

Abecedarian Early Intervention Project

The **Carolina Abecedarian Project** was a controlled experiment that was conducted in 1972 in North Carolina, United States, by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute to study the potential benefits of early childhood education for poor children to enhance school readiness. It has been found that in their earliest school years, poor children lag behind others, suggesting the fact that they were ill-prepared for schooling.^[1] The Abecedarian project was inspired by the fact that few other early childhood programs could provide a sufficiently well-controlled environment to determine the effectiveness of early childhood training.

The Project

The participants in these experiment were 111 infants born between 1972 and 1977. Of these, 57 of which were given high-quality child care while another 54 acted as a control group. An overwhelming majority (98 percent) of the children who participated in the experiment were African-American. The average starting age of participants was 4.4 months.^[2] Whereas other childhood programs started at age two, the Abecedarian Project started from infancy and continued for five years, a period longer than most other programs. The participants received child care for 6–8 hours a day, five days a week. Educational activities were game-based and emphasized language. The control group was provided with nutritional supplements, social services, and health care to ensure that these factors did not affect the outcomes of the experiment.^[3]

Significant findings

Follow-up assessment of the participants involved in the project has been completed. Progress was monitored at ages 3, 4, 5, 6.5, 8, 12, 15 and 21.^[4] The areas covered were cognitive functioning, academic skills, educational attainment, employment, parenthood, and social adjustment. The significant findings of the experiment were as follows:^[5]

- higher cognitive test scores due to enhanced language development
- higher academic achievement in both reading and mathematics
- more likely to attend college
- later childbearing.

The project concluded that high quality, educational child care from early infancy was therefore of utmost importance.

Head Start at East Harlem

The East Harlem Head Start program provides early childhood education to income-eligible children 3-5 years of age. Head Start stands out among early childhood programs for addressing the emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs of each child. The East Harlem Head Start program has operated since 1965 as a federally-funded, comprehensive child development program.

Requirements for entry:

1. Children must be 3-5 years old.
2. Families must meet the income eligibility guidelines.
3. Every child must have a current physical examination.

Hours of Operation:

8 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday–Friday

We have two half-day sessions from 8-11 a.m. and noon-3 p.m. Monday-Friday.

In the Home Based Program, a teacher and a social service worker make weekly visits to the home to engage the child and the parent in a variety of educational activities. Once a week, the Home Based children all come to the Center for a socialization class, where the children learn how to socialize and get along with others, while also increasing their language and academic skills. In addition, the children also attend weekly swimming lessons at the Milbank pool – many of our families come to us without knowing how to swim, but all leave the program confident and skilled and ready to hit the summer beaches.

Rome Head Start

The Rome Head Start Study (Monroe & McDonald, 1981) examined whether or not Head Start makes a difference in the academic achievement of poor children. In 1966, a Head Start program was started in Rome, Georgia, to serve 5-year-old children living in poverty. The program consisted of part-time, center-based services from January to August. In a follow-up study on the long-term effects of having attended Head Start, Monroe and McDonald identified all 1st-graders in the Rome City Schools who qualified for federal funds and determined whether or not they attended Head Start by examining their school records. They compared the two groups on percentages of special education placements and percentages of students dropping out of high school. They found that the group that attended Head Start had significantly lower percentages of special education placements (11% vs. 25%) and lower percentages of high school dropouts (50% vs. 67%).

Early Training Project

The Early Training Project (Gray, Ramsey, & Klaus, 1982), which began in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1962, studied the achievement of 90 disadvantaged children, ages 3 to 4, in that community. The children were randomly assigned to either the treatment group (half-day, center-based instruction during the summer months until the children started 1st grade) or a control group. Comparisons on measures of school achievement were made when the participants were 18 years old. The treatment group had fewer special education placements, fewer grade retentions, and fewer high school dropouts than the group with no instruction.