

John Holt. *How Children Learn*. New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1967. 189 pp. \$US 4.95.

John Holt states that his aim in writing this book is to persuade educators and psychologists ". . . to look at children patiently, repeatedly, respectfully, and to hold off making theories and judgments about them until they have in their minds what most of them do not now have — a reasonably accurate knowledge of what children are like" (p. 173). It seems to this reviewer, at least, that he has achieved his purpose, i.e. he has enabled his readers to look at some of the children *he* has observed, both in and out of school, and thereby to form judgments based, perhaps, on more reasonably accurate knowledge of children than is possible from the mere study of theories about them.

The perennial problem for those who are engaged in teacher education is how to relate theory and practice. It is becoming increasingly evident that in order to understand children and how they learn and are motivated to learn, student teachers must have time to *observe* children. This is not often possible for the hundreds of students in a college of education, but John Holt makes it possible through his books — this, and his earlier one entitled *How Children Fail*.

There is the added obvious advantage that his observations are permanently recorded, so that one can return again and again to look at what a certain child did in a given situation, and possibly gain new insights into how children do, in fact, learn.

A first reaction to this book, especially after *How Children Fail*, might be one of impatience — the author does not appear to be saying anything new. In a sense this is true. The theme of Holt's second book is little more than a repetition, or a re-emphasis of that expressed in his earlier book — that children fail, or that *education fails them*, for "they are afraid, bored and confused" (p. xiii); that they learn when they are allowed "to use their natural desire to explore the new and unknown and to gain some control over it" (p. 127), without being forced to go faster than they are ready to go.

It could be argued that this apparent weakness in writing a second book to affirm what has been stated rather forcefully in the first one is, in fact, a strength. For what Holt has done since the 1963 publication is to continue to observe, teach and work with children, and to

record the results of this observation. His earlier work was centred primarily on fifth grade children, but here attention is focused equally on pre-schoolers, and he has come to the same conclusions about teaching and learning. He reveals through his own attempts to achieve "results" with children how easy it is to fall into the instruction trap: to have a specific goal in mind, "to think we know the best way to get there; but the child knows and will tell us if we but let him."

Allan Fromme, who wrote the introduction to *How Children Fail*, made the statement, "We cannot legislate sensitivity into existence . . . only by specific, concrete examples can we encourage teachers to learn to see their pupils, not their subject matter" (p. x). This is the service that John Holt renders — he helps us to *see* children, and hopefully, to continue to question some of our practices which impede, rather than aid the learning process.

Ruth M. Duncan

The Scottish Council for Research in Education. *The Scottish Standardisation of WISC*. London: University of London Press, 1967. 72 pp. \$2.30.

We are rapidly getting used to the idea that large scale, worthwhile research in education is very expensive, but for many years the Scottish Council for Research in Education has been showing that in certain circumstances this is not necessarily so. This little book describes a piece of work carried out with a high degree of sophistication by competent researchers and with very little cost for professional labour.

For some time the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children has been widely used in Scotland both as a clinical tool and for the assessment of general intelligence. For this latter purpose, however, some anxiety has been

felt over the adequacy of the American norms, so that the Council was urged to undertake a Scottish standardisation. This it did through a committee consisting of university and college of education teachers, practicing psychologists, the Director of the Council and one Research Officer.

With the encouragement of its author, the WISC was administered to a one-day sample of the total population of Scottish school children between the ages of five and twelve years. This comprised about 200 children per age group and some 2000 in all. Testers were all volunteers. They were mainly educational psy-