Smuggling, which netted 53,592 m$^3$ of wood annually by 2015 (1). However, implementation of this program has been slow, plagued by inconsistent application of land-use laws and local corruption.

China is developing a national Forest Certification Standard and Chain of Custody process. This system should help ensure that those wishing to purchase wood products from China will be able to trace the origins of the wood. In 2007, the State Forestry Administration intensified its enforcement of national forest laws, fining or dismantling 3277 timber processing and trading venues involved in illegal activities (2).

Internationally, the Chinese government has worked jointly with its main trading partners to combat illegal logging and trade, signing several multi- and bilateral agreements in this area (3). China has also taken steps to reduce the smuggling of logs: It has banned direct imports of wood across the Myanmar border; issued Guidelines for Sustainable Forestry Management by Chinese Enterprises Operating Overseas (4); proposed an Asia-Pacific Network on Forest Rehabilitation and Sustainable Management (5); and imposed high taxes on solid wood products (such as a 5% tax on solid floor panels) to discourage the overconsumption of hardwood resources. On-the-ground action is also occurring at customs points. For example, in March 2006, Taiping Customs in Guangdong Province launched the “Woodpecker Action” against wood smuggling, which netted 53,592 m$^3$ of illegal wood and led to the arrest of 24 people in a single month (6).

Arguably, major responsibility rests with those nations exporting to China to regulate and monitor their own forests. These exporting countries are also developing countries, with local corruption, poor forest monitoring, and the need to raise export revenue. Illegal logging is most prevalent in developing countries, but even in more developed countries with stronger laws and monitoring, regulating for illegally imported logs is relatively new and difficult. Some sources estimate that as much as 10% of U.S. log imports are from illegal sources (7), and it was only in 2007 that the United States passed the Legal Timber Protection Act to regulate the importation of illegal logs (8).

The illegal wood trade is a global problem and requires coordinated regional and global responses. Continued expertise, funding, and constructive criticism are necessary to keep the pressure on China and other countries to make progress on environmental benchmarks. But vilifying China for its “predatory” behavior fails to recognize that the Chinese wood-products industry is only one part of a chain that extends from producer to consumer. It would be more constructive to recognize that as a developing country trying simultaneously to raise its people’s living standards and improve its natural resources, China needs all the help it can get.

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1. State Forestry Administration.
2. Beijing 100714, China.
3. Portland, OR 97221, USA.
5. These agreements include (i) the China-Russia cooperation agreement on Development of Forest Resources and Sustainable Forest Management; (ii) the MOU between SFA of China and MoF Indonesia to Combat Illegal Logging; (iii) The Third China-United States Strategic Economic Dialogue; and (iv) the China-EU Forest Enforcement and Governance Conference, Beijing, September 2007.

Minding Controls in Curriculum Study

THE EDUCATION FORUM ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

executive functions by A. Diamond et al. (“Preschool program improves cognitive control,” 30 November 2007, p. 1387) reported an educational intervention congruent with the views of clinicians who believe that intellectual ability emerges from early emotional growth (1). Unfortunately, the conclusions drawn by Diamond et al. suffer from evidentiary weaknesses.

A study of this type must reduce differences between groups to those essential to the experimental intervention. Diamond et al. reported that teachers trained to use the executive function techniques (EFs) needed almost a year of work before they were proficient; it was not stated how long the comparison teachers took to achieve their criterion. Anxiety about an unfamiliar curriculum might have motivational effects, causing the EF teachers to be more attentive to children’s behavior than a less anxious group, as the long-established inverted U-shaped motivational function predicts (2).

The evidence is also weakened by a vague description of the comparison intervention. It is possible that more frequent adult-child interactions occurred in the EF condition than in the other group. More frequent interactions could foster the attachment relationships within which young children are thought to do their best learning. This possibility is reminiscent of the “common factors” concept in the study of psychosocial interventions; some researchers have suggested that common factors influence efficacy more than specific techniques do (3). In the Diamond study, the common factors might be adult-child interactions, and such factors might be the effective causes of changes the report attributes to specific EF techniques.

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References and Notes


Response

IN HER LETTER, MERCER OFFERS TWO ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS, COUCHEd AS CRITICISMS, FOR THE FINDINGS WE REPORTED IN OUR EDUCATION FORUM (30 November 2007, p. 1387).
Mercer proposed that until teachers became proficient at the Tools of the Mind (Tools) curriculum, anxiety about an unfamiliar curriculum might have caused them to be more attentive to children’s behavior than teachers in the comparison program. Our data do not support that hypothesis. By Year 2, teachers in both curricula were proficient, and we found virtually no differences between children who were with these programs in both Years 1 and 2 or only in Year 2. If teacher anxiety accounted for any of the differences, one would have expected a difference in performance between children in Tools who were exposed to anxious teachers (in Year 1) and children in Tools who were not (children who only attended Year 2), but such differences were minor.

Teacher anxiety would likely have increased classroom stress levels, impairing children’s ability to master executive function skills or academic content (1). Research on the “long-established inverted U-shaped motivational function” referred to by Mercer has consistently shown that although increased anxiety makes individuals more vigilant and attentive to danger signs, it impairs thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal sensitivity (2, 3).

Mercer also speculated that perhaps more frequent adult-child interactions occurred in Tools classrooms, which could have fostered attachment relationships. There is no evidence, however, that Tools increased the frequency of adult-child interactions, although it did improve their quality, possibly promoting close positive teacher-student relationships as Mercer suggests. We do not consider that a weakness of our study. Indeed, in supporting online materials (SOM), we said that such intermediate variables might mediate, or contribute to, the observed effects.

Mercer’s second suggestion somewhat contradicts her first, for if teachers’ anxiety were heightened, that would impair the development of positive relationships with students. A stressed or anxious teacher is less likely to be emotionally present for the children and more likely to snap at children for small transgressions.

I would also like to correct a possible misconception left by the first paragraph of Mercer’s letter. As we stated in the SOM, pages 14 to 15, the beneficial effect of Tools on academic performance might be mediated by its beneficial effects on emotional growth, but we did not investigate, and have no evidence on, its effect on emotional development.

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References