20 Studies that Shook Up Child Psychology

Wallace E. Dixon, Jr.

Heidelberg College

It's probably a truism to say that scientific advances rarely come about as a result of a bunch of scientists sitting around the dinner table nodding in amicable agreement about the latest scientific findings. Instead, scientific progress is usually the product of considerable debate, disagreement, and even downright contentiousness between the scientists.

Occasionally, the results of a study are viewed by the scientific community to be so preposterous that they must be wrong. At other times, it's not the results that are controversial, but the interpretations of them made by the author. Still, in either case I suppose science benefits because the surrounding controversy stimulates additional research, even if said research is designed for the sole purpose of contradicting the original, controversial work.

In an effort to compile a list of the most controversial child psychological investigations, I surveyed SRCD doctoral-level members about which studies they regard as "Most Controversial" in the field of child psychology. I defined controversial studies as those "that resulted in a great deal of conflict in some venue or forum," and that might have "caused controversy among child developmental researchers and theorists" or "between the child development research community and the lay public."

Based on SRCD member responses, the Rank Ordered List of the 20 Most Controversial Studies Published since 1950 are:


Wallace E. Dixon, Jr. and daughter Rachel

Wallace E. Dixon, Jr. and daughter Rachel
