**Book Reviews**


What are the similarities and differences between group psychotherapy, group counselling, and educational group work? How does the group context determine the way we work with individuals? What do family groups have in common with other kinds of groups, and how does the family group context influence approaches to family therapy? What happens to the group dynamic when groups enlarge? These are the sorts of questions which this book asks eloquently and thoughtfully. The questions are answered by means of detailed comparisons and contrasts backed up with illustrative vignettes.

The author centres herself on the group analytic approach of S. H. Foulkes, who emphasised the constant interplay between the individual and the group, the ever-changing configurations of foreground and background, and above all, the importance of allowing each group to evolve its own distinctive culture, the group leader stepping in to only provide structure, address an imbalance, or protect the group boundary. The beginner would be hard put to find a better introduction to the work of Foulkes and other pioneers of small group work; Bion, Ezriel, Whitaker, Agazarian, and Abercrombie. The philosophy of each is captured in a few simple paragraphs, leaving the reader to contemplate their respective merits and draw something from each.

The chapter on larger groups is especially rewarding. It contains a succinct exposition of the work of Pat de Maré, who believes that dialogue in these groups is the means by which hatred and frustration can be transformed into a healthier state of impersonal friendship, the basis of true democracy.

With the current tendency towards sharp specialisation, this book runs the risk of being dismissed as too eclectic, an old-fashioned indulgence in multidisciplinary thinking. This would be a pity. In the best sense of the term, it stands for a return to basics, an exercise in integrative thinking that provides the foundation for building methods and techniques of group work. It deserves a place in the library of any organisation that hosts groups on its premises. Students and teachers of psychotherapy and counselling will also appreciate its comprehensive sweep and reflective style.

*Harold Behr*


Child psychiatry in-patient units have received much criticism over the past 20 years. There has been widespread debate about the need for, and efficacy of, residential treatment of disturbed children in any setting, and many units have been closed down completely, or been converted into day units. Jonathan Green and Brian Jacobs have set out to address the fundamental questions about contemporary in-patient child psychiatry—How is it done? Who is it for? and How effective is it? They have brought together clinicians from a number of different units across the U.K., and produced a book that is, in the words of Lionel Hersov, “a milestone in the history of the service” (the previous milestone being Philip Barker’s book *The residential psychiatric treatment of children*, which was published in 1974).

Like many such books, the quality and style has its inconsistencies, although there is a good use of references and illustrative case material throughout. The book provides an overview of current practice, and tackles some of the most challenging issues in Parts IV and V: Team Organisation and Dynamics, and Critical Areas of Management. There are some outstanding chapters (e.g. the late William Parry-Jones’s Historical Themes, and Michael Shaw’s Childhood, Mental Health and the Law), and equally some areas which I feel do not do justice to their subject (e.g. neuropsychiatry, and the selection of children with externalising behaviour disorders for treatment). The latest reforms of the NHS have unfortunately rendered those sections of the book that address commissioning out of date, but the arguments for more economic and clinical evaluation of this area of medical practice remain very pertinent.

Jonathan Green and Brian Jacobs have produced here some cogent arguments for the continuing role of in-patient child psychiatric treatment. However, while whole-heartedly supporting the critical evaluation of medical practice, I remain bemused that the treatment of the most severely mentally ill children in our society should continue to require such justification in the eyes of our colleagues and commissioners. One cannot envisage the treatment of children’s severe physical illnesses being subjected to the same degree of scepticism. Perhaps this is another indication of the stigma that continues to attach itself to mental illness at any age, but particularly in the young.

Overall I feel that this book will be a very useful handbook for all who are interested in in-patient child psychiatry and other forms of residential treatment of disturbed children, and it deserves a place on the library shelf of every child and adolescent mental health department.

*Gillian C. Forrest*


The use of video-interviews to help children provide evidence-in-chief to the Courts is now well established. However, there have been a number of difficulties with this process, even when the interviews are carefully conducted and follow the memorandum of good practice. The authors point out that the way in which there is communication with a child often lies at the heart of the problem and add that although many recordings are made, the infrequent use of recordings is of major concern.

This book aims “to provide language guidelines to help professionals when interviewing children” and claims to provide “the first set of guidelines to focus in depth on individual aspects of language use…in the video recorded interview”. The authors have no police or social work training and have, themselves, never carried out any investigative interviewing. Their expertise comes from “empirical research in interviewing presumed non-abused children…and from their knowledge of…academic literature”.

Chapter 1 describes the research on which the book is based, which consists of results from two projects published in this

This text tells the story of 61 older children and their first year of placement with their new permanent families. The book is not laid out as a research document, but rather the information is grouped around topics that range through Preparing the Child, The Child’s Adjustment, and New Parents’ Experiences, to Post-placement Support. Each chapter ends with a brief Practice Implications, which draws upon the chapter’s conclusions to offer pointers to practice and policy. These themes in turn build to the final chapters, which deal with predicting Placement Stability and the Implications for Practice.

With the increasing emphasis nationally on “looked after” children this book is timely, although the literature review around the topics is somewhat meagre, and the text assumes some knowledge of the field. The study suggests that permanent fostering is becoming more frequent than adoption and that this may, in part, be to help the children retain contact with birth families. After 1 year, 72% of the placements were working well, with the children who had been rejected by their birth parents showing the poorest outcome. As with previous work it was found that high levels of preparation did not predict more stable placements and problems with parenting at the time of placement tended to get worse over the study year. Clearly both these findings have implications for practice.

Overall this is an interesting and detailed description of a project in an important area of child care work. It will be of interest to practitioners who become involved with such situations, but is a little too specific to be used as a general introduction to the field.

Maurice Place


This book amounts to a withering assault on the diagnosis of Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome (MBPS) and, in particular, on the work of Schreier and Libow (1993). The authors, both teachers of philosophy, argue that a whole range of situations (including failure to reach the right diagnosis, the seeking of care, and frank child abuse) have been bundled together as a spurious psychiatric disorder—MBPS. They take this diagnosis apart piece-by-piece, reserving their most severe scorn for Schreier and Libow’s defining characteristic of maternal motivation—that she is driven by the need for a relationship with the physician caring for her child. The authors accuse Schreier and Libow of faulty and reductionist thinking in their account of MBPS, and of distorting research data (and even their own case histories) to substantiate their claims.

The author’s critique of MBPS is scrupulously researched and detailed, at times to the point of becoming wearisome. It is all too easy to lose sight of their background argument about the medicalisation of aberrant, or merely unusual, behaviour that has more prosaic explanations once social context is taken into account. They compare the concept of MBPS (and other psychiatric disorders) with witchcraft and hysteria, arguing that these “conditions” were used to validate the authority of the social institutions that invented them—witchcraft by the church, hysteria by the medical establishment. This is an important debate because of the danger that thinking stems once a diagnosis is made, effectively blocking our search for understanding unique human problems and providing appropriate help.

Overall, I enjoyed this book, and it raises some fundamental questions about psychiatric practice and the very notion of psychiatric disorder. Not surprisingly, given the authors’ perspective, it lacks a clinical “feel” but it provides a chastening reminder that the classification of disorders must never be used to mask the unique story behind every diagnosis.

Peter J. Loader

Reference


The challenge continues for clinicians and researchers to unravel the complexities of human memory, especially in relation to matters of significant life experiences, the recall of which may have crucial implications for self and/or others, as far as therapy or court proceedings may be involved. These are the very issues about which this book informs us. Its appeal lies not only in the scholarly manner in which the various authors impart their arguments but also in the breadth, timely publication, and importance of the topics that are covered. These include how and when memory is inclined to be truthful; the extent to which therapy—including hypnosis—may be helpful and harmful in the process of dealing with the thorny questions of repression and recovered memories; and the implications of these for false memories.

Attention is given to both children and adults. The contributions of the scientists and clinicians are authoritatively written in the light of classical and recent research. The contents of the book are divided into six sections: (1) Foundation—which comprises four chapters, addressing mainly conceptual and theoretical issues fundamental to the notion of truth in memory; (2) Early Autobiographical Memories—two chapters; (3) Suggestion and Suggestibility in Children—two chapters; (4) Memory and Psychotherapy; Research Findings and Clinical Considerations—five chapters; (5) False Memories in the Domains of the Law, Textbooks and the Media—two chapters; (6) The Way Forward—three chapters.

Although about two thirds of the book is geared towards memory in adults, many of the issues are pertinent to understanding of, and working with, children’s memory. The substance of this book in many ways transcends the child–adult divide by the very nature of the question of truth in memory and how we try to deal with it professionally. This is a book that will serve to stimulate as well as caution and inform, whether one is primarily research or clinically oriented in the area of human memory.

Trian Fandakis