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BOOK REVIEWS

BRAITHWAITE, John (1983). Explorations in Early Childhood Education, ACER.

The Mt Druitt Early Childhood Project was established in 1975 to provide early childhood programmes for disadvantaged children living in Government housing estates in an outer suburb of Sydney. This book by the project's field director, John Braithwaite of Macquarie University, records the development, implementation, and evaluation of the five programmes in the project. The programmes comprised four centre-based preschools (Cognitive, Contemporary, Competency, Behaviourist) which were subsequently extended into the kindergarten and Year One classes in the schools with which they were associated, and a home-based programme. This programme was designed to help mothers provide appropriate educational experiences for their children in the home and operated only in the preschool year.

The introduction to the report describes the projects as 'an action programme in early childhood education' with 'some elements of a research character'. With regard to the first component, the project addressed many issues of current concern to early childhood professionals in Australia. These included the continuity of programming from preschool to school, community involvement in early childhood education, the co-operation of educational agencies with other community agencies concerned with the health and welfare of young children, and the development of appropriate early childhood programmes for disadvantaged children. The book is a rich source of material on these issues, although discussion is limited and readers will need to draw their own conclusions about the relevance of the data to their own professional concerns.

School administrators, nervous about the association of preschool facilities with primary schools, may be reassured by the account of the co-operation and effort expended by the staff of the participating schools to ensure the successful implementation of the programmes.

Teachers, too, will be interested in the descriptions of the preschool, kindergarten and Year One programmes. The unique character of the home-based scheme deserves special mention; a more comprehensive account of this programme would have been warranted.

The project's research goals focused on the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes between 1977 and 1979 when the first cohort of children proceeded through preschool, kindergarten and Year One. The project benefited from the co-operation of the New South Wales Education Department and generous funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation which enabled the appointment of programme assistants to oversee the programmes. Despite these initial advantages, the contribution of the project to early childhood education is far from clear. Numerous problems in the design and execution of the project contribute to difficulties of interpreting the findings. These problems are, however, honestly reported and in this regard the book may provide salutary reading for the research student who has yet to discover that research objectives do not easily translate into effective empirical investigation.

The zoning system for school admissions precluded the random assignment of children to the programmes, thereby introducing attendant data-analytic problems. Sample limitations were exacerbated by the use of volunteers in the non-preschool comparison group. Consequently, the finding that the preschool children and the comparison group did not differ significantly on the dependent measures at the end of the preschool year is not unexpected. To counter possible sample bias, a further comparison group of children who had not attended preschool was randomly drawn from the 1978 kindergarten intake and their performance on a subset of the dependent measures compared with that of the preschool children. Several significant differences favouring the preschool children were obtained, but these effects had dissipated by the end of Year One.

Early childhood educators may well feel discouraged by these results. If three years of careful programming to ensure continuity between preschool and school cannot overcome educational disadvantage, what is the future of early childhood education in this critical area? The author points to the need to 'develop interactive approaches to the education of disadvantaged children which would involve schools, parents and the community equally' (p.262).

Indeed, the project is noteworthy for its advances in this direction, although clearly there is much ground still to cover. It is, however, also necessary to take into account several design features of the project when interpreting its negligible educational effects.

First, the dependent measures are narrowly focused on academic achievement. Anecdotal accounts from teachers that the preschool children differed on social-motivational variables suggest that the project team's decision to abandon their original intention to include social competence variables in the design because of difficulties in obtaining reliable measures was short-sighted. The use of teachers' ratings of social development did not remedy the deficiency, since independent ratings across programmes were not obtained. Second, examination of the reported programme effects and the process data raises some doubt as to whether the programmes actually differed significantly. Few programme effects were obtained and these varied across the three years. Discriminant function procedures certainly identified differences between programmes on the process data but these also altered each year, raising the possibility that the reported programme effects actually reflected teacher effects. The design does not permit the separation of teacher effects from programme effects hence this question remains unanswered. Third, a notable lack in the design was the failure to include a clearly-formulated language programme. Given the recent interest in the use of dialogue procedures with disadvantaged children, a systematic application of this approach would seem to have great potential for teaching the child's transition to the verbal learning environment of the school. Preschool attendance seemed to have lost short-term impact on verbal measures of achievement; hence it is plausible to speculate that a language-based programme could yield more lasting effects on this dimension. Further, the fact that 50 per cent of fathers and 46 per cent of mothers of children in the cohort obtained Intermediate or School Certificate or a higher qualification raises questions about the degree of disadvantage in the community. The use of regression procedures to tease out the relative influence of home environmental and programme variables could usefully have been employed to address this question.

The book is generally easy to read, although I found the absence of an index a disadvantage. Some tables and figures were difficult to interpret because of insufficient explanation of the measures. Technically-minded readers may also wish for greater detail about

the data analysis procedures and the justification for their use. Possibly these deficiencies would be remedied by referring to additional data in the appendices, which are available on microfiche although not supplied with the book.

The Mt Druitt Project represents an important step in early childhood education in Australia. Despite the many problems which arose throughout the venture, the project team is to be commended for its initiative in addressing the many complex issues associated with early intervention programmes. The forthcoming longitudinal study on the cohort will be awaited with interest by early childhood professionals.

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COWIE, Helen (1984). *The Development of Children's Imaginative Writing*, Croom Helm, Sydney.

$29.95. 236 pp.

This book, edited by a senior lecturer in psychology, is an interesting mix of theory and application.

Part One:
Fantasy and Imagination:
A Development Perspective

Deals with children's fantasy play, its development and its relevance to writing. Smith and Tamburrini adapt a theorist's view of play and imagination and their relation to language development. Neither researcher is prepared to broaden the discussion into the causes of later imaginative writing and its links with young children's fantasy play. Helen Cowie, in chapter 3, takes a developmental view of children's imaginative writing, showing the links between imagination and children's social and intellectual development. Relying heavily on Graves's idea of a 'writing community' Cowie stresses the need for the child writer to develop a personal voice through fantasy play in the early years.

Part Two:
Children's Writing and the Development of Awareness

Reads like a researcher's ragout. Sex roles, diaries and symbolism form the central concerns of the three contributors. Davies considers sex role stereotyping in contemporary society and its consequent reflection in children's writing. Pollock's analysis of children's diaries from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries makes fascinating reading but is perhaps a little too esoteric in its subject matter if not in its method. Ollington considers the archetypal images of literature, particularly myths and fairy stories, and how these form an essential spiritual and aesthetic background to children's development.

Part Three: The Writing Process

Is based more firmly on writing and children's development of their personal writing voice. Wason attacks a problem all writers experience — the writing block. His answer? A happy use of revision. Chapter 8 brings together the two gurus of the modern approach to writing: Donald Murray and Donald Graves. In parallel Murray

describes his writing revision problems and Graves translates these to the problems faced by young writers. This chapter is possibly the most revealing of the book in its link between accomplished and developing writers, with experts' views of the two.

Story grammar, a development from the field of discourse analysis, is demonstrated as a research tool in objective analysis of story structure.

Part Four: Writers and Audience

Considers the writing process in action in classrooms. Chapter 10 discusses children's views on writing purpose, audience and reflection. Children's imprecise knowledge of these reflects, at least in the selected example, a considerable lack of knowledge. The research shows how important the teacher's role is in achieving the decentering stance from expressive, to transactional and poetic modes.

Chapter 11 is a case study of a writing community established in a class of 7 and 8 year olds. The teacher used the conference with individuals as a means of extending and aiding children's writing. Several useful classroom strategies are described. Conferences to explore the writer's craft and develop a sense of audience within a writing community are explored.

The final chapter is devoted to the central issue of all discussions of the teaching of writing: the writer's control of the writing process. Donald Graves covers the major areas of guiding the child from speech to print via invented spelling, and the revision conference.

He identifies four types of 'reviser' and admits there will always be the non-conformist like 8-year-old Amy who could begin a first draft about cheetahs 'A Cheetah would make a sports car look like a turtle'!

Ranging from the somewhat unproved area of fantasy play's influence on narrative, and a digression on areas of social and personal awareness, the book centres, in Parts 3 and 4, on the basic issues of the writing process, the writers and their audience. It is in these chapters that the importance of the teacher's role is made explicit.

The Development of Children's Imaginative Writing is possibly too wide ranging as a text for most writing courses in teacher education, but many chapters would serve as excellent reference sources.

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