



Spotlight on Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections

The research highlighted this month can be found on page 76 of the *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections* research synthesis and comprise a series of follow-up studies that were quasi-experimental in design and focused upon determining the long-term effects of participation by both parents and youth in the Chicago Child Parent Center Program.

The First Component: The Chicago Child- Parent Center Longitudinal Study:

The Chicago Longitudinal Study is a federally-funded investigation of the effects of an early and extensive childhood intervention in central-city Chicago called the Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program, the second oldest federally funded early intervention program in the United States. The study began in 1986 to investigate the effects of government-funded kindergarten programs for 1,539 children in the Chicago Public Schools.

In the late 1960s, at the same time Project Head Start was being launched nationwide, the Chicago Public Schools secured Title I funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to establish early childhood programs within four neighborhood schools in some of the city's most impoverished communities. These CPCs have since been expanded and currently include 25 sites. Although little known, even in Chicago, these programs have quietly served thousands of children over decades. The sites vary in their instructional approaches, but all provide early education in or in close proximity to neighborhood elementary schools, and most provide ongoing programming through third grade. In addition to providing education for young children, all programs provide resources for parents and parental participation in activities at a parent resource room.

Besides investigating the short- and long-term effects of early childhood intervention, the Chicago Longitudinal Study traces the scholastic and social development of participating children and the contributions of family and school practices to children's behavior. The CPC program provides educational and family support services to children from preschool to third grade. It is funded by Title I and has operated in the Chicago Public Schools since 1967.

The study was financed by the National Institutes of Health and the U. S. Department of Education and fills an enormous void in the research on the effects of preschool on poor children. Few studies have examined such programs for more than a few years at a time or for so large a group of children.

The four main objectives of the Chicago Longitudinal Study are:

1. To evaluate comprehensively the impact of the CPC program on child and family development.
2. To identify and better understand the pathways (child, family, and school-related) through which the effects of program participation are manifested, and more generally, through which scholastic and behavioral development proceeds.
3. To document and describe children's patterns of school and social competence over time, including their school achievement, academic progress, and expectations for the future.
4. To determine the effects of family, school, neighborhood, and child-specific factors and practices on social competence broadly defined, especially those can be altered to promote positive development and to prevent problematic outcomes.

Research Review #1:

Parent Involvement in Early Intervention for Disadvantaged Children: Does it Matter?

Wendy T. Miedel and Arthur J. Reynolds 1999

This study was the first of 3 follow-ups to the Chicago Longitudinal Study. It investigated the relation between parents' involvement in the Chicago Child Parent Centers early intervention program and their children's eighth grade school achievement.

The study involved a sample of 704 parents of children participating in the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Through interviews, parents of eighth graders reported retrospectively on their participation in the CPC program when their children were younger. Activities parents listed in the interviews included visiting the parent resource room; attending parent-teacher conferences, school meetings, and assemblies; going on class trips; working in the classroom; receiving home visits; and transporting their children to and from school.

Results of the study showed that even after controlling for family background, the number of activities in which parents participated in preschool and kindergarten was significantly associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention at age 14 (eighth grade), and fewer years in special education placement. The frequency of parent involvement was only marginally associated with reading achievement but was associated with lower rates of grade retention. A confirmatory analysis indicated that teacher ratings of parent involvement were significantly associated with higher reading achievement in eighth grade, lower grade retention rates, and lower rates of special education placement through eighth grade. Evidence from this study suggests that implementing early parent involvement programs can promote future family-school relations and can be a preventive factor in overcoming risk conditions associated with academic achievement.

Three implications of this study are:

1. Parent involvement should be an important part of early childhood programs;
2. Beginning parent involvement activities during early childhood can provide a "strong foundation for family-school relations" that can ensure successful transitions to first grade; and
3. Parent involvement can be a "protective factor in counteracting risk conditions that may lead to school underachievement."

With these implications in mind, researchers stress that encouraging parent involvement is especially important in schools serving large numbers of children from low-income families.

Research Review #2

Success in early intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers

A.J. Reynolds 2000

This second of three pieces of followup research on the Chicago Child-Parent Centers presents an overview of the Child- Parent Center (CPC) program in Chicago. Follow-up data gathered when the children were ages 14 and 15 are reported. This report of data for children ages 14 and 15 provides convincing evidence that early intervention is associated with improved performance on standardized achievement tests, lower placement in special education, less grade retention, and less delinquent behavior. For example, children who had any amount of CPC participation showed an average three-month advantage in reading and math achievement at ages 14 or 15 compared with children with no CPC participation. Those who participated in the full CPC program from preschool to grade 3 averaged a full year ahead of their peers without CPC participation. By ages 14 or 15, only 25 percent of the children who participated in the CPCs had been retained a grade in school compared with 35 percent of other children.

This piece of research shows that the CPC program seems to work equally for boys and girls and across curricular practices, but that there was a tendency for families in more seriously impoverished neighborhoods to show relatively greater gains from the program. Reynolds also asks questions about how the program works. He sets up theoretically driven alternative models of how program effects might occur: through cognitive preparation, prevention of behavior problems, family involvement, school choice, self-image, and child attendance at better grammar schools. Using sophisticated structural equation models, he demonstrates that the most powerful pathways are through early cognitive skill: early intervention results in cognitive gains, which in turn lead to continued academic advantage over time. The data also support an alternative model that early

intervention leads to greater parental involvement in children's education, which in turn leads to improved school performance and reduced delinquent behavior. This model received statistical support that was weaker, although quite remarkable given that the measures of parental involvement were limited to a few teacher ratings of parent participation in school activities; no measures of parental involvement and commitment to their children's development in the home setting were available.

Central to this study is a 1986 cohort of nearly twelve hundred CPC children and a comparison group of low income children whose subsequent activities, challenges, and achievements are followed through the age of fifteen. The lives of these children amply demonstrate the positive long-term educational and social consequences of the CPC program. (Abstract from: <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/success.htm>). When families are involved in their children's early childhood education, children may experience greater success once they enter elementary school (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Getting Parents "Ready" for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education, Holly Kreider, Harvard Family Research Project April 2002

Research Review #3

*Long-term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest
A 15-Year Follow-up of Low-Income Children in Public Schools*

A. J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson, and Emily A. Mann, 2001

This piece of research was a fifteen-year follow-up and third in a series of follow-up reports to the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Additionally, the impact of early childhood intervention was investigated. Researchers found that participation in the CPC program was associated with better educational and social outcomes up to age 20.

Findings

The findings from this study are among the strongest pieces of evidence that established programs administered through public schools can promote long-term success. The following summarizes the reports' key findings.

- Preschool participants in the Chicago Program had a higher rate of high school completion and more years of completed education than those who attended less intensive preschools or no preschool. 49.7% of graduates of the CPC completed high school compared to 38.5% of non-program participants.
- Fewer preschool participants of the CPC Program had been arrested for juvenile crimes. 16.9% for CPC participants vs. 25.1% for those who attended less intensive preschools or no preschool.
- The preschoolers and the school-age CPC participants had lower rates of participation in special education and lower rates of grade retention.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

These studies show that participation in established early childhood intervention programs for low-income children is connected to better educational and social outcomes and children's long-term success. According to the authors of the year 2001 study highlighted here, the results indicate that health and quality educational services, delivered in a venue that involves parents and strengthens families, can improve developmental outcomes among poor children.

Sources:

American Journal of Education, Nov 2000 v109 i1 pg. 153(3) Success in Early Intervention: the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. (Book Reviews). Sydney L. Hans.

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