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Sommario/riassunto	It is never too early to become involved but it can easily be too late.'Armed with such alarming statistics as 125 million primary-school age children are not in school; another 150 million children drop out of primary school before they complete four years of education; and almost one-half of the children in the least developed countries of the world do not have access to primary education; the World Bank convened a global conference in April 2000, to address the benefits and challenges of investing in early childhood development. Scientific studies now show how critical the first few years o