

# *Observation*

## *Educational Home Visiting and the Growth of Competence and Confidence in Adults and Children*

JOHN RAVEN

*Scottish Council for Research in Education*

The purpose of this article is to summarize some of the main results obtained in an evaluation of an Educational Home Visiting Scheme. These have been reported in more detail in Raven (1980), but it is hoped that this article will be of interest to a wider audience.

### *The Visiting*

In the Lothian Region Educational Home Visiting Scheme (Lothian Region is the area around Scotland's Capital, Edinburgh, on the east coast of Scotland), Educational Home Visitors (EHVs) visit the homes of two- to three-year-old children for one hour a week for an extended period, averaging about nine months, with a view to "emphasizing the mothers' unique and irreplaceable role promoting the educational development of their children." The visitors start by working with the child, trying to encourage him or her in activities which are likely to promote cognitive development. Their aim is, however, to encourage the mothers to participate in such activities and, subsequently, to encourage the mothers to become involved in activities which are likely to promote their own growth and development in the expectation that this will, in turn, communicate itself to their children.

The Home Visitors, who are all trained and experienced nursery and primary school teachers, are attached to local nursery schools or primary schools which have nursery classes. For the duration of the study reported here, there were six Home Visitors at work at any one time, but this number has now been increased to fifteen. All the schools are in "socially deprived" areas of the Region. The normal workload of a Home Visitor is ten to twelve families.

Families are selected for Visiting if they "seem likely to benefit from it." This criterion is obviously open to a wide variety of interpretations, but in all

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cases it has meant that families with serious personal or interpersonal problems do not become involved in the scheme, while some families who are already competent and outgoing do so. However, most of the families who are visited are recommended by social workers or by the schools. Schools tend to recommend families for visiting if it becomes apparent that there are younger brothers and sisters in the families of children who are already presenting problems at school.

There is considerable variation between the visitors in the sorts of activities they undertake. This was intentional. It was felt that the visitors should be encouraged to make their own judgments, as professional educators, about how they should go about their work so that they could tailor their activities to the needs of particular families, schools, and communities. It was also felt that, in a new venture such as this, it was appropriate to leave the Home Visitors free to select from the very contradictory research and intervention literature the particular models which they themselves found most congenial. Moreover, since it was recognized that one of the main outcomes of the study would be that the Home Visitors would learn more about the nature of the problem they were trying to tackle as they went along, they needed scope to modify their activities as seemed appropriate.

Despite the apparent openness of their task, however, they were not left to do whatever they wished. The Home Visitors had all attended a short induction course in which it was emphasized that the main focus of the project was on cognitive development and on the use of language to extend the imagination of the child. The work of Levenstein (1972) and Kellaghan and Archer (1975) was particularly stressed. All the Home Visitors were expected to begin by spending a considerable amount of time with the children in activities which made use of such things as blocks, sand, jigsaws, pictures, and books. Even so, the Home Visitors varied considerably from one to another in the way they used such things. This variance between them was particularly marked when it came to the interpretation they placed on the phrase "using language to extend the imagination of the child." Some of the EHV's seem to have adopted the viewpoint, widely associated with the names of Bereiter and Engleman (1966), that it is important to teach children the names of colors, relationships, and things in order that the children may have these tools available to them in their thinking. Others seem to have adopted the viewpoint, much more often associated with the names of Spearman (1927) and MacNamara (1972) that it is more important to promote the development of the child's ability to perceive and think clearly. Once this has been done, it is claimed, the child will rapidly acquire the names of things and relationships. The Home Visitors diverge most sharply from each other in the extent to which they feel that helping the mothers to utilize cognitive processes and develop the competencies and confidence needed to deal with their own problems will help promote the development of their children. Some argue that once they have helped the mothers to develop these qualities, the mother will portray cognitive processes in action, and competent behavior in general, for their children to copy. Further information on the variance between the EHV's will be found in McCail (1981).

### *The Evaluation*

It will readily be appreciated that the evaluation of a scheme such as that just described poses a number of problems. Its effects will vary markedly from visitor to visitor depending on the strategies she adopts. The effects will vary over time as the EHVs develop a better understanding of the problems they are dealing with, and change their behavior. Furthermore, a simple study of the overall effects of the program will not be very revealing—because one will not know what has produced the effects.

It is worth enumerating some of the problems posed for evaluation in more detail.

The first is that currently we are unable to *measure* what may well be the most important outcomes of a program of this sort with the research instruments which we have available to us. Had we embarked on a "hard-nosed" evaluation we would therefore have been unable to assess the effects of the program on such things as the children's confidence, initiative, or adventurousness, or on the quality of their family life. We would have been unable to find out whether the mothers had become more outgoing and confident.

It may be thought that this is not a serious problem: Why didn't we simply concentrate on measuring the outcomes which could be measured, such as IQ? Unfortunately, although this may be appropriate in a pure research study, it would be entirely inappropriate in an evaluation exercise. It would mean that not only would the evaluation be very lopsided and misleading—because the *most important* outcomes of the program would not be documented—but also that, as has so often happened in the past, all subsequent policy discussion would revolve around the outcomes which had been assessed, rather than those which were, in fact, the most important.

The second major problem has already been mentioned: The effects of visiting will vary with the strategies the Home Visitors adopt and the type of families they visit. While it would, in principle, be possible to solve this problem by adopting a multivariate design, the number of Home Visitors and parents involved in the Lothian scheme was too small, and it would not have been reasonable to demand increased numbers since the *raison d'être* of a pilot scheme is precisely to monitor the effectiveness of the scheme *before* it is generalized to a large sample.

A third major problem is that it is important to know what the effects of the scheme will be on the children's *later* educational and social development, yet these effects will not become apparent for many years. In the meantime, decisions will have to be made about whether to close down, extend, or modify the scheme. Without in any way wishing to minimize the importance of longitudinal studies, it is necessary to find some way around this problem in the short term.

The fourth problem is the importance of assessing the impact of the scheme on the larger communities from which the families were drawn, on the schools in which the Home Visitors worked and the pupils studied, and on the thinking of those who run the educational system.

Finally, as Donnison (1972) has observed, if one does mount a statistical study, there seems to be almost a taboo on incorporating into one's report any

of the insights which one has built up, in parallel to one's data-gathering exercise, as the study went along. Yet a better understanding of the *meaning* of growth and development, the processes by which it is to be brought about, and the strategies to be used to influence those processes may in fact represent the most important outcome of a study such as this.

Confronted with these problems, it was decided that our objective must be to mount an "illuminative" evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972; Hamilton, 1977). We would study the operation of the project in such a way as to develop a better understanding of the processes involved. From this understanding we would be able to discern what the likely effects of the program would be. We would be able to discuss both its short-term and long-term effects. We would be able to discuss its probable effects on the families, schools, and communities concerned as well as on the children directly involved. And we would be able to use our improved understanding of the processes involved to improve the project itself and to contribute to general, formal understanding of the process of growth and development.

### *Statistical Study*

Although the study was primarily "illuminative," it rapidly became apparent that there were a number of questions which could be answered relatively easily by collecting statistical data. Furthermore, data was needed on the extent of the problem the EHV's were trying to tackle in the communities in which they were working. Above all, a review of the literature suggested that there was very little information on parents' own priorities in child rearing.

For these reasons, funds were sought, and eventually obtained, to mount what was, initially, a separate study to *develop* interview schedules which would be appropriate to evaluating the Lothian scheme and to collect *background* information. A sample of 200 parents drawn from the areas in which visiting was taking place, and 80 parents from contrasting high socioeconomic status areas of the city were interviewed. Only when the adequacy and relevance of the data so collected to the evaluation of the Lothian scheme had been firmly established was the study extended to include 41 mothers who had had home visits.

It is important to note that we had neither a before/after design, nor a design in which our home-visited mothers were matched with a control group. Neither of these was feasible. Any attempt at interviewing families prior to visiting would have jeopardized the fragile relationships which had been established between the Home Visitors and the parents, particularly because many of our questions (for example, on the discipline strategies adopted by the parents) would have been thought intrusive and irrelevant at that point in time. A control group design was also impossible because some of the Home Visitors visited all the families whose names were drawn to their attention.

We have, however, every reason to suppose that the differences we will report between the responses of the home-visited mothers and those of the

mothers in the low socioeconomic status (LSES) benchmark sample do represent true effects of visiting. The demographic and "quality of life" data we collected, taken together with what we know about the processes through which the home-visited families were selected, show that this group was, in many ways, "worse" off than the general sample of LSES mothers drawn from the catchment areas of the same schools. That this group *was* in many ways similar to the home-visited mothers before they were visited is borne out by the fact that the home-visited mothers' answers to questions which one would not have expected to be affected by the visiting were consistently similar to those given by the mothers in the LSES benchmark sample. In contrast, time after time, in response to questions which dealt with topics directly related to the visiting, we found that the proportion of home-visited mothers who answered in a particular way fell between that obtained from the LSES benchmark group and the high socioeconomic status group.

### *The Probable Effects of the Program: Some Conclusions from the Study of Processes*

Some of the conclusions drawn from our study of the processes involved in the scheme may now be summarized. These conclusions are based on the understanding of the operation of the scheme which we built up by attending the EHV's weekly meetings, by accompanying the EHV's on some of their visits, by listening to tape recordings which the EHV's made of their visits, by interviewing some of the mothers who were being or had been visited, by attending mothers' meetings, and by interviewing members of the staff of the schools in which the Home Visitors were based as well as other individuals concerned with the educational and social services of the Region.

### *IQ*

We are virtually certain that had we measured the children's IQs, these would have increased because many of the activities which the Home Visitors led the children to practice were virtually identical to those measured in IQ tests. We also suspect that these effects will "wash out" because we know of no evidence that the reasoning abilities which are measured by IQ tests at later ages are, in any way, built on these earlier abilities. Furthermore, although, following Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1975) recommendations, the mothers were directly involved in the program, the EHV's did not suggest activities which they might undertake with their children when they were considerably older, for example, when they were nine years old, in order to continue to promote their children's cognitive development.

Despite this overall statement, we suspect that those Home Visitors who have led the mothers to be more responsive to their children and create developmental environments which call on the child's competence and confidence will have initiated a continuing process through which parents will come to expect, and reinforce, logical reasoning on the part of the child.

This may well result in improved performance on IQ tests in later years. We feel, however, that the Home Visitors who have been able to do this are in such a small minority that this effect would not show up in any overall statistical evaluation.

### *School Attainments*

Whatever doubts there may be about the effects of the program on IQ, we are virtually certain that the Home Visitors, by exposing the children to a "teacherish" style of interaction, will lead to the likelihood that the children would accept and adjust to schools. The children will, in particular, be more used to the sort of "tutorial" questions which teachers ask to test children and to find out if they know something which they, the teachers, already know. One consequence of this better adjustment to school will be that the children will be less likely to be assigned to remedial classes and will, therefore, in general, tend to get higher scores on attainment tests because they have been in a classroom in which they have been taught that which is being assessed.

### *Family Relationships*

From our discussions with and visits to parents there is no doubt that family relationships improve. The mothers learn how to amuse and entertain their children and keep them out of mischief. The long-term effects of this apparently trivial benefit should not be underestimated. The mothers become less constricting in their behavior and, as a result, appear to discover how competent their children are. They are consequently more likely to treat their children with respect and allow them to use their abilities. This in turn appears to make further abilities known to the parents, and this would appear to provide the parents with an opportunity to rely on, and reinforce, those abilities. Under these circumstances the parents would seem to be more likely to respond to their children, and, in particular, to take their complaints and needs seriously. They will, therefore, be more likely to reason with them and, when the child finds his reasoning works (in the sense of getting the parents to change their behavior), he will be more likely to develop the *habit* of reasoning. When the child complains about one thing or another the parents will be more likely to take his complaints seriously and try to do something about them. This may be of particular importance if the child complains about school. The parents may *know* that it is not necessary for the child to be unhappy and may therefore intervene with the school to get things put right.

### *Parental Role in Formal Education*

In our interviews it was apparent that the parents had learned that teachers were approachable and that they were more caring and competent than they

had previously thought. It would seem to follow that the parents will be more likely to intervene with the school on their children's behalf. This in turn should help to promote the child's success at school and help to improve school environments.

### *Family Mental Health*

As a result of the community and other out-of-the-home activities initiated by the Home Visitors for parents, the parents make more contact with other parents. They therefore become less lonely and depressed and better able to call for help in time of need. Apparently as a result, it seems that they are able to interact more lightly with their own children. The family atmosphere improves and the parents appear to be able to devote more time more sensitively to their children.

### *Parental Models of Competence*

Those Home Visitors who have led the parents to be better able to tackle their own problems seem to have led the parents concerned to model cognitive processes in action for their children. Their children will see their parents doing such things as making plans, anticipating obstacles to the achievement of their goals, and bringing to bear relevant past experiences. The parents will also have given their children insight into their values and the steps which have to be taken to achieve valued goals. The children will have learned that it is necessary to put up with frustrations in order to achieve such goals, but that such frustrating and difficult experiences are rewarded in the end.

### *Development of the Home Visitors*

One of the most noticeable effects of the program is that the Home Visitors concerned have come to see "language development" as something very different from "growth of vocabulary." They become aware of the social context of language and its relationship to discipline strategies and the cognitive processes which have been mentioned in the last paragraph. They have also come to think of education as having much more to do with facilitating the growth of competence, rather than simply with transmitting prescribed knowledge and low-level skills.

### *The Schools Concerned*

The schools in which the Home Visitors work have come to see the locus of "the problem" differently. They have come to realize that the parents they are dealing with are not simply ignorant, incapable, and disinterested in their

children and their children's education. Rather they are families who are plagued by a wide variety of problems and who manage to survive under difficult circumstances by adopting strategies which are in some ways more effective than any patterns of behavior which they themselves could bring to bear.

Partly as a result of what the Home Visitors themselves have said, and partly as a result of the evaluation, the schools have in many ways come to see their goals rather differently. They, like the Home Visitors, have come to see education as more concerned with the growth of competence. This is to be achieved by responding to the child in a sensitive manner and creating growth-enhancing environments rather than by teaching him and testing him.

### *Undesirable Effects*

Despite the large number of beneficial effects just discussed, the program appears to have a number of effects that are less desirable.

Insofar as the parents engage in more direct teaching of their children—and many of them do—they may in fact depress the growth of the child's competence. As Stallings and Kaskowitz (1974) have shown, undue stress on reading and arithmetic tends to *depress* children's ability to perceive and think clearly.

Second, insofar as parent and child come to value "intellectual" activity more highly, the resulting improvement in school grades may help the child to move out of the environment in which he lives. But this probably rather marginal (Hope, 1977) social mobility may be bought at the expense of failing to develop abilities and values which may be of more value to the child in the environment in which he lives, and to the child, and the parent he will become, in his future life. A particular example of this might be that because of his increased respect for teachers, and his greater unwillingness to reality-test what his teachers tell him, the child may rely more on books and teachers than on his own observations and judgments, and this may considerably diminish his ability to act and cope independently.

Third, having been exposed to a model of professional competence, at least some of the parents come to feel that teachers are better at doing the right thing with their children than they are. Thus, far from having encouraged the mothers to play their unique and irreplaceable part in promoting the educational development of their children, at least some of the Home Visitors have led the parents to feel less able to perform that role and more willing to hand it over to schools and teachers! They may have led them to abdicate their parental role.

Fourth, if parents discover that doing the things they have been taught does not lead their children to be effortlessly successful in the school system, they may come to distrust teachers and social scientists even more than they did previously.

Fifth, from a societal point of view, one may wonder whether, given that no change in our social *structure* has been introduced, the increased empha-



sis on intellectual and academic ability among *these* children, and their resulting somewhat improved ability to avoid some of the most degrading and demeaning occupational and social positions in our society, will not simply lead to *other* children moving into these positions. One's unease on this count may be exacerbated by the reflection that this marginal success may have been bought by destroying a value for collectivist activity and its replacement by a philosophy of individualistic competition and the tendency to blame the poor, and not the social structure, for their problems.

### The Statistical Study

Figure 1 shows that while the vast majority of HSES parents think it is very possible to influence the sort of person their child will grow up to be, only 20% of the LSES group do so. Figure 2 shows that this difference is most

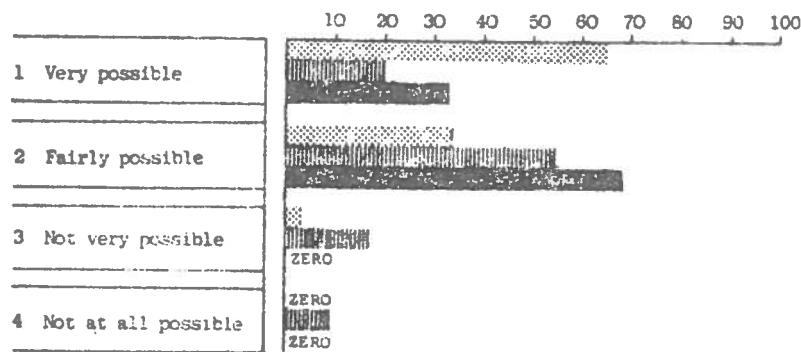


FIGURE 1/How possible do you think it is to influence the sort of person your child will grow up to be?

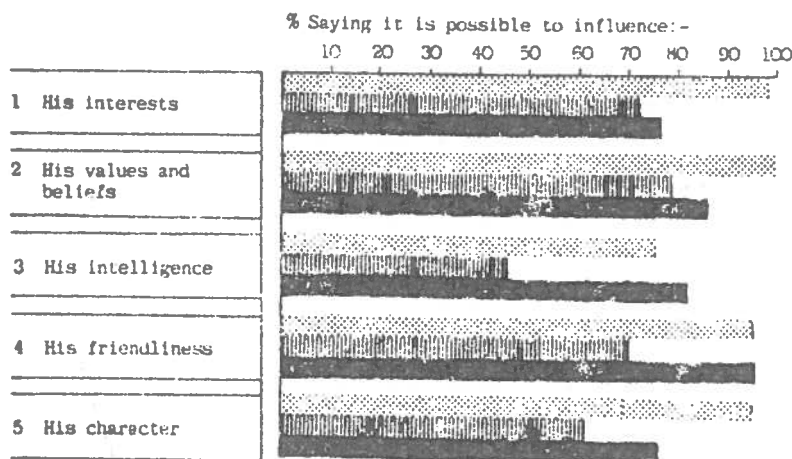


FIGURE 2/Percent saying it is possible to influence certain characteristics.

KEY  
 HSES  
 LSES  
 EHV

marked in relation to intelligence and character, but that it also affects all other characteristics. Both charts also show that the Home Visitors have been able to have a major impact on these beliefs, particularly in relation to intelligence.

The data raise serious questions about who is right, and, in particular, what is to be done to rescue those parents whose new found faith turns out to be unfounded if the LSES parents are, indeed, correct in their view that it is not possible to have a substantial impact on such qualities. In fact, LSES parents are much more exposed than are HSES to evidence that such qualities are heritable. The most convincing evidence for the heritability of such qualities is not that able parents tend to have able children, or that dull children sometimes occur in the families of bright parents, but that bright children sometimes occur in families which have, for many generations, shown no evidence of ability to produce "bright" children. Such evidence that highly able children sometimes come from totally unpromising backgrounds is the most convincing evidence of the heritability of such qualities, and it is the LSES parents, not the HSES parents, who are most exposed to it. Such evidence must suggest to those parents who are exposed to it that children *are* born the way they are.

### *Value for Intellectual Activity and the Perceived Importance of Language*

Altogether, we asked the parents to rate the importance they attached to 67 possible goals in childrearing, but this list was divided up so that no parent would be confronted with too long a list at any one time.

What is most striking is the preoccupation of the HSES group with intellectual activities which are likely to be supportive of success in schools and in HSES jobs. The LSES group rates far fewer things "very important." Only 3 of their top 13 priorities have to do with intellectual activity, and their top priorities have to do with their children having respect for and needing them. Their main concern seems to be with deference, obedience, and dependence.

The EHV's have had a marked effect in consciousness raising, leading the parents they visited to rate many more things "very important." While they have introduced much more emphasis on intellectual activities they have not weakened the LSES stress on dependence.

Our data support the notion that not only do HSES parents think it is much more important to involve their children in intellectual activities, they also seek to foster the child's cognitive growth *indirectly* by emphasizing such qualities as independence, self-confidence, and willingness to use books to find the information he wants. Particular attention should be drawn to this last point. For LSES parents, there was sometimes active opposition to the child using books for his own purposes. As one parent said, "I wouldn't want that; you never know what he might come across poking about in books." The fear of original sin (curiosity) could not be more apparent, and

the fact that it represents a generalized fear of the consequences of curiosity emerges from the LSES parents' responses to many other items.

The above examples are only a few indications among many that indicate that a concern with language and intellectual activities—on which many psychologists have tended to focus in the past—represents only part of a much wider constellation of interrelated attitudes and behaviors which involve such things as discipline strategies, notions of "respect," and an emphasis on fostering independence, initiative, adventurousness, and an inquiring mind.

The implications of this with respect to the EHV intervention are that it is likely to be difficult to change parents' attitudes and behavior in the "intellectual" area on its own. Some parents will be unlikely to change if they feel that this will make it more difficult for them to "discipline" their children or to lessen the "respect" children show for them. To bring about change in their behavior it will be necessary, as the EHV's found, to seek to influence their attitudes and behaviors in all the other areas as well (an intervention which appears to be much less acceptable in our society). Conversely, as the EHV's also found, if one is successful in, for example, encouraging children to ask questions, the child is likely to demand different patterns of discipline from his parents and this may in turn upset the parents.

Attention may also be drawn to the difficulty which researchers (who, by definition, belong to the HSES group) have in finding items which LSES informants will rate "very important." The significance of the observation is this: If, as the author has maintained elsewhere (Raven, 1977), people will only behave in a competent manner, e.g., use language to bring to bear relevant past experiences, anticipate obstacles to achieving their goals, and strive to think of ways around them, and so on, in relation to goals they value, then it is quite inappropriate to seek to find out whether people are able to engage in these complex and demanding activities in relation to goals they do not value.

Our data strongly suggest that had we studied their ability and willingness to talk about their goals, make explicit ways of achieving them, reflect on the causes of previous successes and failures, and their ability to express themselves coherently, in relation to such goals as ensuring that their children were dependent on them, had "respect" for them, were strong and tough, and were able to stick up for themselves, we would indeed have found that they were as capable of expressing themselves, and as capable of behaving in ways which indicated an understanding of competent behavior which was every bit as complete as the HSES parents were able to be in relation to intellectual goals.

### *Change in Stress on Intellectual Activity, but No Change in Stress on Autonomous Learning and Language Learning*

The absence of much change in emphasis on the qualities needed to make one's own observations and learn without instruction, including independ-

ence, adventurousness, and the ability to find one's own information, is a striking aspect of our data. Without a spontaneous tendency to make one's own observations and learn without instruction, one may fail to develop the basic abilities which are required to discern and acquire language competence.

More than that, if one is not treated with respect, as an individual who is entitled to one's own views and opinions, one is not likely to come to think of oneself as someone who is capable of having one's own views and opinions and one is unlikely to reason and to seek to persuade others of the quality of one's reasoning, because one will learn that such activities do not in fact move one toward one's goals.

There is one further aspect of our data which should be considered in passing. This is that no amount of Educational Home Visiting will get rid of the variance in parents' objectives in childrearing. It seems that many of the goals we have discussed are quite incompatible in school classrooms. One cannot, at the same time, encourage some children to question authority and others to be instantly obedient to it. One cannot encourage some children to be original and creative, and others to memorize whatever is put in front of them. Individualization of educational provision would make it possible to cater for this variance in values, but, as we will see, most parents are opposed to this.

Therefore, it would seem that one of the critical tasks to be undertaken by Educational Home Visitors may be to bring parents to understand, and accept, the types of educational provision which would make it possible to cater to this variance in priorities. Unless this can be done nobody's needs will be satisfied, least of all the desires of those parents who are most anxious that their children should develop independence, initiative, the ability to observe and learn without instruction, and sensitivity to those fleeting feelings on the fringe of consciousness which tell one that one has the germ of a creative idea. In other words, it may be of critical importance for the Home Visitors to make explicit and to share with parents information on the nature of the alternative goals which could be pursued by parents and teachers, and the ways in which those goals might be achieved.

In other words, the central role of language in home visiting might be to give parents the concepts they need to think about the nature of human talent, the ways in which it is to be fostered, and the institutions of their society.

### *Processes to Be Used to Facilitate Growth*

We have made a detailed study of the processes which parents thought appropriate to use to stimulate different types of growth. There is space here for only a couple of snippets. These are given in Figures 3 and 4. What is particularly noticeable is the tendency of the HSES parents to *respond* to the child. We have already seen how important it may be for parents to have great respect for their children and their competence if they are to create developmental environments and respond to their needs. The material presented in

Figure 4 suggests—and this suggestion is supported by many of our results—that LSES parents are most unlikely to respect the child's opinions. Instead they expect compliance and instant obedience. They also only rarely make use of teaching strategies based on example, at least in the cognitive/intellectual domain. For them, teaching means telling. In this context it is important to note that the home-visited mothers seem to have been particularly receptive to messages from the EHV's which, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforced this view. For the HSES parents, on the other hand, education means facilitating growth and development. This is to be done by example, by responding to the child, and by creating developmental environments in which the child can exercise and display his competence and discover which types of behavior bring the intrinsic rewards which are associated with effective goal achievement.

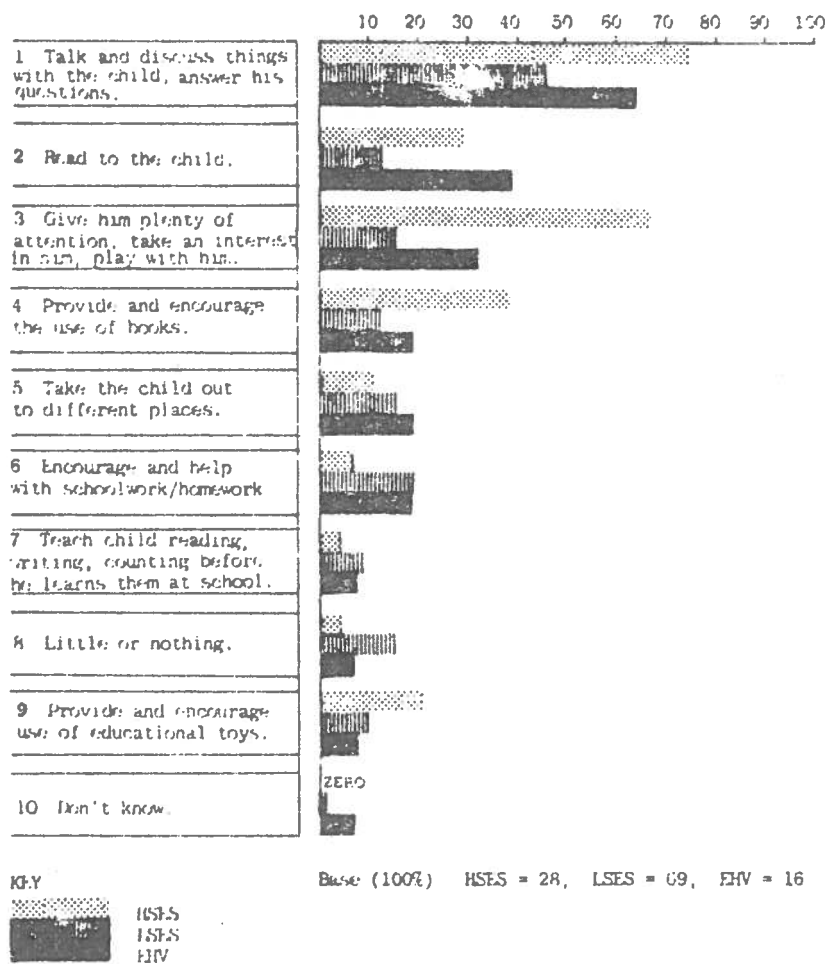


FIGURE 3/What a parent can do to foster intelligence.

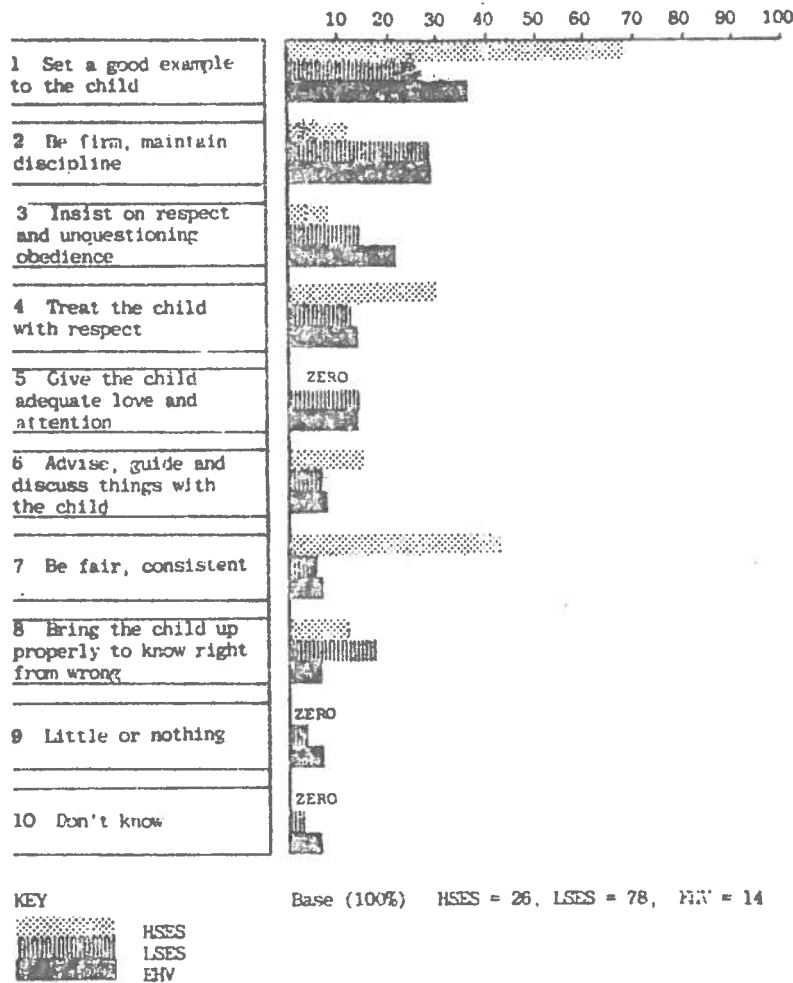


FIGURE 4/What a parent can do to encourage a child to develop respect for his parents.

### The Effects of the Home Visitors on Behavior

Additional comparisons show that the HSES and LSES parents spent their time in very different ways on the day prior to the interview, but that the EHVs have had virtually no influence on the parents' time allocation in the areas they tried hardest to affect, except that the home-visited parents now spend more time taking their children to nursery school!

One interpretation of this data, taken together with the previously documented changes in attitudes, is that it reveals adults in transition, adults whose attitudes have changed but whose behavior has not yet changed to come into line with their attitudes. However, other interpretations include the possibility that the behavior has not changed because the constraints on

the behavior have not changed. They also include the possibility that although the parents now believe it is more important to do various things with their children, they do not feel any more able to do these things and, as one mother said, now rely on the Home Visitors to do these things for them. A fourth possibility is that their more basic values, which we may well have failed to document but which we have illuminated with a few sidelights—may *not* have changed. It is certainly true that they are no less likely to want their children to be dependent on them and no less likely to want them to be able to stick up for themselves. If these basic values have not changed they may well override other changes in attitudes which are less central to the parents' value system.

But whatever the reasons for the lack of change in parental behavior, one is left with the worry that if they now think it is more important to do certain things with their children, but still do not do them, they may now feel *more* guilty than they did before (and they *already* felt guilty and inadequate) and more inadequate rather than more self-assured in their role. They may feel that they should behave differently, and the fact that they cannot, or for other reasons do not want to, change their behavior may have served to increase the stress in their lives instead of decreasing it.

### *The Wider Social Context*

One perspective on the causes of the differences between HSES and LSES parents' attitudes and behavior is that these differences are, at least in part, a product of the wider environments in which those concerned live and work. LSES parents live in less spacious housing in which many activities are going on at the same time, they are much less likely to have gardens in which their children can play safely, and they are more likely to have constant worries about near-do-well husbands, shortage of money, ill health, and crime and vandalism outside the home. These constraints may well force them to spend more time operating at a lower level in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy in order to obtain the basic necessities of life instead of moving on to more self-actualizing activity. This appears to be Bronfenbrenner's (1978) thesis: It seems to be asserted that if the environment were put right the parents would, relatively automatically, move on to "higher order" activities.

In the light of the author's earlier work (Raven, 1977) this thesis seems, at best, questionable, and almost certainly wrong. When he studied the educational priorities of upwardly and downwardly mobile secondary school children, he found that the variance in priorities was as closely related to the destinations the pupils saw themselves *bound for* as those they had come from. The differences in attitudes were *anticipatory* in the Kinsey (1948) sense. Thus, while confirming the "appropriateness" of the attitudes of the pupils to the status groups they would enter, the data showed that Kohn (1969) was *wrong* to claim that the well-known variance in attitudes is a product of life experience in particular occupational groups. It therefore suggests that it is unlikely that LSES parents would move "on" to engage in "intellectual" activity with their children if the environments were "put

right." However, another perspective, still from within the "ecological" camp, suggests that our class ethnocentrism plays a much more central role in our perceptions of "the problem" and its solution than has been recognized previously.

As we have already seen, we have the greatest difficulty developing interview schedules which will allow people with values which differ from our own to reveal them in a positive light. We have also seen that it probably only makes sense to seek to assess an individual's *ability* to engage in cognitive activity in relation to goals he values. If we ask a LSES parent to engage in "cognitive activity" in relation to goals which only *we* value, then he will be unable to do so and we will brand him as "incompetent." Thus, our most commonly accepted conception of "cognitive activity" (which is in reality only "cognitive activity in relation to school work") would appear to be highly class-biased.

If these thoughts have any value, a number of conclusions follow. First, putting parents' environments "right" will *not* lead them on to value the activities we value. But that is not to say that they cannot engage in cognitive processes in such a way that they can model them for their children in relation to goals which they themselves value. The implication for intervention programs would seem to be not that one should put people's environments "right" for them but that one should help parents to solve the problems they care about. They would then *both* create environments which were more in accord with their *own* priorities (and therefore both less stressful for themselves and more congenial environments for their children to grow up in) *and* model cognitive and competent behavior for their children to copy.

In an effort to collect some data which would illuminate these issues, we asked parents (a) to rate how important a number of aspects of their socio-physical environments were to them, (b) to indicate how *satisfied* they were with each of these aspects of their environment, and (c) to indicate what the consequences would be if they were to try to tackle one of the "problems" indicated by a large discrepancy between their "importance" and "satisfaction" ratings. Briefly, the results show that LSES and HSES parents *do* have different *priorities* from their environments, and that LSES parents are much more dissatisfied with those environments and feel much less confident in their ability to cope with them. They tend to have negative self-images as people who have no right to be listened to and whose views should not be taken seriously. (It is difficult to see how people who think that politicians, planners, doctors, and teachers should *not* listen to them can be expected to value developing the ability to express oneself clearly, let alone the ability to think about and understand the operation of their society.)

The Home Visitors have had a significant impact on the parents' priorities; they have led them to feel better *motivated* to tackle these priorities and they have led them to feel more self-confident. Nevertheless, they did not lead them to feel any more *able* to tackle their problems.

This is a somewhat ambiguous conclusion. Taking these results together with the results presented earlier on priorities in childrearing, it is clear that parents from different socioeconomic groups *do* have dramatically different



priorities from their environments and in their childrearing. These differences are so great that it is obvious that *no* progress can be anticipated in seeking to tackle the problems we are concerned with here unless one comes to terms with this variance in values. It is also clear that, whatever their priorities, LSES parents are a great deal less *satisfied* with current provision. And it is clear that the EHV's *can* have an influence—not a marked influence, but an influence nevertheless—on parents' priorities.

But perhaps more importantly, if one sets the fact that the EHV's activities *in relation to childrearing* tended to make the parents feel more *incompetent*, and possibly more guilty and inadequate, in areas which they now felt to be more *important*, alongside the fact that in their role as a "friend" who, almost as ignorant as the mother, tried to help her solve her problems, they led the mothers to feel at least better motivated and more self-confident, one arrives at an interesting and potentially important if very tentative conclusion. It almost seems as if, insofar as they act as professionals and *show* the mothers how to do things, they *depress* the mothers' feelings of competence and worth. Insofar as they act as equally ignorant co-workers, jointly trying to help the mothers to solve some of their problems, they *enhance* feelings of motivation and worth, even if they do not yet enhance feelings of *ability*. They help them to develop new ways of thinking about things and the skills needed to find information and produce an effect. If one generalizes this conclusion from *adult* education to child development, our results may point to the need for systemwide changes in the educational system. The expert portrayal of knowledge may depress self-images and even the growth of our most important skills. An educational system based on cotutoring—on the blind leading the blind—may be much more developmental.

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