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ABSTRACT

Prepared for the White House Conference on Children (December 1970), this booklet reports on a mothers' training program in Urbana, Illinois--one of 34 promising programs on childhood education. The training program is a tutorial program at the University of Illinois involving both mother and child; the program tries to demonstrate that mothers in deprived areas can be effectively trained to provide own children with a more stimulating home environment and some basic preschool skills. Results have been highly promising; in contrast to the usual pattern for children from disadvantaged areas, the participating infants show increasing improvement on intelligence tests. The mothers are self-confident and enthusiastic about the program. The mothers in the program set aside a regular time for daily training sessions at home with the child; these sessions vary in length depending on the infant's attention span. In addition, the mothers attend two-hour group meetings once a week. The program provides transportation to the school and pays $3 per session to cover babysitting expenses. Basic toys and other materials are supplied. For other booklets in the series, see UD 011 120, and 011 122-125. (Author/JW)

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Model Programs

Childhood Education

OE-20147

Mothers' Training Program

Urbana, Illinois

Training mothers in disadvantaged areas to teach their own children at an early age results in new attitudes for mothers, educational gains for children

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Elliot L. Richardson, *Secretary*
Office of Education
Terrel H. Bell, *Acting Commissioner of Education*
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
Donald Rumsfeld, *Director*

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

A tutorial program at the University of Illinois involving both mother and child is seeking to demonstrate that mothers in deprived areas can be effectively trained to provide their own children with a more stimulating home environment and some basic preschool skills. The Mothers' Training Program, one of several research projects on educationally disadvantaged children supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, is being carried out at the Colonel Wolfe Preschool in Urbana under the direction of Dr. Merle B. Karnes, Director of the Institute for Research on Exceptional Children, at the University of Illinois. Dr. Karnes and her staff realize the need to reach disadvantaged children early and the importance of parental involvement in the learning process. The initial results of their program are promising, not only in measurable increases in infants' IQ's but also in broader changes within the disadvantaged family and in the community.

AN EXPERIMENT IN URBANA

Urbana and its twin city, Champaign, are small, semirural cities in east central Illinois. They have a total population of about 80,000, composed mainly of transient citizens--laborers and students or employees of the University of Illinois, which is the most important single organization in the towns. The surrounding area is agricultural, and most of the labor is employed in small

farm-related industries. Many laborers are blacks who have migrated from the South or other parts of the State, and who live in two predominantly black sections of town. The group served by the program is drawn largely from this area.

It has been recognized that learning disabilities are often rooted in the very earliest childhood experiences of the students. In many low-income families, the child is frequently neglected by overburdened parents and his range of experiences is severely limited. These children enter public school qualified only for remedial programs or "special classes," and many of the learning problems they exhibit are irreversible. The Head Start program was initiated in an attempt to alleviate such effects upon disadvantaged children of preschool age, but even Head Start comes too late to forestall the earliest regressive influences on these children. Head Start is already to some extent a remedial program. Furthermore, such preschool programs seldom influence the home and therefore cannot alter the child's basic, immediate environment.

Providing for the child an environment that is more stimulating, ordered, and nurturing demands a new set of attitudes and behaviors in the mother and results in a changed household

environment for the entire family. The Urbana Mothers' Training Program attempts to build these attitudes and behaviors. The program has had highly promising results. Infants participating in the project have made marked progress; in contrast to the usual pattern for children from disadvantaged areas, they show increasing improvement on intelligence tests. Where one would expect to find scores below age-level norms, these children perform on a level with children from more privileged environments. The mothers are self-confident and enthusiastic about the program. Many are energetically recruiting new mothers and trying to spread the program's approach throughout the community. When asked about the program's effect on her child, one mother said, "It's been good for the whole family. He's learned the value of things he has to take care of. He follows directions from others too. It's already helping my newest baby. I don't just leave him to play alone now." Or, as another puts it, "The program has changed our whole house. It looks like I have more time. It makes you think more."

A PROGRAM CENTERED AROUND MOTHER AND CHILD

The Mothers' Training Program brings the mothers together, forms them into a self-evaluating and supportive group, and helps them gain the skills they need to teach their children

s cessfully at home. Thus the program has a two-part emphasis: it is both child-centered and mother-centered.

The program has been offered for children from the ages of 1 year to 3 years. Each mother with her child generally remains in the program for 2 years, the children usually beginning from ages 12 months to 24 months and remaining until they are 3 or 4 years old. They would then be eligible for other programs such as Head Start or for nursery school.

The first program began in the fall of 1967. Twenty children were involved, ranging in age from 14 to 26 months, with a mean age of 19 months at the time of the initial intelligence test. Nine of the infants were girls and 11 were boys; 18 were black and 2 were white. Fifteen mothers of this initial group remained in the program for 2 years.

The mothers in the program set aside a regular time for daily training sessions at home with the child. These sessions vary in length depending on the infant's attention span. In addition, the mothers attend 2-hour group meetings once a week at the Colonel Wolfe Preschool. The program furnishes transportation to the school and pays the mothers $3 per session to cover babysitting

expenses. The basic toys used in training sessions with the child are furnished by the program and may be kept in the home when he finishes. To check on the progress of mother and child and to help solve any problems, staff members make home visits once a month or more often as needed.

TRAINING CREATES A NEW ENVIRONMENT

In the home training sessions, the child's curiosity and growth are encouraged by the use of various simple educational materials and toys, many of which the mothers learn not only to use effectively with their babies, but also to make by themselves from inexpensive materials. Within a budget of $50 per child, the following materials are provided for each of the children in the program: (1) a table and chair set; (2) 11 educational toys; (3) crayons, scissors, play dough, slate, and chalk; (4) four inexpensive books; and (5) a plastic laundry basket for storage of materials. A lending library of 30 wooden inlay puzzles and simple object lotto games is available for all the children.

The most seemingly ordinary objects, such as the table and chair and the laundry basket, play a central role in revolutionizing the environment of mother and child. These objects help to establish an order in the home and to define the pattern of roles

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and behavior which is maintained in every training session. During these sessions the child always works sitting at *his* table, on *his* chair. Each day, the mother takes the training toys from the laundry basket, and at the end of each session she returns them to the basket for safe storage.

Working with the toys, the child learns finger coordination and gross motor skills, concepts of relative size, basic shapes, and verbal skills. One training session might find mother and child playing with a set of five nested cans which the mother has collected herself. Starting with two, she teaches the baby to stack them, saying, "Put the *little* one *on top of* the *big* one. Put the *little* one *in* the *big* one." Later, the mother teaches him body parts, antonyms and prepositions, and visual matching. Scrapbook making and dramatic storytelling are also included in the training sessions at a later stage. Often older brothers and sisters help in making the scrapbook, which the mother and baby "read" together, and the scrapbooks become a source of pride to both mother and child. For most of the mothers it comes as a surprise that these scrapbooks and simple toys, which encourage the child to manipulate and explore, are better than expensive electrical toys which he merely watches. They learn that the best kind of toy is often one that they can make themselves.

In addition to the regular program toys, there are several "fun toys" such as a pounding bench and busy box--again, these are toys that will help the baby develop new skills or concepts. They are to be played with any time, not just during training sessions; and since a number of mothers have reported that their babies do not want to stop when the training session is ended, these "fun toys" are suggested as "transfer toys." The mother simply hands the child one of these toys as a substitute for those she is taking away and lets him play independently. For many of the mothers, this brings a new revelation. The baby does not accept the transfer toy; it is the end of his time with mother that upsets him, not the absence of the toys. The babies are learning, and the mothers are learning too--learning that time spent together and nurturing, affectionate behavior are not only the most important things they can give their babies but also the prerequisites for effective teaching.

INFANTS SHOW IMPRESSIVE GROWTH

The dramatic changes in the attitudes and practices of the mothers are reflected in the changes observable in their children. The children respond better to the teaching of their mothers and of the group leaders on home visits. The mothers themselves report the results of their teaching with pride: "It has changed

Cynthia. She was real stubborn. Now she behaves better. She used to be afraid of the home visitor. Now she likes her." Remarks such as this are typical.

Objective evaluation data support the mothers' feelings about the effects of the program upon their children. The program staff has made careful attempts to obtain objective data on the infants' progress. Because of funding and other problems, it has not been possible to maintain a single preselected control group throughout the entire experiment. However, there are comparisons of the standardized test scores of 15 of the children in the training group and 15 children of similar age and background from a group tested just before the program began.

These control children were carefully chosen to correspond to those participating in the program. Each experimental child was matched by a control child of the same race, sex, and approximate age. Further, each pair of children was matched for the following family background characteristics: number of children in the family, working mother, birthplace of mother, presence of father or father-surrogate, and welfare aid (Aid to Dependent Children--ADC) to the family. Both the experimental and control groups were pretested and posttested using the Stanford-Binet IQ Test and the

Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA), a test used to measure language development.

In comparison with the control group, the mean IQ of the children whose mothers worked with them at home was 16 points above that of the children who received no home teaching. On the ITPA the control group of disadvantaged children showed scores 6 months below their chronological age; the infants in the program were achieving at age level.

The program staff feels that an important variable, motivation of the mothers, was uncontrolled by this comparison. The mothers participating in the program have a desire to improve their children's education, which has enabled them to overcome their fears and hesitancy about entering the group. The possible lack of a parallel level of motivation in the other mothers leaves a significant influence upon the infants uncontrolled. In order to make an evaluation in which this factor is the same and the presence or absence of home teaching is the only significant variable, the staff members constructed a second comparison. Six children in the experimental group had older brothers or sisters for whom test scores were available at similar age levels and before their mothers entered the training program. Despite the small size of

this control sampling, statistically significant differences in test scores were obtained. The differences are even more striking than in the first comparison. The program children were 28 points above their siblings in IQ. They achieved a mean acceleration in language development (ITPA) of 3 months while the sibling control group scored nearly 4 months below age level.

The researchers say that the results of the initial study must be interpreted with caution. Disadvantaged children at older age levels have received special preschool instruction and have shown gains similar to those of the program children. These gains, however, have been only temporary. Unless the gains of the program children can be maintained, the superiority of early training cannot be conclusively demonstrated. However, there are indications that a program which includes early intervention through the mother and which affects the child's total environment will show more lasting results. Members of the program staff are cautiously optimistic.

GROUP SESSIONS DEVELOP CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE

No less impressive are the effects of the mother-centered aspect of the project. The 20 mothers were all from poverty-stricken homes. In only one case did family income exceed $4,000;

there the mother worked a 16-hour day at two jobs and had nine children. Public assistance through ADC was the total or partial support for 16 of the families, and the fathers were absent from all but two homes. Six mothers worked part time to supplement ADC funds, three had full-time jobs, one attended a beauty culture school. Three of the women were actually grandmothers who had responsibility for the child. The ages in the group ranged from 19 to 56 years, with a mean age of 29.4 years. The mean educational level was 9.2 years.

At the beginning of the program, many of the mothers are withdrawn, doubtful about the program, and resistant to participating freely in the group. The group process, however, is of central importance in the functioning of the program as a whole. The two group leaders are both highly trained, skilled professionals in education and social work. Within the group, honesty, even in the confrontation of painful or threatening topics, is stressed. To really "get at" the problems of families in the disadvantaged environment, it is necessary to do just that--to think and talk about them; only then can solutions follow. Group leaders have not shied away from discussion of such subjects as the fatherless home, birth control, beating as a means of child discipline, power contests between parents and children or among siblings. At the

same time, they do not preach or patronize; they are open, understanding, and supportive. Even in presenting methods and techniques for working with the child and using the toys, their approach is an inductive one. Instead of handing out prescriptions for attitudes and behavior, the group leaders try to elicit the mothers' understanding of the teaching and learning process and of their relationship with their children, even as this understanding grows. They treat the mothers with an honest respect. As one leader remarked of the teaching abilities which the mothers so much doubted in themselves, "These women do have the potential, but not the competencies, because they simply haven't been taught."

The group meetings follow a pattern which reflects both the child-centered and mother-centered aspects of the program. Typically the first part of the session is devoted to discussion of the children--their characteristics, learning problems, and progress. The second part deals with topics relating to the mothers themselves and their concerns about their roles in their families and their community. In the early stages of the program the group meetings tended to concentrate on the child-centered material, which was more comfortable for the mothers to talk about and less difficult to confront than were their own problems. As time went

by and the group became more cohesive, relaxed, and self-confident, the emphasis shifted more to the mother-centered aspect.

At every meeting two group leaders are always present, one to conduct the meeting and the other to take notes, since this is a research project as well as a community program. Principles and methods of teaching the child of course occupy a part of each session. The following guidelines for the mothers are repeatedly stressed:

- If you have a good working relationship with your child, you can become an effective teacher. A good relationship is based on mutual respect.
- Be positive in your approach. Acknowledge the child's success in each new task, even when the child simply tries to do as he is instructed. Minimize mistakes, show the right way immediately, have the child attempt the task again, and praise him.
- Break a task into separate steps. Teach one step at a time, starting with the simplest. Do not proceed to the next step until the child is successful with the first.

- If the child does not pay attention or try to do as instructed (and you are absolutely sure he can do what is asked), put the toys away until later. Try again when he is ready to work. Do not scold, beg, or bribe. This time together should be fun for both of you.

The group leaders also introduce the toys and methods of using them. Their technique for training the mothers is to ask questions about methods of teaching children and handling family problems, and then let the mothers discuss the questions and try to find answers within the group. Group leaders offer guidance; they do not simply set forth instructions for mothers to follow, because they feel that mothers will understand better the methods they themselves have arrived at through discussion.

Group activities during the second, mother-centered part of the session include discussion of readings from pamphlets and magazines, movies, speakers from such organizations as the local black movement and Planned Parenthood, and field trips to the public library and the University of Illinois Nursery School. Subjects for discussion range from a pamphlet on child discipline to a consideration of birth control and the Negro mother. There are also role-playing sessions on such themes as the generation gap,

recruiting mothers for the Mothers' Training Class, and a mother and child during a work session. The mothers themselves take more and more responsibility for what goes on in this part of the sessions. They present talks, moderate discussions, invite speakers, and plan demonstration sessions for visitors.

MOTHERS TAKE ON NEW ROLES

After 2 years in the program, mothers show many signs of growth, as do their children. Their favorable comments reflect their enthusiasm for the program and their own increased sense of worth and ability to perform successfully as teachers of their children. According to one mother, "This kind of program should be taught to all mothers. I never knew the best kind of toy at all," and another reports, "I enjoyed it very much. It has helped me and him. He has enjoyed it. It makes him more happy. I learned a lot of things I could teach him." So impressed are the mothers with the results of the program for them and its possibilities for others that two of them are initiating a new program group with five mothers who have the meetings in their homes on a rotating basis. They work under the guidance of graduate student trainees who are studying at the University of Illinois with Dr. Karnes, and they make one visit a week to the Colonel Wolfe Preschool.

In addition to encouraging the spread of the program, the mothers are also taking on new roles as individuals. Within the group meetings they are no longer withdrawn and hesitant, but consistently lively participants. They often take over planning and conducting of sessions. Several have been trained to carry out home visits and are performing ably. Their increasing involvement extends to the community as well, where four mothers have assumed responsibility for Head Start recruitment and one has become a Head Start teacher. Many of the mothers have attended local meetings on topics related to education in the community, such as the establishment of a parent-child center for the neighborhood.

PROMISING POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPANSION

The results of the program with the initial group of 20 mothers are encouraging to the educational researchers of Dr. Karnes' staff. They have shown that by training mothers positive changes can be made in the development of young disadvantaged children before the age of 3. This finding has important implications for possible future programs. Although intensive work with infants in disadvantaged areas has been tried before and proved effective, previous projects have used trained professional tutors, a practice much too expensive to be implemented on a wide scale. At-home teaching by mothers, however, can be budgeted at a fraction

of the cost. Funding for the Urbana program is Federal, an Office of Economic Opportunity research demonstration project. Expenses of replicating the program would include (1) the salaries of one trained professional to supervise and two paraprofessionals to aid with group meetings and home visits; (2) funds to cover transportation of mothers to group meetings and babysitting expenses; and (3) the costs of materials and toys used in the training sessions. It is estimated that these expenses would total $200 to $300 per child.

Dr. Karnes and her staff have shown that programs which train the mother to serve as teacher hold potential for developing her self-help capabilities and sense of personal worth, and these can be pivotal factors in effecting broader changes within the disadvantaged family. Through group interaction mothers may extend this sense of responsibility for infant, self, and family to the wider community in which they live.

Community reaction to the program in Urbana has been very positive. Many mothers would like to participate in the program, more than can presently be accommodated. Dr. Karnes feels that she and her colleagues who are associated with the University of Illinois project have two basic responsibilities: first, a responsibility

to the parents and children of the community who are involved in the program, and second, a responsibility for the graduate student trainees who are now receiving instruction and experience through working with the program. These people will be qualified to extend the aims and methods of the Urbana project by helping to implement programs in other communities and by making the program available to more of those who are currently asking for it in the community of Urbana.

Encouraged by the success of the Mothers' Training Program, Dr. Karnes is starting a sibling training project based on the same principles. The new program attempts to combat predelinquent tendencies in older children and replace their negative influences on infant brothers or sisters with a constructive teaching-learning relationship which benefits the infant and gives a new sense of responsibility and achievement to the older children. The Urbana approach may well offer a model for a comprehensive attempt to restructure the environment in the disadvantaged home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To obtain information prior to a visit, consult the following documents, available upon request from the Institute for Research on Exceptional Children, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois:

Merle B. Karnes et al., "An Approach for Working with Mothers of Disadvantaged Preschool Children," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development*, Vol. 14, #2, 1968. (Reprints available)

Merle B. Karnes et al., "Educational Intervention at Home by Mothers of Disadvantaged Infants," *Child Development*, to be published December 1970.

Merle B. Karnes et al., *Research and Development Program on Preschool Disadvantaged Children, Final Report*, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research, May 1969 (3 volumes).

Arrangements for visiting the Urbana Mothers' Training Program may be made through the director, Dr. Merle Karnes, Institute for Research on Exceptional Children, 4th and Healy, Champaign, Illinois 61820.

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.