

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Programs of early childhood education grew slowly in the United States. The first such programs were influenced primarily by advocates of early childhood education from outside the United States (e.g., Maria Montessori, 1912; Margaret McMillan, 1919) and tended to exist for the purpose of freeing the parents so they could work. In the 1920s, there was a change in thinking, and a large number of nursery schools were established for the purpose of providing educational advantages to children. This type of thinking prevailed until the 1960s when advocates of early childhood education within the United States began to emphasize the cognitive development of low-income children. In general, there was strong public advocacy and broad acceptance of these programs because of the expectation that early educational experiences could help low-income children enter the public school system on equal footing with children who were more economically advantaged. Although research conducted in this area is inconclusive, some findings since the 1960s suggest that intervention, particularly early intervention, may have a dramatic effect on both the cognitive and affective development of children.

One of the earliest views on the cognitive development of children was that intelligence is a fixed and/or genetic capacity (Galton, 1869; Jones, 1954). This view lost support when evidence was presented that intelligence (as measured by IQ tests) and subsequent life experiences could be significantly altered by enriching a child's environment (Skeels & Dye, 1939; Spitz, 1945; Spitz & Wolf, 1946; Dennis, 1960; Skeels, 1966). A different theory of child development was proposed that focused on the early years as being a time when special learning takes place rather than addressing the relative importance of heredity, deprivation, or environment (Piaget, 1926; Hebb, 1949). Based on this theory, Bloom (1964) developed a general theory of stability and change in human characteristics from which he proposed that the effect of environment is greatest during the period of most rapid normal development of a given characteristic, while its effect is least during periods of least rapid normal development. Bloom's proposition that environmental changes early in life were more effective than changes later in life was influential in shaping an emerging interest in the cognitive and social environments in which children developed.

There was evidence as early as 1900 that certain types of children in the United States performed poorly on intelligence tests. By the 1950s, there was evidence that children from low-income families tended to perform poorly on many academic achievement tests (Anastasi, 1958). Such evidence offered promise that early childhood education could, once the specific aspects of the low-achieving child's environment that contributed to his/her academic difficulties were determined, serve as the means for preventing or alleviating the damaging effects.

Research in the 1950s and 1960s (Loban, 1963; Deutsch, 1965) began to investigate social-class differences that could be important in the cognitive development of children. There were two basic tendencies that emerged from this research. One tendency was to use the white middle-class category as the standard for comparison, the underlying purpose of which was to identify ways the child of a low-income family was at a disadvantage in school. The alternative

tendency was to change the schools. The central problem in both tendencies, however, was to identify the environmental factors that accounted for the children's cognitive differences.

Two significant studies that examined this problem include investigations of relationships between parent-child interactions and socioeconomic status (SES) conducted by Hess and Shipman (1967, 1968) and Keller (1963). Results of these studies concluded that lower-class families were "culturally deprived" as compared to middle-class families. These conclusions implied that the academic and social problems of the children from low-income families were a result of the disadvantaged environment in which they developed. It was argued by some (Baratz, 1969) that, rather than being deprived of culture, children from low-income families and minority groups merely developed in a culture different than the culture in which children from white middle-class families developed. Based on this argument, it was proposed that schools and institutions needed to be reformed, not the children (Clark, 1965; Ginsburg, 1972).

In reaction to this proposal, some of the early childhood education programs established in the 1960s were established by psychologists, early childhood educators, and social workers as experimental early intervention programs. The results of these programs showed significant IQ gains as well as positive effects on the children's social, motivational, and emotional behavior during the program; however, the IQ gains tended to decrease and even disappear within several years after completing the program. While most of these programs stressed equally the importance of cognitive and socioemotional (affective) development, cognitive measures played a more central role, largely because of the availability of standardized intelligence tests that were reliable and valid. Further, the cognitive measures had considerable predictive validity. In contrast, there were doubts about the psychometric soundness of the socioemotional measures; that is, there were questions about what the socioemotional measures actually measured (i.e., validity) and about the reliability of these measures.

Partly because of the evidence provided by the experimental intervention programs that a child's personality and intelligence was modifiable, and partly because of the social and political attitudes that existed in the 1960s, the federal government began allocating funds for early intervention programs, the most popular of which was the Project Head Start. The main purpose of the Head Start programs was to increase achievement and opportunities for children of the poor.

Most evaluations of preschool intervention programs have neglected the impact that preschool experiences have had on the child's socioemotional development. One of the few programs that included socioemotional measures in its evaluation was the Philadelphia Study (Beller, 1983), which examined the effects of preschool experience on intellectual as well as socioemotional development. Researchers associated with this study contended that "disadvantaged segments of society reflect not as much a low state of intellectual development as a lack of the effective use and integration of intelligence in socioemotional development" (Beller, 1983, p. 334).

There is much that needs to be examined about the effects of early intervention on the socioemotional development of children. In particular, an examination of the interventions that go beyond preschool and the contributions of contextual variables such as those associated with the family and community are needed. The current research examined an existing database, generated by a longitudinal study of kindergarten through third grade intervention, that included measures of the child and his/her family as well as indicators of Head Start/non-Head Start experience. The purpose of the current research was to determine how select measures within the existing database contributed uniquely to the socioemotional development of the sample's disadvantaged children over four time points.