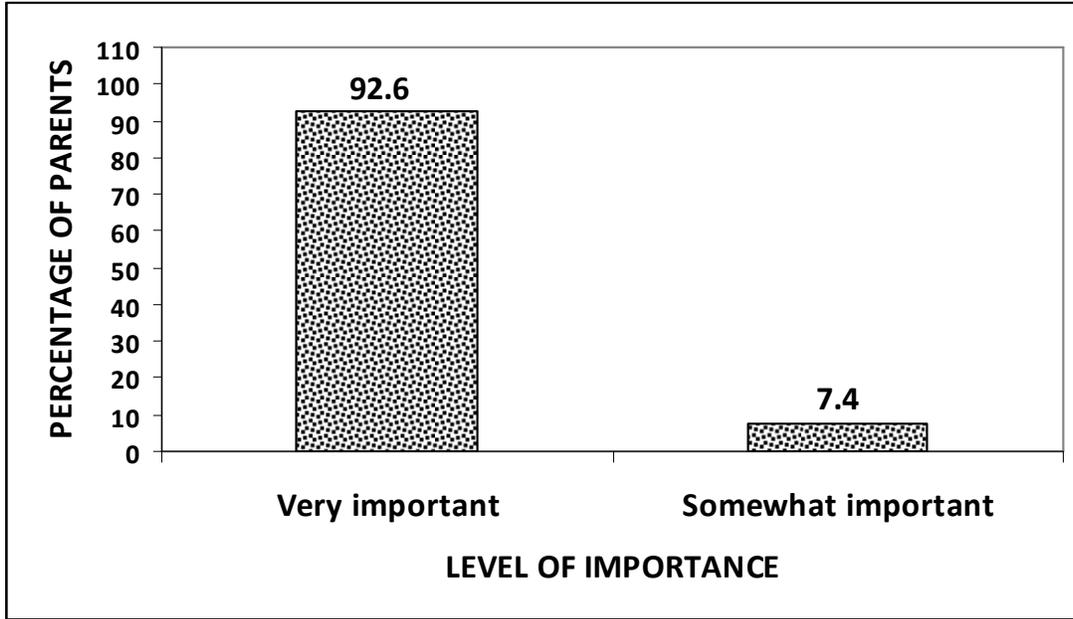
Figure 11. Parental perception of the importance of children being attached to their teachers.
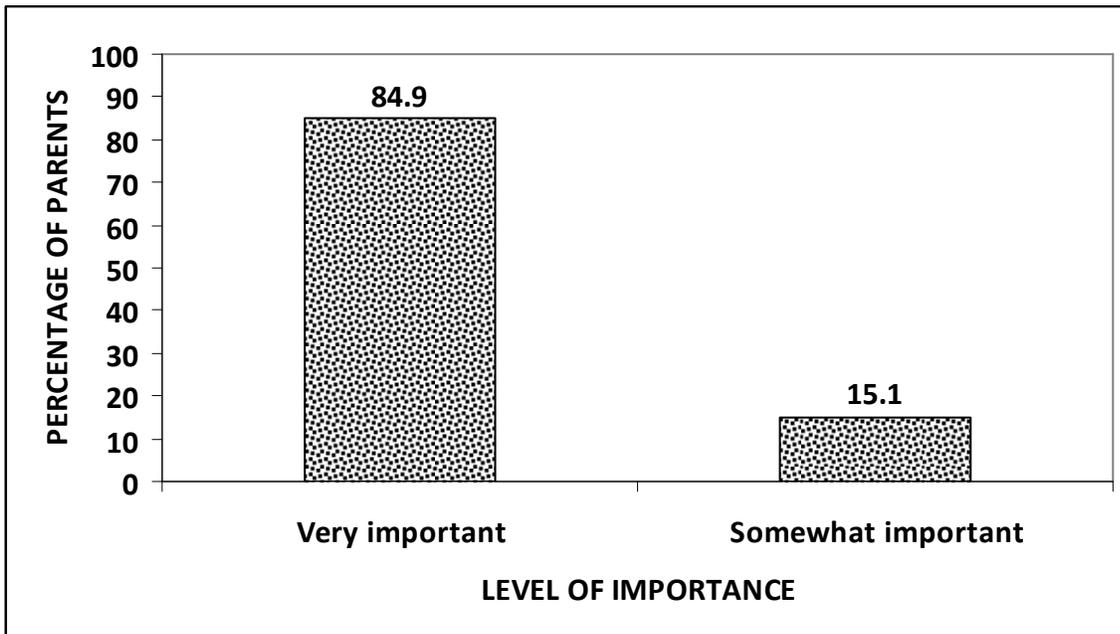
Figure 12. Parental perception of Mothercraft's ability to foster attachment between teachers and children.
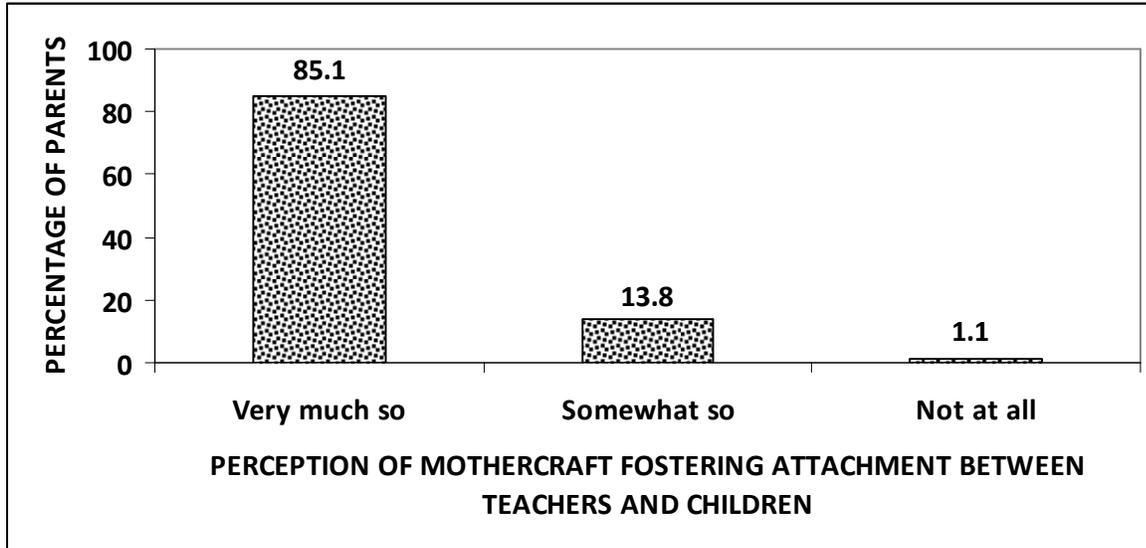
Figure 13. **Parental rating of the importance of an environment that fosters attachment in deciding to enroll their children at Mothercraft.**
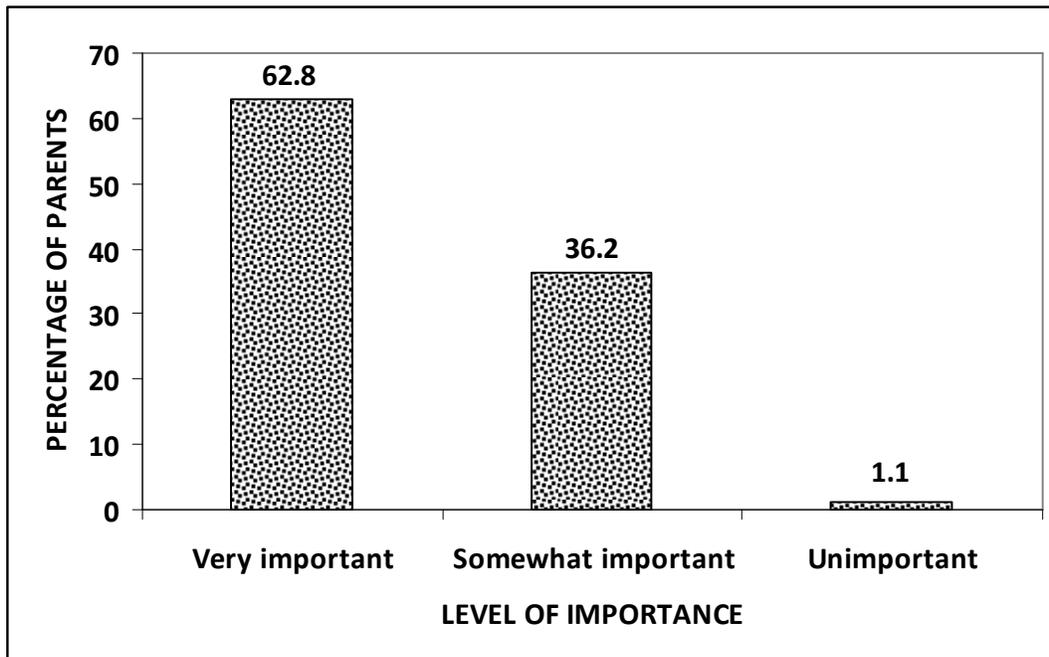
Figure 14. **Parental perceptions of the importance of implementing practices based on research collaboration.**
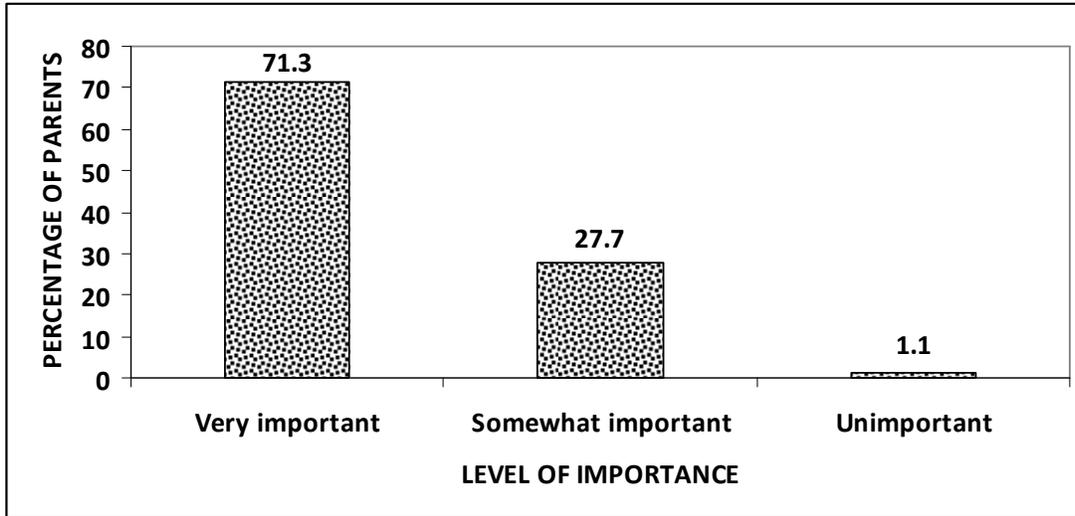
Figure 15. Parental perception of the importance of Mothercraft centres serving as teacher training facilities.
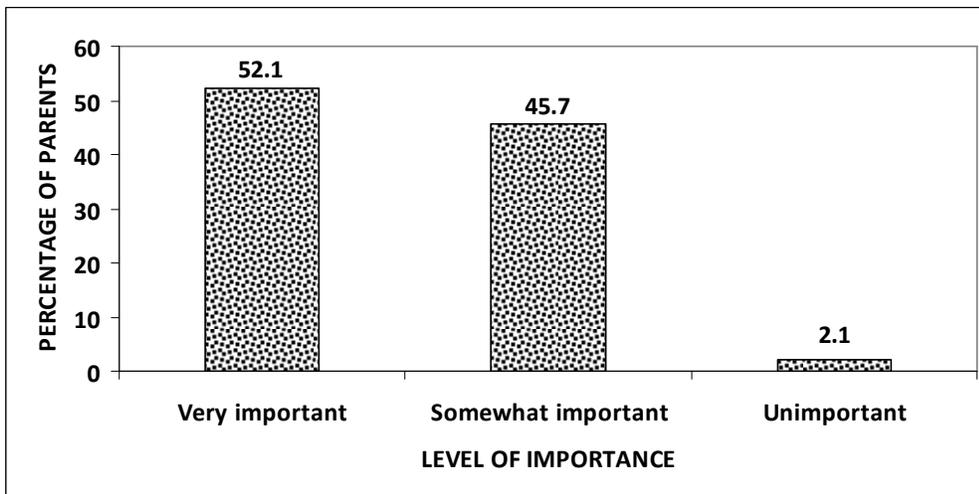
Figure 16. **Parental awareness of services provided by Mothercraft.**
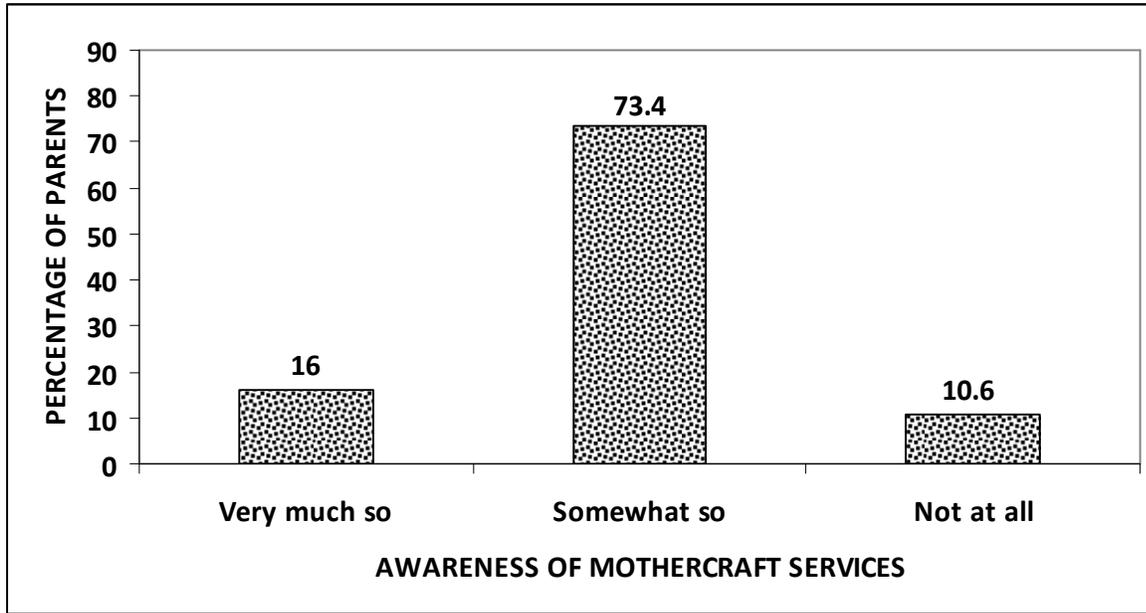
Figure 17. Parental rating of the importance of Mothercraft providing a wide array of services.
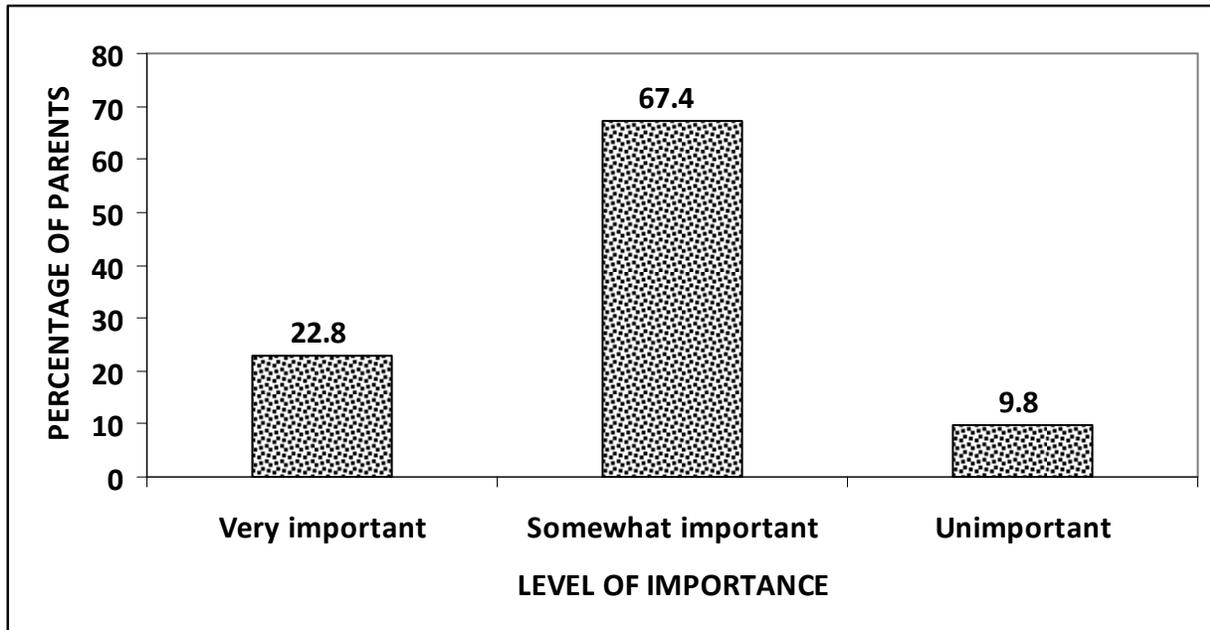
Figure 18. Overall rating of Mothercraft centres.

APPENDIX A: Survey

Survey: Understanding What Matters to Parents in Promoting Their Children's Healthy Development

Part 1: Background Information
It is helpful for us to have some background information on the families who are taking part in this study. Please answer the following questions by circling your response or filling in the blanks as appropriate.

1. What are the <u>first three</u> digits of your home postal code? _____

2. Please indicate your household structure:
       Father and Mother
       Father only
       Mother only
       Other (please specify) _____

3. Please indicate your highest level of education:

| Mother:	Father:
a. Less than highschool diploma	a. Less than highschool diploma
b. Highschool diploma	b. Highschool diploma
c. Trade/Vocational certification	c. Trade/vocational certification
d. College diploma/degree	d. College diploma/degree
e. Bachelor's degree	e. Bachelor's degree
f. Master's degree	f. Master's degree
g. Doctoral degree	g. Doctoral degree

4. Please indicate your employment status:
       Mother: Full-time   Part-time   Not working
       Father: Full-time   Part-time   Not working

5. Please indicate your first language:
       English
       Other (please specify) _____

6. Please indicate your ethnic background:
       Mother: _____
       Father: _____

7. Please indicate the number of children in your family: _____

8. What is your relationship to the child(ren) enrolled at a Mothercraft Centre?
          a. Mother/Father (circle one)   b. Legal guardian

9. How many of your children are <u>currently enrolled</u> at a Mothercraft Centre? _____

10. Please indicate the Mothercraft Centre at which your child(ren) is/are enrolled:
       Brookfield Place
       Eaton Centre
       Robertson House

For Questions 11 and 12, if you have multiple children <u>currently enrolled</u>, please circle more than one response (or a response twice) and provide comments in the space provided.

11. In which room did your child(ren) <u>first enrol</u> at a Mothercraft Centre?

     a. Infant Room
     b. Toddler Room
     c. Preschool Room
     d. Kindergarten Room

12. In which room is/are your child(ren) <u>currently</u> enrolled at a Mothercraft Centre?

     a. Infant Room
     b. Toddler Room
     c. Preschool Room
     d. Kindergarten Room

13. Do you have any children who were previously enrolled at a Mothercraft Centre and have graduated?
     a. Yes
     b. No

<u>Part 2: Survey</u>
This section consists of different types of questions. Please read the instructions for each question carefully before responding.

1. Have any of your children used other non-parental care <u>prior to being enrolled</u> full-time in a Mothercraft Centre? (Please circle your response.)
     a. Yes
     b. No

2. If you answered *yes* to Question 1, please answer the following questions:

   i. What type of non-parental care has/have your child(ren) been in? (Please circle your response.)
     a. Another Licensed Child Care Centre (*please circle one*: non-profit <u>or</u> for-profit)
     b. Another Unlicensed Child Care Centre
     c. Licensed Home Based Child Care (*please circle one*: non-profit <u>or</u> for-profit)
     d. Unlicensed Home Based Child Care
     e. Care by a Non-Relative in Child's Home (e.g., nanny, au pair, etc.)
     f. Care by a Non-Relative in Someone Else's Home (e.g., neighbour, etc.)
     g. Relative other than parent (e.g., grandparent, older sibling, etc.)
     h. Other (specify) _____

   ii. Does/do your child(ren) still use the non-parental care? (Please circle your response.)
     a. Yes

b. No

iii. Why does your child still use, or no longer use, the non-parental care? (Please describe.)

_____

_____

3. What purpose does childcare serve for you and your child(ren)? Please rank the following from 1 to 5 in order of importance (e.g., 1 = most important).
__ Child care during the day (e.g., feed, monitor, etc.)
__ Prepare children for school
__ Socialize children (e.g., teach children how to get along with others)
__ Help children build basic skills (e.g., reading, writing, etc.)
__ Other (specify): _____

4. Please rate with a check mark the level of importance of each factor in deciding to enrol your child(ren) in a Mothercraft Centre:

	Unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
a) Close to home	___	___	___
b) Close to work	___	___	___
c) Area surrounding centre	___	___	___
c) Non-profit childcare	___	___	___
d) Reputation	___	___	___
e) Waitlist space	___	___	___
f) Experience of staff	___	___	___
g) Warmth of staff	___	___	___
h) Home-cooked meals	___	___	___
i) Recommended by friend	___	___	___
j) Child-staff ratio	___	___	___
k) Licensed child care	___	___	___
l) Subsidized space	___	___	___
m) Educated/trained staff	___	___	___
n) Staff turn-over	___	___	___
o) Facility & equipment	___	___	___
p) Health/safety policies	___	___	___
q) Hours	___	___	___
r) Learning curriculum	___	___	___
s) Other _____	___	___	___

5. Please tell us what you think about the five main areas of early development by **ranking** them in order of importance from 1 to 5 (e.g., 1 = most important):
__ Physical Health & Well-being
(e.g., can pick up a ball, can hold a pencil, has enough energy for classroom activities)
__ Social Knowledge & Competence

(e.g., can play/work with other children, knows what is acceptable behaviour in a public place)

__ Emotional Health & Maturity
   (e.g., can deal with his/her feelings at the age-appropriate level)

__ Language and Cognitive Development
   (e.g., can read and write, knows the alphabet, knows numbers)

__ General Knowledge & Communication Skills
   (e.g., knows that leaves fall in the autumn, can communicate needs and wants effectively)

6. From the list below, please **pick** and **number** in order of importance the <u>five</u> most important skills   you believe children should have in preparation for school (1 = most important):

__ Gross motor skills (e.g., walk, run)   __ Fine motor skills (e.g., pick up a ball, hold pencil)
__ Handedness   __ Self-hygiene (e.g., dress & toilet themselves)
__ Self-control   __ Self-confidence
__ Follow rules   __ Get along with others
__ Knowledge about the world   __ Take responsibility for own actions/decisions
__ Cope with change & transition   __ Problem-solving skills
__ Empathy   __ Offer help to others
__ Able to concentrate   __ Solve conflict without aggression
__ Self-soothing   __ Capable of making decisions
__ Can read   __ Can write
__ Recognize numbers   __ Know alphabet
__ Remember things easily   __ Know how to turn pages of a book
__ Communicate clearly   __ Story-telling skills
__ Imaginative play   __ Other(s) (specify): _____

7. How would you rate Mothercraft programs in their ability to help children build the above mentioned skills in preparation for school? (Please **circle** your response.)
        a. Excellent
        b. Above Average
        c. Average
        d. Below Average
        e. Very Poor

8. From the list below, please **pick** and **number** in order of importance the <u>five</u> most important qualities that you value in a teacher (1 = most important):

__ Attentive to child   __ Confident as a teacher   __ Consistent to child
__ Communicates effectively   __ Has good lesson plans   __ Is creative
__ Disciplines when necessary   __ Instills love of learning   __ Instructs child
__ Is knowledgeable   __ Encourages confidence   __ Is patient
__ Is personable   __ Encourages curiosity   __ Is resourceful
__ Is loving & sensitive   __ Teaches social skills   __ Is supportive
__ Tutors child   __ Is understanding   __ Other(s) _____

9. How would you rate your child's teacher(s) in terms of having these qualities?
        a. Has all 5 of them   b. Has 4 of them

c. Has 3 of them   d. Has 2 of them
e. Has 1 of them   f. I don't know

10. Attachment is the emotional bond between children and primary caregivers that promotes a sense of security in children.

a) How important do you consider attachment in fostering healthy child development?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

Please explain why:

_____

_____

b) How important is it that children are securely attached to their teachers?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

c) Do you feel that Mothercraft fosters attachment between teachers and children?
Not at all   Somewhat so   Very much so

d) How important was an environment that fosters attachment in your decision to enrol your child at Mothercraft?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

11. How important do you feel it is for centres for early child development to implement practices based on collaboration with child development researchers?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

12. How important is it that Mothercraft centres are teaching facilities for early childhood educators in training?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

13. Mothercraft provides a wide array of services to families.
a) How aware are you of the different services provided by Mothercraft?
Not at all   Somewhat so   Very much so
b) How important is it to you that Mothercraft provides a wide array of services to families?
Unimportant   Somewhat important   Very important

14. Overall, how would you rate the service that you and your child(ren) have received from
Mothercraft? (Please circle your response.)
a. Very satisfied
b. Somewhat satisfied
c. Neutral
d. Somewhat unsatisfied
e. Very unsatisfied

15.   Please comment on the service that you and your child(ren) have received from Mothercraft.

_____

_____

_____

_____

16.   Are there services for children and families that you would like Mothercraft to provide?

_____

_____

_____

17. What is the best method of communication for us to share information about early childhood learning with you? (Please **check** those that apply.)

☐ Verbally at pick-up/drop-off
☐ Display on bulletin boards
☐ Mothercraft website
☐ Email
☐ Letters sent home
☐ Other(s)(specify)_____

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our study.

Please return this survey with your signed consent form to the sealed return box at a Mothercraft Centre for Early Development.

APPENDIX B: Services that Parents Would Like Mothercraft to Provide

   Brookfield Place

- Baby-sitting after hours
- Baby-sitting resources for students
- Recommendations for baby-sitters
- School extension (Grade 1 onwards)
- Parents Night Program
- More parenting seminars on current parenting challenges based on research/practice
- Extracurricular lessons, e.g. music, drama, etc. provided on site
- Option of purchasing meals
- More opportunities for excursions
- Put curriculum online for review and support

Eaton Centre
- Workshops on specific developmental milestones
- More regular updates on children's progress/needs
- Having separate JK and SK classes
- More language training
- Second-hand clothing swapping
- Extracurricular activities (e.g. dance, yoga, music, etc.)
- Workshop on positive discipline

Robertson House
- Literacy and mathematics programs (similar to Oxford Learning or Kumon)
- Immunization clinics
- Addition of 15-20 minutes of structured play in the afternoon
- A way for parents to communicate and organize among themselves – discussion group/ board/ email
- Baby-sitting after hours
- Academic research connection – how to raise children
- Better procedures to prevent children from getting sick
- More writing in JK
- More parenting workshops/handouts