

This Week's Citation Classic

Hess R D & Shipman V C. Early experience and the socialization of cognitive modes in children. *Child Develop.* 36:869-86, 1965. [University of Chicago, Chicago, IL]

Many studies document a correlation between children's achievement and SES of their families, but mediating processes are obscure. Variations in mother-child interaction among three groups drawn from different SES backgrounds are described. We argue that social environment affects family interaction in ways that influence school achievement. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI™) indicates that this paper has been cited over 250 times since 1966.]

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"Writing an article is a bit like rearing a child —one does one's best but the results sometimes depend on circumstances beyond one's control. This paper was timely and presented data not available in the mid-1960s. We are surprised and pleased that it continues to be referenced.

"The article came from research motivated, in part, by issues raised during the 'War on Poverty' of the early 1960s. It was an attempt to analyze social and economic deprivation as conditions that shape family interaction and regulate the development of school-relevant skills in young children. It is related, conceptually, to analyses of the influence of family background on cognitive development and achievement in school.

"There was an unusual excitement in the mid-1960s in this sort of research. Much of the empirical work on early learning of school-related skills was conducted in nursery schools attached to universities and thus represented data from upper middle, often academic, families. We knew very little

about interaction and cognitive development in low income families and even less about Black families. Given the political and social context, the work had a particular relevance. There was a general sense of educational injustice and discrimination against Blacks and against the poor in the US. A spirit of crusade was in the air; we were exhilarated by the relevance of our research to social problems. Unfortunately, the high hopes we had for amelioration of educational inequality haven't been fulfilled. Things haven't changed much. Fortunately, the theoretical issues and data of this article are not limited to a particular population or social climate.

"This paper was one of several prepared from a study of cognitive environments of urban Black children.¹ The study was intended to provide specific information about family environments that could be used in planning intervention programs for children from low-income communities. Our colleagues on this project were Jere Brophy and Roberta Bear.

"The article was originally one of four papers prepared for a symposium presented at the AAAS meetings in Montreal in 1964. It would probably not have been written without the occasion of a symposium. The data presented are preliminary and do not include results that we obtained later that seem to confirm our hypothesis of a connection between social class and school achievement through early socialization in the family setting.² Its popularity comes, we suspect, from the attractiveness of family interaction research and the heightened interest in the 1960s in social reform through early intervention. It was this social and political climate that produced Head Start and other national programs of early education. We like to think that the article deserves such widespread recognition, but we suspect that it was a matter of saying something useful at the right place and the right time. More recent work in the field is to appear in *Families as Learning Environments for Children*.³

1. Hess R D & Shipman V. Cognitive elements in maternal behavior. (Hill J P, ed.) *Minnesota symposia on child psychology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967. Vol. 1. p. 57-81.
2. Hess R D. Maternal behavior and the development of reading readiness in urban Negro children. (Douglass M P, ed.) *Claremont reading conference thirty-second yearbook*. Claremont, CA: Claremont University Center, 1968. p. 83-99.
3. Hess R D, Holloway S D, Price G G & Dickson W P. Family environments and acquisition of reading skills: toward a more precise analysis. (Laosa L M & Sigel I. eds.) *Families as learning environments for children*. New York: Plenum. In press, 1981.