

Preschool Child-Initiated Learning Found to Help Prevent Later Problems

Young people born in poverty experience fewer emotional problems and felony arrests if they attended a preschool program that focused on child-initiated learning activities rather than scripted academic instruction. These are the key findings of a new High/Scope monograph *Lasting Differences: The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study Through Age 23* by Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart.

The High/Scope Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study assesses which of three theoretically distinct preschool curriculum models works best. Conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation since 1967, the study has followed the lives of 68 young people born in poverty who were randomly assigned at ages 3 and 4 to one of three groups, each experiencing a different curriculum model:

- In the **Direct Instruction** model, teachers followed a script to directly teach children academic skills, rewarding them for correct answers to the teacher's questions.
- In the **High/Scope** model, teachers set up the classroom and the daily routine so children could plan, do, and review their own activities and engage in key active learning experiences.
- In the traditional **Nursery School** model, teachers responded to children's self-initiated play in a loosely structured, socially supportive setting.

Program staff implemented the curriculum models independently and to high standards, in 2½-hour classes held 5 days a week and 1½-hour home visits every two weeks, when children were 3 and 4 years old. Except for the curriculum model, all aspects of the program were nearly identical. The findings presented here are corrected for differences in the gender makeup of the groups.

By age 23, the High/Scope and Nursery School groups had ten significant advantages over the Direct Instruction group – both groups had two advantages, the High/Scope group alone had another six

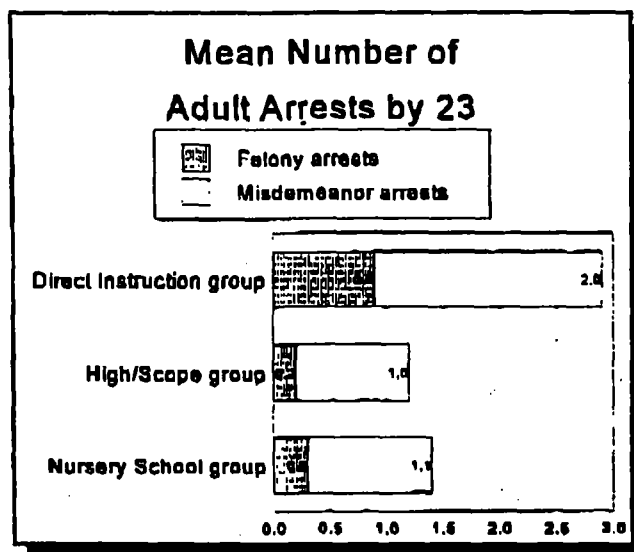
advantages, and the Nursery School group alone had two additional advantages. However, the High/Scope and Nursery School groups, after controlling for gender makeup, did not differ significantly from each other on any outcome variable (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

By age 23, the High/Scope and Nursery School groups both had two significant advantages over the Direct Instruction group:

- Only 6% of either group needed treatment for emotional impairment or disturbance during their schooling, as compared to 47% of the Direct Instruction group.
- 43% of the High/Scope group and 44% of the Nursery School group had ever done volunteer work, as compared to 11% of the Direct Instruction group.

The High/Scope group had six additional significant advantages over the Direct Instruction group:

- Only 10% had ever been arrested for a felony, as compared to 39% of the Direct Instruction group.
- None had ever been arrested for a property crime, as compared to 38% of the Direct Instruction group.
- 23% reported at age 15 that they had engaged in 10 or more acts of misconduct, as compared to 56% of the Direct Instruction group.
- 36% said that various kinds of people gave them a hard time, as compared to 69% of the Direct Instruction group.



High/Scope Educational Research Foundation 600 North River Street Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198-2398 (313) 485-2000

HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM FOUND TO IMPROVE ADULT STATUS

Adults born in poverty who attended a high-quality, active learning preschool program at ages 3 and 4 have half as many criminal arrests, higher earnings and property wealth, and greater commitment to marriage, according to the latest findings of the High/Scope Perry Preschool study. Over participants' lifetimes, the public is receiving an estimated \$7.16 for every dollar invested.

Conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation of Ypsilanti, Michigan, the study examined the lives of 123 African Americans born in poverty and at high risk of failing in school. At ages 3 and 4, these individuals were randomly divided into a program group who received a high-quality, active learning preschool program and a no-program group who received no preschool program. At age 27, 95% of the original study participants were interviewed, with additional data gathered from their school, social services, and arrest records. Post-preschool program differences between the groups represent preschool program effects. Findings reported herein were statistically significant (with a two-tailed probability of less than .05). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Ford Foundation funded the age 27 phase of the study.

Social responsibility By age 27, only one-fifth as many program group members as no-program group members were arrested 5 or more times (7% vs. 35%), and only one-third as many were ever arrested for drug dealing (7% vs. 25%).

Earnings and economic status At age 27, four times as many program group members as no-program group members earned \$2,000 or more per month (29% vs. 7%). Almost three times as many program group members as no-program group members owned their own homes (36% vs. 13%); and over twice as many owned second cars (30% vs. 13%). Three-fourths as many program group members as no-program group members received welfare assistance or other social services at some time as adults (59% vs. 80%).

Educational performance One-third again as many program group members as no-program group members graduated from regular or adult high school or received

General Education Development certification (71% vs. 54%). Earlier in the study, the program group had significantly higher average achievement scores at age 14 and literacy scores at age 19 than the no-program group.

Commitment to marriage Although the same percentages of program males and no-program males were married (26%), the

