ENCYCLOPEDIA on Early Childhood Development

Synthesis

Consult these experts' papers in the *According to experts* section

How important is it?

"Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins, and continues throughout life. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure." – *James J. Heckman*

"ECD has taken its place in the economic literature besides schooling, on the job training, public health and informal learning." – *David Dodge*

"A wide range of policies, including those directed toward early care and education, primary health care, child protective services, adult mental health, and family economic supports, among many others, can promote the safe, supportive environments and stable, caring relationships that children need." – *Jack P. Shonkoff*

"The early years of human development establish the basic architecture and function of the brain." – *J. Fraser Mustard*

"The interplay of the developing brain with the environment is the driving force of development." – *Clyde Hertzman*

"The Convention of the Rights of the Child was adopted far more quickly and broadly than any previous human rights treaty." – *Gary B. Melton*

What do we know?

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Human capital interventions should include, in addition to cognition and “academic smarts”, social adaptability and motivation. – *James J. Heckman*

Neglecting investment in good health (pre and post conception), good nutrition, good parenting, strong social support and stimulative interaction with others outside the home reduces the value of investment in other areas. – *David Dodge*

“From pregnancy through early childhood, all of the environments in which children live and learn, and the quality of their relationships with adults and caregivers, have a significant impact on their cognitive, emotional and social development.” – *Jack P. Shonkoff*

“We now know that nurture in early life as well as nature is important in early human development and that nurture in the early years has major effects on learning in school and physical and mental health throughout the life cycle.” – *J. Fraser Mustard*

"The competencies and skills fostered through ECD programs are not limited to cognitive gains, but also include physical, social and emotional gains - all of which are determinants of health over the life course." – *Clyde Hertzman*

"The child’s right to personality is meaningful from the moment of birth." – *Gary B. Melton*

What can be done?

“As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene. The best evidence supports the policy prescription: invest in the very young and improve basic learning and socialisation skills.” – *James J. Heckman*

“Public investment in human capital should be directed towards the very young but the way these investments should be directed in order to be productive is far less clear.” – *David Dodge*

“The basic principles of neuroscience indicate that providing supportive conditions for early childhood development is more effective and less costly than attempting to address the consequences of early adversity later.” – *Jack P. Shonkoff*

“…epigenetic effects initiated during early development can be prevented or reversed by good nutrition and stimulation.” – *J. Fraser Mustard*

"National policy and economic factors are significant for ECD. Although child development tends to be more successful in wealthy than poor countries, the priority given to children in social

policy can overcome national poverty in child developmental outcomes." – *Clyde Hertzman*

"The U.N. Committee emphasized the need for public investment in services for young children, not just school-aged children, and in related data collection, research and training for parents and professionals involved in young children's care and education." – *Gary B. Melton*