



Education of the Infant and Young Child

AAAS Symposium • 28 December 1969 • Boston

One of the trends in "early education" is to shift the start of formal education to even earlier ages. At the present time there are a number of programs, including day-care centers, where very young children are exposed to a variety of educational experiences. If one projects this trend, it is highly likely that there will soon be day-care centers around the country which will be aimed at the very young child (6 months old) and particularly that segment of the population which is often called "culturally deprived." Indeed, a number of statements have been made by various federal officials to the effect that day-care centers will be established as a means of taking care of infants and young children.

One question of great concern is: What experiences should these infants receive in the day-care centers? We have massive amounts of information from many diverse fields showing that the events occurring in very early life have long-lasting and powerful impacts upon developing organisms, including the human. Thus, the manipulation of experiences (educational, emotional, social, and others) in a day-care center offers the potential for great good or great harm.

One of the purposes of the symposium on Education of the Infant and Young Child is to review and summarize data which are available at both the human and the subhuman level concerning the effects of early experiences. Findings will be presented which demonstrate that the lack of appropri-

ate experiences, or the occurrence of inappropriate ones, will have deleterious consequences upon the growth, development, and behavioral capabilities of the young organism. Other results will show that the performance capabilities of infants and young children may be significantly improved if one intervenes with the appropriate types of experiences in very early life. In addition, there are data showing the need to continue these experiences if one wishes to insure the long-term positive consequences.

Current data, sparse though they are,

clearly establish that there is no one regimen or sequence of events which will optimally benefit all infants. A set of experiences which may facilitate a child's subsequent behavior along several pertinent dimensions may, at the same time, interfere with the development of other important behaviors. The degree and kinds of relationships between various types of experiences in early life and subsequent behavioral performance is not at present known. Nor is there adequate theory to guide those who have to make decisions concerning the kinds of experiences to give infants. This is a matter of empirical determination.

One of the points to be emphasized in this symposium is the extreme importance of having experimental day-care centers where various programs of experience are tried out with different groups of infants, and the consequences of these programs are evaluated over a period of years. The infant is our most important natural resource in the world today. His capability for assimilating and processing information in very early life as well as his capabilities for emotional reactivity and physiological involvement have been clearly documented. The growth and development of the infant into his adult capabilities are too important to be ignored on the national level and must be the subject of experimental investigation and effective evaluation.

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Speakers and Topics

28 December (morning)

Arranger: Victor H. Denenberg (University of Connecticut).

Opening Remarks, Victor H. Denenberg.

Theoretical Issues in Intervention Strategy, Jerome Kagan.

Early Deprivation in Biological Perspective, William Mason.

Effects of Group Rearing Conditions During the Preschool Years of Life, Hanus Papousek.

(afternoon)

Need for Early and Continuing Education, Earl Schaefer.

Early Enrichment in Infants, David Weikart.

Discussant: Jerome Bruner.

Preliminary program notes appear in the 15 August and 12 September issues of Science. Registration forms for the meeting, hotels, and tours appear in the 12 September issue. Information about the symposiums "Tektite" and "Expanding Horizons in Medical Education" appears in the 12 and 19 September issues.