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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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Long-Term Consequences of Child Care

From the Director's Office: Long-Term Consequences of
Child Care

Abecedarian Project

Mussorgsky

Depression

Relationships, Child & Teacher

NCEDL News: Georgia Conference

NCEDL News: Nearly 1,000,000 Served

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early developments



Don Bailey

Long-Term Consequences of Child Care

“Benefits of Quality Care Persist into Adulthood”

“Mom’s Depression Can Affect Children’s Learning”

“More Children Attending PreK in Public Schools”

“Child-Teacher Relationship Predicts Social Relations”


from the Director’s Office

Headlines such as the above this year reflect the exciting research that is giving us more insight into child care and child development. For example, new studies by the Frank Porter Graham Center and the National Center for Early Development & Learning, both based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, reinforce the growing public awareness that programs for helping children should start much earlier than they typically do.

In this issue, we look at the dramatic results of the Abecedarian Project Follow-Up, which shows that the positive effects of educational child care on poor children, which was given almost from birth to kindergarten, persist until at least age 21. This article starts on page two.

Our research continues to show that child care programs must be of high quality. Such programs need to stimulate children, provide for more teacher training and compensation, offer comprehensive learning curricula, and encourage staff to work more closely with families.

We are learning more about the importance of relationships for very young children. An article on page ten reports that at age three, children whose mothers are chronically depressed fare significantly worse on tests and other measures of school readiness, verbal comprehension and language skills than children of mothers who are never depressed. Another article, which begins on page 12, looks at the importance of child teacher relationships.

But there is still much to be done. What is the best way to implement the things we are learning? What should governing agencies do in the way of standards? How should we finance early childhood programs? In an article on pages 14-16, we take a look at some of the more innovative early childhood programs around the country. 

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(inside back cover)

Gains from high quality child care persist into adulthood — landmark study

Poor children who received early educational intervention had higher scores on mental, reading, and math tests than children who didn't receive the intervention and, more importantly, these effects persisted until at least age 21, according to researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



“Our study provides scientific evidence that early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and educational achievements of poor children even into early adulthood. The importance of high quality, educational child care from early infancy is now clear,” said **Frances Campbell**, principal investigator of the Abecedarian Project Age 21 Follow-Up.

It is one of the longest running and most carefully controlled studies of its type in America, having begun more than two

decades ago, researchers said. It is believed to be the first study that definitively links high quality infant/preschool child care with positive outcomes in the children as adults.

Data also showed that more than twice as many children who received the intervention attended college than those who did not.

Furthermore, young adults in the intervention group were two years older, on average, when their own first child was born than those who didn't receive intervention.

“These data are significant,” said **Craig Ramey** of the University of Alabama, director of the early intervention study, “not only for parents, but for policymakers seeking to make a difference in children from low-income families and for directors and administrators of child care programs.”

“The degree of scientific control in this study gives us greater confidence that differences between the treated and untreated individuals can be attributed to the intervention itself, rather than to differences among treated and untreated families,” said Campbell.

The Abecedarian project differed from most other childhood intervention projects in that

- 1) it began in early infancy whereas other programs began at age two or older, and
- 2) treated children had five years of exposure to early education in a high quality child care setting whereas most other programs were of shorter duration.

The project began with 111 infants from low-income families. Of those, 57 were randomly assigned to a high-quality child care setting and 54 to a non-treated group. The latest assessment of the children, who are now 21 years old and older, covered 104 of the original group.

Joseph Sparling, who helped design the early childhood curriculum, said that each child had an individualized program of educational activities consisting of game-like interactions that were incorporated into the child's day. "These activities were designed to enhance social, emotional, and cognitive development, but gave particular emphasis to language," he said.

Over the years, Ramey said, children in the intervention group scored significantly higher on cognitive tests than children in the control group. Through middle adolescence, the differences between the groups remained large for reading and large-to-moderate for math.

Campbell said, "Welfare reform has increased the likelihood that children in poverty will need early child care. The educational stimulus value of these early caregiving years must not be wasted. More and more of America's children will need out of home care. This is especially true for poor children. We must not lose this opportunity to provide them the early learning experiences that will increase their chances for later success."

Researchers have placed the executive summary of the study and other information on the web site <www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc>.

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Highlights of the study

- Young adults who received early educational intervention had significantly higher mental test scores from toddlerhood through age 21 than those who were untreated.
- Enhanced language skills in the children probably increased the effects of early intervention on cognitive skills performance.
- Reading achievement scores were consistently higher for individuals with early intervention. The differences between the groups remained large from primary school through age 21. Enhanced cognitive skills appeared to positively affect reading achievement.
- Mathematics achievement showed a pattern similar to reading, with treated individuals earning higher scores. The differences were medium in contrast to the large effects for reading. Again, enhanced cognitive functioning appeared to positively affect results.
- Those with treatment were significantly more likely still to be in school at age 21—40% of the intervention group as compared with 20% of the control group.
- A significant difference was also found for the percentage of young adults who ever attended a four-year college. About 35% of the young adults in the intervention group had either graduated from or were at the time of the assessment attending a four-year college or university. In contrast, only about 14% in the control group had done so.
- Young adults in the intervention group were, on average, two years older (19 years) when their first child was born compared with those in the control group (17 years), although the youngest individuals in both groups were comparable in age when the first child was born.
- Employment rates were higher (65%) for the treatment group than for the control group (50%), although the trend was not statistically significant.

For more information, search for Carolina Abecedarian Project at <www.fpg.unc.edu>.