

Abecedarian Project pioneer lauds new evidence supporting early educational interventions

April 7 2014, by John Pastor

Children who participated in a landmark early childhood intervention known as the Abecedarian Project in the 1970s are now in their late 30s and early 40s. And, relatively speaking, their physical health is more robust compared with other adults, according to recent findings.

The social experiment, a carefully controlled scientific study originally spearheaded by Craig Ramey, formerly of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and now a professor and distinguished research scholar at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, investigated whether a stimulating [early childhood education](#), starting at six weeks of age, could produce significant benefits in language and learning in disadvantaged children.

The study of children born between 1972 and 1977 in the vicinity of Chapel Hill revealed early educational [intervention](#) – along with nutritional supplements, basic [social services](#), and access to health care – had stronger effects than interventions that took place in older, school-age children.

The newest study, [now online in the journal Science](#) by researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who have carried on Ramey's work, shows that high-quality, intensive intervention in the early years can be effective in preventing, or at least delaying, the onset of adult disease.

"This report breaks new ground in demonstrating the emergence of the relationship between early education and health," said Ramey, who was not involved in the latest research. "It broadens our understanding of the enduring power of high-quality early education to change lives for the better."

Men who had received the educational intervention along with nutritional, social, and health-care services had lower average blood pressure and no signs of a health problem known as metabolic syndrome, which is characterized by excess abdominal fat and [high blood sugar](#).

But men who received social, health, and nutritional services without the early educational intervention had higher average blood pressure, and about 25 percent of the men in the comparison group had [metabolic syndrome](#).

Similarly, health benefits were detected for women in the study.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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