

up with single, right solutions (p. 51), and Glick (p. 56) noted considerable teacher-led direct instruction in the High/Scope approach. The use of phrases like "active" child-initiated learning vs. "passive" teacher-directed learning does not reflect the reality of the children's preschool experiences.

The information available is insufficient to declare which types of preschool experiences most enhance the lives of economically disadvantaged children. The congruency between actual classroom practices and philosophical foundations of early education models is in question. There is some research to suggest, however, that the type of vaguely articulated active learning model Schweinhart and Weikart advocate is particularly difficult to implement in public settings (Kennedy 1978).

Early childhood education needs to move away from vague, emotional phraseology (e.g., "high quality," "whole child") toward a realistic assessment of what actually happens in our preschool settings—much as elementary education did in the '70s. When Schweinhart and Weikart mention that a child at age three meets with teachers to "plan learning activi-

ties, and review accomplishments," is a child merely walking over to the sandbox, and is the teacher later telling her she did a nice job of building a castle?

The issue of determining which preschool approaches are most effective is a serious one. The field must

move away from the vague generalities Schweinhart and Weikart promulgate. □

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Does Direct Instruction Cause Delinquency? Response to Schweinhart and Weikart

Policymakers would be mistaken to abandon direct instruction programs with proven effectiveness and scientific validity on the basis of Schweinhart's questionable data.

The conclusion that preschoolers taught by direct instruction end up with twice the rate of delinquency of children who come through the High/Scope program is alarming—

sufficiently alarming that it threatens in one stroke to undo the extensive and well-documented case for the educational benefits of direct instruction (e.g., Becker 1977, Bereiter and Kur-

land 1981, Pearson 1984, Roehler and Duffy 1981).

But is the conclusion valid? The study by Schweinhart and colleagues fails to provide adequate grounds for

it. The crucial data are self-reports of juvenile delinquency collected from preschool graduates when they were 15 years old. Given the obvious doubts that must arise concerning such data, the report is distressingly silent on matters of procedure. We do not know how the questionnaires were administered or by whom, what sorts of assurances were given to the subjects when they were being asked to provide such sensitive information, or what efforts were made to ensure unbiased treatment. Under close examination of the facts that are provided, however, the evidence quickly evaporates.

1. Half of each group reported having been picked up by police or arrested. This fact not only argues against a difference in delinquency rates, but it also casts doubt on the rosy picture the High/Scope youths presented of themselves.

2. The difference in reported delinquency between the direct instruction group and the child-centered nursery school group is not statistically significant. This is the most relevant comparison, because the nursery school group represents the usual alternative to direct instruction.

3. The questionnaire was geared to male delinquency. The most common forms of female delinquency are not mentioned. Yet the High/Scope group was 61 percent female as against only 44 percent for the direct instruction group. This difference alone could account for a large part of the variance in reported delinquency.¹

4. The sensational differences reported all involve comparison with the High/Scope group. Self-report studies are highly susceptible to experimenter bias—subtle influences on respondents to give answers the experimenter is looking for. Blind procedures should have been used, so that staff charged with locating, interviewing, or testing the subjects did not know which preschool group they came from. The most likely effect of bias would be to make the High/Scope group look good. In essence this is all the results amount to.

For all these reasons, the High/Scope self-report data need to be discounted. When this is done, there is nothing left of the claim that direct instruction leads to delinquency.

Some policymakers, wishing to err

on the safe side, may be tempted to reject direct instruction, just in case there's something to the High/Scope evidence after all. That would be to err, all right, but not necessarily on the safe side. There is abundant evidence of a link between reading failure and delinquency, and longitudinal research shows reading deficiencies to be evident as early as the second grade (Meltzer et al. 1984). Throwing out programs that have proven efficacy in preventing reading failure would therefore be a very bad bet as a way of reducing delinquency. Hard evidence (rather than self-reported intentions) indicates that students who went through a Direct Instruction Follow Through program significantly exceeded controls in the percentage completing high school, the percentage applying for college admission, and the percentage being accepted (Meyer 1983). Such findings are not only important in their own right, but they suggest academic and social success quite incompatible with the High/Scope findings.

Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool (Bereiter and Engelmann 1966) has played a role in educational mythology quite distinct from its role in curriculum development. In its latter role, the book provided the first explicit formulation of the idea of direct instruction, an idea that has gained wide acceptance and a substantial research basis in the intervening years. (Direct instruction has recently received official endorsement in the U.S. Department of Education publication, *What Works*, p. 351.) *Teaching Disadvantaged Children* may also have contributed to an increase in the academic content of typical preschool curriculums (Bereiter 1970). In its mythic role, however, it has stood for a host of dark forces that many educators imagine to be lurking in the background of early childhood education. Actually reading the book, which very few of the myth-makers appear to have done, would go a long way toward dispelling such phantoms. Unfortunately, the Schweinhart report does more to perpetuate the myths than it does to advance the scientific basis of early childhood education. □

1. I am not suggesting that there was biased sampling. The difference in male-

female ratios is within the accepted range of chance variation. But this does not prevent it from accounting for a substantial part of the difference in reported delinquency.

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