

Research Reviews

Early Intervention & Early Experience

Ramey, C., Landesman Ramey, S. (1998). Early Intervention and Early Experience. American Psychologist, 53, 2, 109-20.

Vigorous efforts have been based on the premise that early intervention for children of poverty and for children with developmental disabilities can yield significant improvements on cognitive, academic, and social outcomes. This article summarizes these past efforts and presents a conceptual framework to understand the design, research, and policy relevance of these early interventions. This framework, “biosocial development contextualism,” is created from social ecology, developmental system theory, developmental epidemiology and developmental neurobiology. This integrative perspective predicts that fragmented, weak efforts in early intervention are not likely to succeed whereas intensive high quality ecologically pervasive programs can and do. Relevant evidence is summarized in six principles about efficacy of early intervention: developmental timing; program intensity; direct provision of learning experiences; program breadth and flexibility; individual differences in program benefits and ecological domain; and environment maintenance of development. The public policy challenge in early intervention is to contain costs by more precisely targeting early intervention to those who need and benefit from these interventions. The empirical evidence on biobehavioral effects of early intervention has direct relevance to federal and state policy development and resource allocation.