

Preschool 3

For more information on the model programs discussed, see Links.

There are several control-group evaluations showing the positive impact of preschool and home visits by child development counselors, including the **Perry Preschool Program**, the **Houston Parent- Child Development Center**, the **Syracuse Family Development Research Project** and the **Yale Child Welfare Project**. Building on them, the national **Head Start** program has been evaluated as successful, and a growing number of states are refining initiatives to ensure that 3- to 5-year-olds come to school ready to learn. See the **Citations** at the end of this section. For more information, visit the **Children's Defense Fund**, the **National Black Child Development Institute**, the **National Center for Children in Poverty** and the **National Head Start Association**.

The Perry Preschool Program

The Perry Preschool Program used the High/Scope Cognitively Oriented child training and development curriculum. The program fostered social and intellectual development in children ages 3 to 4 years. It targeted children with below average IQs from low-income African-American families in a poor neighborhood in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Nearly half the children were from single-parent families. The preschool teacher divided the classroom into language-oriented learning centers that encouraged children to use, experience and discover language through activities and play. The teachers and children jointly planned and initiated activities. The teachers also met with children and mothers weekly. The teachers encouraged the mothers to engage children in activities consistent with work in the classroom.

Children were randomly assigned to the program group and to a control group. Both groups were followed to age 19. Participants attached greater importance to school and displayed higher academic achievement than those in the control group, as indicated by standardized tests and grade point averages in high school, high school completion rates and literacy levels at age 19. Program participants had better employment records, spent more time in vocational school and college and had a lower likelihood of receiving public assistance than controls by age 19. Only 31 percent of program participants had ever been arrested or charged with a crime by age 19, as compared with 51 percent of those in the control group. Program participants self-reported approximately 50 percent less violent behavior than controls.

The Houston Parent-Child Center

During the first stage of this program—the first year of a child's life—staff visited homes to point out ways that parents could enhance the cognitive development of their children. When children were 2 years old, centerbased educational nursery school began. Follow-up evaluations 5 to 8 years later, when children were ages 8 to 11, found that participants in the program displayed less teacher-rated fighting and disruptive, impulsive, and restless behavior than children in a randomly selected control group.

The Syracuse Family Development Research Program

This initiative operated between 1969 and 1975. Its goal was "the support of child and family behaviors that sustain growth and development after intervention ceases." This

was done through enhancement of parent-child interaction, child cognitive development activities, social support, a toy and book lending library, educational child care and a parent organization. By age 5, children in the experimental program showed statistically meaningful gains in their cognitive functioning compared with randomly assigned control group children. For the 60 experimental program children who could be found years later, only 6 percent had been placed under supervision of the probation department, contrasted with 22 percent of the 54 children in the control group who were located. This translated into an estimated cost to society for court processing, probation services, supervision, and detention of \$186 per child in the program group compared with an estimated \$1,985 per child in the control group—more than 10 times as much.

The Yale Child Welfare Project

This program provided home visits, pediatric child care, parenting skills and job counseling to low income mothers and their first child during the 30 months following birth. Ten years later, children from the program showed significantly less aggression, disobedience, lying, and cheating than control children. Program children were less likely than controls to require special education. At the 10 year follow-up, participating parents were less welfare dependent, better educated and had fewer children than control parents.

Head Start

These preceding successes tended to be more academic experiments, but we have included them because they have been used to help design and refine the much more widely implemented federal Head Start program. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Head Start enables children to deal more effectively with their present environment as well as their later responsibilities in the school and community. Solutions embrace education, social services, medical, dental, nutrition, and mental health services, and parent involvement. The goal is to enable children to develop to their highest potential. Head Start is implemented through a nationwide network of 1,321 grantees serving approximately 2,050 communities. The program employs approximately 97,000 persons and enlists the aid of approximately 800,000 volunteers in these communities.

The Committee for Economic Development, composed of corporate executives, has concluded:

It would be hard to imagine that society could find a higher yield for a dollar of investment than that found in preschool programs for its at-risk children. Every \$1.00 spent on early prevention and intervention can save \$4.75 in the costs of remedial education, welfare, and crime further down the road.

Yet less than half of all eligible lower-income children aged 3 to 5 presently are served by Head Start. Most eligible children receive Head Start for only 1 year. The enrollment rate for 3-year-olds is especially low. The percentage of children receiving preschool is considerably higher for middle-income-family (\$35,000 and more) children, whose parents pay for private programs.

Half of all Head Start workers earn less than \$15,000 a year. As it stands, the low pay leads to rapid and disruptive staff turnover, which diminishes the quality of care, and not enough staff have sufficient training to cope with the increasingly complex problems

(including parental drug abuse) that children are bringing with them to the program. Instructors are less skilled than in, for example, the Perry Preschool Program.

Recently, dramatic new biological and chemical evidence has demonstrated how attention to babies in their earliest months determines how the brain is wired and provides a basis for their social, emotional and intellectual development. But this is bad news for welfare mothers who must work—unless we set in place quality, universal preschool (as in Sweden and France) and child care when parents work—building on successful models like Advance, HIPPIY, Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start and Healthy Families America.

The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the present level of Head Start funding will need to be increased by \$6B to \$7B per year to provide eligibility for all lower-income children who qualify, with the exact amount depending on how quickly the additional funding is phased in.

In spite of the need for higher pay for teachers and other staff at existing Head Start sites, Congress in recent years reduced funds for management of Head Start programs. This was followed by criticism by Congress of poor management at some Head Start sites.

Recent attempts to increase the number of college graduate teachers have not been matched by increased funding. The National Head Start Association estimates it would add \$3.4 billion to the cost of Head Start. They further note that proposed funding (FY2006) is \$234 million below what is needed to keep the current level of service, which has deteriorated due to a number of well intentioned, but unfunded mandates.

Head Start enrollees have shown substantial immediate improvements in intellectual and social development. However, they have not shown the kind of long-term benefits demonstrated in the Perry Preschool evaluation. We believe that this can be attributed to less time in the program for Head Start compared to Perry Preschool youth, less intensive intervention, lower-quality teachers and support staff, lower pay and less funding for management and inadequate funding for the training and supervision of volunteers.

The lack of sustained longer-term benefits, we believe, also can be explained by the absence of a national youth development program corresponding to Head Start for youngsters older than 3 to 5 years old. Presently, lower income children who receive Head Start typically return, at age 6, to the same high-risk environment of the streets, but without any assurance that Head Start-type interventions and safe havens off the street will be available to help provide common-sense guidance and discipline. The response needs to be a rites-of-safe passage policy that continues Head Start-type investments, but for older children and youth. We need public school reform, youth development, and job training.

As Professor William Julius Wilson at the John F. Kennedy School at Harvard University concludes:

Anyone familiar with the harsh environment of the inner-city ghetto should not be surprised by the research findings on the Head Start fade-out. It would be extraordinary if the gains from Head Start programs were sustained in some of these environments. The children of the inner-city ghetto have to contend with public schools plagued by unimaginative curricula, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate plant and facilities, and only a small proportion of teachers who have confidence in their students and expect them to learn. Inner-city ghetto children also grow up in

neighborhoods with devastating rates of joblessness, which trigger a whole series of other problems that are not conducive to healthy child development or intellectual growth. Included among these are broken families, antisocial behavior, social networks that do not extend beyond the confines of the ghetto environment, and a lack of informal social control over the behavior and activities of children and adults in the neighborhood. If enrichment programs like Head Start were extended throughout the elementary, middle, and even high school, it is very likely that initial gains would be sustained. In the absence of such programs, however, it is unwarranted and intellectually irresponsible to attribute either the academic failure of these children or their lack of success in postschool employment mainly to their "cognitive ability." Moreover, most geneticists agree that there is currently no definite line separating genetic influences from environmental influences.

As the impact of No Child Left Behind has begun to be evaluated, the question has been asked, 'What about Head Start'? The White House website notes the importance of Head Start, and at a presentation before the conservative Hoover Institute, Martin Carnoy, Professor of Education and Economics at Stanford University, has said:

I would expand Head Start down to two years old. ----The evidence (Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey) suggests that in the early years of education, the only decline that occurs for the low income kids occurs in the summer, not during the school years.

Moderator: It's the home environment that's the problem?

Professor Carnoy: No, the opportunities outside of school.

3/ Citations: This section is based on:

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