

# Early Start Is Key

## *Stimulation Helps Child Development*

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Early childhood education is very important to the development of children said Barbara Bowman.

Bowman spoke to a crowd at the Chautauqua Institution on Tuesday, discussing how education beginning at birth can help children immensely when they reach school age.

"People don't think they need much until school," she said. "But that's not the case. People don't seem to appreciate how important early childhood education is."

Not only does early childhood education affect the child, but also affects their children and their children's children, she said.

"We have a three-generational effect that is really important to understand," she said. "It is in our nation's self-interest. How we treat that child between birth and age 7 or 8 has an enormous effect."

Early childhood education begins at birth, with all children born both similar and different, she said.

Children are all born with the same human traits hard-wired into them: however culture defines the learning experiences children will have. Some children develop atypically and have a different opportunity to learn, she said. Early childhood education should be able to serve the range of all these children, she said. According to research collected through many studies that Bowman shared, the education of the child depends heavily on the experiences they encounter. Children who come from less-privileged

backgrounds develop differently from those of other backgrounds, she said.

"There are two kinds of experience," she said. "There is expectant experience, which is universal to all children, and then there is dependent experience, which is particularized for each child."

This particularization effects how the child learns, and if the skills they develop ready them for school, she said.

During these sensitive periods of development, it is important for the children to get the appropriate stimulation at the appropriate time in the appropriate way in order to develop normally, she said.

"School skills are not naturally a part of some children's experience," she said. "The earlier education starts, the more likely it is to be retained."

In order to achieve these goals, children need to learn in small groups with much individual attention, she said. Knowledge based upon the skills they already attain must also occur. Teacher training is critical to this goal, she said.

There are many problems with early childhood education, she said. The debate to focus on pre-k or kindergarten through 12 is a big part of the debate. Also the debate between offering education versus social services to those less-fortunate children, and whether this type of education should be universal to all children or targeted just to those who are less-fortunate is important to the development of universal programs, she said.

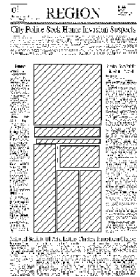
"Having a single system to align with school-age education is very important," she said. "In order to ready our children to accomplish to the best of their abilities, a national standard for early childhood education needs to be developed," she said.

Bowman urged the audience to use the knowledge she had imparted to them in order to advocate for early childhood education.

Bowman is a co-founder of the Erikson Institute, the nation's premier graduate school in child development and the chief early childhood education officer for the Chicago Public Schools.

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**Barbara Bowman spoke at Chautauqua Institution on Tuesday morning about the need for early childhood education as part of the Week 6 theme "Excellence in Public Education."**

**P-J photo by Andrew Carr**