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## **Towards Understanding the Difficult Child: The Difficult Child**

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been put in the translation of Fr. Plater's work could not have been happier. Fr. Castro and all those who have been behind him deserve our full gratitude and unreserved praises.

BENJAMIN SAN JUAN

## TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULT CHILD

THE DIFFICULT CHILD. Joseph S. Roucek, ed. New York: Philosophical Library, 1964. viii, 292, pp.

Child specialists are continually trying to sensitize lay persons to the need for a basic understanding of children's problems, its dynamics, symptoms and possible remedies in the light of present day studies.

*The Difficult Child* represents such an effort. It is a compilation of several papers on children's problems. As the editor, Roucek, puts it, the book is intended, "as a handbook, a survey of existing experiences and serious thinking about the outstanding problems of the difficult child" for "all parents, and those representatives of society, especially the educators and social workers, handling the problems of children." Indeed, the teacher or parent who has neither the time, the temperament, nor the sophistication to use the scientific journals, will find this volume easy but very substantial reading material.

On the whole, however, this book is primarily addressed to the classroom teacher and school administrators, in other words, to those who set up and implement the school curricula, standards and policies. Three factors combine to make it so. First, the choice of problems. Difficulties in mathematics, in music, in reading, in writing, in paying attention and in memory are problems whose relevance to the classroom situation and to the task of the teacher can be immediately seen. These are the problems chosen for discussion in this book. Second, the orientation toward educational research of the specialists who have written the articles. Probably, due to this, what they have most successfully brought out is the role of the classroom teacher and school administration in the treatment of the problems, as well as the relevance of otherwise abstract theoretical formulations and empirical studies to the classroom situation. The teacher will readily find in each article, concrete, practical suggestions that he can immediately try in his own classes. Third, the language is non-technical for the most part. In fact, there is no emphasis on carefully worked-out theories, or detailed presentation of empirical data or strict operational definitions.

Written by people of varying talents, the resulting array of papers that make up this volume are not uniform in their approach, emphasis, organization, coherence and originality. Some have, to a greater extent than the others, made use of carefully selected studies and convincing data to substantiate their conclusions. Others have presented evidence that to the more empirically trained reader would seem arbitrary and subjective. Still others are somewhat lacking in organization and cohesiveness of message, striking one as a mere hodgepodge of observations. A few succeed only in re-exposing present-day thinking on the subject matter while the rest manage to contribute some original, even unconventional but still insightful, ideas.

A very thought-provoking article is that of Carol Felleman and Abraham Shumsky on "The Aggressive Child." Though there is really nothing new in their exposition of the psychological dynamics of aggressive behavior, their analysis of the question "why is it so difficult for teachers to look more objectively at the problem of aggressive behavior?" would certainly set off very interesting group discussions.

Felleman and Shumsky observe that the majority of teachers in the elementary school are ladies. As such, "The behavior that they idealize is feminine-oriented toward compliance, neatness, and a general passivity." They go on to say that "The middle class female teacher is denoted by a characteristic of both her social class and her sex-repressed aggression. Overt aggression challenges and threatens her success in maintaining her personal equilibrium by provoking her unconscious aggression."

Toward remediation of the difficulty in handling aggressive behavior, they suggest a broader concept of the "ideal child, and the greater clarification of their role as teachers." Novice teachers, they observe, expect that "relations with children are a flow of love and affection whereby a creative, warm, and permissive teacher enchants his students and has their complete attention." Thus, the expression of aggression constitutes a sense of defeat and personal failure to many dedicated young teachers.

In contrast to the usual discussion on the ill effects of pampering such as fearfulness and anxiety and consequent lack of originality, curiosity and creativity, the paper of Kenneth Lottich on "The Pampered Child" attempts to bring out "evidence" of the good effect or "positive potential" of pampering and overprotection. He cites illustrations of pampering and precocity in the cases of Cortez, Poe, Coleridge, Fox, Hegel, Rousseau, Voltaire and Wagner. He suggests that pampering may result in the creation of a "sustained drive" or "secret goals" in the individual which in turn may provide the spark or dynamo in his pursuit of superiority. Doubtless, these conclusions as well as those of Felleman and Shumsky invite a lot of criticism, but best of all, suggest interesting areas for further research.

If one were to seek for the most dominant theme or thought that unites these people, it will perhaps be this—the realization of a need for new techniques which are in keeping with the democratic ideal of “mutual respect” and with the idea that “in a democratic society all are born with equal opportunities to develop their individual uniqueness.” The solutions are sought in the relaxation of traditional molds and the expansion of narrow conceptions of what an ideal child should be.

The mathematical child, for example, is seen as possibly having unique ways of arriving at numerical concepts and relationships, which are frustrated by “excessive rigidities” and lockstep procedures that fail to make use of his unique experiences.

Lowe and Lovel, who write the final article, propose a counselling procedure which involves the active participation of the whole family. Both the parents and the child discuss their problems in “open sessions”, that is, in the presence of their neighbors, friends and the child’s teachers and arrive at a better understanding of the interrelationships that exist between the behaviour of the “difficult child” and the parents’ methods and attitudes. Lowe and Lovel are unambiguous in their stand that “there is no principle of learning acceptable to the writers which support the notion that children can learn to live democratically having been raised or taught in an autocratic atmosphere.”

EDUARDA A. MACARANAS

## MERLEAU-PONTY AND PHILOSOPHY

IN PRAISE OF PHILOSOPHY. By John Wild and James M. Edie. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963. xxiii, 67 pp.

This present work is an English translation of the inaugural address of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, delivered on January 15, 1953 after he had been elected to the chair of philosophy at the College de France. He was then the youngest professor ever to be named for such a post. What is significant about this work is that it was addressed not to the professional philosopher but to the ‘world at large’. In this short work, one finds Merleau-Ponty himself explaining to the world how he understands philosophy.

This short book is divided into six sections. The first three sections are concerned with Lavelle, Bergson and Socrates. The last three treat of Religion, History and Philosophy. In these six sections the author shows what philosophy is by being the philosopher and thinking the philosopher who must have the “... taste for evidence and a feeling for ambiguity” (p. 4). And this ‘feeling of ambiguity’