

# BOOK REVIEWS

## **CHILDREN AND PARENTS: Everyday Problems of Behaviour**

*Hermann A. Peine & Roy Howarth* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1975, 50p).

Behaviour modification has a bad name in many places these days. Its political implications are comprehensible and alarming. Yet even those adults who recall the influence of an older person in their early lives tend to dismiss the effect their own actions might have on others. Influence and its conscious use are often marked out of bounds in the fields of learning and growth.

Parents and teachers are the early models from whom children learn the skills to communicate. But more than that, adults' responses to children have a very important effect on how kids learn the behaviour that will (or won't) bring them satisfaction and gratification throughout their lives—how they learn the behaviour that will 'work' for them. In *Pathways to Madness*, Jules Henry describes a mother who wanted to train her young one to keep clear of the street outside their home. Each time the child ventured out toward the street, Mother made a game of directing her back into the garden. Rather than learning the danger of the roadway itself, the child discovered a new method for having fun with Mother, in which, it seemed, the roadway was an element. The very best intentions of parents can be so easily misdirected by the very process they use to get their intention across.

*Parents and Children* focuses on adults' behaviour and responses as major factors in the shape a child's behavioural patterns will take. Hermann and Peine acknowledge these influences and outline a programme in which parents and teachers can make the best use of them. The book is presented as a handbook for parents and teachers concerned with minor behaviour difficulties in children. I think, however, that by highlighting adult response as a behaviour reinforcement for kids, it speaks to all parents who want their children to learn about appropriate behaviour and honest social interaction.

The authors teach—and consciously!—how adults can make their own actions more closely reflect the good intentions they have for their kids. They stress parental attention as so important that kids will attract scolding attention if they can't get 'stroking' attention. So what are the most effective ways of *using* attention in bringing up children?

Peine and Howarth outline a simple model of behaviour modification which parents can (and inevitably, if unwittingly, do) use to alter a child's behaviour. With clear and sometimes fun examples the authors examine different types of parental responses and the kinds of behaviour they can encourage. How does it come about, for example, that Mother has to spend an hour or more each night in little Anne's room before she can get to sleep? How important are rewards, and how are they most appropriately used?

How effective is punishment as a method of decreasing unwanted behaviour? The authors don't pretend to know absolute answers, but they approach these questions honestly and lucidly.

I like the model of teaching on which the book itself is based. Each of the areas covered is outlined and organised for easy reading and learning. There are exercises which involve the reader in the material and allow him to try to apply what he's just read. Except for the chapter on setting down observations of a kid's behaviour, the book is written in a matter-of-fact language which could encourage a parent to try out what he's learned.

Behaviour modification is not an answer to a child's difficulties, nor do Howarth and Peine present it as such. The book is written with next to nothing said about family dynamics which contribute to such situations. But what the authors propose they propose positively and pragmatically. I think that any parent or teacher who would take the time to read this kind of book (like many of its type it's bound to be read by students and enterprising child-care personnel, but what about those parents!) would learn quite a bit from this one.

**Pat Pegg**

## Reference

Jules Henry (1972), *Pathways to Madness*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

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Aaron V. Cicourel and others. *Language Use and School Performance*, Academic Press 1974.

Ethnomethodology is a word we all going to have to know soon. It refers to a relatively recent movement in sociology, which is determined to get down to the little nitty-gritty details of what actually goes on in society, as opposed to what is supposed to go on. It is very sympathetic to humanistic psychology, because it insists on treating human beings as human beings, busily processing and interpreting their worlds.

This book is a very good example of the process in action. It has seven chapters, each one by a different author (except for Chapter 1, which is an introduction by the senior author). Chapter 2 deals with the placing of children into streams; Chapter 3 analyses part of a classroom lesson, which was tape recorded and videotaped while in progress (part of the Introduction tells the story of how difficult it was to get any teacher to

volunteer for this!); Chapter 4 deals with intelligence testing as a social activity, again depending on recordings of what actually took place in the testing session; Chapter 5 deals with other forms of testing which are done with children, and contrasts what is supposed to happen with what actually goes on; Chapter 6 does the same with some other tests and some other children; and Chapter 7 draws together some of the theoretical threads and underlines some of the conclusions to be drawn from the work.

The entire work seems to me quite devastating. Intelligence testing, in particular, is shown up as an incredible process by which virtually everything of any importance about the child's education-relevant abilities is systematically ignored. But as Robert says:

*Polemically I would suggest that the powerful pronouncement of science sanctifies common-sense prejudice and legitimizes the production of persons whose qualifications (or lack of them) block them from anything but menial or semi-skilled jobs. But it is a vicious circle since the objective test started from these prejudiced beliefs about the world. The tests are used by test constructors, teachers, administrators and politicians to support their own beliefs and value systems.*

All the way through, it emerges again and again that so much of education and testing is based on what should happen and what ought to be the case, rather than on what is happening and what is actually the case. It is almost as if no one wanted to know what was really going on. This is the basic error, remarked on so often by Fritz Perls, of not distinguishing between what we perceive and what we imagine or expect. This book should be read by anyone who thinks they know what is going on in the classroom, or in educational testing of any kind.

**John Rowan**