Vocational Potential

Advantage and Disadvantage. A Profile of American Youth. R. DARRELL BOCK and ELSIE G. J. MOORE. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 1986. x, 230 pp., illus. $29.95.

The Profile of American Youth Survey, conducted for the United States Departments of Labor and Defense by the National Opinion Research Center, is the most extensive and detailed attempt on record to assess the cognitive development and vocational aptitudes of young Americans. Several qualities of the project and of the analyses reported in this monograph set the work apart from its predecessors and will attract readers not only from the ranks of educators but also among sociologists, economists, demographers, psychologists, and psychometricians, as well as policy makers and concerned citizens.

To begin, the survey captured a complete cross-section of 15- to 23-year-olds by sampling households rather than schools. Individual-level background data were obtained from the Department of Labor's 1979 National Longitudinal Study (NLS) of labor force participation, and test data were obtained from nearly all of the study's 12,000 participants in 1980. Most large-scale attempts to assess the attributes or achievements of the nation's youth, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), rely on the lone institution where youngsters are known to congregate for a few hours each day. But we know from reported school attendance patterns and 50% dropout rates in some urban centers that a sizable share of youth are chronically unavailable to researchers. Further, since premature school leaving is known to be more common for certain groups, such as Hispanics and blacks, school-based measures of developmental disparities probably understate true group differences, at least for domains enhanced by secondary school participation.

Despite a seemingly narrow initial purpose for the testing phase of the project—updating norms for the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery—it is satisfyingly broad in scope, for the battery includes numerous established scales of cognitive attainment as well as vocational skills. The subtests (ten in all) assess various reading, quantitative, science, and mechanical skills and possess documented validity as predictors of such outcomes as success in school, positive supervisor ratings in civilian employment, and successful completion of military training sequences. So patterns of performance across the tests are credible indicators of promise for success in adult life. And thus the title and purpose of the book: to consider what is the nature of advantages and disadvantages across groups as American youth make transitions to adulthood.

Rather than modeling comprehensively for average attainment through the labyrinthine path schemes of the status-attainment tradition (as represented for example by the work of Jencks *et al.* and Sewell and Hauser), the authors employ multivariate analyses of variance to examine levels of performance on individual tests in fine-grained subclasses of respondents—by highest grade completed, rich versus poor, mother's educational attainment, male versus female, white, black, Hispanic, and region of residence. What results is a profuse set of displays that can inform current educational and social issues too numerous even to list here. And the authors give considerable attention to the arguments fueled by their data and amply consider the literature that speaks to the issues they identify.

The value of the monograph lies at least as much in these last features as in its chosen and assiduously defended manipulations of test data. To mention a central example, one discussion that may attract attention both in academic circles and in the educational policy community is the book's extensive grappling with a persistent puzzle: the tests point to continued and striking performance differences (with years of school controlled for) among the three dominant sociocultural groups in the United States. Hispanics typically score 1/4 to 1/3 standard deviation below whites, and blacks typically score an additional 1/2 standard deviation below Hispanics. (Of course numerous departures from this rough characterization inspire stories of their own.) The gaps prompt the authors to examine extant explanatory theories, which they find substantively wanting. They proceed to pose a comprehensive theory of their own.

Genetic endowment theories are discredited with a careful examination of recent studies. Linguistic theories (postulating middle-class English as prerequisite to test performance) have trouble surviving the findings of this study, where differences in group means are roughly comparable across tests differentiated in their demands on the

test-taker's English proficiency. Cultural deprivation hypotheses wither in the light of data such as those showing increasing differences between blacks and whites at increasing levels of education.

The rival explanation proposed by the authors is titled a community norm theory:

> A more satisfactory explanation [for overall group performance differences on the tests] is simply that the communities represented by the present more-or-less exclusive sociocultural subpopulations in the United States maintain, for historical reasons, different norms, standards, and expectations concerning performance within the family, in school, and in other institutions that shape children's behavior. Young people adapt to these norms and apply their talents and energies accordingly [p. 158].

The authors' elaboration of this explanation suggests that externally applied standards, such as required test performance, or the numerous reforms allocating social responsibility for improved educational outcomes to schools through more stringent curricula and demands on students' time, are partial and inauspicious solutions to educational shortcomings, including the inequities of selective disadvantage. Rather, the process of raising standards must extend "to parents, families, social groups, and every institution in which members of the community participate," and to be realistic such processes "must work on the scale of decades, and not just years" (pp. 158–59).

These conclusions may prove bitter pills for governors, legislators, educators, or citizen activists. And they question both an American penchant to locate attention to social problems in isolated, uncoordinated, and competing agencies and our chronic overreliance on schools as a means for social change. But there appears to be more truth in this assessment of Bock and Moore's than in the flood of rhetoric prescribing one quick educational fix after another in recent decades, and most particularly in recent years.

Disappointments with the work are few. One is that the authors identify few explicit implications of the touted comprehensiveness of their sample. Beyond a prima facie case for improved representation of the surveyed cohort, what biases latent in other major attempts (such as NAEP) to characterize youth on these dimensions are exposed by this work? A second disappointment is no fault of the authors—namely that we do not have truly parallel portraits from past years, say 1970 and 1960, in order accurately to mark trends in the topics covered in the monograph. Nor do we hear a promise that the work might be replicated for a similar cohort in 1990. Given recent public outcry and legislation in the name of educational excellence, this work constitutes a timely benchmark from which to assess dimensions of progress (or its lack) during the 1980s.

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The Child in Japanese Culture

Child Development and Education in Japan. HAROLD STEVENSON, HIROSHI AZUMA, and KENJI HAKUTA. Freeman, New York, 1986. xii, 315 pp., illus. $24.95; paper, $14.95. A Series of Books in Psychology. Based on a conference, 1982.

Japan's recent economic strength and the high academic performance of its schoolchildren have aroused interest, particularly among Americans, in understanding what underlies these phenomena. This book was conceived to meet such interest by drawing attention to child rearing and education as embedded in the broad cultural context of Japan. These 19 papers are authored or coauthored by 32 scholars, American and Japanese, who are predominantly psychologists but also represent education, human development, anthropology, sociology, history, and linguistics. The collection is thus diverse and rich in content and approach.

Two papers by Stevenson *et al.* address themselves specifically to academic performance, using carefully designed tests and tools to compare Japanese and American grade-school children. Japanese children are indeed found to surpass American children in mathematics to an impressive degree, which the authors attribute to the amount of school time devoted to math education and the importance attached to homework. In reading, however, our preconception of Japanese superiority in literacy is refuted sharply by the Stevenson studies. In a chapter on the history and contemporary status of school education, Inagaki describes a change in educational institutions from the Meiji era on and reinforces our general impression that Japanese teaching is more regulated and standardized than the American counterpart.

Several other papers are concerned more with early socialization, focusing on mother-child bonding and its effect on child development, a major theme of this volume. The continuing impact of the late William Caudill and his associates, who in the 1960s pioneered the observational study of mother-infant interaction in the United States and Japan, is evident here. The chapter by Hess, Azuma, and eight others, a good example of international collaboration, summarizes a longitudinal study of linkages between family socialization and school readiness. The researchers found that in the process of instructing preschool children to perform a task, the American mothers asked for more verbal responses from their children than did the Japanese mothers; this is consistent with the findings of the Caudill team. The Japanese mother encourages her child to perform correctly by elaborating her instructions, whereas the American mother does so by repeating the instructions. In soliciting the child's obedience, the American mother asserts her authority, whereas the Japanese mother appeals to feelings or mentions the consequences of disobedience. The authors suggest that the Japanese maternal strategy is more effective in instilling the expectations and norms of adults and thus better prepares children for school discipline. With maternal expectations well internalized, Japanese children are more likely than American children to approach classroom performance as a matter of "receptive diligence," whether or not they find the assigned task interesting (Azuma).

Several psychological papers take mother-child intimacy as a point of departure for exploring the child's emotions and temperament, centering around such variables as attachment, inhibition, and irritability (Takahashi; Chen and Miyake; Miyake *et al.*). Takahashi's general discussion includes a criticism of the dyadic model of mother and child.

Two other papers employ different historical perspectives to examine the mother-child dyad in the framework of family structure. Befu compares the traditional Japanese structure, in which the sexual division of roles makes the wife/mother exclusively responsible for child rearing, to the American model, in which "conjugal alliance" calls for the couple's joint responsibility. Morioka traces the history of "privatization" of the family, especially marked since World War II, whereby communal, multiple parentage is replaced by personal, exclusive parenting.

Cutting across several papers and partially overlapping the mother-child theme is the theme of cultural views of the child (Yamamura; Kojima; White and LeVine; Kashiwagi; Befu). Yamamura elaborates the Japanese traditional belief in the goodness of the child to the point of sanctifying it; Kojima introduces Tokugawa writings on child education, which treat the child as an autonomous learner with inner potentials, difficult to control by an external agent. This view is consistent with Japanese methods of child discipline, in which the mother avoids