

Voices for VI Children: “*Daily News*” August 2006 column
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Title: Early Childhood Learning, and Teachers’ Abilities, Really Matter

Why do group childcare providers need higher education?

The simple answer is this: because a well-educated early-care provider is, perhaps, the best teacher your child may ever have.

Why? Perhaps you know that the “daycare” years are the most open, productive period for learning and development in a child’s life. From birth to about age five, a child’s brain absorbs experiences and, depending on how positively engaging these experiences are, forms its less-complex or more-complex network of multiple nerve connections: the brain’s wiring, or “architecture.” By age five, this foundation has been set for the child’s likely curiosity, self-confidence, trust in others, and –importantly – the child’s ability for future learning.

Caregivers/teachers who have training or degrees in *early learning and child development*, are ready to provide programs that encourage children to actively engage in positive experiences, participate in learning, and build new understandings based on their prior knowledge.

Specialized training and education provides caregivers with a concrete awareness of what’s appropriate for every child at each developmental age and level, whether it’s a fearless 1-year-old, or another one who is reclusive...whether it’s an active, distraction-prone 3 year old...or a four and a half year old experiencing a loss in the family.

Educated teachers’ skills and tools are successful because they’ve been rigorously tested and found to work. Cultural, social and cognitive research – and recent brain-based research – has revealed how children learn, and effective ways to promote and strengthen a child’s learning.

Educated teachers can respond appropriately to children’s diverse needs. “A trained teacher can take an opportunity that a child presents, and turn it into a teachable moment. This skill is one of the central aspects of high-quality early childhood teaching,” according to Dr. Kelly Kantz, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Inclusive Early Childhood and Special Education degree program at the University of the Virgin Islands. “Highly trained teachers aim to educate the whole child – emotionally and socially as well as cognitively.” She goes on to say, “There is a direct correlation between good quality in early childhood programs, and the level of higher education of the teachers who provide childcare services there.”

Beth Marshall agrees. Ms. Marshall is an early-learning specialist and director of The Family Connection Center located in Vitracó Park Mall on St. Thomas. The TFC Center offers professional development training, technical assistance and other knowledge-building resources to early childcare and education providers throughout the Territory. She says that caregivers who are best equipped are able to “individualize their approach to each child, and to plan a curriculum to keep these individual children growing in all areas.”

Voices for VI Children salutes those early childhood teachers who are enhancing their ability to provide high- quality learning for our youngest children, and we encourage others to do the same.