

# REVIEWS



## ETHNIC FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

by Kevin Marjoribanks  
George Allen & Unwin  
1979 Sydney  
172 pages  
\$12.95

This study is concerned with the relationship of family background to academic achievements. Marjoribanks reports research undertaken on ethnic families in Australia which sought to examine the relationship between "the family learning environments, attitudes to school, and academic performance of 11 year-old children from different Australian ethclass groups".(11) The concept of ethclass is described as allowing a society to be pictured as "being stratified horizontally into social-status groups and also divided vertically into ethnic groups".(11) Viewing both the school and the family as providing significant social contexts which influence children's achievements, Marjoribanks takes the theoretical position that "middle social status families have: (a) the power to decide what type of school achievement will be rewarded by society, and (b) in relation to minority social groups they have greater means of creating learning environments associated with children's 'successful' achievement".(18) The core of the book consists of detailed expositions of the design of the study and the conceptual framework was that "certain levels of particular environmental dimensions may need to be attained before other family measures, lower in the hierarchy, begin to be associated with children's achievements",(65) and overall these differed for some major ethnic groups such as Greeks, Italians and Yugoslavs. For instance, it was found that, unlike Southern-Italian parents, Greek parents were more likely to offer quite regular praise for their child's school achievements and to

"very regularly" discuss their progress.(76) A number of interrelated findings of this nature are presented and discussed. The final chapter discusses these findings in relation to the recommendations of the Galbally Report emphasizing education in order to enhance the "educative processes of school systems".(133) One particular change required is that schools "re-organize curriculum and allow more experimentation with the teaching of ethnic languages". The book is concisely presented and contains detail which should be of interest to sociologists, educators and social workers.

Loula Rodopoulos



## LIVING WITH A TODDLER

Brenda Crowe  
George Allen and Unwin,  
London, August 1980,  
263 pages,  
\$16.95

Living with a Toddler is a very timely book. It is not another baby or baby and child manual. It is a small work devoted entirely to the needs and feelings of the very young child, and to those of his/her parents. Rarely does an author demonstrate so much detailed understanding of both child and parent, and refreshingly, while remaining a child-oriented work, the parents' perspective is covered first, making clearly the point that it is within the context of the parents' feelings and needs, met and unmet, and the tensions or availability arising from these, that the child's well being is placed. There are no illusions

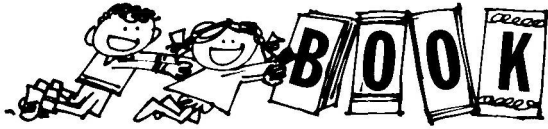
about the stress involved in parenting a small, determined child, nor about the limitations of most ordinary, caring, sensitive parents. And yet, despite the awareness conveyed of the stresses of parenting a toddler, the sheer delight, the fascination and the companionship of the toddler emerge clearly from the detailed picture of all aspects of the toddler's interests, needs and development.

Ms Crowe writes in a personal, anecdotal style which conveys warmth and intimacy, and projects herself solidly as a mother as well as a professional kindergarten teacher, writing both subjectively as well as at times from a more objective viewpoint. My response to her writing is necessarily similar. As a part-time child psychologist/family therapist and a mother of two toddlers, I read this book both reflecting on my own experiences and with a view to its impact on a clientele such as my own.

The book is divided into three sections:

**Parents and Toddler's Feelings, The Doings of Toddlers, and Living Together.** The first section includes letters from parents with whom Ms Crowe has had contact in her position as National Advisor to the Pre-School Playgroups Association. The excerpts cover expectations of child-rearing, pregnancy and birth, parents' distressing and pleasing discoveries, surprises. It concludes with a refreshingly direct and honest section called "The Shock of Aggression". This section conveys tremendous understanding both of the etiology of the child's rage in the face of a world of mazes and of giants, who appear to behave at times capriciously and incomprehensibly to frustrate, and the common, overwhelming feeling reactions of the parent. Some suggestions for management are discussed — with a very clear bias against physical punishment.

**The Doings of Toddlers** covers the range of specific interests and needs



of the child in the overwhelming urge towards control and mastery of the environment. In this section and **Living Together**, which looks at the child in the context of daily routines of which he learns to be part, practical suggestions abound as to ways to encourage the child's exploration, interests and learning, while at the same time allowing the daily demands of a house and family to be achieved (sometimes), and the parents' sanity to be maintained!

My reservations about this book emerged on reading these last two sections. At times I felt that Ms Crowe unwittingly came to adopt a "talking down" approach both to her readers (mostly assumed to be mothers) and in her suggested ways of speaking to children, which at times include the use of "we", instead of "you" and "baby-talk" like "comfy" and "uncomfy". There is a thin line between being personal and supportive and becoming paternalistic and over-instructive, and it is here that I feel

that Ms Crowe, despite her warmth and caring, has perhaps picked up some common, unfortunate habits of professions which deal with children and patients. Towards the end of the book Ms Crowe describes with positive gratitude her experience as a new mother of being "taught" how to chat to her new baby by a similarly warm but paternalistic nurse in hospital, which for me put this aspect of her writing in perspective: that, sadly, this remarkable woman with her intuitive understanding and rapport with infants had been made to think that this was something she had needed to be taught.

My only other reservation about this book was that, like this attitude, particular rather outmoded ideas and assumptions strike a slightly jarring note in 1980. For example, while subscribing to modern views about not pressuring children to eat, the degree of detail into which she goes about how to carefully observe and cure unwilling eaters suggests that

she is, in fact, still purveying the old idea that toddlers cannot be trusted to meet their own dietary requirements even if provided with good, varied food. Similarly there are suggestions (not spelt out) in the section on toilet-training that two years is perhaps on the late side for training a child, and that one might expect him to be dry at night at the time of transition from cot to bed — certainly out of keeping with the more relaxed expectations of the normal range of age for children to train of today.

Overall, despite these limitations, however, I consider this to be a unique and valuable book. Any parent and any professional working with young children and their parents could gain a lot of insight, understanding and support from it.

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