



September 2012

News

[Starving the Future](#)

by Charles M. Blow for The New York Times

In this article, Charles M. Blow - closing speaker at NHTA's fall leadership institute! - delves into the findings of a new report from the Center for American Progress that show China and India are educating more young children and expanding their early childhood programs at a far higher rate than the United States. In addition, he emphasizes a report from Share our Strength about the growing rate of child hunger. As Blow puts it, "We will need to make choices as we seek to balance the nation's budget and reduce the deficit, but cutting investments in our children is horribly shortsighted."

[When a Headline Isn't News: Child Poverty Persists](#)

by Hannah Matthews for The Huffington Post

Census data for 2011 was released on September 12th, and while many had anticipated increased poverty, numbers had held steady from 2010. Currently 15.1% of all Americans are living in poverty, and 24.5% of children under six. In this article, Matthews goes further into the details of the census report and calls on everyone to continue the conversation about child poverty.

Resources

[Executive Function: Skills for Life and Learning](#)

"Science tells us that brains, minds, are built, not born."

Executive Function consists of a set of skills commonly referred to with terms including attention, working memory, persistence, flexibility, and self-control. This five minute video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University explores what Executive Function means, how it develops in the brain, and how early childhood care and education influences its development. Recommended for staff and parents alike! (For more on Executive Function, scroll down to the Research section below!)

[Developing Self-Regulation in Kindergarten: Can We Keep All the Crickets in the Basket?](#)

by Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong for NAEYC

This short piece by the creators of the *Tools of the Mind* curriculum (see more on that in the research section below!) describes how self-regulation works in the classroom and offers teachers strategies for supporting its development in young children

Research

[The Evidence Base for Improving School Outcomes by Addressing the Whole Child and by Addressing Skills and Attitudes, Not Just Content](#)

by Adele Diamond in Early Education and Development

In this commentary for the journal *Early Education and Development*, Diamond reminds readers to focus on the purpose of education: to produce caring, responsible citizens capable of clear and creative reasoning. She then explores how a child's development into that sort of adult relies much more on development of executive functions - including flexibility, self-regulation, effortful control, attention and more - than on fact-based academic content. These skills also enable children to be better community members, workers, and eventually parents. Diamond cites research showing that executive function is best developed in joyful, nurturing environments where children are challenged to take on difficult but doable tasks and are supported by teachers who understand their needs.

This research underscores how important Head Start's whole child model is, and how without a comprehensive focus on physical, emotional and cognitive development, the program would be nowhere near as effective.

[Relations between preschool attention span-persistence and age 25 educational outcomes](#)

by Megan M. McClelland, Alan C. Acock, Andrea Piccinin, Sally Ann Rhea & Michael C. Stallings for Early Childhood Research Quarterly

The authors examined the effect of one executive function on long-term outcomes by evaluating data from the Colorado Adoption program to determine the relationship between parents' assessments of children's attention-span persistence at age 4 and later academic outcomes, including college graduation.

Age 4 attention-span persistence was a stronger predictor of college graduation than either math or reading ability at 7 or 21 years old. Children who were a standard deviation higher for attention-span persistence (a matter of only a few points on the scale used) were 48.7% more likely to complete college by age 25. The authors hypothesize that children who are able to focus for longer periods are able to be more successful in academic settings.

The authors emphasize that their work supports the need for early childhood programs, especially those that provide early interventions to improve attention-span persistence and self-regulation. Focusing on these skills, even though they're not as obviously academic, is critical in order to improve children's long-term outcomes.

Interventions shown to Aid Executive Function Development in Children 4–12 Years Old

by Adele Diamond and Kathleen Lee for Science

Executive functions (creativity, flexibility, self-control, discipline) clearly contribute to school and life success - and it's important to understand that these skills can be developed. In this article, the authors describe interventions for developing executive function in children. The most effective interventions all called for repeated practice on tasks that continuously increased in challenge. Effective practices also contributed to building a positive climate, where children were engaged and excited. Children with weakest initial skills made the greatest gains, though typical students did as well.

For young children, the following improved executive function:

- Curricula including *Tools of the Mind* and Montessori
- Supplements to curricula including PATHS and the Chicago School Readiness Project
- Aerobic exercise emphasizing enjoyment and intensity
- Martial arts emphasizing self-control and focus
- Computerized training through CogMed

The studies reviewed generally found that training on an individual executive function helped students improve in that area, but that training didn't often generalize from one function to another (for example, from working memory to self-control). Interventions that were part of curriculum, like *Tools*, were most effective when woven in throughout the school day. Activities to help children develop their executive functions can affect their success in school and life for many years to come, and programs and teachers should make thoughtful choices about how to support children in this area.

Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org).