

BOOK REVIEWS

Children's Reading Interests by Elley, W. B. and Tolley, C. W. New Zealand Council for Educational Research and the Wellington Council of the International Reading Association, 1972.

The books which children choose to read are of interest to the developmental psychologist both because of the particular cognitive ailments which they provide and as a reflection of previously acquired attitudes. And since reading is still one of the main sources from which children learn the traditions of their culture, the educationist has an additional concern with the specific values which books transmit.

The research recorded in this monograph is based on a survey conducted by a sub-committee of the Wellington Council of the International Reading Association towards the end of 1969. As the sub-title properly indicates, it involves a limited geographical sample, representative of four class levels (S2, S4, FII, FIV) of urban Wellington area schools. The questionnaire elicited information on the children's leisure time activities as a whole, on their preferred reading materials (e.g. books v periodicals), extent of interest in types of fictional and non-fictional content, sources and methods of choosing books, favourite materials and authors, and so on.

There are few surprises in the results. The analyses are straightforward and invite comparison, as the authors state, with the more extensive survey made by W. J. Scott on a New Zealand-wide sample in 1942. The Wellington sample includes younger age groups than did Scott, but where direct comparison is possible the types of books read by early adolescents do not appear to have changed significantly. Adventure is still a prime ingredient for boys—now exemplified in warfare rather than in exploration or historical events—but historical adventure and romantic stories continue to predominate for girls. The books and authors nominated as favourites appear to be more diverse than 25 years ago but, of course, the range available is also wider. The changes in magazine reading are more noteworthy; *Playboy* and *Man* are among the most popular with boys in both FII and FIV, and the periodicals *Sixteen* and *Seventeen* with girls in FII and FIV respectively. To what extent this is a reflection—for urban children at least—of earlier maturity or again simply of availability there is no way of telling.

It is a pity that the survey could not have been extended to some rural samples as well. Scott (1947) found that there were some substantial differences in the leisure-time activities of rural and urban children—rural children read more books, listened to fewer serials but attended more films, for example. More seriously, Elley and Tolley provide no evidence at all for their statement (p.51) that children of the age groups concerned "are now reading less than their 1942

counterparts". (Witty, 1966, cites evidence that some types of reading have actually increased since the advent of television). Nevertheless, the findings from this research are at least a pointer to changes in children's reading interests which may be taking place throughout the country.

REFERENCES

Scott, W. J. *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes of High School Boys and Girls*, Wellington: N.Z.C.E.R. (1947).

Witty, P. A. The electronic Pied Piper—enemy or ally of reading. *Education*, 87, 42-47 1966.

P. S. Freyberg

Crellin, E., Pringle, M. L. and West, P. **Born Illegitimate; Social and Educational Implications**. London: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, (1947).

The authors are to be congratulated for this third book in the now classic 1958 National Cohort Study of 17,000 children. They managed to isolate 679 (81%) of the illegitimate children in their entire original sample, and compared medical, psychological, and sociological data obtained from them with those obtained from the remainder of the sample. Further, they subdivided the illegitimate group into that which was adopted and that which was not. Then they focussed upon the adults with whom the illegitimate children had spent most of the seven years since their birth. Time and again they found that, excluding those who were adopted, the illegitimate children were at a disadvantage. They had low birth weight, were slow to develop, were poor at school, at work were maladjusted, and, despite the social origins of their mothers they lived in overcrowded houses. As the authors say,

"Overall, they were beset by a multiplicity of unfavourable circumstances not only giving them a relatively poorer start in life but which continued to build up into a complex web of circumstances and disadvantages and deprivations."

To their credit the authors then embarked upon a discussion of the primary, secondary and tertiary methods for the prevention and alleviation of illegitimacy. They make some pungent criticism of societies that do not hesitate to pay for the institutional care of neglected children but steer clear of advocating contraception to prevent the births of such children. These final issues need further study, especially since social change and planned solo parenthood may soon overrun the existing social security facilities in every developed community to the detriment of the children concerned. Somewhat surprisingly abortion received no mention in the book, nor even the need for a study of the psychosocial features of the fathers of illegitimate children. None-

theless, this book stands as a masterpiece of clarity that provides information for the teacher, and a model for the researcher who is not afraid of hard work in the field. It is objective, sensitive and expresses social concern that would give heart to any social scientist.

At first sight the price of \$6.00 for this paperback might seem high, but presumably the extra money will go to finance more research. I am looking forward to their next book.

A. J. W. Taylor

Restle, F. **Mathematical models in psychology, an introduction.** Penguin (1971).

A paperback psychology reader with linear algebra in it is a welcome sign that publishers are catching up with reality; we are no longer obliged to be surprised or grateful, but may ask is it done well?

Restle illustrates the use of formalised theory construction in psychology with examples from concept learning, adaptation level, strength and choice theory, and similarity. There is a necessary final chapter on parameter estimation, which, if nothing else, should bring home to the observant student the fact that much of what is taught in statistical cookbooks, based on obsolescent sampling theory, is irrelevant and useless to the modern theoretical psychologist. It is odd that Restle introduces Markov models with his own concept learning theory which needs a four-state representation; the beginning student has conceptual difficulties with a two-state model. As a whole, the book is suitable background reading to an introductory course in mathematical psychology, it gives some idea of the style of modelling but little insight into how to construct theories. The student or teacher who cannot understand this book is unable to follow a lot of contemporary mainstream psychology, the student who can, has still got plenty left to learn.

R. A. M. Gregson.

Church, R. J. **Linear program length and pupil performance.** N.Z.C.E.R. Educational research series, No. 49, 1972.

It is not clear why this monograph was put into type and hard covers; it is inconclusive and ephemeral, so a paper would have been sufficient. Church set out to investigate a conjecture of Skinner's that a program designed for the slowest student in the school should not seriously delay the fast student, since each can progress at his own speed. The material learnt by two groups of Wellington pupils was some elementary operations in algebra. One group used a full linear program and the other an abbreviated form. A twenty-five percent shorter program only resulted in fourteen percent time saving. The faster performers achieved post-test scores of about equal level on the full or abbreviated programs, the slower groups seemed to do worse

on the shorter programme. The methods of statistical analysis do nothing to clarify what is going on in a complex dynamic situation, strings of correlation coefficients in what is apparently a multiple regression problem leave the reader feeling that anything might be the independent variables. Skinner wasn't confirmed, but without some sort of cost-analysis on pupil time, and on the risk of proceeding in a topic without learning to criterion at the intermediate stage represented by the programs used, the decision on what program length to use is as unsettled as ever. The introduction by Elley rambles on about the spelling of 'program', but lets Church get away with gratuitously split infinitives.

R. A. M. Gregson.