Six Principles of Effective Early Intervention

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Excellent advice can be found in an article by Craig Ramey and Sharon Landesman Ramey. (Reference: Ramey, C. T. and Landesman Ramey, S. (1998). *Early intervention and early experience*. *American Psychologist*, 53, 109-120.) These authors were not writing in support of applied behavior analysis or any other approach. They are highly respected investigators of early intervention. These are the results of their extensive research and literature review.

The major points are quoted below.

“For 4 decades, vigorous efforts have been based on the premise that early intervention for children of poverty and, more recently, for children with developmental disabilities can yield significant improvements in cognitive, academic, and social outcomes. The history of these efforts is briefly summarized and a conceptual framework presented to understand the design, research, and policy relevance of these early interventions. This framework predicts that fragmented, weak efforts in early intervention are not likely to succeed, whereas intensive, high-quality, ecologically pervasive interventions can and do. Relevant evidence is summarized in 6 principles about efficacy of early intervention.” (p 109)

The 6 principles are:

“**Principle of developmental timing.** Generally, interventions that begin earlier in development and continue longer afford greater benefits to the participants than do those that begin later and do not last as long.” (p.115)

“**Principle of program intensity.** Programs that are more intensive (indexed by variables such as number of home visits per week, number of hours per day, days per week, and weeks per year) produce larger positive effects than do less intensive interventions. Furthermore, children and parents who participate the most actively and regularly are the ones who show the greatest developmental progress.” (p. 115)

“**Principle of direct (vs. intermediary) provision of learning experiences.** Children receiving interventions that provide direct educational experiences show larger and more enduring benefits than do children in programs that rely on intermediary routes to change childrens competencies (e.g. parent training only).” (p.116)

“**Principle of program breadth and flexibility.** Interventions that provide more comprehensive services and use multiple routes to enhance childrens development generally have larger effects than do interventions that are narrower in focus.” (p.116).

“**Principle of individual differences in program benefits.** Some children show greater benefits from participation in early interventions than do other children. Thus far, these individual differences appear to be related to aspects of the childrens initial risk condition.” (p. 117)

“**Principle of ecological dominion and environmental maintenance of development.** Over time, the initial positive effects of early interventions will diminish to the extent that there are not adequate...
environmental supports to maintain childrens positive attitudes and behavior and to encourage continued learning related to school.” (p. 117)

In closing, the authors say:

“The primary issues for early intervention now are ones of the political will to aid vulnerable children, the appropriate scale of resources needed to provide potentially effective interventions, and commitment to conducting rigorous research to move the field of early intervention forward.” (p. 119)

Although Ramey and Landesman Ramey do not say so, you will find that well organized and conducted ABA programs will conform to all of the above 6 principles. Most other programs do not. Before selecting a program or program advisor, consider if these principles are being followed.