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THE ACQUISITION OF COGNITIVE SKILLS AS A FUNCTION OF A TELEVISION PROGRAMME.

CLAUDETTE GALAUN

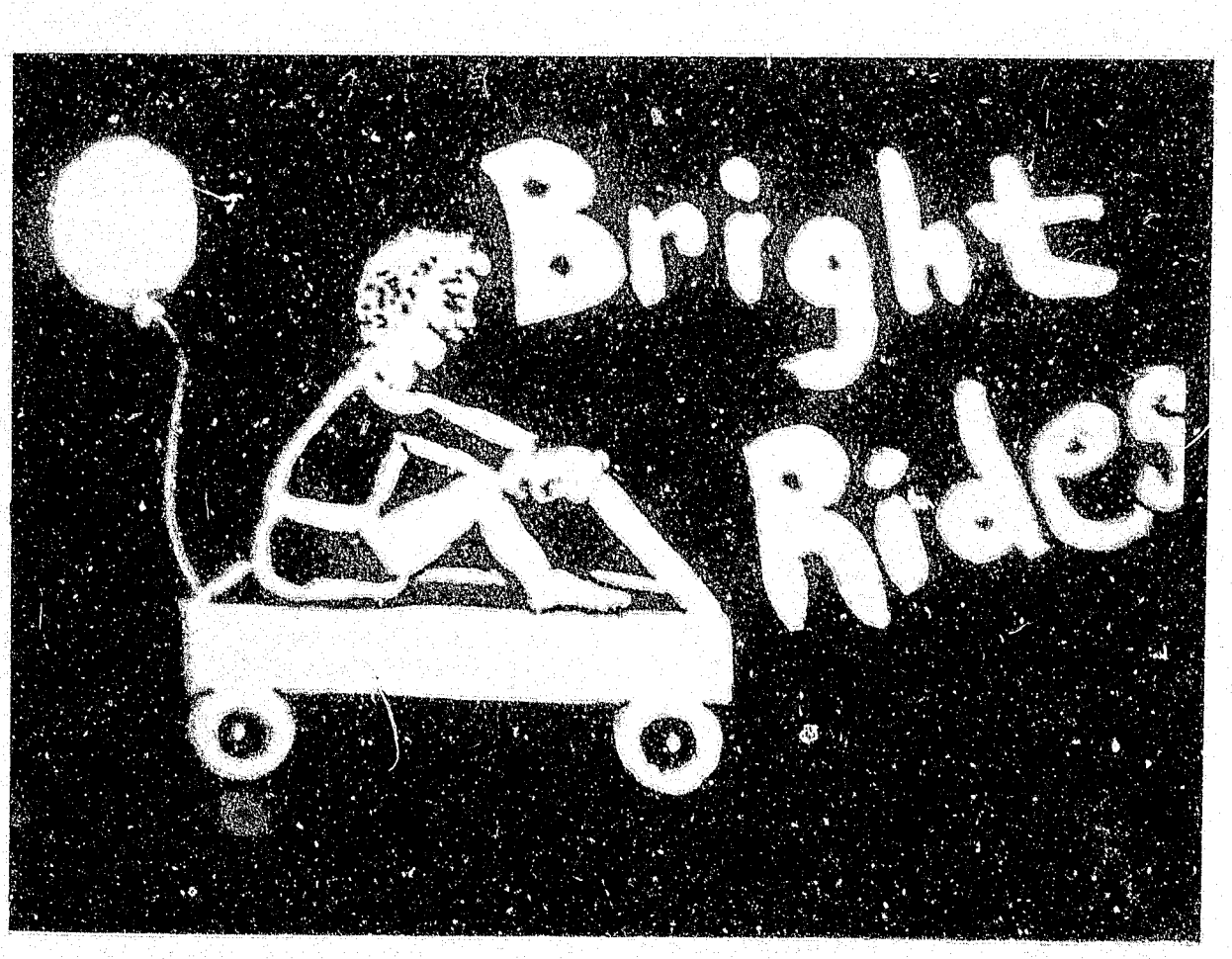
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for the Degree of Master of Arts.

JOHANNESBURG , 1979.

'At this point in history and perhaps at this time in my life I am looking for the social invention, however radical, that would make it possible for people to work together on our massive problems of poverty, urban life and learning to use technology effectively.'

Jerome S Bruner
THE RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION,
1974

'Come along, come along to see Bright Rides. We will have so much fun on this Happy Bright Rides Run.'



to Dennis

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S.

I wish to thank :

Dr. Diana Shmukler, my Supervisor for her encouragement and skilled guidance.

All those who participated in the presentation of Bright Rides with special thanks to Avril Spiers, Debbie Hiebner, Charnelle Petersen, Lynette van Ster, Mandy Shmukler, Paul Shmukler, Gavin Hiebner, Steven Bloch, Clive Fullager, Jeff Fuhr, Trevor Brazil and Rahleen Kaplan.

The production team of Wits Vision, the Television Studio of the University of the Witwatersrand as well as those people who helped in the preparation of props for Bright Rides, especially Manda Steynberg, Cheryl McLachlan, Malka Galaun, Malka Shamir, Ian Bader and Keyan Tomasselli.

The psychology students who assisted in the research as testers.

Sister John Vianney (Supervisor Holy Rosary Nursery School), Mildred Roux (Supervisor Jubilee Crèche) and

Adelaide Norman (Supervisor, Dorkas Crèche) whose continuous help and cooperation was invaluable in this research.

Fred Ingram for his assistance in the computing of the statistics.

Michael Saling and Margaret Beadle for the opportunities they provided to discuss aspects of this research with them.

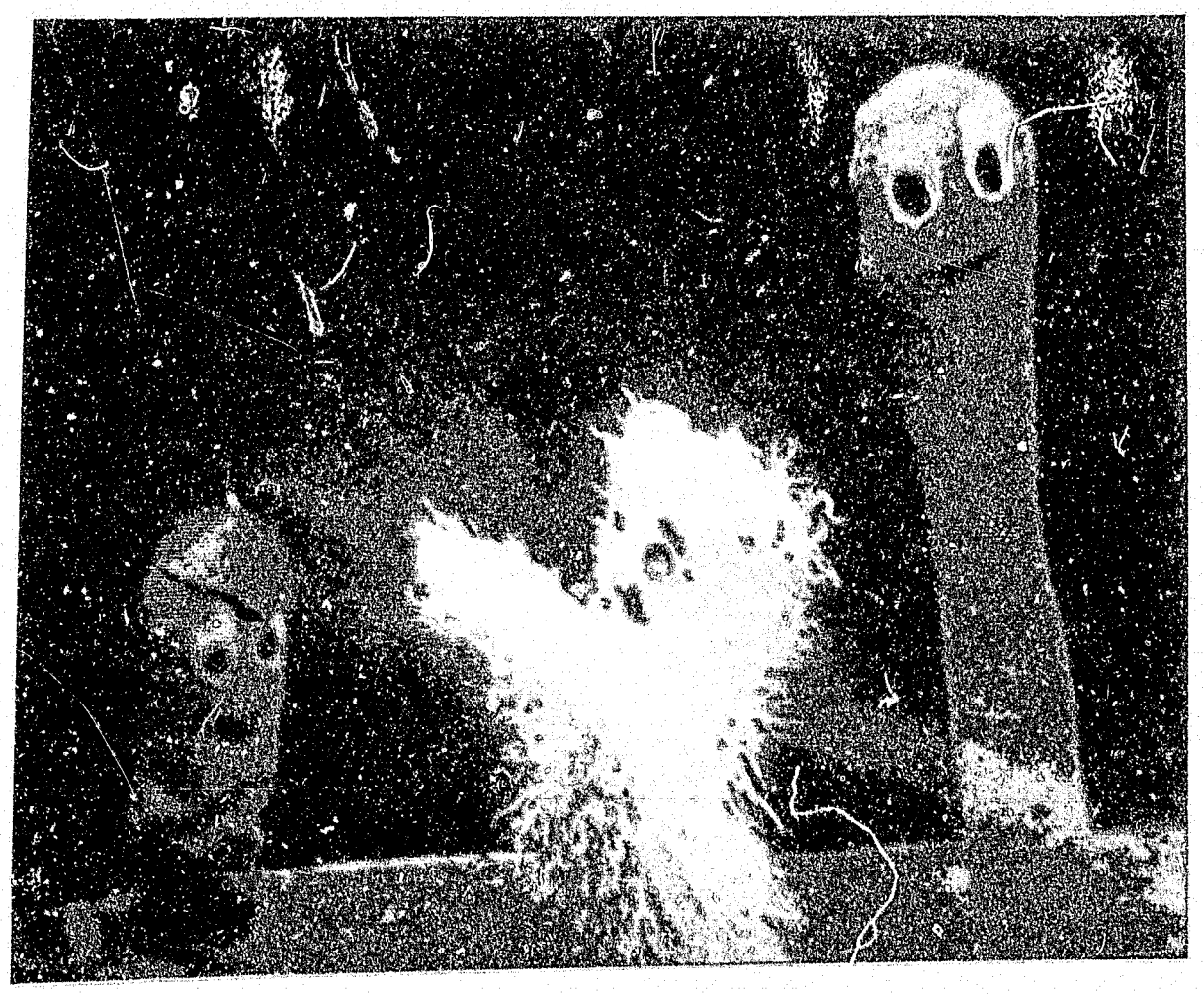
Human Sciences Research Council and the University of the Witwatersrand for their financial assistance.

Charmaine Shaeffer, Marion Davis, and Marilyn Betbeder for their skill in the typing of this dissertation.

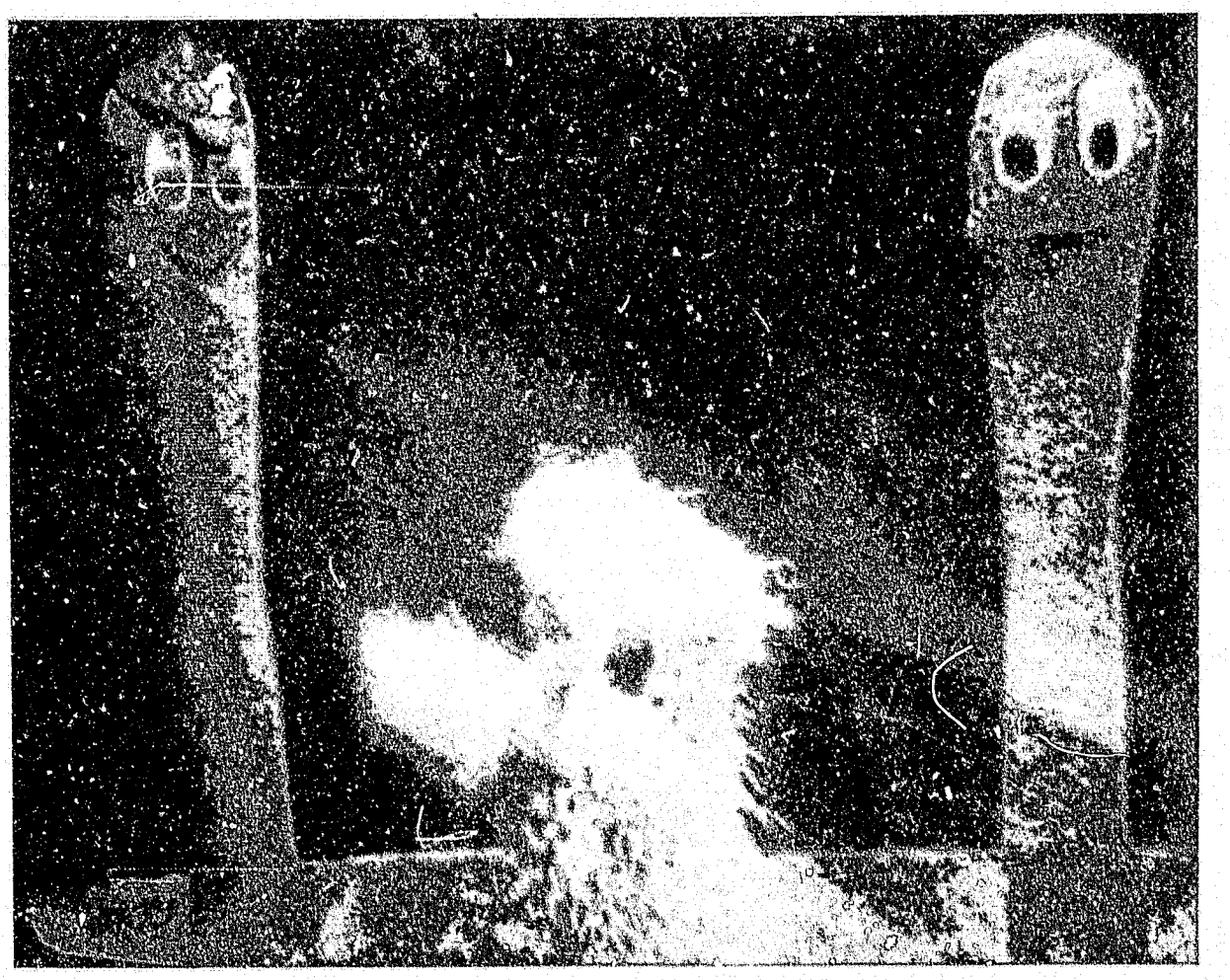
My parents for their endurance and encouragement throughout the period of this study.

My husband for his moral support and tolerance, without which this study could not have been completed.

'This is Tort Short, and this is Paul Tall.'



'Hey Tort, you're supposed to be short!'



ABSTRACT.

A review of the literature indicates that very few studies have been conducted into the educative and cognitive effects of television viewing on young children in America and Europe and even less has been res.. rched in this respect in South Africa where television is still a relatively new medium. There is thus a need to stimulate such research in this country.

The basic aim of this study is to investigate the use of television as an educational facility in the South African context and to ascertain whether preschool children who watch an educational television programme will learn cognitive skills from it. American studies indicate that television is an important medium to disseminate information to the poor and the minorities. The present study sample is a group of 140 Coloured children who are part of a minority group, many of whom live under poverty conditions. They usually lack parental instruction and mediation and their cognitive development is poor as a result of what Feuerstein and Rand (1975) term inadequate mediated learning experiences. For this reason they are termed culturally disadvantaged.

In order to stimulate cognitive growth in these children, a television programme was specially produced to teach a number of cognitive skills including the naming and recognising of letters, numbers, body parts, geometric forms and so on. The programme contained humour and attention holding techinques in order to entertain as well as educate. To test whether cognitive skills were learnt from the programme, the study compared the acquisition

of cognitive skills between an experimental group who viewed the programme and a control group who did not. In order to ascertain which children learnt most skills the independent variables of sex, age, day-care centre attended, television viewing frequency and home language were investigated in both experimental and control groups. The tests used were the M-test (a test adapted from the Sesame Street battery) the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Draw a Person test which provide measures of verbal and non-verbal intelligence.

The study took place in three phases :

1) the production of Bright Rides;
2) pilot testing to ensure that the M-test was adequately measuring what was taught in Bright Rides;
3) pretesting and posttesting of the control group, pretesting of the experimental group, the viewing of Bright Rides by all children and the posttesting of the experimental group. The research design departed from the traditional paradigm in which experimental and control groups are tested concurrently, since it was important to reduce uncontrolled variables of jealousy or information leaks which could occur under these experimental conditions.

Results of a content analysis indicate that Bright Rides appeared to be an entertaining as well as educative programme. After conducting Analysis of Covariance and t-tests, significant differences in scores on the M-test, Peabody and Draw a Person were found between children who saw Bright Rides prior to posttesting and children who did not see the programme. Furthermore learning was greatest on the subtests of body parts, geometric forms, numbers, classification, identifying

community members and places, relational terms and emotions. The independent variables, mentioned above, affected very few subtests indicating that the children benefited from viewing Bright Rides irrespective of their age, sex, child care centres they attended, their language group or their regularity of viewing nationally broadcast television.

The research was formative in that it set out to develop an educational television programme which could be modified and improved for future programmes. In addition the research indicated new directions for future television research in South Africa, and showed that whilst a study of this nature can measure only a limited amount, the scope for further studies using the television programme Bright Rides, is extensive.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Outline:

The broad outline of this study is to establish whether a range of cognitive skills necessary for school readiness can be acquired by a group of preschool children through the intervention of the medium of television. More specifically this study sets out to measure whether those children who view a particular educational television programme will acquire those cognitive skills presented on the programme to a greater extent than a group of children who do not view the programme.

In the light of the above, this study investigates the recent emergence of television in South Africa and its possibilities for educating in the home and school as an additional facility to the parent and teacher. Lesser (1972) points out that "television must never be designed to replace or compete with other educational experiences. It can only aspire to complement whatever else the child has available." (p 233)

Gerbner and Gross (1976) note that television has the greatest attraction of all modern media. Unlike newspapers and books, television does not require print literacy, and television literacy seems to be achieved easily through continuous exposure to the television screen. Unlike the cinema or theatre one need not leave ones home to see it. In this way, young children

old people, sick, poor or rich people share the same cultural system of messages and images. Television thus offers a universal curriculum to which everyone is exposed.

It would appear that children and youth are the most studied population groups with regard to television (Comstock, 1975). The three major reasons for this research preponderance are : 1. public concern over their welfare; 2. interest in their socialisation and development and 3. the operating circumstances of social science. (Comstock et al 1975 a).

Concern over television's possible deleterious effects derives from the considerable influence that television has on American children. In particular, the effects of aggressive and antisocial behaviour have been studied. (Berkowitz, 1962, Bandura 1972, Cameron and Janky 1971). In addition, television's influence on beliefs, values and attitudes, child socialisation and development has motivated research into the role that television plays in the lives of young people.

The use of television by children has been investigated in many studies to which only a few are referred below, since these are canvassed more fully in ensuing chapters. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) conducted a comparative study over three age groups for the amount of time children spent viewing television and found that approximately 6½ hours per day was spent watching television by most American children from preschool through to

tenth grade. (Chapter 2.)

Von Feilitzen (1976) questioned 1 800 Swedish children from 3 to 15 years as to the functions that television fulfilled for them and found that entertainment and information functions were the most important. The prosocial effects of television have been studied by Bryan and Walbeck (1970) who showed that children learn to be charitable from watching a model sharing his possessions, and behaviours such as self-control (Stein & Bryan 1972) and courage (Bryan and Shwartz 1971) have been imitated by children watching models demonstrating self-control or resistance to temptation and courage . (Chapter 3.)

In addition a few studies have been conducted into the cognitive effects of television viewing. The question as to whether day to day viewing of television affects the acquisition of factual knowledge and intellectual skills has not been widely researched yet this is an area which is important with regard to the education and socialisation of children (Comstock et al 1975a).

The early evidence indicated that commercial television's influence on cognitive learning was extremely limited. Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) found that amongst children, television viewing increased knowledge about popular entertainers but not about more academic subjects and gave them a vocabulary advantage in the early grades which vanished by the

time the children had reached the later grades: The unintended message which emerged from this research was that there was little to discover in the area of television and cognitive development and as such this area of research has remained undeveloped. Nevertheless recent studies by Bandura (1973) and Noble (1976) indicate that there is much to learn from cognition and television in terms of social learning theory and the cognitive development approach. These theories are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

In addition renewed interest into the cognitive effects of television was generated when populations such as the minorities and the poor were studied. (Bower 1973, Greenberg and Dervin 1970, 1973, Bogatz and Ball 1970, 1971).

Results from these studies indicate that television is very important in the lives of the poor and the minorities, The reason for this phenomenon is borne out in a study by Greenberg and Dervin (1970, 1973) who having obtained data from over 1000 American school children in the fourth, fifth, tenth and eleventh grades, including Black and White children of relatively high, middle and low socio-economic status, found that children from lower income familities and from Black families devoted more time to television. The reason for this was that they expressed a greater belief than the balance of the sample that television accurately portrays real life.

In addition the lower socio-economic group reported greater dependence on television, regarding it as a source of stimulation and information. As a result of this potential for wide-spread television viewing by Blacks and the poor, the educative function of television became a focus of attention in television research (Chapter 6).

With a view to improving the lives of minority children in the U.S.A., Bogatz and Ball (1970) presented a series of American childrens' programmes called Sesame Street to 1 200 children of different races and socio-economic levels. They tested for the acquisition of skills associated with prosocial and cognitive behaviour in their quest to develop a set of television broadcasts whilst at the same time investigating the phenomenon of cognition itself (Comstock and Lindsey 1975). The main reason for this research was to develop a set of preschool experiences in order to foster intellectual and cultural development in a group of children who did not have the opportunity to attend preschool (Bogatz and Ball 1970).

Results from this study showed that viewing Sesame Street resulted in gains for skills such as naming body parts, recognising geometric forms, alphabet recitation, recognising and naming numbers counting, relational terms, classification and sorting. As part of this study Bogatz and Ball (1970)

investigated whether Spanish speaking children would benefit from viewing the programme. They found that this sample made greater gains on the cognitive skills test after viewing Sesame Street than did other advantaged and disadvantaged children in the sample.

However these results were not replicated in a later study conducted in 1970. Nevertheless in their second year follow-up study, Bogatz and Ball (1971) found that 283 disadvantaged Blacks and Whites both benefited from regularly watching Sesame Street and they concluded from their 1970 and 1971 research that Sesame Street could help to close the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children (Bogatz and Ball (1970).

Results from both studies indicated that exposure effects were not strongly related to viewer variables such as sex, race, intelligence quotient, race or family socio-economic status.

Salomon (1974) examined the effects of Sesame Street on Israeli children to ascertain whether exposure to the programme would enhance the development of specific skills related to media literacy. He found that whilst the children did learn from the content of the programme they did not acquire specific skills related to the format or presentation. In other studies Salomon (1972, 1975, 1976) has shown that with

continuous exposure to television, mental skills necessary for media literacy are learnt. These skills serve to enhance the understanding of television content (Chapter 4).

Research into the effects of television often requires the use of television-naive subjects, (Ekman et al 1972) since as Ekman notes, a long history of exposure to television on the part of the children studied may invalidate inferences about the effects of television. In most countries where research is on-going, naive populations are scarce. Although a television service has been operational for three years in South Africa much of the population has had little exposure to the medium of television. For this reason, South Africa is an ideal country for television research.

Unfortunately, Sesame Street may not be shown in South Africa and unlike Sesame Street, no locally produced programmes seem to have readily testable education goals as production guidelines. One would thus face a difficult task of identifying educational goals to be tested in existing South African childrens' programmes. For this reason a childrens television programme was specially produced with educative and enriching goals in mind. This programme, called "Bright Rides" was produced in co-operation with Wits-Vision and was written to entertain at the same time

as it would educate. Humour and attention holding sequences were written into the programme for this purpose (Chapter 7).

Whether this programme wou'd indeed educate became the major question of this study. If it could serve as an entertaining enrichment programme then to some extent it could be used as a basis for an educational programme for children which could be presented on South African television.

In addition, the present study proposed to investigate whether Bright Rides would be able to raise the level of cognitive skills in a group of preschoolers, who live in Coloured townships on the outskirts of Johannesburg. These children are members of a minority group and often live under conditions of poverty (Venter 1974). According to Brindley (1976), they usually lack parental instruction and mediation which as Feuerstein (1978) notes is necessary for perceptual and cognitive growth. Their language is usually primitive and restricted and concept development is poor as a result of inadequate mediated learning experiences. For this reason they are termed culturally disadvantaged (Chapter 5).

Thus, the general aim of the study is to establish whether educational intervention in the form of the programme "Bright Rides" will be beneficial to preschool

children and more specifically whether it will be of benefit to culturally deprived children. To test whether the programme is effective the study compares the acquisition of cognitive skills between an untreated (control) group and an experimental group who view the programme.

A more specific aim of the study is to investigate if particular viewers of Bright Rides learn more than others. Thus, whilst all are Coloured[1] children the sample includes middle class and lower class children, children from various geographical areas, children aged three, four, five and six years old and children with English or Afrikaans language backgrounds.

Cognitive skills are evaluated on a test called the M-test which was adapted from the Sesame Street test, devised in 1969 by the Educational Testing Service of New Jersey. (Bogatz and Ball 1971). This test was designed to test for skills thought to be important for the schoolgoing child and to this end it examines the skills such as: recognising letters and numbers, naming body parts and simple geometric forms, classification of objects by size, form, numbers and function, relational

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[1] Coloured children in the S.A. context are children of mixed blood resulting from the intermarriage of Whites of European descent and Blacks of African descent

skills, e.g. amount relationships, size relationships and position relationship.

Since this test was not standardised, two other tests were used. These were the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and the Draw a Person (DAP). The PPVT was included in order to assess the level of verbal intelligence and to compare this score with scores on the M Test. The DAP, another standardised test known to correlate with measures of verbal intelligence and held to be relatively culture free, is an indicator of non-verbal intelligence. (Dennis 1966). It was thus used to assess the mental age of the child and the relationship of non-verbal intelligence to the M Test.

The study poses the following questions:

1. Is the programme educative and entertaining?
2. Is there a significant difference in M-Test Scores between children who see Bright Rides and a control group who do not see the programme?
3. On which sub-tests of the M test, does most learning take place?
4. Which children learn more skills and which learn less after viewing Bright Rides?

These questions will be answered in the ensuing chapters after an examination of the theoretical background to the study in which the following are discussed.

Chapter Two investigates the use of television by children, describes the factors which influence their use of the medium such as their age or their sex, and considers the functions that television serves for children. This chapter also looks at the viewing preferences of children, at the content of the programmes they view and at the lessons they learn from day to day viewing.

Chapter Three discusses two theories of learning from television, the first being the social learning approach and the second the cognitive development model.

Chapter Four considers the use of television as an educational medium and whether it is beneficial for the child to learn via a visual or a verbal presentation. It also proposes that television is a tactile medium, and that this mode can restructure the minds of its viewers. Media literacy, or the way in which the child learns to extract and process information from a television programme is also discussed.

In Chapter Five the subject of cultural disadvantage is considered in relation to the Coloured population of South Africa. While decrying the methods employed by traditional schools, this chapter discusses which skills are most important for the development of perception and cognition in the preschooler. It proposes that television can introduce these skills to children in an exciting and entertaining

manner instead of through the tedious methods so often used in school.

Chapter Six considers the potential of television in South Africa and how it can be beneficial to the poor and the minorities. It also investigates the characteristics of the Coloured people, whose children are the sample of the study. It describes the environment of the townships in which they live, and then looks at the child care centres which were chosen for study.

Chapter Seven discusses the best methods of producing a childrens television programme which will catch, direct and hold the childs attention. It outlines the use of formative research which is employed in the present study and describes the methodological basis for the adaptation of the test used to measure the acquisition of cognitive skills.

Finally Chapter Eight provides a summary of the theoretical rationale for the present study.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

2.1. Introduction:

Since children are the major focus of this study, this chapter investigates the use of television by them, the factors which influence their use of the medium such as their sex, age or intelligence quotient and the functions that television serves for them. In addition this chapter discusses the viewing preferences of children, the content of the programmes they view and the lessons they learn from day to day viewing.

In order to place this study f children and television in perspective, this chapter first considers the roots of television and the way in which it has developed into the most popular medium of communication in most countries today. Unfortunately most available research is conducted in Western countries and so information regarding Eastern and African countries is sparsely presented in this study. Chapter four, however briefly discusses the development of educational television in Russia, China and Japan.

2.2. The Roots of Television:

Long before television appeared on public circuit, basic technical advances necessary for audio-visual transmission were made. However, in 1884 a television patent was issued in Germany and by 1926 a British television pioneer, John L. Baird demonstrated a complete television system. In 1927 the American Telephone and Telegraph Company set up a

long distance telecast in the United States and by 1939 the National Broadcasting Company had begun regular telecasting. When World War II broke out, however, television progress declined and almost ceased. In both America and Britain the technical and psychological energies necessary for the cultivation of this medium were stifled during the war. Yet television which was clearly destined to grow regained momentum, and by 1947 a period of massive development began.

During the next three decades, the medium mushroomed into the massive commercial enterprise it is today. Television as a mass medium of communication spread through the United States, Britain and other European countries to such an extent, that by 1960, eighty per cent of American homes owned one or more TV sets, while in 1970 this level had reached almost one hundred per cent saturation, with sales of television sets still on the increase (Liebert, et al - 1973).

According to De Fleur (1970), television was the quickest mass medium to reach its maximum penetration which was almost universal adoption. It also took over the demand for other media.

In America and Britain television powerfully diminished the audience for films, lowered listenership to the radio, and reduced the demand for newspapers and books. According to Liebert et al (1973) newspapers are now read because they comment on TV productions and list TV programmes, and in addition they elaborate and substantiate news the reader already knows from having seen it on TV. Radio is listened to whilst driving a motor vehicle since it would be unsafe to watch a TV set, and books gain wide circulation when their authors appear on TV talk shows.

2.3. The Child as Televiewer:

According to Liebert et al (1973) television is the "early window" onto the world for the very young child. In America, the average two year old toddles over to turn on the set and by the age of three or four he is a regular television watcher (Liebert et al 1973 pX). By the time the young British or American matriculates he has spent many more hours in front of the TV box than he has spent in the classroom. He started watching TV as a preschooler, he watched on weekends as well as on schooldays and the attraction of TV extended beyond the summer holidays into the academic year (Liebert et al 1973).

In South Africa, television is a very new medium introduced into the country in January 1976. As yet the population is still relatively naive since no generation has yet grown from infancy to adulthood with television as a constant companion. This should be contrasted to the position of the American population who have been viewing television in a technologically advanced form for about twenty years. However it should be noted that whilst Americans have been viewing television for so long, the social scientists of the fifties had neither the sophisticated technology for the insights into the wide-spread effects of television to adequately research the impact of the introduction of such a powerful medium on the society and its individuals. (Schmukler 1976). Thus research conducted in the early fifties bears little relevance to the development of television today.

The South African television service is a one channel commercial medium with transmission in English and Afrikaans, starting at 6 p.m. and broadcasting for approximately five hours a day. The service is

restricted in that it offers only 2½ hours per language, so that English and Afrikaans viewers see television in their own language for only two and a half hours each day. Children's programmes are broadcast for the first 45 to 50 minutes daily in the alternate languages (English and Afrikaans). Television is not yet transmitted in an African language, although such programmes are scheduled to appear in the 1980's. Thus, whilst a limited service is provided to English and Afrikaans speakers, nothing at all has been developed for speakers of African languages.

In addition the service is further restricted since local programmes are based on Western cultural ethics, and imported programmes from the United States and Britain adhere to the same Westernised bias. Thus, South African television offers a very limited service and its effect on the televiewing population as yet remains relatively small. However, the effects of televiewing noted on people abroad will soon, no doubt be seen in the South African population.

In the United States television is generally intended to reach adults since they respond to advertisements and buy household commodities and luxury products such as cigarettes and beer. The American adolescent spends less time watching television than do his parents and younger siblings since he prefers spending his time in the company of his peers or in settings away from home. As a result, television advertising is only occasionally beamed to the teenagers (Liebert et al 1973). Concerning very young children, a negligible amount of television time is directed specifically at them since they have limited purchasing power and are therefore not of importance to the advertisers. The TV writer and producer hardly considers the eight year and never thinks of the three year old. Thus, young children as televiewers are intruders,

or unexpected guests.

> "They are voyeurs of a scene intended for other eyes, eavesdroppers on words meant for other ears". (Liebert et al 1973 p.x.)

Some programmes are especially produced for children, but the majority of programmes watched by young children are intended for older viewers who are more sophisticated in the ways of the world and more aware of the difference between fantasy and reality.

The South African preschooler may see special childrens' programmes which are broadcast from 6 pm to 6.45 pm. However, in many cases, particularly amongst the minorities and lower classes, where parents work till late and the child is not permitted to switch on the set alone, he never sees these childrens' programmes. Instead he is allowed to watch adult programmes which are broadcast later in the evening (Sr. John Vianney 1978).

Older viewers are able to balance television messages against school education and life experience. For the very young child, however, television is so different from anything in his life experience that he has no compensating source of information. Unable to read, he cannot turn to books or newspapers for other perspectives on the world. His intelligence and experience are still developing and are thus unequal to the task of assessing and evaluating what he sees on TV. In the absence of other frames of reference the young televiewer learns avidly from the content of television in that he emulates the behaviour he sees modelled by the people on television. Since he is a constant user he becomes a constant pupil of the behaviour portrayed on this medium.

2.4. Factors which influence Childrens use of Television:

According to Lyle (1972) children are "purposeful viewers" with regular viewing times and favourite programmes even before they enter first grade. (p 4). The viewing habits of children are influenced by factors such as age, socio-economic status, educational level and intelligence.

2.4.1 Age:

Von Feilitzen (1976) in her studies on Swedish children found that the majority of children start to pay real attention to television at the age of three. Before that age they occasionally watch the set but their interest is shortlived. Once they have acquired a mode of concentration, most preschoolers (three to six year olds) watch every day, and few view less than three days a week. On average they devote around one and half hours a day to viewing (Von Feilitzen & Linne 1969, Henningsson and Filipson 1975).

On investigating the viewing habits of American children, Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that first graders spent slightly less than 24 hours watching television during a week; sixth graders spent slightly more than 30 hours; and tenth graders spent about 28 hours. In each grade, girls viewed slightly more than boys. On average first graders watched about 2½ hours, sixth graders watched 6½ hours and tenth graders 5½ hours. Younger children were more likely to watch during the early evening hours, first grade viewing peaked at 8.00 p.m., although 10-15% were still watching at 9.30 p.m. About half the older children were watching at 9.00 p.m. and over 25% were watching at 10.30 p.m. (Liebert et al 1973).

2.4.2 Socio-Economic Status and Ethnicity:

Studies by Blood (1961), Greenberg and Dominick (1969) show that American children of lower socio-economic status watch more television than children of higher socio-economic status. The reason for this phenomenon has been mentioned in Chapter 1 above and is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

Race and ethnic background seem to make no difference in the viewing of young children, but differences appear at the older ages (Lyle & Hoffman 1972 and Murray 1972). Lyle & Hoffman (1972) found that Mexican-American sixth and tenth graders especially girls, watched more often than their American peers. In another study by Greenberg and Dominick (1969) low income black teenagers were found to watch for over 6 hours a day while low income whites watched for only 4½ hours. The same research team found similar results for fourth and fifth grade children. Liebert et al (1973) note that race is usually associated with socio-economic status, with black children tending to be of low socio-economic status. However, these differences are found to appear regardless of socio-economic background.

2.4.3 Intelligence Quotient:

Children with high intelligence quotients view less television than those with lower scores (Himmelweit et al 1958, and Coffin 1955). First graders rated in the lower third of their classes by their teachers, watched more television than children in the middle and upper third. No differences were found for sixth grade children, but slower tenth graders also tended to watch more (Lyle & Hoffman 1972). According to Efron &

Hickey (1969) more intelligent grade school pupils watch more television, but by early adolescence they are watching less.

2.5 The Functions Television Serves for Children:

Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) believe that television acts as a

> "great shining cafeteria from which children select what they want at the moment. A child comes to television seeking to satisfy some need. He finds something there and uses it". (p 3).

The individual's needs are dependant upon psychological factors existing in the individual (such as sex, age, development, personality, intelligence, experience and interests) and social factors (such as place of domicile, socio-economic status, relationships with family and peers, living habits, leisure activities and the societal system of norms and values). Thus mass media effects do not occur unless the individual himself chooses to use the mass media in a certain way (Edelstein et al 1966). However the preschooler does not have total freedom over his viewing frequency. Parents influence the child's use of the media directly by prohibitions or indirectly by their own viewing behaviour. Thus children's television viewing is largely a matter of learning the family's television-viewing behaviour (Von Feilitzen 1976).

In a study by Von Feilitzen (1976) 1,800 Swedish children from 3 to 15 years were asked what they personally "got out of television". Five functions were identified in the childrens responses (p 98).

2.5.1 Entertainment Functions:

Children viewed the programmes as "amusing and exciting; it relaxes, passes time and allows fantasy exploration". (p 101).

2.5.2 Informative or Cognitive Functions:

Children responded "you learn a lot", "you find out what's happening in the world". (p 101). In general responses pointed to the childs needs of reality orientation, general knowledge, information on current events and stimulation of fantasy. Furthermore, television seemed to provide practical information, advice, norms, and curiosity stimulation.

2.5.3 Social Functions:

Childrer found they could identify with and obtain an almost real contact with people on television, that viewing was a well established habit and that the programmes provided topics of conversation. Older children expressed needs for status, such as "I want to know as much as other people", and social commitment - "you want to talk about the injustices of the world" (p 101).

2.5.4 Non-Social or Escapist Functions:

A minority of both younger and older children responded that television met a need for escapism and a need to get away from people around them.

2.5.5 Mode of Consumption and Medium Level Functions:

These functions are associated with the context of use and the non-

content characteristics of the medium. Children noted that they chose TV above other media because "its got both picture and sound" and "you can watch TV at home" (p 101).

On the whole, Swedish children seemed to consider that the most important functions of television were its "entertaining" functions closely followed by the "informative" functions (Von Feilitzen 1975). Furthermore, they did not consider that entertainment programmes alone provided entertainment or that information programmes alone offered information. They considered that every programme and every message contained a measure of information which was more or less entertaining depending on its manner of presentation. From this study it appears that television serves as a mass medium which provides indirect learning while simultaneously entertaining. For example, children watching adult entertainment programmes are introduced to a broader sphere of experience, or to a 'reality orientation' in the adult world. This reality orientation seems to relate less to the family and peers with whom the child is familiar, and more to values and concepts concerning occupation, status, and peoples roles outside the home and the schools (Capecchi and Livolsi 1973, Himmelweit, et al 1958).

According to Von Feilitzen (1975) the early studies indicated that a high degree of attention to entertaining content afforded an unrealistic picture of the world and implied escapism on the part of the viewer. It was assumed that this in its turn would lead to an impaired capacity to deal with problems of real life and encourage physical, mental and social passivity. However, Von Feilitzen's study on Swedish children, opposes this definition of escapism, showing that escapism defined as social withdrawal applies to a minority of children. Relaxation,

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identification and contact with people were not viewed as escapism but rather as elements of the entertainment and social functions of television. Television is able to provide a social relationship in that it permits identification, contact with television personalities, distraction from loneliness and security. In terms of its social function, television is perhaps most valuable to its viewers.

On the whole, it appears that children watch television because they want information, preferably presented in an entertaining manner; because they want social contact per se, and because they want to improve their real social contacts. Sometimes, but only rarely this is coupled with escapism. The present author agrees with this formulation and supports Noble's (1975) contention that mass communication researchers, who claim that children escape life by attending to television, have overlooked the very important function which television serves, of providing an opportunity to explore social roles and to increase their involvement in their society.

2.6 Viewing Preferences:

According to Streicher and Bonney (1974) American children within the six to twelve year age group prefer cartoons, fantasies, situation comedies and dramas. Boys appeared to prefer cartoons more often than did girls, and the youngest boys preferred cartoons to other types of programmes. Amongst older children (age 10 to 12) boys preferred fantasies, whilst girls chose situation comedies. Von Feilitzen (1976) found that Swedish preschoolers liked their own programmes best, but that many viewed adult programmes. A Western series was found to be

a regular programme for many preschoolers. In addition many preschoolers had seen the evening news programmes, although their viewing was sporadic and their involvement comparatively slight. (Von Feilitzen & Linne 1969).

2.7 Television Content and the Lessons it Teaches:

What children prefer to see and what they actually do see are two very separate issues in television viewing. Television entertainment offers many symbolic lessons to children - about occupations, racial groups, sex and violence, much of it being a biased and distorted reflection of reality (Liebert et al 1973). American television teaches that the white unmarried male is an aggressive hero, whilst the woman who is usually married is the victim of violence (Liebert et al 1973). According to Gerbner (1972), minority groups are more likely than white Americans to be projected as law breakers, and to pay a higher price for their crimes than their American counterparts. Head (1954), Gentile and Miller (1961) report that less than one tenth of the people on television are working class - and when blue collar workers do appear they are usually presented in a negative light. In contrast, professionals and managers are greatly over-presented and their roles glamourized (Smythe 1954). In addition, occupational roles are usually stereotyped - lawyers are very clever, and usually legally unorthodox. Members of the artistic professions are almost always temperamental and eccentric. Police officials are generally hardened and often brutal. Private Investigators are always resourceful and clearly more capable than the police. Nurses are cold and impersonal. Salesmen are glib. Journalists are callous. Taxi, bus and truck drivers are burly and aggressive. (De Fleur 1964, p 71).

Although television stereotypes have changed considerably within the last decade, it would appear that the above proposition by De Fleur and the findings by Head (1954), Gentile & Miller (1961) are still valid. South African telecasting offers stereotypes of similar nature as far as the White population is concerned. With regard to the Black population group, apart from the exposure given to "acceptable" Black leaders, Blacks are generally not seen on television in any role other than that of the domestic worker or farm labourer.

2.7.1 Violence:

Violence has always been part of film and television content. Television in the United States appears to have the most violence when compared to other western countries, showing programmes featuring violence to a lesser extent in Britain and Israel. (Gurevitch 1972). Sweden's network in contrast to other countries has very little violent content (Dahlgren 1972). Gray (1978) reports that South Africa also broadcasts very little violence. He notes

> "our violence is quite muted and is no uglier than scenes most adults saw in Saturday morning matinees years ago (The Star, May 8, 1978 p 8).

According to Gerbner (1972) the most violent programmes were those designed exclusively for children

> "since the average cartoon hour contains more than six times as many violent episodes as the average adult dramatic hour and nearly 12 times the violence rate of the average movie hour" (p 36).

However, Himmelweit et al (1958) and Schramm et al (1961) report that

children are frightened by realistic, rather than stylistic aggression portrayed in cartoons and as such cartoon violence is not a potential danger.

The argument that television is a significant cause of violent action is an extremely controversial subject. There are two main schools of thought with regard to this problem. The first trend proposes that television is a very effective "school for violence" (Wertham, 1964 p x) and maintains that televised aggression can only adversely affect child viewers. Advocates of this view are Wertham (1964), Bandura (1972), Bandura and Walters (1963), Berkowitz (1962), and many of these studies show that violence has a negative effect on the subsequent behaviour of children.

The Bandura/Berkowitz type experiments may be criticised however since they were conducted in artifical laboratory situations, and the samples studied may not have been representative of the general population. In addition Noble (1975) contends that the methods used by these researchers calls into question the validity of their results. However, there has been support for Bandura and Berkowitz's views on television violence and aggression. In 1972 the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee came to the conclusion that there is some causal link between violence viewing and subsequent aggressive behaviour. Along with members of the public, they called for a decrease in violence in American television programmes and were prepared to go to court to enforce their demands. An example, presented here demonstrates public concern over television violence.

Recently a case was brought to the American courts in which a television

film was "accused" of perpetrating a crime. The crime, in which a nine year old child was sexually assaulted by four other girls aged 10 to 15, allegedly occurred after the girls had viewed an almost identical attack in the television movie "Born Innocent". The victim's mother sued the NBC for twelve million dollars and the California Medical Association supported the claim because it maintained

> "profound social implications of violence on television can no longer be ignored. The health of society demands that broadcasters be accountable for their programming" (Gray, Star, May 8, 1978).

In contrast to the Bandura/Berkowitz experiments the other school of thought proposes the "catharsis theory" that televised violence does not stimulate the viewer to act out violently but serves to stimulate aggressive fantasies which may reduce aggression in the viewer (Feshbach and Singer, 1971, Ancona 1963, Croce 1963, Noble 1975. According to Feshbach and Singer (1971) the reason why aggressive fantasies may reduce aggression in the viewer is that an individual can lower his arousal level by punishing his victim in thought, which will reduce his need to punish by actions. In addition televised violence may create fantasies to frighten the viewer of the possible consequences of violence.

Noble (1975) set out to reconcile the aggression theory of Berkowitz and the catharsis theory of Feshbach and came to the conclusion that there appeared to be some truth in both propositions but that each investigator was talking about the effects of different forms of filmed aggression on different types of viewers. To this end Noble compared a sample of twelve, six and a half year old aggressive boys (Feshbach) with

twelve same age non-aggressive boys (Berkowitz) in their reactions to stylistic aggression (Feshbach) and to more realistic aggression (Berkowitz). The results from this experiment were that

1) For viewers who were initially non-aggressive and who viewed sport or realistically televised aggression, Berkowitz's theory was maintained that televised aggression prompts viewers to be aggressive.

2) For aggressive viewers who viewed stylistically televised aggression, or sport where the home team wins, catharsis occurred as Feshbach had suggested.

Noble concluded however that since the studies by Feshbach and Singer (1971) and Noble (1975) were conducted in more natural everyday media-viewing situations than the more artificial laboratory oriented experiments of Bandura and Berkowitz, the media generally have positive effects, namely catharsis effects on their viewers. However, as Noble points out, he is not suggesting that more violence should be projected than is already available but that, aggressive portrayals should show the realistic consequences of aggression, so that children will see that violence is not clean and fun but that it causes harm.

Whilst agreeing with Noble's contention that televised aggression may be acceptable, if not beneficial to viewers by allowing them to sublimate their aggressive feelings, the present author contends that the punitive consequences of aggression are not often shown on day to day television programmes and that extremely horrific incidents are

sometimes shown which can seriously affect a child who cannot cope with such violence causing him to brood on the aggressive acts until he finds a chance to express his pent-up feelings in real life.
It appears thus that there is a need for more control of violence on television. For example, a classification system could be instituted indicating which programmes are desirable for certain age groups. In addition a more responsible approach could be taken by producers to show not only that violence is exciting but that unfortunate consequences occur as a result of such aggression.

2.7.2 Pro-Social Behaviour:

In addition to the violent content of television programmes, one also sees examples of co-operative effort, of helping and of sharing on many of today's programmes (Liebert et al 1973). Examples of experimental studies highlight the importance of this type of programme. Bryan and Walbeck (1970) showed that when children saw a television character acting as a charitable model, they would share their possessions - in contrast to when they saw a greedy model. Stein & Bryan (1972) demonstrated that a televised model could also induce self-control or resistance to temptation. Television has potential therapeutic effects too. Bryan and Schwartz (1971) showed that television could develop courage in children. Bandura and Mendlove (1968) taught children who were fearful of dogs to play with them fearlessly by means of a programme showing children enjoying playing with dogs.

The type of learning described above follows the social learning model

of Bandura and his associates in which the child imitates the behaviour of an observed model. This model of learning underlies much television research and will be discussed more fully in Chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

TWO THEORIES OF LEARNING FROM TELEVISION

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter discusses two theories of learning which form the major basis on which most television research into the effects of television on children is founded. The two theories are the social learning approach of Bandura (1965, 1969, 1971) and his colleagues, which was briefly introduced in the previous chapter, and the cognitive development approach of Piaget (1952, 1962) Bruner (1966) Kohlberg (1968) and others which will be discussed below after an examination of the social learning approach.

3.2 Social Learning and Television Viewing:

Social learning theory is a powerful theory in modern psychology in that it is an extension of the behaviouristic school and subscribes to the idea that the adult end-product is a direct function of the teaching forces of the family and environment as the child perceives them and as they affect him. The organism is thought to be shaped by its experiences and not determined by its genetic make-up. Social learning theory extends beyond the scope of traditional learning theory in that it places the individual in the social context instead of noting interactions between isolated individuals. Furthermore it indicates the importance of vicarious learning in which an individual observes the behaviour of another and learns to imitate the behaviour, or in some way model himself after the other person. This theory also considers that the human

being is modifiable at any age in contradistinction to the Psychoanalytic theory and cognitive development theories which place emphasis on certain critical developmental stages during which certain types of experience have a maximum effect. Social-learning theory is important in television research since the television set is a powerful environmental influence on organisms living in a technological society. Observational learning, modelling, inhibition, imitation and disinhibition are aspects of the social learning process and these are discussed more fully below.

3.2.1 Observational Learning:

Children learn to be aggressive, or to be kind through simply observing a live model, or a model on film or television. (Bandura & Walters 1963). Observational learning can influence a child's willingness to help others (Rosenham & White 1967), his ability to display self control (Bandura & Mischel 1965) and his learning of language rules (Lieber, Odam, Hill, Huff 1969). Observational learning is a major aspect in the socialisation process and thus television plays an important role as an observational teacher.

3.2.2 Modelling:

Modelling refers to the overt behaviour of others which may be demonstrated directly (live modelling), or through films, television or print (symbolic modelling).

3.2.3 Imitation, Inhibition, Disinhibition:

One method of learning is by the imitation of modelled behaviour.

The imitated event is defined as one in which the new responses occur, or the characteristics of existing response repertoires are modified, as a function of observing the behaviour of others, without the modelled responses being overtly performed by the viewer during the exposure period (Kniveton 1976). This means that the subject simply observes and models behaviour but does not copy whilst the model is performing. Thus any learning that occurs is purely observational or covert. However, when placed in a different situation, or when angered or frustrated, the child may bring these new behaviours into play Imitation may be direct or counter-imitative. (Liebert et al 1973). In direct imitation, the child attempts to copy the model's behaviour as closely as possible. In counter-imitation, he actively avoids copying; for example, staying away from a hot stove after seeing a playmate burned by touching it.

3.2.4 Inhibition:

Watching violence on television, might inhibit the aggressive behaviour of youngsters by draining off aggressive impulses, showing the horror of violence, or by convincing the observer that he will be punished for aggressive behaviour. This is the catharsis hypothesis which states that a drive may be reduced by fantasy aggression, and has been discussed above.

3.2.5 Disinhibition:

Disinhibition or response facilitation is best explained by an example. A child who observes people giving clothes to the Red Cross, on television, may then share his toys with his sister; thus emulating the idea of sharing.

Both the characteristics of the model and of the viewer affect the extent to which a model will be imitated.

3.2.6 Characteristics of the Model:

The more attractive or more rewarding the model appears to the viewer, the more likely he is to imitate its behaviour. (Bandura et al 1963 a, Bandura and MacDonald 1963 b). Other researchers (Rosenbaum et al 1962, Henker 1964) have shown that the more competent a model appears the greater the degree of imitation produced. Other factors related to competence level, such as age (Bandura & Kupers 1964, Hicks 1965), sex (Bandura et al 1963 c, Rosenblith 1959), social Power (Mischel & Grusec 1966) and ethnic status (Epstein 1966) have been shown to enhance the influence of the model. Models who purported to be experts (Mausner 1953), or celebrities who possessed symbols of socio-economic success (Lefkowitz et al 1955) were highly influential models. A high status model may be imitated because he or she is presumed to know what is appropriate or permissible behaviour (Liebert et al 1973). Sometimes the high status model is imitated simply because the observer aspires to high status himself and hopes to attain it by imitating behaviours of the high status model.

Bandura and Huston (1961) found that children imitate the behaviour of an emotionally "warm" model more than that of an emotionally "cold" model, when the behaviour was constructive by nature. Aggressive behaviour was, however, imitated irrespective of which model was observed. Thus the characteristics of the model, while exerting important influences, are not independent of the type of behaviour observed. The relationship between model and observer did not affect aggressive behaviour but did

affect the learning of constructive behaviour.

3.2.7 Characteristics of the Viewer:

How susceptible the viewer is to modelling influences depends on his past experiences, expertise and motivations. Thus a model who appears competent to one viewer, is a novice to another.

Bandura (1971) suggests that a minimum of cognitive development or skill development is necessary for the viewer to imitate a model's behaviour.

Kniveton and Stephenson (1970) claim that children with few interests of their own are likely to be more susceptible to the example of film models than those children with other interests. In their view, pre-experience innoculates the viewer against the films influence. In a subsequent experiment (Kniveton & Stephenson 1972) working class children were less able to develop their own interests than middle class children, and displayed greater imitation than middle class children. It is the view of the present author that working class children required external stimulation in the absence of their own internal motivation, whilst middle class children who already possessed internal motivation developed through varied external influences.

Stein et al (1972 b) found that for normally aggressive children between four and five and a half years, viewing aggressive films increased their aggressive behaviour. However, normally aggressive children ranging in age from eight to eighteen years did not become aggressive after watching aggressive television (Feshbach & Singer 1971). Thus it appears that

Author Galaun C
Name of thesis The acquisition of cognitive skills as a function of a television programme 1979

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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