Early Learning, Later Success

THE ABECEDARIAN STUDY

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Representative Articles


The Importance of Early Intervention

➤ Children are more likely than any other age group to be poor.
➤ After declining in the 1960s and 1970s, child poverty rates are climbing.
➤ Minority children are 3 times more likely than majority children to be reared in poverty.
➤ Poverty in early childhood has long-lasting negative consequences for cognitive development and academic outcomes.
➤ An enormous human resource is lost when children do not achieve to their highest potential.
➤ Early childhood education can make a critical difference in the later success of poor children.

The Abecedarian Intervention

➤ The Abecedarian project was a carefully controlled scientific study of the potential benefits of early childhood education for poor children.
➤ Children from low-income families received full-time, high-quality educational intervention in a childcare setting from infancy through age 5.
➤ Each child had an individualized prescription of educational activities.
➤ Educational activities consisted of “games” incorporated into the child’s day.
➤ Activities focused on social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development but gave particular emphasis to language.
➤ Children’s progress was monitored over time with follow-up studies conducted at ages 12, 15, and 21.
➤ The young adult findings demonstrate that important, long-lasting benefits were associated with the early childhood program.

Major Findings

➤ Children who participated in the early intervention program had higher cognitive test scores from the toddler years to age 21.
➤ Treated individuals were older, on average, when their first child was born.
➤ Academic achievement in both reading and math was higher from the primary grades through young adulthood.
➤ Intervention children completed more years of education and were more likely to attend a four-year college.

Policy Implications

➤ The importance of high quality, educational childcare from early infancy is now clear. The Abecedarian study provides scientific evidence that early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and educational attainments of poor children even into early adulthood.
➤ Welfare reform has increased the likelihood that poverty children will need early childcare. Steps must be taken to ensure that quality childcare is available and affordable for all families. This is especially critical for low-income families.
➤ Learning begins in infancy. Every child deserves a good start in an environment that is safe, healthy, emotionally supportive, and cognitively stimulating.
➤ Childcare officials should be aware of the importance of quality care from the very first months of life.
➤ Quality care requires sufficient well-trained staff to ensure that every child receives the kind of appropriate, individualized attention provided by the Abecedarian model.
➤ Future research should concentrate on identifying the specific learning techniques most effective for all groups and types of young children.
➤ Poverty is increasing among America’s children. At the same time, more and more of them will require out of home care. We must not lose the opportunity to provide them with the early learning that will increase their chances for later success.