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Book Reviews

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

All Our Future. A Longitudinal Study of Secondary Education. By J. W. B. Douglas, J. M. Ross and H. R. Simpson. London: Peter Davies. 1968. Pp. 241. Price 42*s*.

Long term follow-up studies of population samples often seem to run into the difficulty that so many data are collected that (unless designed to test specific hypotheses) the analysis and interpretation of results is apt to become over-complex and subjective. The National Survey of Health and Development, started under Dr. Douglas in 1946, seems to have fallen into this trap.

The previous book, *The Home and the School*, published in 1964, traced the school achievements and behaviour of a strictly random sample of over 5,000 British children born in the first week of March 1946 up to the end of primary and entry into secondary school, and related these characteristics to home factors (maternal care, social class, overcrowding, parental interest, etc.), to quality of schooling and other factors. It was an outstandingly successful volume, both because of the care with which the data were collected, the skill with which they were analysed, and because it showed not only that children from poorer backgrounds do less well at school (which everybody knows) but also that the effects are cumulative. Children from different socio-economic classes, or children with more *vs*. less interested parents, diverged even more widely in success at 11 than they did at 8.

The present volume carries on the story throughout secondary schooling till the children either leave, or enter the sixth Form (and further follow-up is promised). Complete information was available only for 64 per cent (with some information for a considerably larger number); fortunately the losses do not seem to have biased the sample appreciably, as so often happens. But the findings, though fascinating, are exceedingly complicated, because the subjects are by now classifiable under so many overlapping dimensions. These include:

Sex
Social and educational class of parents
Size of, and position in, family
Type of school: grammar, modern, comprehensive, independent
Ditto: single-sexed or coeducational
Staffing and amenities of school
Staying on at school for various periods
Desire for further education, and vocational aims
Test results and assessments at 8, 11 and 15 years
Two tests of intelligence, two of attainment
G.C.E. results
Parental interest and aspirations
Symptoms of emotional maladjustment
Health, age of puberty, vision, left-handedness.

Doubtless the computer has tabulated everything against everything else, but the associations are so numerous and so interwoven that only a small selection of the results can be presented, and the selection of what is most meaningful must depend on the authors' judgement. Sometimes, for example, a particular influence may be found to affect the school performance of working-class boys of borderline ability who just got into grammar school, and yet not affect middle-class boys, or boys of higher or lower ability, or girls. Again, some relationship, say that between short sight and good achievement, may be partly explicable by the greater frequency of short-sighted children in higher social class families, hence further calculations have to be made of the relation when social class is held constant. Thus the complexities multiply, together with the temptation to put forward *post hoc* hypotheses. Despite Dr. Douglas's impartiality and remarkable skill in sorting out results, his conclusions are sometimes obscure, or even contradictory. For example, dealing with absences among girls:

p. 173 'It is particularly middle-class girls at secondary modern schools who lose much time after reaching puberty . . .'

p. 174 '. . . the manual working-class girls at secondary schools have the worst absence records . . .'

A further problem is that while the initial sample was commendably large there are so many 'breakdowns' that one suspects that conclusions are often based on quite small groups. The authors usually tell us whether or not a relationship is statistically significant, but in their efforts to simplify matters and to avoid burdening the reader with statistics they seldom state the number of cases so that he can judge for himself.

Obviously one cannot adequately summarize a summary, and every reader, whether sociologist, educationalist, politician, doctor, psychologist or parent, will be more interested in some points than others. However, here are a few of the perhaps more unexpected findings, to whet the appetite.

Background differences do not usually result in greater divergence of abilities at the secondary stage (though there is some uncertainty since we cannot readily allow for likely regression of extreme groups towards the mean). Douglas concludes, therefore, that the divergence found at 11 years was mainly an artifact of working for the 11+ examination.

Although able lower working-class children are handicapped educationally in many ways, as compared with middle class, their teachers tend to be more biased in their favour than against them. The major reasons for their poor performance and early leaving seem to be lack of interest in academic schooling and rebelliousness against school discipline.

Boys at public schools do not do better at G.C.E. or stay on longer than boys of equivalent ability and social class at grammar schools. Boys and girls at other independent schools are considerably less successful.

The eldest boy in a family of two children is considerably superior, better even than the only child. This does not hold for eldest girls. Though girls are usually behind boys in mathematics, those who are only children are not.

Early sexual maturers tend to be slightly superior in abilities throughout their careers; i.e. there is no sudden spurt of ability at puberty, and late maturers do not catch up later.

Left-handedness is *not* associated with inferior achievement, nor with stuttering or emotional disturbance.

Delinquent boys are more frequent in families where parents are divorced or separated, but not in other types of broken home. Roman Catholic boys are not more apt to be delinquents than non-Catholics.

Sudden death of a parent does not affect success, but prolonged father absence, unemployment, or parental illness do.

Some agreement was found (though we are not told how much) between assessments of emotional disturbance from parental reports of symptoms, from teacher ratings and from pupil questionnaires. These assessments did not differ appreciably in different types of school, or for different social classes, but were associated with reduced achievement.

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MAN'S INEQUALITY

Fight for Education: A Black Paper. Edited by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson. London: The Critical Quarterly Society. 1969. Pp. 80. Price 5*s*.

Accepted contemporary doctrine among educationists calls for a very far-reaching egalitarianism, a reluctance to inflict disagreeable routine learning on the child, and enthusiastic encouragement of letting him find his own way and learn how to think for himself. When these laudable aims result in cramming of all levels of ability into large classes, with a very low teacher-pupil ratio, in holding up the development of the more intelligent out of a belief that it is bad for anyone to find himself excelled, and in an ultra-permissiveness which fails to equip the citizen-to-be with any capacity for self-discipline, one may feel that, perhaps, some other values might be held in mind. So at least think the contributors to 'Fight for Education', a vigorous and thoroughly enjoyable polemical pamphlet with a number of very famous contributors (e.g. Kingsley Amis, Robert Conquest, Angus Maude). They would like to see children not all provided with the same educational diet but each provided with what is apposite to his needs. This, of course, means varying the curriculum for the bright, the average and the dull. How otherwise are we to get the best out of our children? And is there not something to be said for the pursuit of excellence, for the spread of scholarship, even for learning how to put in hard and frustrating work in order to achieve?

Tap a man's knee, and his leg will kick. The pamphlet obviously hit on a sensitive (an inflamed?) spot, and its reasonable suggestions have been met with unreasoning fury. Mr. Edward Short gave it a lambasting, without counter-arguments or counter-facts, and the press have joined in at the same level ('a trivial document by some elderly reactionaries', *Evening Standard*; 'much of (it) . . . tendentious cliché supported by superficiality piled on superficiality', *Sunday Times*). However, the points made by the authors are serious ones, and they should be met and discussed at a serious level. What was once liberal and humane educational theory seems to have become petrified, and may well be no longer either realistic or even humane.

J. B. S. Haldane, who was a lifelong champion of the under-privileged, had no doubt that education should be tailored to meet the range of individual needs (*The Inequality of Man*, 1937). With courses arranged to fit the average boy, he wrote, it is hard for the intelligent to learn more than his fellows. Like Spearman, J. B. S. believed that 'every normal