
This is just the right book, on a very hot topic, at just the right time, by just the right author. Several years ago I realised, as a clinician, that I needed to know more about the emerging fields of developmental neurology and neurosciences research, but much of the writing was dense and complex, as anyone who has soldiered through Schore’s (1994) seminal book Affect Regulation and the Development of Self will know. Others, such as Damasio (1994), have offered very readable neuroscience accounts in the adult context, but Siegel now describes the interface of developmental theory with neuroscience from the perspective of a clinician working with children. The book is about the “new” neurosciences, about brain-body-environment processes (rather than the “old” neuroscience of localised function), about how, in development, whole brains give rise to complex dynamic systems to “states of mind”. In particular it is about the advances that have come from the study of developmental neurobiology—and how brains (and therefore minds) develop in response to environmental influences. The story Siegel tells is indeed fascinating, essentially describing the transactional processes that happen at the interface between developmental neurobiology and the environment of an individual. He links every level of the system from cell chemistry, to brain architecture, to caregiver-infant attachments, to interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Siegel presents his synthesis of these rapidly developing fields in a readable style aimed at those professionally involved clinically in the field, but which could, like Damasio’s book, also be read by the interested layperson.

The book consists of nine chapters, beginning with a very concise Introduction which gives an overview of the whole. The next five chapters are each on a major psychological domain: Memory, Attachment, Emotion, Representation, and States of Mind, but each chapter takes these familiar topics and re-examines them in the context of a “developmental systems” understanding of body/brain/environment processes. Siegel’s three fundamental principles are that (1) the human mind emerges from patterns in the flow of energy and information within the brain and between brains, (2) “mind” is created within the interaction of internal neurophysiological processes and interpersonal experience, and (3) the structure and function of the developing brain are determined by how experiences shape the genetically programmed maturation of the nervous system. The golden thread running through the whole text is that emotion, which was previously neglected in neurosciences and cognitive psychology, is now seen as underlying and providing the setting conditions for all the processes of mind. Siegel argues persuasively for “the inseparable nature of thought and emotion through the experiential and neurological reality” (p. 159).

Chapter 6, States of Mind, is central to the argument since it proposes in a very clear and coherent form the manner in which new understanding of dynamics in complex systems can help us to understand brains and people. Siegel nails his colours to the mast of dynamic systems theory in stating quite categorically that “We are all nonlinear dynamic systems” (p. 235) and holding that “the theory of nonlinear dynamics of complex systems ... provides several principles that will deepen our ability to understand many aspects of mind, from emotions to human relationships” (p. 217). In doing so he offers one of the first accounts in child clinical psychology and psychiatry to make use of dynamics systems so comprehensively.

The final three chapters, on Self Regulation, Interpersonal Connection, and Integration show how these complex processes within the dynamic system can be seen as forming the basis of all later functioning in the individual and relevant, if limited, clinical examples are amplified. The core of the clinical process is that of interpersonal “attunement” between individuals.

This is a book to stimulate, illuminate, and drive our understanding of human developmental processes forwards and I suspect that The Developing Mind will be seen as a milestone work in the future. If it has a weakness it is that most of the clinical examples are drawn from adult psychotherapy, rather than work with children, and that Siegel is perhaps too dependent upon the standard four categories of attachment, drawn from Attachment Theory. One would expect later refinement and revision of these initial ideas, but the book is very important just because it so cogently presents a first look at new, neuroscience-based understanding of developmental processes and the consequent implications for clinical models.

The only major niggle, but one which comes close to spoiling the pleasure of reading the book, lies in the tortuous referencing. The reader is directed by superscript numbers to “notes” for each chapter at the back of the book, but here one finds no “notes” in the usual sense of expansion of points in the text, but merely reference names and dates. The reader then has to keep one finger in the page being read and one in the chapter notes page, then search the full reference list for the (often several) references given, by which time exasperation has set in and the original point is forgotten! Why Guilford Press have adopted this off-putting layout (let alone chapter “notes” with no notes in them), is unclear and suggests editorial malfunction. Nor is it just this reviewer who is niggled since a colleague—equally excited about the content of the book—had exactly the same complaint: Great book—shame about the referencing!

Terence Gaussen

References


Adolescence is a phase in the life cycle that hosts a number of secrets. To a large extent, mystery is an inevitable feature of a stage of development characterised by formation of an individual identity and growing independence. Experimentation, with its resulting successes and (sometimes embarrassing) failures, is also a significant part of a picture that is not fully shared with adults. Frequently, relations with adults in authority can be ambivalent and turbulent, whether they be parents, teachers, or the police. If one adds a degree of self-consciousness, the mateculateness of youth and the impenetrability of the adolescent vernacular, it is not surprising that many adults find themselves mystified by the thoughts and actions of normal, healthy teenagers. When it comes to abnormal deve-

This book is part of a series of basic texts on the fundamentals of counselling and therapy written primarily from a family therapy perspective. It combines theory and relevant research findings with practical guidelines on specific topic areas about chronically sick children and adults within the healthcare system. The introductory chapters cover the impact of illness on self and relationships, and outline the influence that societal, professional, and family attributions can have on our responses to illness. The models set out are psychological in the main, but by the second chapter, the author’s commitment to a systemic approach is more explicit. Most readers who work in the field of illness and the family will find something helpful in these sections, for example on managing interfaces between professional systems and families, and the role of the non-medical professional in a medical context. There is practical advice about managing these differences constructively and respectfully, including dealing with thorny issues about confidentiality in the healthcare system.

Early chapters highlight the contribution of systems thinking to understanding how different family members adjust when an individual is ill. Chronic illness is described as introducing uncertainty and unpredictability into individual and family life. Altschuler describes in detail what illness means to children and young people. She offers guidelines for working with children who are confronting illness in themselves or their parents, and also addresses therapists’ powerful emotional reactions. The emphasis is on helping promote resilience and coping and in influencing the context positively. Two chapters written by Barbara Dale follow, on the deleterious effects on self and on one’s relationships, including parenting, when an adult is ill. Dale also offers an optimistic approach to this work, in that illness is described as creating possibilities for growth and intimacy. Yet she does not shirk from describing the very real conflicts that illness creates for couples, especially in relation to the burden of giving and receiving practical care, and made more complex when gendered roles and tasks are altered. John Byng Hall has contributed a chapter that concludes the book. Illustrated by case material, he elegantly demonstrates his approach to helping families accept a diagnosis and adjust to the loss of health that entails.

Although the main focus of this book is on the effects of illness on sick children and adults in the healthcare system, I was impressed that Altschuler included a chapter discussing the personal implications of this work for therapists. This is a welcome addition to the book and acts as a reminder that professionals will face many and varied challenges when they are working in this field.

The book overall offers a systemic view of individuals and relationships and is didactic in tone. As such it is ideally suited for trainee family therapists about to embark on work with families who are coping with illness, and who are interested in understanding wider influences on families’ experiences. I hope that experienced mental health professionals who are working with seriously ill individuals and their families also read this book. The ideas it contains are of great relevance to their therapeutic work and their views of health care staff. I would certainly also recommend the book to any nurse or doctor with an interest in their patients’ experiences of illness and its effects.

Irene Sclare


The particular focus of this book is the relationship between cultural context and the ways in which children achieve developmental goals. In an attempt to understand this relationship, the editor draws on the work of Vygotsky and activity theory, and presents data from a series of studies on aspects of early child development either conducted in specific cultural settings, or cross-cultural in design. The first chapter serves as an introduction to the structure and content of the book. Approaches in terms of design and analysis that could be used in cross-cultural work are mentioned and the chapter includes a critique of mainstream approaches to the study of child development. The author contends that the cultural context in which a child grows is the norm for the particular child whereas mainstream approaches tend to assume a norm derived largely from Western ideas and values. Such work ignores the diversity of cultural contexts within which children grow. This chapter makes interesting reading in its own right. Subsequent chapters are grouped, and report on children’s relationship with their world, play, acquisition of planning, numeracy, and literacy skills. Study sites range from a Mayan village to communities in the United States, Estonia, Mexico, and Korea.

The need to understand development and behaviour within cultural contexts is essential for developing a discipline of child psychology and psychiatry that is cross-cultural. This book is useful reading for clinicians and researchers and certainly for trainees, as it is informative and thought-provoking.

Anula Nikapota