

The book, however, is not without its limitations. As the authors acknowledge, though the study design was rigorous and collected rich data from a variety of sources, the results are by no means fully generalizable. Hamilton College is a small, well-endowed, residential, northeastern liberal arts college, and most of the entering students have records of high academic achievement and come from upper-middle-income homes. Hamilton is also unique in that it does not have a set of required courses that introduce the students to a range of disciplines.

Another point of concern is that early on the authors cast aside issues of socioeconomic status, saying, “Lifting all children in America out of poverty would dramatically improve the country’s education results. But no dean or president, however influential, can just change her current students’ history or background” (p. 10). Nonetheless, the importance of students’ economic backgrounds is evident throughout the text. In particular, the data indicate that when students are entering college, those who previously attended prep schools benefit from academic and social advantages. Similarly, there is very little consideration of how race alters students’ college experiences, though nonwhite students also reported disproportionate difficulty in entering and feeling a sense of belonging in the college. Conspicuously absent are the recommendations within the locus of a college’s control that attend to inequalities during the crucial beginning period of college.

Notwithstanding, by achieving its dual aims—to depict how college benefits, or fails to benefit, students and positing what colleges, professors, and students can do to improve students’ educational experiences—*How College Works* offers a meaningful contribution to existing research on organizational and social structures in higher education.

A.S.M.

THE STATES OF CHILD CARE: BUILDING A BETTER SYSTEM

by Sara Gable

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The last several years have seen notable growth in many of our nation’s early childhood care and education programs. The rapid development of state-funded prekindergarten (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005), the boost to the Child Care Development Fund by way of the American Recovery and Reinvestments Act (Aber & Chaundry, 2010), and the launch of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grants (Hyson & Tomlinson, 2014) are just a few of many recent policy endeavors meant to increase access to high-quality and affordable care and education for children under the age of five. However, Sara Gable’s new book, *The States of Child Care: Building a Better System*, suggests that these policies would lead to the greatest benefit for young children if the nation were to create a comprehensive child-care system that

successfully managed and integrated the fragmented options that make up the current landscape.

In her well-researched and informative book, Gable argues that early childhood care and education in the United States has “struggled under the weight of disparate policy goals” (p. 1). She thoroughly describes the current early care and education options available to families. In particular, she draws a distinction between public programs such as Head Start and state-funded prekindergarten programs—which strive to close socioeconomic achievement gaps by supporting the development of children from low-income families—and the mostly private child-care sector, which is seen as an employment support for parents with young children. Gable argues that these differing goals, along with an undervalued and underpaid child-care workforce, cultural views of maternal employment, and a lack of consensus around what “quality” child care looks like, have contributed to the fragmented and disconnected menu of child-care options that exists today. Indeed, she cites a statistic suggesting that before the age of five, the average child experiences up to five different child-care settings, a potentially worrisome number given research that suggests that more stable and consistent child-care arrangements are associated with positive developmental outcomes (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004; Morrissey, 2009).

Ultimately, Gable makes a compelling case for the creation of a comprehensive child-care system with no distinction between programs meant to enable parent employment and those meant to support child development. She advocates for a connected network of providers that aspire to a common definition of quality for all children in all settings. Her book has the potential to appeal to researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and parents alike, as it offers a comprehensive review of the literature and an analysis of key policy challenges while also giving voice to the experiences of educators and parents who work in and use child care.

Gable’s six-chapter book begins with a broad review of the child-care landscape in chapter 1 and continues on in chapter 2 to discuss the details that characterize the supply and demand sides of the child-care market. The author highlights the “information asymmetry” present in the child-care market and describes the ways in which, despite the development of the child-care quality rating improvement systems (QRIS), statewide regulated systems meant to assess and communicate the quality of child-care settings for the public, the concept of child-care quality is elusive and hard to discern for most parents. For example, parents may be able to judge the physical environment of a child-care center (e.g., materials and furnishings), but the quality of the learning interactions between teachers and children can be more difficult to assess. She rounds out the discussion of child-care quality in later sections (chapter 4 in particular) by discussing how researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have not reached consensus on how best to measure child-care quality,

and she argues that the variation in views within the field has contributed to today's disjointed system.

In addition to looking at larger research trends, Gable explores in chapter 3 the cultural factors that influence child-care policy. She describes how conflicting cultural values—those that devalue nonparental care and suggest that the best care for children is at home with mothers and others that urge mothers to “have it all” by juggling parenthood and career with the aid of child care—have also impeded the development of a more comprehensive child-care system.

The book closes on a forward-looking note with a case study of North Carolina's child-care system, which Gable deems a “shining star” in the national child-care landscape. The North Carolina case provides excellent examples of different policy decisions a state can make to create greater alignment and synergy among child-care options. In particular, the book highlights the state's success in building collaboration and lines of communication between state legislatures and local programs, the flexible and creative use of funding, and the ability to respond to the changing national policy context. Gable then builds on this case to offer concrete recommendations for future policy.

Throughout the volume, Gable organizes her ideas with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems framework in mind. Her application of this framework allows her to explore the many micro (e.g., families and individual child-care settings) and macro (e.g., state and federal policy) systems that together comprise and influence families' child-care options. In general, her discussion of the macro-level forces, namely the cultural factors that influence child-care policy, are the most successful arguments in the book. For example, Gable nimbly weaves a historical narrative describing the ways that women's increased access to education in the last half of the twentieth century led to more women in the workforce and thus a need for more child care. In the book, she also implicitly suggests that this same trend in women's access to work and education may have contributed to decreasing quality of the child-care workforce, as well-educated women who were once limited to teaching and child-care jobs are now leaving the field for more lucrative employment. Gable explores these complicated sociocultural relationships by highlighting the voices of working mothers and child-care workers (many of whom are *both*) in a compelling discussion that offers a unique contribution to the field.

By contrast, some discussions of micro-level influences and processes related to child-care could have been expanded further. In chapter 2, Gable presents results of her original empirical research in which she explores how the names of child-care centers indicate the ambiguity of goals and purposes, arguing that “names reveal how program operators express themselves, strive to meet consumer demands and work to maintain full enrollments” (p. 35). She conducted this work by categorizing the names of licensed and unlicensed child-care providers in one state (Missouri) and by measuring how a sample of indi-

viduals reacted to these names. While Gable's desire to reveal variation in the goals and services in the child-care market is important, one could question whether a study of child-care center names is the most effective way of addressing this idea. In addition, she employed a sample of undergraduate students ("future child-care consumers") in the study to approximate the opinions of parents (p. 41). Her work might have been improved (and her results may have differed) had she measured how parents who were currently consuming child care reacted to child-care center names. Nonetheless, she raises interesting questions about the information families use to make child-care choices and alludes to how an improved system might help provide parents with the facts they need.

While child-care policy has not yet reached Gable's goals for a more integrated system, new federal initiatives are currently moving in that direction. Head Start's twelfth National Research Conference on Early Childhood was held in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 2014, just months after the publication of Gable's book. The conference featured many sessions focused on improving child-care systems, including a plenary presentation in which the policy leaders from the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care spoke about their efforts to create federal partnerships across their agencies in an effort to better serve families. Their words echoed many of the issues Gable raises in her work. In this way, *The States of Child Care: Building a Better System* is a book of the times, speaking directly to the issues in a field that is ready for innovation.

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