

Why Does Early Learning Matter Most?

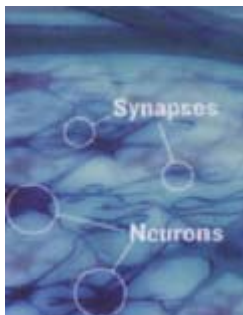
What if every child had **5 years of learning before kindergarten?**

That's already the case today.

New science showcased in *Newsweek* says children begin learning at birthⁱ. Their emotional, social, and cognitive development starts from the moment they enter the world.

All children are born learning. Together, we shape their learning.

The first few years provide the foundation for a child's future success because that's when the brain architecture – the structure of the brain – is being builtⁱⁱ. In fact, a young child's brain is twice as active as an adult'sⁱⁱⁱ during that construction. That's why a baby has 1,000 trillion synapse connections at 8 months...but adults have only 500 trillion.^{iv} This brain structure is the foundation for all future learning, just like architectural frameworks support a house. With the right kinds of interactions in the first few years, a baby's brain architecture becomes strong.

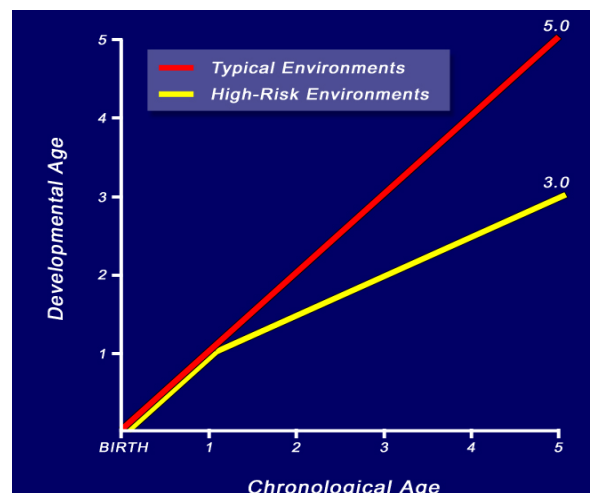


But it's not flashcards and fancy toys that build a strong brain architecture. Studies prove that loving, nurturing relationships and everyday experiences matter most^v.

“A child's day-to-day experiences affect the structural and functional development of his or her brain, including intelligence and personality.”^{vi}

By the age of 5, many children in high-risk environments are already developmentally behind. This gap only grows over time – undermining school readiness and success in life^{vii}.

“The quality of young children's environment and social experience has a decisive, long-lasting impact on their ... ability to learn.”^{viii}



What can we do to support early learning for all children?

A child’s first teacher is family – parents, grandparents and family members who may care for the child during the day.^{ix} That’s why the *Born Learning* public engagement campaign helps families, caregivers and communities build early learning for young children. (For more details, visit www.BornLearning.org)



Research shows that **when adults interact with young children** – talking, singing, and playing rhyming games – they stimulate language and vocabulary development and build important foundations for learning to read^x.

But it’s just as important for **communities to provide an environment that supports early learning**. That could mean funding parenting programs or local family resource centers; starting quality rating systems to help parents choose quality child care; improving the quality of child care; making pre-school available to all children; or passing policies, laws or budgets that boost early childhood education.

Every person who touches the life of a child – directly or indirectly – **can enhance that child’s early learning**.



It’s an investment that pays off – because **quality early learning helps a child succeed in school, work and life**.

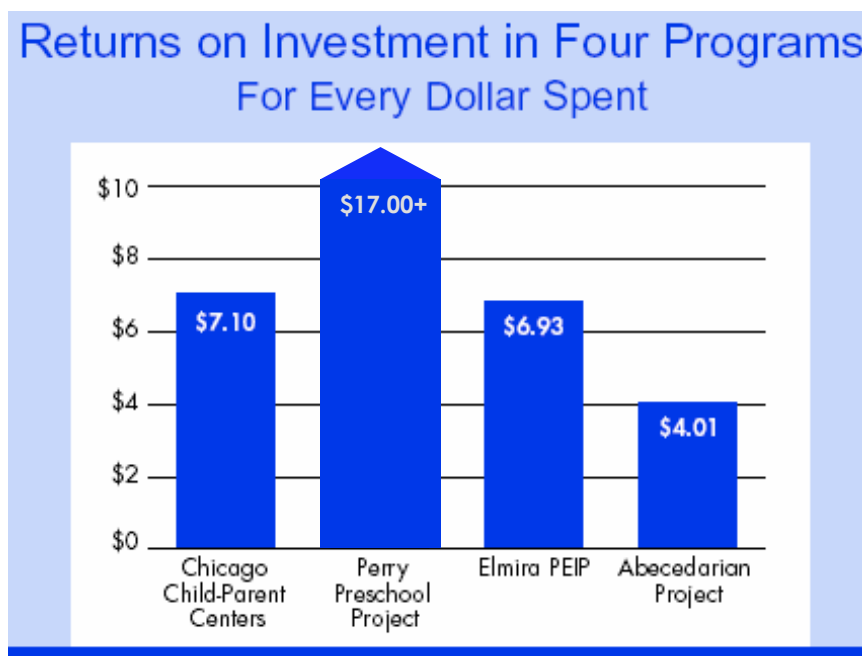
- Experts say what families do to support literacy in the home is more important than family income or level of formal education in predicting future success.^{xi}
- Sensitive and responsive parent-child relationships are associated with stronger cognitive skills in young children and enhanced social competence and work skills later in school – illustrating the connection between social/emotional development and intellectual growth^{xii}.

- The broader quality of the home environment (including interactions within the family setting, activities, and toys) also is strongly related to early cognitive and language development, performance on IQ testing, and later achievement in school^{xiii}.
- A 40-year longitudinal study that followed infants into adulthood shows that investing \$1 in early learning saves \$17 down the road, with tangible results measured in lower crime, fewer teen pregnancies and higher individual education and earning levels^{xiv}.
- Other studies show children with better-quality early education have stronger language, pre-mathematics and social skills. And quality care has an even greater impact on the most vulnerable children's language skills and self-perceptions^{xv}.

But too many children aren't getting enough quality early learning experiences now.

- Kindergarten teachers estimate that 1 in 3 children enter the classroom unprepared to meet the challenges of kindergarten^{xvi}.
- Some 46% of kindergarteners come to school at risk for failure^{xvii}.
- The poorest children start kindergarten 1-2 years behind in language and other skills important to school success^{xviii}. 1 in 3 children are born in poverty^{xix}.

We need to do more. Leaders in academia, economics and business agree that the benefits of early childhood investment far outweigh the costs^{xx}.



Whether it's equipping parents and families, supporting high quality early learning and preschool, or implementing family friendly policies, **supporting a child's early learning** in the first few years **can make all the difference** in that child's future success.



**What matters more?
It's their future. And our responsibility.**

ⁱ Pat Wingert & Martha Brant. (August, 2005). "Reading Your Baby's Mind," Newsweek; p32-39.

ⁱⁱ Craig T. Ramey & Sharon L. Ramey. (January, 1999). Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life. Goddard Press, Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Shore (1997). "Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development." Families and Work Institute.

^{iv} Ronald Kotulak (1997). "Inside the Brain: Revolutionary Discoveries of How the Mind Works". Andrews McMill Publishing: Kansas City.

^v D. Glassy, J. Romano, and the Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care (2003). "Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children: The Pediatrician's Role." *Pediatrics*; 111: 911-913. Retrieved 9/16/05 from <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/111/4/911>. Also, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care (2005). "Quality Early Education and Child Care From Birth to Kindergarten." *Pediatrics*; 115: 187-191. Retrieved 9/16/05 from <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/115/1/187>.

-
- ^{vi} D. Glassy, J. Romano, and the Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care (2003). “Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children: The Pediatrician’s Role.” *Pediatrics*; 111: 911-913. Retrieved 9/16/05 from <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/111/4/911>. Also, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care (2005). “Quality Early Education and Child Care From Birth to Kindergarten.” *Pediatrics*; 115: 187-191. Retrieved 9/16/05 from <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/115/1/187>.
- ^{vii} Dr. Craig Ramey, Director of the Center for Health & Education, Georgetown University
- ^{viii} Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children. (1994). *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, Carnegie Corporation of New York: New York, NY.
- ^{ix} C. Bruner, with S. Floyd & A. Copeman. (January 2005) *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness: Revised & Expanded Toolkit*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN), part of the Child & Family Policy Center: Des Moines, IA. Available online at <http://www.cfpciowa.org/pdf/7%20Things.pdf>.
- ^x Betty Hart, PhD & Todd R. Risley, PhD. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- ^{xi} Jennifer Ballen and Oliver Moles (September 1994). *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. U.S. Department of Education.
- ^{xii} Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships. (2004). *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child*, Working Paper No. 1. Available online at <http://www.developingchild.net/reports.shtml>
- ^{xiii} Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships. (2004). *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child*, Working Paper No. 1. Available online at <http://www.developingchild.net/reports.shtml>
- ^{xiv} Schweinhart, Lawrence J. (2005). *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions*. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, p3. Available online at <http://www.highscope.org>.
- ^{xv} S. Helburn, et al. (1995), *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study: Executive Summary*. Denver, CO: University of Colorado.
- ^{xvi} Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children. (1994). *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, Carnegie Corporation of New York: New York, NY.
- ^{xvii} Nicholas Zill and Jerry West for the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Entering Kindergarten: A Portrait of American Children When They Begin School: Findings from The Condition of Education 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001035.pdf>.
- ^{xviii} Urahn SK. (September 2001). “Promoting Universal Access to High Quality Early Education for Three and Four-Year Olds.” The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Starting Early, Starting Strong Initiative.
- ^{xix} Children’s Defense Fund (August 2004). *Key Facts About American Children*. Available online at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/data/keyfacts.aspx>.
- ^{xx} C. Bruner, with S. Floyd & A. Copeman. (January 2005) *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness: Revised & Expanded Toolkit*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN), part of the Child & Family Policy Center: Des Moines, IA. Available online at <http://www.cfpciowa.org/pdf/7%20Things.pdf>.