

The Debate over the Young “Disadvantaged Child”: Preschool Intervention, Developmental Psychology, and Compensatory Education in the 1960s and Early 1970s

by [Barbara Beatty](#) — 2012

I focus on the role of preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers in defining the concept of the “disadvantaged child” and in designing and evaluating remedies to alleviate educational “disadvantages” in young children. I argue that preschool interventions concentrated especially on compensating for supposedly deficient language acquisition patterns in interactions between low-income African American mothers and their children. The language of the discourse of the “disadvantaged child,” with its terminology of cultural deficits, thus mirrored research on supposed language deficits in young children. I begin with a brief overview of the history of psychology and social science research on deprivation and the black family. Next, I examine three pre-Head Start preschool intervention models that used different methods to enhance black children’s language development: the Institute for Developmental Studies begun in New York City in 1960 by Martin and Cynthia Deutsch; the Perry Preschool Project begun in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1962 by David Weikart; and the laboratory preschool begun at the University of Illinois in 1964 by Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. I also examine an influential 1965 study by University of Chicago psychologists Robert Hess and Virginia Shipman, which compared effects of the childrearing styles of black mothers from upper- and lower-income backgrounds on children’s language and cognitive development. I then trace some of the critiques that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s in which preschool intervention research was used as evidence that compensatory education was a failure, and criticized for imposing white middle-class stereotypes on poor black children. I conclude with a plea for a balanced approach to interpreting the many factors that may hinder some children’s performance in school.

In 1962, Martin Deutsch, director of the Institute for Developmental Studies, told attendees at a National Association for Nursery Education conference that “going to school was a kind of cultural trauma” for children from “lower socioeconomic circumstances.” School was a “foreign land” where teachers spoke “in continuous sentences for longer periods of time” than the children had heard before, and “often in a different dialect.” Preschools, Deutsch said, could serve both as “a bridge between the two cultures” with which the “disadvantaged child” had to deal, the culture of the home and the culture of school, “and as a stimulant to his development.” To be effective, however, preschools for disadvantaged children should be “carefully planned,” which did

“not mean regimenting the children.” Instead, Deutsch recommended that preschool teachers provide the “kinds of experiences a middle-class child has.”¹

Deutsch’s recommendations for “the disadvantaged child,” the title of his influential 1967 book, are exemplary of the movement for compensatory education for young children in the 1960s, when preschools were sites for research used to identify supposed lacks in poor children’s development, and to design, implement, and evaluate interventions to boost language and cognitive development and school achievement. Deutsch’s specification of the kind of preschool education poor children needed is indicative of a larger debate that emerged in compensatory education over perceived cultural deficits and the imposition of white middle-class stereotypes on black children and families.² The intervention programs I examine provided enrichment primarily for black children. In fact, as journalist Fred Powledge, author of a 1976 book on the Institute for Developmental Studies, wrote, the “disadvantaged child” often “automatically” meant “*the black child*.”³

Preschool intervention research provided much of what would now be called the “science-based research” that figured centrally in arguments about the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of compensatory education as a whole. What did prominent preschool intervention researchers and developmental psychologists studying young poor children in the 1960s say were the main causes of educational and developmental problems? What did these researchers recommend as remedies? How did they address issues of race, class, culture, and language? How and why was research on preschool intervention critiqued? What were some of the effects of the debate over preschool intervention on compensatory education generally?

To explore these questions, I start with a brief overview of some of the origins of research on young disadvantaged children. I then concentrate on three influential pre-Head Start preschool intervention projects: Martin Deutsch’s Institute for Developmental Studies begun in the New York City Public Schools in 1960; the Perry Preschool Project begun by David Weikart in an Ypsilanti, Michigan, public school in 1962; and the laboratory preschool begun by Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann at the University of Illinois in 1964. I chose these three programs because they allow me to tease out some of the issues in the debate over the effects and effectiveness of different types of preschool interventions.⁴ In part because of its size and complexity, and because it operated under local control as a range of qualitatively different programs, I do not directly address Head Start, although, of course, it was the largest, most significant compensatory preschool program. Along with Head Start, the three programs I discuss figured prominently in Arthur Jensen’s controversial 1969 critique of compensatory education.

I next analyze an influential pre-Head Start study on black mothers and children from different social class backgrounds conducted by University of Chicago psychologists Robert Hess and Virginia Shipman, who worked with preschool intervention researchers. Published in 1965, “Early Experience and the Socialization of Cognitive Modes in Young Children,” which by 1981 had become a Citation Classic, became a touchstone in debates

about black mothers' childrearing and black children's language development. Finally, I examine some of the series of critiques of preschool intervention and compensatory education that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The interventions and research I describe evolved during a time of intense social crisis, at the height of the civil rights movement, when sit-ins, marches, church bombings, the assassinations of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, and protests over school desegregation were in the nightly news. Books such as Oscar Lewis's *The Children of Sanchez* (1961) and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) publicized the "culture of poverty" and "urban crisis." Sociologists Lee Rainwater, Nathan Glazer, Thomas Pettigrew, and others drew scholarly attention to race, families, and cities. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report *The Negro Family*, which referred to black families as "a tangle of pathology," became a lightning rod for debate.⁵ President Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act, the Economic Opportunity Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and started Head Start, keystones of his Great Society and War on Poverty. Race, class, poverty, and education were on the minds of many Americans during these tumultuous times.

ORIGINS OF RESEARCH ON THE YOUNG "DISADVANTAGED" CHILD

Research in the 1960s on the young disadvantaged child was embedded in the long history of preschool education for poor children and research on causes of poor children's problems. Infant schools and kindergartens in the 19th century were promoted as cures for poverty, crime, and immorality. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, psychologists and educators G. Stanley Hall, Margaret McMillan, Maria Montessori, and others began doing research on the effects of preschool education on poor children.⁶

With the growth of psychology, sociology, and the child sciences, preschool studies merged with broader bodies of research on biological, environmental, cultural, social, and racial influences on child development and intelligence.⁷ In part to disprove hereditarian theories of intelligence, streams of psychologists began focusing on retardation and different forms of deprivation. In the 1930s, for instance, George Stoddard, Beth Wellman, Harold Skeels, and others associated with the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa examined the effects of sensory and maternal deprivation on orphanage children. Stoddard and Wellman also documented that preschool education could raise supposedly fixed IQ scores, findings that were much criticized.⁸ Studies in the 1940s and 1950s by Anna Freud, Dorothy Burlingham, John Bowlby, and others on orphans, and by Rene Spitz on institutionalized children, added to concerns about maternal deprivation, as did stimulus-response research on animals.⁹ Although connections between this deprivation research, which blurred different types of deprivation, and the concept of cultural deprivation so influential in the 1960s, were indirect, many developmental psychologists and preschool intervention researchers were aware of the links.¹⁰

Research comparing the home environments of black and white children from different social class backgrounds also contributed to the concept of cultural deprivation

in young children. Prodded by Selena Butler, president of the National Conference of Colored Parents, a committee headed by psychologist John Anderson from the University of Minnesota Institute of Child Welfare surveyed black children and families in its report for the White House Conference of 1930 on Child Health and Protection. In *The Young Child in the Home*, based on interviews with 2,758 white families and 202 African American families, Anderson and the committee documented many examples of inequality and discrimination. Compared with the average white family, more black homes were crowded and in disrepair. Black children had fewer toys and less access to playgrounds. Given these and other disparities, which existed between upper- and lower-class white children as well, Anderson and the committee asked if the “children of the United States” could be considered to have “equal opportunities” when they grew up in such dissimilar environments.¹¹

Although most nursery school children were white, nursery schools were sites of influential research on the effects of racism on black children. While doing her master’s degree in psychology in 1939, Mamie Clark studied 300 black children in a Works Progress Administration nursery school in Washington, D.C., where she began examining young black children’s racial identity. Her well-known husband was also very interested in the effects of racism on young children. Kenneth Clark’s doctoral work had been supervised by Columbia University psychology professor Otto Klineberg, who had documented regional differences in black IQ test scores and contributed to Gunnar Myrdal’s widely read 1944 book on racism, *An American Dilemma*. In 1946, the Clarks, who were strong preschool supporters, started the Northside Child Development Center in Harlem, where they did the research on the negative self-images of black children that led to the famous “doll studies” featured in Footnote 11 of the *Brown* case in 1954.¹²

In another broad strand of research debunking genetic arguments about race, social scientists began studying the effects of poverty, racism, and cultural influences on black children, families, and education. E. Franklin Frazier and others followed in the path of W. E. B. Du Bois, whose 1899 and 1908 books *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Negro American Family*, respectively, set the tone for the field. In his 1932 book *The Negro Family in Chicago* and 1939 book *The Negro Family in the United States*, Frazier focused on the lasting impact of slavery and noted the “poverty and disorganization of Negro family life in the urban environment” in the North and “neglect” of many black children due to the effects of “economic and social factors.”¹³ In his 1934 book *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, Horace Mann Bond showed how racial discrimination limited black children’s education.¹⁴

In the 1940s, regional differences in black family life continued to be a theme. University of Chicago anthropologist and educator Allison Davis helped produce the 1941 book *Deep South*, which compared “caste and class” in the experiences of black and white children.¹⁵ With University of Chicago education professor and developmental psychologist Robert J. Havighurst, Davis also did interviews with black and white middle- and working-class mothers in Chicago, meant in part to update upon John Anderson’s 1930 survey. Like many earlier researchers, Davis and Havighurst

emphasized that “*differences between social classes* proved greater than those between color groups.”¹⁶

Highlighting the importance of language, Davis, who chaired the University of Chicago Education Department, extended his insights about race and social class to schools. In his 1948 book *Social-Class Influences on Learning*, Davis stressed the need for teachers to know “enough about the slum culture to understand what the pupil’s words and learning-acts mean” and expressed pessimism about “slum schools,” which he termed “almost a complete failure.” After critiquing language bias in IQ tests due to “vocabulary and sentence structure, as these are developed in the culture of the higher socio-economic groups,” Davis went on in the 1950s to help develop a more culture-free intelligence test.¹⁷

Refuting genetic arguments and documenting the importance of environment and culture continued to be central in discourse in the 1960s about poor children. Three books were especially influential. In his 1961 work *Intelligence and Experience*, developmental psychologist J. McVicker Hunt argued that in well-designed environments, young children would progress “naturally” to higher stages in Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. In his 1964 book *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*, educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom stated that about 50 percent of the development of intelligence took place between birth and age four, implying that preschool education during this “critical period” of early development could permanently raise IQ.¹⁸

The third book, social psychologist Frank Reissman’s *The Culturally Deprived Child* (1962), was especially influential. Reissman argued that the “culturally deprived child” was not deprived of culture, but came from a culture negatively affected by poverty and discrimination that led to alienation from school. Although he put forth stereotypes such as “broken” homes and the “aggressive” physical punishment to which poor black children were subjected, and other “deficits,” Reissman also pointed to “overlooked positives of disadvantaged groups,” noting disadvantaged children’s “hidden verbal ability” outside of school, a theme that would take on heightened importance in critiques of preschool intervention and research on black children’s language acquisition.¹⁹

THE INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

Extending earlier research on race, class, culture, and preschool education, psychologist and educator Martin Deutsch combined psychological and sociological methods in his studies of poor children’s language, cognitive development, and learning. In 1960, with support from the Ford Foundation and other philanthropies, Deutsch transformed a mental health research center on learning disabilities into the Institute for Developmental Studies. Located on the edge of Harlem, the Institute was associated with the Department of Psychiatry at New York Medical College, and then in 1966 with New York University, where Deutsch became a professor of early childhood education. Working collaboratively, Deutsch, his wife Cynthia, and other researchers conducted numerous investigations on different groups of children in the New York City Public Schools.²⁰

Like many psychologists and sociologists before him, Deutsch and his colleagues were interested in disaggregating racial and socioeconomic variables. To do so, they collected extensive data on a sample of black and white first- and fifth-graders and their families, divided into three social-class levels by parents' employment and education. Among other variables, the six most important for predicting school problems appeared to be "Housing Dilapidation," "educational aspirational level of the parent for the child," "number of children under 18 in the home," "dinner conversation," "total number of cultural experiences anticipated by child for coming weekend," and kindergarten attendance. Based on this research, Deutsch and his colleagues designed a Deprivation index of indicators of types of "sociocultural deprivation" associated with low academic achievement.²¹

While most of the Institute's research showed that social class factors were more important than race, a few studies suggested that race was salient. When studying educational aspiration levels, for instance, Deutsch and his colleagues Richard Bloom and Martin Whiteman found that black parents had "significantly higher occupational and educational aspirations for their children" than white parents did. Bloom, Whiteman, and Deutsch attributed this to the possibility that African Americans knew that they "must aim higher and be better in order to get as far" as their white counterparts. Black parents were also more concerned about their children's reading levels in school.²²

In a study on the effects of social class and race on children's language and intellectual abilities, Whiteman, Brown, and Deutsch found complicated interactions among Deprivation index variables in black and white children. The effects of socioeconomic status and Deprivation index variables on language test scores got worse over time for all the children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The most significant racial difference was on vocabulary tests, on which black students' performance declined more rapidly than that of white students. Because Deprivation index variables tended to be independent from race and social class, Whiteman, Brown, and Deutsch concluded that ameliorating such factors as lack of kindergarten experience might have "an advantageous effect despite relatively low socioeconomic status," a strong argument for "enrichment programs." But controlling for Deprivation index variables did not explain black children's cumulative vocabulary deficit.²³

To get at these vocabulary differences, the Deutsches and their colleagues began examining language acquisition patterns in black families. Like many other psychologists at the time, they were influenced by the early work of British sociologist Basil Bernstein, who wrote about the "restricted" language code that Bernstein argued children from lower-class families acquired, in which they spoke informally about things in their daily lives. Bernstein contrasted this code with the more formal, "elaborated" code acquired by middle- and upper-class children, which he argued led to success in school and upward mobility. (Bernstein later modified his views and objected to how they were used.) Citing Bernstein's sociolinguistic theories, the Deutsches and their colleagues were convinced that black children were getting inadequate language stimulation at home.²⁴

Determined to raise achievement and enhance language and cognitive development, the Deutsches saw the goal of the Institute for Developmental Studies as using research, not simply generating it. As Deutsch wrote in his 1965 annual report, the Institute's studies were part of a "mutually reinforcing cycle of basic and applied research, demonstration programs, and their evaluation."²⁵ The main focus of the Institute's research was the early enrichment program that the Deutsches began in East Harlem in 1961, which by 1963 had become an experimental intervention study with control groups.

To prevent the cumulative deficits their research documented, the Deutsches designed an innovative model that may be the first example of the preschool-to-grade-three approach promoted by some education reform advocates focusing on early education today. Each year for seven years, a new group of children entered the program at age four, continued in classes with special curricula and other supports through third grade, and were compared with control groups. The 483 children in the experimental groups were black, had no physical, emotional, or behavioral problems, and were from English-speaking families who met the Institute's criteria for low socioeconomic status. Through a special arrangement with the New York City Board of Education, the Institute's classes were located in public schools, taught by teachers paid by the public schools, and selected and trained by the Institute for Developmental Studies.²⁶

The Institute's preschool was intended to provide stimulation similar to what middle-class children supposedly received.²⁷ Deutsch said that he saw this stimulation as instilling skills, not middle-class values, a distinction that many critics of compensatory education rejected. Early training was "not a matter of inculcating middle-class values but, rather, of reinforcing the development of those underlying skills that are operationally appropriate and necessary for both successful and psychologically pleasant school learning experiences," he stated. Although these skills were "almost routinely stimulated in middle-class homes," Deutsch argued, "that did not mean that in content they are middle-class."²⁸

Drawing on Jean Piaget's developmental psychology and other sources, the Deutsches divided the skills necessary for school success into language, conceptual abilities, reading, self-concept, and social interaction. They concentrated heavily on language development, the variable that appeared to be so important in their research. Institute for Developmental Studies researchers designed listening centers, where children listened to tapes made by their teachers and recorded and compared language samples of their own, meant to teach differences between standard and nonstandard English. A Language Master machine was used to record and play back information from laminated cards. Special Language Lotto, Matrix games, and letter form boards reinforced language skills. The teachers planned enrichment activities, took the children on field trips, and made home visits. The Deutsches also pioneered a breakfast program, started parent centers, and hired parents as community aides.²⁹

The institute's intervention program produced positive results that were immediately picked up by the press. Although children in the treatment group gained only about three IQ points, children in the control group lost points, and the treatment group's gains

increased as the children moved up in school.³⁰ Long-term gains were even more impressive. In 1964, Charles Silberman featured the program in an article in *Harper's Magazine* as a shining example of how to "reverse the effects of a starved environment." Kindergarten teachers were "speechless with enthusiasm" about how children from the Institute's preschools performed in their classes, Silberman wrote.³¹ Silberman's piece and information about the Institute's preschools were passed around in Washington. Visitors started flooding in, including Lady Bird Johnson, who reported back to her husband. Deutsch showed off 20 of his model students in Washington. Well known after only a few years in operation, the Institute for Developmental Studies preschool intervention was used by the Johnson administration to support the proposal for Head Start.³²

THE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROJECT

Like the Institute for Developmental Studies, the Perry Preschool Project brought together streams of psychology research refuting genetic causes of mental retardation and school failure with concerns about mothering, language acquisition, and the cognitive development of black children from low-income families. Like Deutsch, Perry Preschool founder psychologist David Weikart, director of special education in the Ypsilanti, Michigan, public schools, had a background working with mentally retarded and learning-disabled children. Unlike the Institute for Developmental Studies, the Perry Preschool program was located in a smallish town very different from the urban setting of Harlem.³³

By the late 1950s, Weikart had become frustrated with school psychologists and officials telling him that there was nothing that could be done about children with low intelligence test scores. Determined to prove that preschool education could raise scores and prevent school failure, Weikart convinced the Ypsilanti school district to let him begin an experimental preschool program at the Perry Elementary School in 1962. With the help of associates, he recruited a sample of 123 African American three- and four-year-olds who attended the preschool in five waves until 1967. Divided into a treatment group of 58 and a control group of 65, the children, as Weikart described in an early report, tested as "educably mentally retarded." They came, he said, from "culturally deprived families," as measured by a scale of "cultural deprivation ratings" based on parental occupation, education, and number of people living in the home.³⁴ Fewer than 20 percent of Perry Preschool parents had graduated from high school; half of the children came from single-parent families. The children had IQ scores in the 70–85 range.³⁵

Like Institute for Developmental Studies programs, the Perry Preschool was a high-quality model, with fully certified, well-trained teachers. Perry Preschool children attended three hours a day, five days a week, for the length of the school year. They did not get the special follow-up classes once they began school that the Institute for Developmental Studies offered, but Perry Preschool children started at age three and got two years of preschool. Perry Preschool children also got more home visits, 90 minutes a week, during which the children's teachers demonstrated teaching techniques to mothers,

with whom they modeled standard English and provided home educational materials meant to encourage “the stimulation of maternal involvement in the educative process.”³⁶

The Perry Preschool Project produced more striking results than the Institute for Developmental Studies did. The large gains may have been due in part to the children beginning with lower IQ scores. After one year, Perry children’s IQ scores went up an average of 15 points, which put them in the normal range.³⁷ But the gains did not last. After the second year, when the children entered elementary school, their IQ test scores started to go down.

Weikart wondered if the Perry Preschool’s traditional nursery school curriculum might be the problem. Aided by Constance Kamii, whom he had met in graduate school in psychology at the University of Michigan, Weikart redesigned the curriculum. Like Kamii, he thought that disadvantaged children had “cognitive deficits” because they had not progressed through Piaget’s developmental stages. Weikart contracted for teachers to be given Piaget workshops and read Israeli preschool researcher Sara Smilansky’s work, which focused on how teachers should ask children to plan their play. Weikart consulted with University of Chicago developmental psychologist Robert Hess, who suggested that Perry Preschool children should review their play after each session. These ideas came together in the Perry Preschool’s “plan-do-review” approach, in which children met with a teacher for about 10 to 15 minutes to plan their play, played for about 45 minutes to an hour, and then met with the teacher again to review what they had learned, to ensure that the children were making meaning from their experiences as middle-class children supposedly did.³⁸

Like the Deutsches, Weikart worried about children’s language development. He encouraged the teachers to do what he called “verbal bombardment,” meant to compensate for language interactions he thought Perry Preschool children were lacking at home. He did not recommend teaching language directly, however.³⁹ Instead, Perry Preschool teachers labeled things in the environment to “intensively ‘feed in’ language.” They used verbal “stimulation throughout the day to give the child a strong language input tied to his experience,” to expand the children’s language from “single-word utterances to phrases and simple sentences” in natural ways as part of the curriculum.⁴⁰

Weikart also weighed in on the growing debate over what type of preschool education was most effective. Asked by the U.S. Office of Education in 1967 to evaluate existing preschool programs, he contrasted three types: traditional nursery schools based on unstructured play; preschools such as Perry with “carefully sequenced presentations of teacher-planned activities according to a specific developmental theory”; and “*task-oriented* nursery school methods” that employed “teacher-planned activities to accomplish specific pre-determined goals such as reading, arithmetic, or logical thinking.”⁴¹ The developmental and task-oriented models would be most effective in aiding children’s intellectual development, Weikart concluded.

As the High/Scope Foundation, as Weikart’s research center came to be called, continued to collect data on the Perry children, it got increasingly impressive results on many

indices. When Lawrence Schweinhart and Weikart reported on the treatment group's progress at age 15, they found no significant lasting IQ gains compared with the control group, and modest but significant gains of about eight percent on school achievement tests. But there were other important outcomes.⁴² Subjects who had been in the program experienced less delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and placement in special education classes, problems that cost society money. As data kept coming in, the cost-benefit ratio increased, according to Schweinhart, Weikart, and their colleagues, providing support for Head Start and other preschool interventions. Over time, despite its small size and unrepresentative sample, the Perry Preschool intervention became the most frequently cited evidence for the long-term effectiveness of investing in preschool education.⁴³

THE BEREITER-ENGELMANN DIRECT INSTRUCTION PRESCHOOL

The preschool intervention begun by psychologist Carl Bereiter and educator Siegfried Engelmann in 1964 at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, was an academic, task-oriented program, the other model that Weikart said would be effective. Bereiter characterized the direct instruction method, as the Bereiter-Engelmann model came to be called, as a “nonpsychological approach to early compensatory education,” although its methods came from the tradition of behaviorist psychology. The “sensible starting point for compensatory education,” Bereiter argued, should be teaching children academically useful things in a “matter-of-fact-way,” not based on psychological theories.⁴⁴ Bereiter and Engelmann said that they wanted to “avoid such ambiguous terms as ‘development’ and ‘intelligence,’” as they wrote in their 1966 book *Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool*, and focus on “*learning*.” Learning could be “speeded up, whereas the term *development* often connotes a process that must go on at its own rate.”⁴⁵

Like the Deutsches and Weikart, Bereiter and Engelmann were concerned about poor children's language acquisition. A “lack of verbal learning is the outstanding characteristic of culturally deprived children,” Bereiter and Engelmann said. Bereiter and Engelmann even went so far as to compare “culturally deprived” children to deaf children. Verbal communication, they said, “of any sort between parents and children is limited in lower-class homes,” in part because of large family size, working mothers, “lack of fathers,” and crowding that forced children outdoors and “away from adult contacts.” Black children's speech was especially problematic. Black children, Bereiter and Engelmann stated, did not speak in “distinct words,” but in “whole phrases or sentences that function like giant words,” such as “Da-re-truh” instead of “That is a red truck.” These perceived language deficits were what the Bereiter-Engelmann preschool was designed to remedy.⁴⁶

Unlike the moderately structured, play-based methods promoted in the Institute for Developmental Studies and Perry Preschool programs, Bereiter and Engelmann advocated teaching academics, especially standard English, explicitly and directly.⁴⁷ Children were taught short, fast-paced, tightly scripted lessons meant to develop vocabulary and comprehension. Using verbal rewards, teachers taught concepts logically rather than thematically. Instead of learning about animals by going to the zoo, children were taught didactically about what the elements of a set were, as in a lesson on the

concept of weapons. When the teacher asked what a picture of a rifle was, she said, “Good. It is a gun,” if the child said, “Gun.” The teacher gave a more positive verbal reward, such as “I’m really proud of you,” if the child said the correct answer in a full sentence, in standard English. After a sequence of scripted question-and-answer responses and repetition of the general rule that weapons were used “to hurt somebody,” the children had supposedly learned the concept of weapons.⁴⁸

As with the Institute for Developmental Studies and Perry Preschool interventions, the Bereiter-Engelmann model produced immediate increases in IQ and achievement test scores. Bereiter and Engelmann started with two groups of children from low-income backgrounds—one treatment group of 15 black children whose older siblings had been labeled by their teachers as “problem children showing the effects of cultural deprivation,” and another group of 15 black and white children—and some comparison groups of middle-class children. After nine months, 11 of the 15 black preschoolers in the all-black treatment group scored at or above first-grade level on standardized achievement tests of reading and arithmetic. The children’s IQ scores went up, too, from an average of 93 to 100, as did their achievement test scores and scores on the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities.⁴⁹ Bereiter and Engelmann published their results, garnering much attention, but also intense controversy over their scripted, didactic methods and rejection of nonstandard English.

With such different approaches, and pressure for preschool intervention results spurred by Head Start, the Perry Preschool and direct instruction models soon came into conflict. In 1969, Constance Kamii and Siegfried Engelmann had a face-to-face confrontation at a conference on standardizing a Piagetian test as an alternative to IQ tests, at which Piaget himself was present, along with many other psychology, measurement, and preschool luminaries.⁵⁰ Kamii had been asked to write a critique of a paper by Engelmann, who said that he could teach Piagetian tasks directly, without children playing with objects or even seeing pictures.⁵¹ Kamii retested the children. They recited rules, she said, without understanding concepts, proving that children had to construct knowledge themselves, in an environment like the Perry Preschool.⁵² “Children are taught,” Engelmann replied, and the Piagetian approach was an inefficient way to do so. The reason one of the children retested by Kamii had done poorly, Engelmann said, was “appallingly simple.” The little girl had been absent for two days. Argument over the comparative effectiveness of the cognitive-developmental Perry Preschool and the Bereiter-Engelmann direct instruction academic model continued, as did debate over the effectiveness of preschool intervention generally.⁵³

ROBERT HESS AND VIRGINIA SHIPMAN ON MOTHERING STYLES AND BLACK CHILDREN’S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In the early 1960s, psychologists Robert Hess and Virginia Shipman began doing research on black mothers and children that became a touchstone for compensatory preschool intervention. Published in 1965, their article “Early Experience and the Socialization of Cognitive Modes in Children” pointed to sources of the language deficits that the Deutsches, Weikart, and Bereiter and Engelmann were attempting to remediate.

With a doctorate in human development from the University of Chicago, Hess was a professor and director of the University of Chicago Early Education Research Center who later taught at Stanford. With a doctorate in clinical psychology from the University of Pittsburgh, Shipman was a research associate and lecturer in human development and director of the Head Start Evaluation and Research Center at the University of Chicago who later worked at the Educational Testing Service. With these connections, their research was widely circulated.⁵⁴

Like the Deutsches, Hess and Shipman sought to disaggregate the effects of race and social class. Supported by the Research Division of the Federal Children's Bureau and the Ford Foundation, their study was based on a sample of 163 black mothers and their four-year-old children, divided into four groups of mothers: college-educated professionals; blue-collar high school graduates; semiskilled or unskilled working-class predominantly elementary school graduates; and semiskilled or unskilled mothers supported by public assistance and living without the fathers of their children.⁵⁵

In home visits and campus interviews, Hess and Shipman found significant differences in the mothers' language and parenting styles. The sheer language output of college-educated black mothers when explaining tasks to their children was almost twice that of black mothers from the lowest socioeconomic group, Hess and Shipman reported. Citing Basil Bernstein's ubiquitous notion of class-based codes, Hess and Shipman said that the better-educated black mothers in their study used a more individualized, child-centered style, with a wider range of options, like that of well-educated white mothers. Lower-class black mothers, they stated, used a "constricted" style with "coercive," rigid rules. Children of better-educated black mothers grew up with a sense of choices and autonomy, Hess and Shipman asserted, and learned to "play with an element of flexibility, not by role-conforming rigidity." Lower-class black mothers and children acted impulsively, without planning ahead. Children of better-educated mothers acquired "cognitive styles more easily adapted to problem-solving and reflections." The "meaning of deprivation," Hess and Shipman concluded, was "deprivation of meaning."⁵⁶

Hess advocated for federal support for the kind of unregimented preschool interventions that the Deutsches and Weikart implemented. With his Chicago colleagues Allison Davis and Benjamin Bloom, Hess was one of a group of distinguished social scientists sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education who worked on the 1964 report *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation*, which placed preschool intervention within a larger social context. Bloom, Davis, and Hess stressed the importance of raising poor children's literacy, for the children's sake and the good of society.⁵⁷ "Ideally, early intellectual development should take place in the home," Bloom, Davis, and Hess said, but they expressed "pessimism" that much could be done in homes to help many children overcome "the general effects of cultural deprivation." If parents could not provide the "intellective training" children needed, then "the school is the logical social agency to do it."⁵⁸

Hess was aware of the implications of government intervention into families. In a book based on a 1965 conference on preschool education attended by leading developmental

psychology, preschool, and child language experts, including David Weikart and Cynthia Deutsch, Hess wrote that if the family's "teaching functions" were "not being adequately performed," then "pressures" were "likely to emerge for modification of the socializing procedures or for a change in the agents who are allocated responsibility for socialization." Preschool intervention would take on more of the role of families. This "growing skepticism about the effectiveness of the family" might bring about a major change, Hess said, "*a fundamental shift in the relative roles and potential influence of the two major socializing institutions of the society—the family and the school.*" Experts were becoming the "locus" of decision making about "what to teach and how to deal with the developmental problems of 3- and 4-year-olds."⁵⁹ Many of these experts were white developmental psychologists.

Concerns about state intervention into the private family surfaced again and again. President Richard Nixon's 1971 veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act sponsored by Democrat Senator Walter Mondale and Congressman John Brademas, which put forth universal child care and preschool education, was exemplary of the growing politicization of issues related to preschool intervention. Objections to the bill, which some termed "The Federal Child Control Act," came mostly from the right. Nixon's final wording, which his aide Pat Buchanan helped write, decried the bill's "fiscal irresponsibility, administrative unworkability, and family weakening implications." The bill, Nixon said, would "commit the vast moral authority of the national Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over [and] against the family centered approach."⁶⁰ Universal child care and preschool education went down; critiques of preschool intervention increased. Hess and Shipman were excoriated for using white middle-class norms to judge black families.

CRITIQUES OF PRESCHOOL INTERVENTION AND COMPENSATORY EDUCATION

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ground under preschool intervention and compensatory education shifted rapidly as critique upon critique followed in rapid succession. Indeed, the whole notion of preschool intervention came into question as some psychologists, sociologists, and educators rejected the concept of cultural deprivation as scientifically unsound and racially biased. As Sylvia Martinez and John Rury document, usage of such terms as the "culturally deprived" and "disadvantaged" child peaked around 1969 in press coverage and then dropped off sharply, about the same time that doubts were increasingly raised about the effectiveness of preschool intervention.⁶¹

In 1969, only four years after Head Start had begun, hopes were deflated when a federally sponsored study by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio State University came out saying that positive effects of Head Start faded by third grade. Critiques of the study's flawed methodology were ignored, as was the inaccuracy of assessing Head Start prematurely and as a unified program when it was so locally variable. Nevertheless, the Westinghouse report immediately became a rationale for

questioning preschool intervention and compensatory education generally, as former Head Start director Edward F. Zigler documents.⁶²

Based in part on Westinghouse findings, educational psychologist and psychometrician Arthur Jensen began his hotly debated 1969 *Harvard Educational Review* article stating that “Compensatory education has been tried and it apparently has failed.”⁶³ Rejecting half a century of research on environmental, social, and cultural factors, Jensen argued that heritability of racial differences in intelligence was one of the main causes of the ineffectiveness of compensatory education. If environmental enrichment through compensatory education did not work, then biology must be the problem. Although the relationship between socioeconomic status and IQ was “one of the most substantial and least disputed facts in psychology and education,” Jensen said, there were “real average differences” among racial groups.⁶⁴

Jensen used the results of preschool intervention research to prove his case. Admitting that the “majority of small-scale experiments in boosting the IQ and educational performance of disadvantaged children” had produced “significant gains,” Jensen stated that “massive compensatory programs” had “produced no appreciable gains in intelligence or achievement.” As to the debate over different types of preschool intervention, Jensen praised the Bereiter and Engemann approach, with its specific training in “verbal skills,” dismissed gains at the Institute for Developmental Studies on the grounds of selection bias, and said that the Perry Preschool Project showed a “nonsignificant gain.”⁶⁵

Jensen then quoted, appreciatively but out of context, psychologist Edmund Gordon and educator Doxey Wilkerson, who since the mid-1960s had been critiquing the middle-class bias of compensatory education. In their 1966 book *Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged*, Gordon and Wilkerson had said that the “unexpressed purpose of most compensatory programs” was “to make disadvantaged children as much as possible” like “middle-class children in school performance.” But these “children are *not* middle-class children,” Gordon and Wilkerson stated, and “many of them never *will* be, and they can never be anything but second rate as long as they are thought of as potentially middle-class children.” These children are “different, and an approach which views this difference merely as something to be overcome is probably doomed to failure.” What Jensen did not quote was that Gordon and Wilkerson went on to say that schools and teachers needed to accept poor children as they were and “assume the burden of finding educational techniques appropriate” to children’s needs, and excoriated schools for not doing so.⁶⁶

In the firestorm that erupted over Jensen’s article, his views on racial differences elicited the most criticism, but his dismissal of compensatory education was also condemned. In the next *Harvard Educational Review* issue, the editors published some of the myriad angry responses they received. A “Letter from the South” by educator William F. Brazziel was exemplary of many critiques. Brazziel, an Ohio State University graduate who was coordinator of general studies at the Norfolk Division of Virginia State College, had conducted an intervention of his own, with Mary Terrell, a teacher at an elementary

school in Tennessee. They had found that explaining school readiness to black sharecroppers and giving them a 30-minute educational television show to watch with their children at home during the first six weeks of first grade raised the children's reading and IQ test scores significantly. The problem, Brazziel and Terrell concluded, was the "inexcusable devastation of human potential" in black children, devastation that could be rectified with better teacher training, provision of more teachers, and a more "direct parent-teacher partnership."⁶⁷ Compensatory education was not a failure, Brazziel said. In many places in the South, it had not been tried. Schools were "just now learning how to run compensatory programs," and, given the depth of Southern prejudice, "really try to."⁶⁸

Brazziel expressed belief in the effectiveness of compensatory education but critiqued it for what he saw as its derogatory stance toward African American culture and parents. A member of the National Advisory Council for Head Start Research and Evaluation, in 1967, Brazziel had criticized the idea of cultural deprivation, especially research that stereotyped and deprecated black mothers. Some studies, Brazziel said, documented "a high degree of sensitivity" about "the use of the labels 'culturally deprived' and 'culturally disadvantaged'" among Head Start parents. He described a "Harlem housewife . . . picketing a new middle school in the fall of 1966" who said that parents "did not want to be told that the children weren't learning because mothers were often heads of the households or because they had cornflakes instead of poached eggs for breakfast," possibly a reference to Deutsch, who had used "nutritional adequacy of child's breakfast" as another deprivation variable.⁶⁹ More preschool intervention was needed, Brazziel said, more "early stimulation and imprinting, and integrated schools with teachers who are free of racial and social class prejudices."⁷⁰

Like Allison Davis 20 years earlier, Brazziel pointed to inherent racial bias in psychometric research on black children done by white testers. White psychologists' "color, voice, manner, gestures turn many kids off," Brazziel said. The kids "refuse to try." Writing when the press had begun to turn on compensatory education discourse, Brazziel asserted that black students read about the bias of white psychologists in the black press. "How are you going to have a valid test session with kids who read in black papers and magazines that white researchers are sending their kids to Harvard by overstudying the black community with federal grants?" In a reference to the growth of black power movements, Brazziel asked how black students "who received a leaflet from a community group blasting tests as an 'unfair tool of colonialists who control the black community'" should be expected to perform representatively.⁷¹

Brazziel continued to critique IQ tests and white research on black children and families in ways that showed growing concerns about racial bias. In a 1973 article, "White Research in Black Communities: When Solutions Become a Part of the Problem," he urged white researchers to "suspend racial comparisons on tests" and "suspend the use of tests with all-white norms."⁷² Researchers should "impose a moratorium on further documentation of pathology of black behavior and make a greater conceptual effort at distinguishing between solving problems and creating or sustaining them." A "black parent advisory panel" and a "welfare mothers' advisory panel" should "review and

monitor” and “oversee” all research involving black children.⁷³ Black mothers were not the problem, Brazziel argued, they were part of the solution. In a 1974 report sponsored by the National Leadership Institute for Teacher Education and Early Childhood Education, he pointed to the strengths of black mothers. Studies of high IQ black children from “depressed” areas, he said, showed that the “key” to high scores was “a most ambitious mother coupled with the children’s nurturance by a powerful community group.”⁷⁴

In another critique of Jensen, Martin Deutsch wrote a stinging rebuttal that was published in the issue of the *Harvard Educational Review* following Brazziel’s response. Deutsch also condemned Jensen’s views on race, IQ, and IQ tests, along with Jensen’s dismissal of compensatory education. Jensen held “a wholly anti-democratic eugenic position,” Deutsch said. Jensen’s article was filled with errors about the “nature of intelligence, intelligence tests, genetic determination of traits, education in general, and compensatory education in particular,” Deutsch wrote. It was “destructive” and had “negative implications for the struggles against racism and for improvement of the educational system.” Deutsch, who had coedited a book with Jensen in 1967, now accused Jensen of racism, of showing “a consistent bias toward a racist hypothesis.”⁷⁵

Like Brazziel, Deutsch said that compensatory education had not been truly tried. With so little funding available for “so-called compensatory education, we have never really had a national compensatory effort,” Deutsch argued. Federal money had gone to the Vietnam war instead. The “grim truth was that while we have had social destruction and urban decay, our overall thrust as an organized society has placed our major resources in the arena of war rather than in the arena of improving general social organization,” including teacher training and schools. Major societal problems needed to be addressed along with schools, before the effectiveness of compensatory education could be judged. Until then, Deutsch argued, it was “simply not possible to arrive at a verdict as to the efficacy of education, to say nothing of the efficacy of compensatory programs.”⁷⁶

Sociologists and other developmental psychologists weighed in with critiques of stereotypes of black families and racial bias in white research. In his 1968 book *Black Families in White America*, sociologist Andrew Billingsley portrayed the strengths of black families, disaggregated many different types of black families, and focused on the importance of social class. Among other recommendations, Billingsley said that every school in black neighborhoods should be extended down to three-year-olds, “without waiting for definitive research.”⁷⁷ In 1973, a black caucus was organized within the Society for Research on Child Development to, as some of the founders later wrote, make white developmental psychologists aware that “Black folks were not monolithic, nor should they be categorized as such.” More “understanding of Black family issues” was needed “to see African American families as culturally different, not culturally deprived, to better comprehend the legacy of racism and its impact on families.”⁷⁸

Some developmental psychologists began using international comparisons to refute the idea of cultural deprivation. Based on ethnographic research in Africa and elsewhere, Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole, Sylvia Scribner, and others declared cultural “deficits” to

be cultural “differences.” Directly critiquing Deutsch’s research, Cole said that it was “clear that various minority groups (black, Latin Americans, Appalachians, Indians, and so forth) are viewed to be ‘victims’” and proposed a multicultural perspective in psychology and education.⁷⁹

Some of the strongest resistance focused on language, the crux of so much research and preschool intervention. Bereiter and Engelmann came in for particular condemnation. Sociolinguist William Labov stated that Bereiter and Engelmann did not understand that Black English Vernacular was a coherent variant of English and that black children grew up in language-rich environments. In a widely cited 1969 paper, “The Logic of Nonstandard English,” Labov said that the “notion of verbal deprivation is a part of the modern mythology of educational psychology,” a particularly dangerous myth because it diverted “attention from real defects of our educational system to imaginary defects of the child.” Bereiter and Engelmann, Labov argued, put black children in “a hostile and threatening situation” in which the children were defensive and could not demonstrate their “total verbal capacity.” Not linguists, Labov said, Bereiter and Engelmann were propagating unfounded, damaging views. Labov also refuted Deutsch’s research, the Deprivation index, and Jensen.⁸⁰ Sociolinguists Courtney Cazden, Vera John, Dell Hymes, and others documented the linguistic competence of black, Mexican American, and Native American children as well.⁸¹

In another scathing critique, preschool intervention and the entire edifice of social science research on which it rested came under fire. “Early childhood intervention,” sociologists and educators Stephen Baratz and Joan C. Baratz argued in an influential 1970 article, was “the social science base of institutional racism.” Preschool intervention was harmful. By blaming black children and families, it hurt more than it helped. “Research on the Negro,” Baratz and Baratz wrote, was “guided by an ethnocentric liberal ideology which denies cultural differences and thus acts against the best interests of the people it wishes to understand and eventually help.”⁸²

Baratz and Baratz condemned both genetic and cultural arguments. Research on cultural deprivation, they said, had been substituted for hereditarianism. Neither position was right; neither black genes nor black families were the problem. Liberals, Baratz and Baratz wrote, had “eagerly seized on the social pathology model as a replacement for the genetic inferiority model.” Both models “postulate that something is wrong with the black American . . . for traditional racists . . . something transmitted by the genetic code; for the ethnocentric social pathologists . . . something . . . transmitted by the family.”⁸³

Once again, language was critical. Rather than criticizing the role of black mothers in language acquisition, Baratz and Baratz supported them, and black English. They critiqued the Deutsches, Hess and Shipman, and others for not proving that differences in how black mothers raised their children were connected with black children’s ability to learn. Schools were the problem, not parents. Nor did data support the idea of black children’s linguistic deficits, Baratz and Baratz said. A “revolution” in thinking about urban black children was under way, based primarily on studies showing that supposed linguistic deficits were differences. The “social pathology model,” Baratz and Baratz

concluded, “has led social science to establish programs to prevent deficits which are simply not there.”⁸⁴

SEEKING A MIDDLE GROUND

Despite critiques, preschool interventions continued, as did debate about how best to teach young disadvantaged children. How might preschool intervention and preschool-related developmental psychology research in the 1960s and early 1970s be assessed from the standpoint of today? Some critiques of preschool intervention and developmental psychology research were due to the terminology of the period. Most psychologists in the 1960s wrote about “the child” monolithically, in the singular, in what sound like simplistic stereotypes. In part, this terminology reflects the methodology of many education and psychology researchers, who sought to make generalizations from individuals to groups, generalizations that were thought to increase the credibility of research that was often based on uncontrolled data from relatively small subsets of unrepresentative samples. For developmental psychologists in particular, in a field that dealt with young children and mothers and relied on the descriptive, observational methods of eminences like Jean Piaget, scientific status was an important goal.⁸⁵

Closer examination of sources reveals that some developmental psychologists and preschool intervention researchers were aware of simplistic categorizations. In the preface to *The Disadvantaged Child*, Deutsch used the wording the “so-called disadvantaged child,” wording that activist child psychiatrist Robert Coles, author of *Children of Crisis* on Ruby Bridges and other children who desegregated schools in the South, commented on favorably in a 1968 review of Deutsch’s book.⁸⁶ Coles said that “we do neither ourselves nor the ‘disadvantaged’ any good by saddling people with labels that simply do not do them justice” and went on to “happily recommend Dr. Deutsch’s book, despite its title.”⁸⁷ In the preface to Fred Powledge’s 1967 book on the Institute for Developmental Studies, Deutsch noted that “disadvantaged” and “middle-class” were often spoken of as if they were “homogeneous groups,” when in fact there were “great variations in family organization, background, and personal experience.”⁸⁸

Although some developmental psychologists and preschool intervention researchers were leery of overreliance on IQ scores, extensive use of IQ results created problems. Proving that preschool education could raise IQ was part of the long quest to refute genetic and racial arguments about intelligence, but using IQ scores as a measure of success also provided fodder for critics like Jensen when gains faded. Many developmental psychologists and preschool intervention researchers saw Piaget’s stage theory of cognitive development as a better alternative to IQ but were unable to produce the kind of quick, usable results that policy makers demanded. Intelligence tests scores were the currency of the day.

Preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers may have obscured social, racial, and educational inequalities by situating problems with children and families rather than schools and society. But focusing on young children and families is what preschool educators and developmental psychologists do. Most of the researchers

discussed in this article also pointed to the importance of larger social factors beyond the scope of their research.⁸⁹

Whether preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers thought that preschool intervention alone could solve big social problems is unclear. Although many probably saw preschool intervention as a complement to other programs and economic growth, faith ran strong in the 1960s about the power of technical approaches and in developmental psychology research as an empirical science that could solve societal problems.⁹⁰ So close to what they and many others at the time saw as the “roots” of poverty in the family and childhood during a “critical period” before the effects of poverty could accumulate, many preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers were optimistic. Optimism that preschool intervention could bring about permanent change raised high hopes, hopes that came back to haunt compensatory education after its heyday in the mid-1960s.⁹¹

Overstated optimism is endemic to social programs, however, as program developers grab attention to compete for resources. As developmental psychologist Eleanor Maccoby and Miriam Zellner wrote in a 1970 book on compensatory education programs, there is a predictable cycle of inflated hopes, realistic results, and deflated expectations. A “remedial” program is first presented as “a powerful cure-all for a wide range of social ills.” Its “potential advantages probably *must* be exaggerated” if it is “to have a chance of adoption in the first place,” Maccoby and Zellner said. Then, because there is “little chance of accomplishing quickly the unrealistic objectives set forth . . . there follows a period of disillusion.” Support for the program “dwindles away, and new competing programs absorb the available resources before there has been time for the original program to show what it *can* do.”⁹² Given this rapid cycling, indefatigable efforts by Edward Zigler, David Weikart, Siegfried Engelmann, and others were required to keep Head Start, the Perry Preschool, and the direct instruction model alive. Martin Deutsch was less fortunate, though not for want of trying.⁹³

Even before Head Start, some sociologists, educators, and psychologists were dubious. Worried about possible unintended side effects, some warned that preschool intervention might exacerbate other problems and by itself could never be enough. At a National Association for Young Children conference in 1964, sociologist Richard Kerckhoff warned of the danger that preschool programs supported only by “poverty” funds might create a segregated, “dichotomized system of early childhood education in America.”⁹⁴ At the White House Conference on Children in 1965, University of Chicago education professor Jacob Getzels, who studied malleability of IQ, said that with a growing number of studies showing that preschool effects did not last, the “most useful conclusion” would be that “‘one-shot’ compensatory programs would seem to be a waste of time and money.” How could a “program of compensatory education for the disadvantaged even at its best be salutary,” Getzels asked, “in any ultimate way without altering the disadvantaged environment giving rise to the disadvantaged child?”⁹⁵ Reflecting on the history of preschool intervention, developmental psychologist J. McVicker Hunt said that some psychologists at the time were concerned that “overselling early childhood

education with unrealistic expectations might lead in turn to an overkill of federal support for such an enterprise.”⁹⁶

Such lack of faith was not always well received. When Martin Deutsch, who worried that Head Start was underfunded, said publicly that a “miracle cure” was not possible and expressed doubts about teachers with brief training achieving Head Start’s literacy goals in a short summer program, he was asked to resign from the national Head Start advisory commission.⁹⁷ All along, Deutsch had said that preschool intervention needed to be followed by continued special help in schools through at least third grade, as the Institute for Developmental Studies did.

The role of changing ideology had a huge impact. Baratz and Baratz’s critique of preschool intervention as the “social science base of institutional racism” exemplified the new political tone of the early 1970s. Baratz and Baratz were not the first to express concern about cultural arguments replacing heredity. In a discussion of the “cult of cultural deprivation” in his 1965 book *Dark Ghetto*, Kenneth Clark noted that environmentalism had replaced earlier explanations of “inherent racial inferiority.” The “cultural deprivation approach” was “seductive,” Clark said, in need of “intensive scrutiny,” and might be a “jargon tautology.”⁹⁸ With the black power and black pride movements to which Brazziel referred, new research on cultural differences, and other societal shifts, preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers were caught in a rapid transition. Although there is merit to criticisms of the work of the Deutsches, Hess and Shipman, and others whose discourse was filled with talk of cultural deprivation, inadequate stimulation, and negative descriptions of African American childrearing styles, they were on record using concepts and language that were no longer acceptable.

In parallel, language, both researchers’ discourse about deficits and what they argued was the deficient, impoverished language of impoverished black mothers and children, was a central theme in preschool intervention and reactions to it. Looking for causes of the deficits that supposedly hindered poor children’s performance in school, preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers focused on children’s home experiences. Comparing childrearing practices of mothers from different socioeconomic and racial groups led preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers to home in on language acquisition, the variable that seemed most salient. Studying language acquisition led to questions about mothers’ and children’s vocabularies and to nonstandard English, about which Bereiter and Engelmann made especially pejorative comments. This chain of connections, from preschools to homes to mothers to language acquisition to black English, generated much of the pushback against preschool intervention in the early 1970s.

Support for compensatory education as a concept declined, but concern about the problems of poor children, particularly poor black children in cities, did not go away. In the 1980s, the term “underclass” came into use and was critiqued. In 1987, sociologist William Julius Wilson’s influential book *The Truly Disadvantaged* laid a new groundwork for understanding urban problems.⁹⁹ In 1988, social policy scholar Lisbeth

Schorr's book *Within Our Reach* revived ideas about compensatory social programs, including the Deutsches' Institute for Developmental Studies, and how preschool education could help break the "cycle of disadvantage."¹⁰⁰ In 2005, sociologist John Ogbu stirred controversy with his study of what he saw as problems in how black families, including upper-income families, educated their children. In his 2007 book *Toward Excellence with Equity*, political scientist Ronald Ferguson addressed troubling issues in black youth culture.¹⁰¹

Some recent developmental psychology research also deals with race, class, mothering styles, and language variables in terminology reminiscent of the 1960s. In a 2003 article, "The Black-White Test Score Gap in Young Children," psychologists Jeanne Brooks-Gunn et al. found that in addition to poverty, controlling for differences in home conditions, "maternal characteristics," including mothers' education level and verbal ability, and home environment variables related to "provision of learning stimulation" and "maternal warmth" reduced test score gaps between black and white three-year-olds. Warning about tests heavily weighted with language items, as Allison Davis and Brazziel had, Brooks-Gunn et al. say that some studies show that the race of testers matters, especially for black children.¹⁰² In a 2011 article on preschool-age siblings of incarcerated youth from "ethnically-diverse families from underserved communities," Laurie Miller Brotman et al. describe "preventive intervention trials" that reduced "coercive exchanges" and "harsh parenting" and increased "responsive parenting, and home-based parent involvement in education," in terms that Hess and Shipman might recognize.¹⁰³

Poor children's language acquisition is back as an issue as well. In their much-cited 1995 work, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*, Betty Hart and Todd Risley describe a yawning vocabulary gap between children of affluent parents and children living in poverty. Some researchers never stopped looking at mother-child interactions in language acquisition, as the work of psychologist Catherine Snow on the importance of family variables in early literacy documents.¹⁰⁴

Stereotypes about the effects of poverty on children are back too. Ruby Payne's much-criticized 1996 guide for teachers, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, features a chapter highlighting language problems. Her many other products promote simplistic class- and racially biased definitions of poor children and families described in ways reminiscent of deficit models in the 1960s.¹⁰⁵

What about possible effects of research on the disadvantaged child on teachers? Some preschool intervention and developmental psychology researchers in the 1960s worried that research on deprivation factors in the home and family might lower teacher expectations. Mamie Clark said that terms such as "underprivileged" and "deprived" created stereotypes that might function as rationales for low teacher expectations and construct "an acceptable block against helping" poor children. In a possible reference to Deutsch, she noted that statements about "culture shock at entrance into school" could limit teachers' effectiveness.¹⁰⁶ Deutsch, too, worried that teachers underestimated poor children's ability to learn. "It is all the environment, impoverishment, economic

insecurity, segregation, second-class citizenship, historical chains,” he said he heard teachers say, views that negated children’s “actual and potential strengths” and created “an elaborate rationale for the further alienation of teachers from their primary function, teaching.” It is “up to the school to develop compensatory strategies,” Deutsch stated; the “disadvantaged child is still further disadvantaged when the school, as the primary socializing agent, refuses to accept its own failure when any such child fails.”¹⁰⁷

In 1971, psychologist Reginald Jones, editor of the anthology *Black Psychology*, in which Brazziel had a chapter, implicated teacher education as part of the problem. At a U.S. Office of Education conference, Jones reported that teachers who took courses on “urban education and on the ‘deprived’ child had lower estimates of the children’s capabilities,” a somber warning for teacher educators and urban education researchers today.¹⁰⁸

The swings from optimism to condemnation of compensatory education have made it difficult to strike a balance among the many factors that make it hard for some children to succeed in school. In his 2010 book *The Hidden History of Head Start*, former Head Start director Edward Zigler writes about the “backlash . . . that rejected the existence of deficits within the culture of poverty or racial group.” It was hard, Zigler says, for the national Head Start planning committee to find “a middle ground between the negative deficit model and the optimistic, romantic view that poor people were so strong that they didn’t need any help.”¹⁰⁹

Reexamining preschool intervention and developmental psychology research and critiques in the 1960s and early 1970s may help us think more carefully about not searching for one set of answers for one “type” of child. Reexamining debates about the effects of poverty on young children and the effectiveness of different forms of intervention may help us talk more clearly about out-of-school factors that affect many poor children’s performance in school, but also remind us that these factors should not serve as rationales for low achievement. Preschool intervention and developmental psychology research played important if problematic roles in the ideological shift in the 1960s and early 1970s from changing children and families to changing schools, but children and families continue to need help.¹¹⁰ We are still seeking middle ground, between dismissing educational “disadvantages” and overstating them.

Notes

1. Martin Deutsch, “Nursery Education: The Influence of Social Programming on Early Development,” reprinted from *The Journal of Nursery Education* (National Association for the Education of Young Children) 18, no. 3 (April 1963), based on a talk at the National Association for Nursery Education, Philadelphia, October 27, 1962, in Martin Deutsch, *The Disadvantaged Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 78–79. I want to thank members of the Boston Area History of Education Study Group, including Christina Collins, Lauri Johnson, Adam Nelson, Julie Reuben, and Geoff Tegnell. I am grateful to Elizabeth Rose, Ruby Takanishi, John Spencer, Carlos Kevin Blanton, John Rury, and Sylvia M. Martinez for their helpful comments. I also want to thank Katie Erlich, Julianna Monjeau, and others in the New York University Archives.

2. On deficit discourse, see among others, Richard R. Valencia, ed., *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice* (London: Falmer Press, 1997) and *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
3. Fred Powledge, *To Change a Child: A Report on the Institute for Developmental Studies* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 1. For discussion of the black–white binary that excluded Latino and other children of color, see, among others, Carlos Kevin Blanton, “A Legacy of Neglect: George I. Sánchez, Mexican American Education, and the Ideal of Integration, 1940–1970,” in “Rethinking Compensatory Education: Historical Perspectives on Race, Class, Culture, Language, and the Discourse of the ‘Disadvantaged Child,’” ed. Barbara Beatty, special issue, *Teachers College Record* 114, no. 6.
4. According to Jacqueline M. Royce, Richard B. Darlington, and Harry W. Murray, all three of these programs met criteria for experimental preschool studies with at least 100 subjects, of which 16 were completed by 1969. See Royce, Darlington, and Murray, “Pooled Analyses: Findings Across Studies,” in *As the Twig Is Bent: Lasting Effects of Preschool Programs*, ed. Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1983), 411–12.
5. Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez* (New York: Random House, 1961); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962); Lee Rainwater, *And the Poor Get Children* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1960); Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963); Thomas F. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the Negro American* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1963); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, Washington, DC, 1965; Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, eds., *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967). For history of this research, see, among others, Michael Katz, ed., *The Underclass Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), and James T. Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
6. On infant schools, kindergartens, Hall, Montessori, and child study, see, among others, Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); V. Celia Lascarides and Blythe F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000); and Gerald Lee Gutek, ed., *The Montessori Method* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004). On the growth of the child sciences, see, among others, Hamilton Cravens, *Before Head Start: The Iowa Center and America’s Children* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Judith Sealander, *The Failed Century of the Child: Governing America’s Young in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice about Children* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Alice Boardman Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children, 1893–1935* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); and Barbara Beatty, Emily D. Cahan, and Julia Grant, eds.,

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