

Positive & Negative Effects of Preschool on black Children

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Preschool is an important developmental environment for children. This foundational period between 0-5 years old allows for cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development outside the home environment and parent-child relationship. Many different models of childcare are available, such as home care, daycare, private preschool, and public preschool. For this literature review, the focus of investigation will be on how preschool affects the cognitive and social development of black children. For many reasons, more specific research as to why and how blackness affects the domain of preschool education and development is being done. The main age range for preschoolers being investigated is the 3–5-year old's, leaving a major gap in research for infants to toddlers aged 0 to 3 years old (Iruka, 2017).

Years of research has shown that high quality early childhood education has long lasting positive effects on child development and learning in areas of cognition, communication, confidence, and gross motor development, and the benefits are even greater for children with low socioeconomic status as well as those with disabilities (Hanna et al., 2022). This is especially important as it pertains to black children due to decades of research documenting racial biases by teachers, indicating that many instructors have a more negative perception of black children than their counterparts which shows through unfair punishment and social isolation (Goldberg & Iruka, 2023). The need for research on black preschool children is also due to the lack of research investigating why preschool effects often vary by race (Bassok, 2010). For this reason, among many others, I will be investigating the bias teachers may have towards black preschoolers and how this impacts their cognitive abilities such as awareness and memory, as well as the social effects such as imitation and sharing

Cognitive Development

Gross motor development is an indicator of cognitive Development. An example of how this works is when a caretaker notices that an infant is approaching the stage of exploring objects to become more aware of their environment, the caretaker may place toys within reach of the infant to allow them to decide to move towards or pick up an object. Also, this may occur through hiding an object to explore the stage of object permanence where an infant will remember that even when an object is not visible it still exists from memory (Kretch et al., 2022).

According to Malina (1988), often black children are more advanced in their motor skills than other races of children during the first two years of life but explaining why has yet to be done. This transfers into adolescence as black children are often pushed into athletics versus more standard intellectual activities such as advanced placement classes or social clubs. Klimowicz (2018) posits that the “law of compensation” explains that intellect and athleticism are inversely correlated. If this theory is true, one could potentially conclude that black children are consistently ranked lower in cognitive functions such as perception, attention, language, and memory due to being inherently superior athletically thus inferior intellectually. Yet a literature review by Tomporowski et al., (1984) showed that children who engage in more physical activity perform at a higher level than those who perform less, and effects show throughout the lifespan from early childhood to adulthood. This is why I strongly believe that instead, teachers are

ignoring many black children's cognitive abilities and are focusing on differences in gross motor development, which leads to the stereotyping of black children. Shi and Feng (2022) have shown that physical activity promotes the cognitive functions of children and is widely agreed upon, thus creating an opportunity to explore how black children would benefit most from incorporating physical activity throughout the learning process.

According to Bassok (2010), racial gaps in cognitive ability begin to develop prior to matriculation into elementary school. Whether being taught at home, daycare, Early Childhood Education Centers (ECEC), or head start there are consistently differences in the ability of the child based on race. However, why preschool effects vary by race has not been fully investigated, although there are many beliefs that socioeconomic status (SES) is a major factor. Also, research has shown that the racial identity of black boys negatively impacts the teacher-child relationship, and positively impacts the relationship for white boys due to teachers reporting closer relationships with the white boys (Goldberg & Iruka, 2022). This could be due to the similarities of white teacher-students' cultures' and attributing any behavioral or attention variances to things other than their awareness, ability to remember to follow the rules, or ability to learn in general (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009),

Knowing that black children who have a black teacher are often viewed as more competent and socially skilled, while also exhibiting fewer behavioral problems, resulting in improved academic and cognitive trajectories than when not having a black teacher should incentivize the hiring of more black educators (Soliday et al., 2023). Additionally, according to Wymer et al. (2022), black preschoolers account for 18% of state funded preschool enrolment in the United States yet make up 42% of suspensions. The teacher's perceptions of black children, especially boys, show extensive evidence of less close relationships than other students and are more conflictual than student-teacher relationships with girls (Goldberg & Iruka, 2023).

According to Zippia (2023), an online data base showing early childhood teacher demographics research, 62.3% of ECE teachers are white with 92.4% of them being women. This shows the link between cognitive development and black children falls in the hands of an overwhelming majority of white women, suggesting that culturally responsive training as well as increasing the number of black male ECE's would benefit the development of black children in areas of spatial relationships, problem solving, imitation, and memory. Teachers' judgements being used to gage children's abilities can be problematic because many of the assessment strategies do not account for teacher bias, and assessments may be more indicative of the teachers' characteristics rather than the children being assessed (Mashburn et al., 2006).

Healthy cognitive development is fueled by positive parent, teacher, and environmental interactions. Knowing that socioeconomic status is a major factor for accessing preschools and the quality of environment is more important to the developmental outcomes of black children than others is reason enough to remove the hurdles barring access to adequate preschools (Bassok, 2010). Meaning that most often black children are at a disadvantage due to accessibility to a preschool of high-quality due to affordability, travel times, insinuating statistical research that shows black children are less advanced than other races cognitively may be invalid because of the inability to prove their ability in the same type of quality care environment as other children. This can be shown through the median wealth of white and black families being \$188,200 and \$24,100 respectively and studies showing that throughout the lifespan from early childhood to late adulthood whites tend to have a higher cognitive function in episodic memory, attention, and working memory than blacks (Moss et al., 2020; Walseman et al., 2022). These cognitive racial gaps that start incredibly early and widen throughout the lifespan show that psychologists and educational researchers need to devote more effort to resolving the problem (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

What is high quality childcare? High quality childcare is a combination of peer group status, classroom environment, education of teachers, and policies to structure of the day, as well as time spent outside the classroom. High quality childcare for black children would mean removing the white centered standard of behavior and ability, as well as focusing on black teachers with a positive view of black children (Goldberg & Iruka, 2023).

According to Burchinal et al. (2002), infants and toddlers with highly educated parents from a more affluent background are more likely to display greater cognitive ability and social skills than their peers and the gap only gets bigger over time. This is an important finding to point out due to the percentage of blacks with university degrees almost mirroring with average rate of other races in Canada yet the median home income being significantly below others (York, 2023; Block, 2010).

However, research shows when predicting future language and academic skills independently from familial experiences and combating the impact of poverty, quality childcare is still a major determining factor, once again confirming that race and preschool cognition need further investigation for cognitive outcomes as the association between positive outcomes tends to lean more towards black children (Goldberg & Iruka, 2023) Even more important than the policies put in place by management and the classroom environment is the teacher-child relationship due to negative teacher child relationships being connected to negative academic outcomes and unruly behavior as well as a bleak outlook on schooling (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009).

Social Development

According to M.I. Kids Matter (2023), a State of Michigan governmental agency for information relating to preschool, infants during their first year of life will begin to develop socially with teachers in the preschool setting by forming a special bond with caring adults. For example, I have been in the infant classroom observing 9-month-old children offering toys to their caregiver during “floor time” only to trick the teacher and pull the toy back for a game of give and take or what some call “psyche”. This form of developing social skills is to understand teacher reactions towards sharing or pretending to share. This is a healthy teacher-child interaction and is based on exploring levels of trust and how to interact socially.

According to Bishop and Keth (2013) children 0-2 years of age are in a stage of trust vs mistrust, relying on preschool teachers to provide a nurturing environment that is safe and secure. Failure to properly develop trust will result in isolation and withdrawal from social interactions. If properly set up by the caregivers and teachers, the child will develop confidence which is the foundation to explore the world around them. Examples of positively developed social skills from infants and toddlers are crying when they have a wet diaper, want to be held, or raising their hands to be picked up when they need a hug to feel better. This social cue shows that the child has a message to communicate, that a teacher or caregiver will come to their aid based on previous interactions, showing a level of trust by knowing that their needs will be met with proper communication. Many times, black children’s social cues are misattributed due to attribution theory and are considered problematic, loud, and needing excessive attention resulting in over policing of black children's behaviors in the classroom (Allen et al., 2021).

As an ECEC director, I have supervised many teachers of infants. Most often in the preschool classroom setting the ratio of teachers to infants is 4:1. Allowing the child to be within moments of assistance from the care giver to ensure that the child is interacting with the environment properly. As we know, babies are extremely inquisitive and will try to touch and taste everything in their environment. Most notably infants learn through looking through their environment and begin to focus on objects and people specifically just minutes after birth. This allows them to differentiate objects within their environment and make predictions about the future based on previous events including behavior (Clearfield et al., 2008). For example, I have seen 6-month-old babies that are in a sitting up posture fall back and not cry because there was no scream or abrupt picking up of the child from the care giver. Then I have seen infants who cry because of the facial expressions of the caretaker and the abrupt picking up of the child. These subtle and not so subtle actions cue a response that the child believes is appropriate for the situation based on the care givers consistent actions.

An example of research further investigating imitation has noted that younger children imitate older children much more often than older children imitate younger ones. It was also shown that black-black child imitation rates are higher than white-white children's (Fisk ,1975). This would support more research on how an all-black preschool would affect social interactions, which could be positive and negative. However, there is a lack of evidence of research on heterogeneous black population imitation as it relates to child-child or teacher-child interactions. As we have already seen having a black teacher for black children improves the potential for cognition and social development, I would be inclined to learn more about teacher-child imitation as it pertains to race on a large scale.

Research by Portuges and Feshbach, (1972) observing imitation of white female teachers showed that socioethnic background played a significant role in imitation and sociality by

students. The middle-class white children imitated the teacher at a much higher rate than the poor black children. The study also showed that imitation increased by positive reinforcement as opposed to criticism (Portuges & Feshbach, 1972). Following this train of thought it could be hypothesized that black students would imitate a black teacher at a higher rate than a white teacher due to understanding of culture and attribution of behaviors if the teacher were of a higher SES. Again, implying that positive social development could be facilitated through hiring and paying black teachers a salary above that of the average income.

The gaps in research on how preschool affects the cognitive and social development of children have been consistent over a prolonged period. The remaining gaps are still in areas pertaining to large sample groups investigating the level at which SES is no longer a factor in black preschoolers' development, the extent to which race specific outcomes are evident once ruling out other possibilities such as 2 parent household, parental education level, immigration status, and teacher racial bias. Studies show black students benefit from quality pre-schooling, but few can afford to enroll in quality care, or wait extensive periods of time to enroll in an ECEC due to elongated waitlisting especially in Ontario, Canada (Peesker, 2023). The positive effects out way the negative effects of attending preschool in general for white children, however for black children this is not a fair finding. Due to SES, bias, and racial makeup, the quality of care is much more important and indicative of the cognitive and social outcomes for black children. However, race and attendance have a much more positive correlation for black children once SES is accounted for thus creating an opportunity to disprove SES based attributions of cognition and sociality, however this has only been tested on small sample sizes.

Universal preschool would be a great start to mitigating the impacts of low SES as well as creating opportunities to further conduct research on a much larger scale (Bassok, 2010). I also believe that having black teachers with practical or academic experience, as well as culturally sensitive white teachers who are strategic in their educational approach to teaching black children would benefit preschool students and researchers overall which could transfer into other areas of life as students interact with black people outside of the educational setting (Douglas et al., 2008).

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