

that individual programs often vary, and developmentally appropriate education is an evolving concept. Recent changes in the concept have given more attention to socio-cultural factors and the teacher's active involvement and implementation of systematic intentions, as well as how strongly academic skills should be emphasized and how they should be taught.

## Education for Young Children Who Are Disadvantaged

For many years, U.S. children from low-income families did not receive any education before they entered the first grade. Often when they began first grade they were already several steps behind their classmates in readiness to learn. In the summer of 1965, the federal government began striving to break the cycle of poverty and poor education for young children through **Project Head Start**, a compensatory program designed to give children from low-income families the opportunity to acquire skills and experiences that are important for success in school (Hustedt, Friedman, & Barnett, 2012; Miller, Farkas, & Duncan, 2016; Paschall & Mastergeorge, 2018). More than half a century after the program's inception, Head Start continues to be the largest federally funded program for U.S. children, with almost 1 million children enrolled in it annually (Hagen & Lamb-Parker, 2008). In 2007, 3 percent of Head Start children were 5 years old, 51 percent were 4 years old, 36 percent were 3 years old, and 10 percent were under age 3 (Administration for Children & Families, 2008).

Mixed results have been found for Head Start. A recent study found that one year of Head Start was linked to higher performance in early math, early reading, and receptive vocabulary (Miller, Farkas, & Duncan, 2016). In another study, the best results occurred for Head Start children who had low initial cognitive ability, whose parents

had low levels of education, and who attended Head Start more than 20 hours a week (Lee & others, 2014). It is not unusual to find early gains, then see them go away in elementary school. For example, a national evaluation of Head Start revealed that the program had a positive influence on the language and cognitive development of 3- and 4-year-olds (Puma & others, 2010). However, by the end of the first grade, there were few lasting outcomes.

Often the best Head Start results occur when parents make positive contributions to their young children's development (Alarcon, 2017). For example, two recent studies found that improved parenting engagement and skills were linked to the success of children in Head Start programs (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Roggman & others, 2016).

Also, one-fourth of Head Start children have mothers who also participated in Head Start. In a multigenerational study, a positive influence on cognitive and socioemotional development (assessed in the third grade) occurred for Head Start children whose mothers had also attended Head Start programs (when compared with Head Start children whose mothers were not in Head Start) (Chor, 2018). This result likely occurred because of improved family resources and home learning environments.

*Early Head Start* was established in 1995 to serve children from birth to 3 years of age (Burgette & others, 2017). In 2007, half of all new funds appropriated for Head Start programs were used for the expansion of Early Head Start. One study revealed that Early Head Start had a protective effect on risks young children might experience in parenting stress, language development, and self-control (Ayoub, Vallotton, & Mastergeorge, 2011). However, some studies have revealed mixed effects for Early Head Start (Love & others, 2013).

More attention needs to be given to developing consistently high-quality Head Start programs (Faria & others, 2017). One person who is strongly motivated to make Head Start a valuable learning experience for young children from disadvantaged backgrounds is Yolanda Garcia. To read about her work, see *Careers in Life-Span Development*.

**Project Head Start** A government-funded program that is designed to provide children from low-income families the opportunity to acquire the skills and experiences important for school success.



### How Would You...?

As a health-care professional, how would you explain the importance of including health services as part of an effective Head Start program?

## Careers in life-span development

### Yolanda Garcia, Director of Children's Services, Head Start

Yolanda Garcia was the director of the Children's Services Department of the Santa Clara, California, County Office of Education for several decades. As director, she was responsible for managing child development programs for 2,500 3- to 5-year-old children in 127 classrooms. Recently, she became the Director of WestEd's E3 Institute, which focuses on excellence in early childhood education in Santa Clara County.

Her training includes two master's degrees: one in public policy and child welfare from the University of Chicago and another in education administration from San Jose State University.

Garcia has served on many national advisory committees that have produced improvements in the staffing of Head Start programs. Most notably, she served on the Head Start Quality Committee that recommended the development of Early Head Start and revised performance standards for Head Start programs. Garcia currently is a member of the American Academy of Science Committee on the Integration of Science and Early Childhood Education.



Yolanda Garcia, Director of WestEd's E3 Institute, works with a child.  
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One high-quality early childhood education program (although not a Head Start program) is the Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a two-year preschool program that includes weekly home visits from program personnel. In analyses of the long-term effects of the program, adults who had been in the Perry Preschool program were compared with a control group of adults from the same background who had not received the enriched early childhood education (Schweinhart & others, 2005; Weikert, 1993). Those who had been in the Perry Preschool program had fewer teen pregnancies and better high school graduation rates, and at age 40 they were more likely to be in the workforce, to own a home, to have a savings account, and to have had fewer arrests.

## Controversies in Early Childhood Education

Two current controversies in early childhood education involve (1) what the curriculum for early childhood education should be (Morrison, 2017, 2018) and (2) whether preschool education should be universal in the United States (Zigler, Gilliam, & Barnett, 2011).

### Controversy Over Curriculum

A current controversy in early childhood education involves what the curriculum for early childhood education should be (Bredekamp, 2017; Follari, 2019). On one side are those who advocate a child-centered, constructivist approach much like that emphasized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), along the lines of developmentally appropriate practice. On the other side are those who advocate an academic, direct-instruction approach.

In practice, many high-quality early-childhood education programs include both academic and constructivist approaches. Many education experts, such as Lilian Katz (1999), though, worry about academic approaches that place too much pressure on young children to achieve and don't provide opportunities to actively construct knowledge. Competent early childhood programs also should focus on both cognitive