

Kevin Marjoribanks. *Ethnic Families and Children's Achievement*. (Winchester, Massachusetts: Allen and Unwin, 1980) 172 pp., \$14.95.

In this book Marjoribanks clearly stands with the environmentalists in the "nature vs. nurture" controversy over inequalities in children's academic achievement. He examines the relation between various dimensions of family environments, attitudes toward school, and the academic performance of eleven year old children from different Australian ethclasses, i.e., groups that are horizontally stratified according to social status, while at the same time vertically stratified into ethnic groups. By examining data from six Australian ethclasses (Anglo-Australian middle social-status families; and Anglo-Australian, English, Greek, Southern Italian, and Yugoslavian lower social-status families), Marjoribanks finds that differences in family learning environments are related to ethclass differences in children's academic achievement.

Although he offers his findings with the caveat that other environments are also important to children's academic performance, Marjoribanks underscores in the following theoretical propositions the centrality of the family in the schooling process: "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. . . ." In other words, middle social-status families, particularly those in the dominant group (e.g. Anglo-Australian) have more of the attributes ("cultural capital" of an academically-oriented family than minority (non-Anglo) ethclass families. In the Australian context, the author conceptualizes an ideal-type family as one that expresses an achievement orientation, exerts a strong press for English and for independence in its children, is individually rather than collectively centered, and has high educational and occupational aspirations for its children. Using this model, he then takes his reader through various analyses within and between ethclass variations.

With regard to intra-ethclass variations, it is not clear why Marjoribanks excludes non-Anglo middle social-status families from the study sample. Ethnicity notwithstanding, it would seem that if middle social-status families possess the means to obtain the "valued goals of schooling," a more stringent test of the efficacy of these means would be demonstrated if within-group class differences were also

examined. Another question raised by the study has to do with the definition of the conceptual model. The author has labelled it as interactionist, and therefore, nonrecursive, but in fact he presents a recursive model and then proceeds to carry out his research accordingly. A nonrecursive model would have explicated the reciprocal effects of children's achievement on family learning environments, and vice versa, a relation to which he alludes. Another problem is that Marjoribanks' use of figures to display his findings is somewhat confusing. However, his clear writing style compensates for this shortcoming.

The book's major strength lies in its contribution to the body of literature that attempts to demonstrate empirically that environmental factors bear an important relationship to children's academic achievement. Accordingly, he recognizes the need for schools to assist ethclass families in equipping their children with important skills (English language, mathematics) that are necessary for success in prevailing cultures. But at the same time, he correctly emphasizes the need to generate programs that incorporate the language of major ethnic groups (bilingual programs) in order to improve the performance of non-Anglo children in English-speaking educational systems.

In the United States, these ideas are neither novel nor recent. Educators who are trying to develop viable educational processes in schools that serve minorities (e.g. blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans) are already pursuing many of the ideas he proposes. The difficulty lies in finding the necessary support to implement bilingual programs. Marjoribanks offers sound ideas about how this might be accomplished, but, again, his ideas are neither new nor practical. Consider, for example, his proposal to give all parents a choice of schools or programs within schools which would "approximate their educational expectations." Undoubtedly, such a proposal would meet with overwhelming resistance from educational planners in many local school jurisdictions.

Marjoribanks agrees that much more research is necessary to determine the relationship between environmental factors and ethclass differences in children's school performance. His book raises provocative questions about how one can build on his research to demonstrate the important, reciprocal relations that result in the lower school performance of minority status children.

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