

Preschool: A Protective Factor for At-Risk Children

Millions of American youth are living in poverty, and the current political, educational, and social systems in place in the United States are depriving those children of the opportunity for success.¹ Although most states require compulsory education starting at around age 6, there are no requirements for younger children. In this paper I explain how families living in poverty are often not able to provide developmentally supportive environments for their young children at home, and that this creates a huge gap in school-readiness when children begin formal education. I provide evidence to support the claim that intervention programs and high-quality childcare prepare low-income children for school and bridges the developmental gap between low-income and middle-class students.² Therefore, in order to ensure academic success, I argue that intervention preschool programs, such as the one at the King Street Center in Burlington, VT, should be made more accessible to low-income families.^{3, 4}

School Readiness Gap and the Home Environment⁵

Children from low-income families are at a distinct disadvantage compared to their middle-class peers when they start kindergarten or first grade. Young children go through many cognitive, physical, social, and emotional sensitive periods in their first few years of life that

¹ Provide the reader with a context for the current problem.

² The thesis is specific enough that I'm able to provide detailed analysis of a problem, but broad enough to provide me with enough sources.

³ This paper served as a cumulative project after doing service-learning downtown. The King Street Center is an organization that provides Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms to low-income families, as well as after-school care for local students.

⁴ The introduction should provide a framework for the paper's main topics.

⁵ Using headings can help guide a reader through a longer paper and can also help the writer to effectively structure their argument.

prepare them for schooling.⁶ Although some aspects of development are determined by genetics, there are environmental factors such as child-care quality and adult interaction that can largely impact development. Landry et al. (2014) argue that such factors can have an “impact on brain development, learning, behavior, and physical and mental health throughout life,” (Landry et al., 2014, p. 527).⁷ Therefore, in order to ensure positive development in all domains, it is essential to provide all children, especially low-income children, with high-quality environments that promote development.

The home environment has a large impact on young toddlers, as it is the primary setting that they participate in. At home, children from low-income families are much more likely to experience less verbal communication with their parents than children from middle-class families. In her article “The Power of Talking to Your Baby”, Rosenberg (2013) found that, “Children whose families were on welfare heard about 600 words per hour... and children from professional families heard 2,100 words,” (Rosenberg, 2013, pp. 49-40). ...

Impact of Intervention Programs on Low-Income Children

There are many studies that show that high-quality early childhood care can have a profound impact on the developmental outcomes of low-income children. These studies measure the cognitive outcomes of low-income children who attend intervention programs. A sample of low-income children that attend high-quality childcare programs and a sample of low-income children that do not attend these programs are compared for cognitive abilities such as

⁶ This final paper was intended for a professional audience of academics and service providers, so a formal tone is used throughout.

⁷ HDFS argument essays require academic sources from class readings and outside sources (empirical research, literature reviews, etc.).

vocabulary, reading level, and writing ability. Landry et al. (2014) found that low-income children enrolled in a Responsive Early Childhood Curriculum (RECC) or a RECC program with social-emotional learning had significantly better cognitive outcomes⁸ than those same children that were placed in “normal” childcare (Landry et al., 2014, p. 526)⁹. ... In this way, high-quality childcare systems provide children with teachers and experiences that foster positive cognitive development.¹⁰ Not only were these at-risk children able to increase their cognitive functioning, they also were more able to establish non-aggressive and non-anxious relationships with their caregivers and peers (Landry et al., 2014, p. 526). This difference is not just temporary.

Several longitudinal studies have found that the positive consequences of intervention programs are life-long. Geoffroy et al. (2010) explain that low-income children enrolled in high-quality childcare “enjoyed better cognitive competencies over the life course than those who did not receive such intervention,” (Geoffrey et al., 2010, p. 2). ... If they are not provided with appropriate environments to cultivate positive development, low-income preschoolers may never be able to catch-up.¹¹ Therefore, it is imperative to provide universal high-quality childcare to low-income preschoolers.

Accessibility of Intervention Programs

⁸ A lot of research used in HDFS courses comes from psychological studies and research, so having a good understanding of the fundamental concepts will greatly help you when crafting a logical argument.

⁹ It isn't customary to include page number in APA for paraphrasing or summarizing, but some HDFS professors require them.

¹⁰ HDFS, especially at UVM, looks at the immediate contexts that an individual participates in, and how those contexts shape and influence a person's life. It's important to explain how these contexts may positively or negatively influence human development.

¹¹ Argumentative essays in HDFS should highlight your expertise in the field, especially in upper-level classes.

As of 2014, only 15% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in state funded pre-K or federally funded intervention programs like Head Start (Barnett et al., 2015, p. 8).¹² More than 50% of children under age 3 come from low-income families, making it clear that early childcare programs, albeit high-quality ones, are not as accessible as they should be (Colvard, 2012, p. 1).¹³ ... Policy must be created to ensure that all low-income families are able to enroll their child(ren) in high-quality intervention programs.

Case Study: The King Street Center (Burlington, VT)

The King Street Center, an organization that provides both Early Head Start and Head Start programs, as well as after-school programming for school age children, is one of several intervention programs in the Burlington, VT area. The toddler program (Early Head Start Program) provides high-quality childcare. Through personal experience volunteering there I have found that the daily routine in the toddler room involves informal play, book reading, toileting, outdoor play, and naptime. Additionally, the Center provides meals and snack as well as periodic home visits.¹⁴

The Early Head Start program offers eight slots for low-income children who are eligible for the program. With only two organizations (King Street Center and Burlington Children's

¹² Most of your citations should be in the body paragraphs.

¹³ Here I am examining the social issue. Studying HDFS is different from studying psychology because you must be able to think critically about possible solutions to social problems.

¹⁴ I spent about 2-3 hours per week volunteering in the Toddler Program. Service-Learning courses are amazing and you get a lot more out of them than normal courses. I ended up interning with Head Start because I loved this course so much.

Space) offering Early Head Start programming in Burlington, it is clear that not all low-income families in the area are able to enroll their young children. ... ¹⁵

Implementing Effective Policy and Practice¹⁶

Early childcare programs have been proven to be the most effective way for low-income children to overcome the school readiness gap and attain age-appropriate developmental outcomes. The most successful programs, like Head Start, provide comprehensive educational, family, and medical assistance. However, most states are unable to provide this kind of support due to lack of funding and community resources. There are two major ways to increase accessibility. First, and most effectively, the United States could increase federal funding to Head Start and the non-profit organizations that implement their community programs.¹⁷ ...

Creating stronger community partnerships between local and state government, non-profit organizations, and child healthcare providers is another way to increase the effectiveness and accessibility of intervention programs.¹⁸ ...

Conclusion

Low-income children in the United States are being cheated. Due to a lack of effective policy and programming, most low-income children are not receiving childcare that prepares

¹⁵ The body paragraphs and supporting evidence should show the reader why you are making the argument and conclusion that you are.

¹⁶ Depending on how the implications of your research tie into your argument, you can either include them in your body paragraphs, or more briefly in your conclusion.

¹⁷ After analyzing the evidence, you should be able to make a well-informed suggestion for solving the issue. Although your solution doesn't have to be perfect, it should be well thought-out and should show that you can think critically.

¹⁸ Again, HDFS looks at how multiple contexts affect an individual, and you should consider all of them when writing an argumentative paper.

them for kindergarten and formal schooling. Compared to their middle-class counterparts, these children are less likely to attain cognitive developmental outcomes that are appropriate for their age. This gap has a life-long impact. Therefore, in order to increase accessibility to high-quality childcare and intervention programs, we must increase federal funding and community partnerships.¹⁹

There are always limitations when trying to create policy to help with such a widespread issue. A specific limitation of this paper may be finding a way to increase funding in a way the politicians would agree on. Although this is a human issue that will affect the generations to come, some politicians might not prioritize the education of our nation's children. However, increasing the accessibility of intervention programs would provide support to millions of young children. Creating new policies would make education more equitable in the United States and would give every child the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.²⁰

¹⁹ In the conclusion, recap the themes of your evidence and the argument you are making. This is especially important when writing a longer paper.

²⁰ Identifying limitations shows that you can think critically about your own argument and view it from another's perspective. Metacognition, or thinking about your thinking, shows that you have researched all sides of the argument.

References

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- Rosenberg, T. (2013). The power of talking to your baby. *Annual Editions: Child Growth and Development*, (21), 49-51.²²

²¹ Ask your professor if they need a direct link to your sources.

²² This source comes from an edited book of various recent HDFS articles. These are common sources of information for professors because they are updated with the most current research.