

Early Training Project

OVERVIEW

The Early Training Program was designed to influence both attitudes and aptitude relating to educational achievement. The program targeted economically disadvantaged pre-school children and targeted both children and parents. Results of a random assignment evaluation conducted in the 1960s showed that children in the experimental groups out-performed children in the control groups on assessments of IQ, receptive vocabulary, word knowledge, word discrimination, and reading in early elementary school, a year after the intervention ended. However, some of these findings faded in the follow-ups.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

Target population: 4 to 5 year olds who were economically disadvantaged

The program involves weekly home visits during the year as well as a 10-week part-day preschool program during the summer. The program lasts between 2 and 3 years.

EVALUATION(S) OF PROGRAM

Gray, S.W. & Klaus, R.A. (1970). The Early Training Project: A seventh-year report. *Child Development*, 41, 909-924.

Evaluated population: African-American low-income children in two small southern cities. 61 children in one city were part of the experimental study. 27 group children in a comparison group were in a second city.

Approach: The 61 children in the first city were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The first group received three years of the Early Training Project which consisted of weekly meetings and a three summers of the 10-week part-day preschool program. The second group received two years of weekly meetings and the preschool program (starting the intervention one year after the first group). The third group received no intervention treatment. In addition, the 27 children in the comparison group from the second city received no treatment. For the first three years of the intervention, children received pre- and post-test assessments during the summer. Follow-up assessments were given in the fourth, fifth, and seventh summer. Children were assessed using the Stanford-Binet, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), and the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

Results: Results of the study indicated that, over the years of assessment, children in the experimental groups performed better than children in the control group (and the comparison group). Likewise, the experimental groups outperformed the control group on the PPVT however these findings faded and were not seen in the seventh summer. For the Metropolitan Achievement Test, children in the experimental groups outperformed children in the control group on measures of word knowledge, word discrimination, and reading at the end of first grade but at the end of the seventh year, the children only differed on measures of word knowledge and reading.

American Indian-Alaska Native Head Start

Educational achievement as evidenced by graduation rates, test scores, and educational attainment is one area in which disparities emerge early in life for minority populations in the US; they are observed by the time children enter kindergarten and are related to gaps in both cognitive and academic as well as social and emotional skills at school entry.

The American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population in the US is among the most heavily impacted by disparities in health, health care, and social and economic indicators. For AI/AN children high rates of poverty, trauma and violence, morbidity and mortality, and inadequate health services present difficult obstacles to overcome in development.

As one of the leading efforts to address these early gaps, Head Start (HS) programs seek to meet the educational, social, emotional, and health needs of low-income preschool children through education and early childhood development, medical, dental and mental health services, and parent involvement. Research has shown that early child intervention can make a difference in the lives of children, in both the short- and longer-term, and results from the Head Start Impact Study, the Family and Child Experiences Study, and the National Evaluation of Early Head Start

have pointed to the ways in which existing HS services can make a difference and might be further improved to make even more significant changes. Unfortunately, however, none of these studies have spoken to the experiences of AI/AN children, families, and programs, which is even more significant given that HS represents a particularly important type of early childhood intervention in tribal communities, serving AI/AN children across the country who make up 3.1% of all children served by HS programs.

Perry Preschool Project and Rome Head Start

The Perry Preschool Project (Weikart, Deloria, Lawser, & Wiegerink, 1970) sought to increase impoverished 3- and 4-year-olds' academic achievement in the later school years, as well as their chances for a meaningful and productive life. Information about participants was collected and analyzed yearly from the ages of 3 to 11, and also at ages 14, 15, 19, and 26 (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984; Weikart, 1996; Weikart et al., 1970; Weikart, Epstein, Schweinhart, & Bond, 1978). Throughout the school years, the participants had higher achievement test scores, higher grade point averages, fewer failing grades, and lower rates of special education placements. The follow-up study by Weikart (1996) when the participants were 26 found that in addition to higher rates of school achievement, the participants also had fewer arrests and were less in need of welfare assistance, compared to the control group. Moreover, Weikart noted that for every dollar spent on the project, over seven dollars were saved in future spending.

Similar to the Perry Preschool project, 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%).