

Book Reviews

The reviews in this edition of IJEE have a distinctly 'applied' feel to them, with each dealing with practical and professional issues, albeit in very different contexts. Many thanks to our reviewers for giving up their time to read the texts and write the reviews. As usual I will email ENSEC members requesting volunteers to perform the reviews for the next issue (don't forget, you get to keep the book by way of thanks for your help) in the near future. In the meantime, please enjoy the three reviews below.

Neil Humphrey, book reviews editor

1. *Educational psychology casework – a practice guide (2nd Edition)*

Author(s): Beaver, R.
Publisher: Jessica Kingsley
Year of Publication: 2011
ISBN: 18490517392

Having just read Rick Beaver's second edition, I wish I had seen the first. The book takes a refreshing look at educational psychology casework. It is well placed within a changing context that sees additional resources allocated directly to schools and frees up Educational Psychologists (EPs) from a gate-keeping role into one that allows them to practise psychology through more extended casework. The psychological approach suggested in this easy to read, practically orientated book draws upon personal construct psychology, neurolinguistic programming, solution focussed approaches and family therapy. It is a slice of EP work and the book is not over ambitious in attempting to cover everything that EPs do. This is a great strength of the text. The focus is on bringing about change and there are useful sections on planning and implementing interventions as well as evaluating impact and service delivery. It is timely in that some of the topics in the book are also threads on the EP electronic discussion forum *EPNET*.

Overall, I thought that this was a book that most EPs would find useful. The level of information in the book is very much at the practical, 'doing' level. This may mean that more experienced EPs would want something that adds more theory. In this case, the book is a good starting point from which the basic principles can be quickly gleaned before reading deeper.

I would have no reservations in recommending it for EPs, their services and for trainee EPs. It is a great resource for fieldwork supervisors of trainee EPs on placement. Some parts of the book would also be useful for teachers in schools e.g. there is a great chapter on techniques for eliciting children's views.

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2. *Counselling and supporting children and young people: a person centred approach*

Author(s): Prever, M.

Publisher: Sage

Year of Publication: 2010

ISBN: 1847879357

In this book, Mark Prever attempts to apply the principles of person-centred counselling, as originally propounded by Carl Rogers, to the specific context of working with children and young people. Drawing on over 30 years experience of working with young clients in a person-centred way, Prever's work provides a valuable introduction for students and trainee counsellors as well as those working with children and young people in fields such as education, youth work, mental health and social work.

Given Rogers' profound influence on the development of counselling and pedagogical approaches to working with children and young people, it is remarkable that with a few notable exceptions, such as the work of Richard Bryant-Jefferies, there is a surprising dearth of material directly concerning this topic. As such, Prever's attempt at a general introduction is much needed and most welcome.

The book is divided into two parts: the first introduces the theoretical basis of the person-centred approach before the second considers practical application within a variety of contexts. The text is interspersed with a plethora of well-chosen case studies drawn from Prever's own experience which serve to illustrate key points in the main text and breathe life into the work, reminding the reader that the individual

child and their relationship with the helper is at the core of the person-centred approach. Whilst the bulk of the text is applicable to all readers, each chapter contains sections specifically addressed ‘to the counsellor’ and ‘to the helper’ – a reminder that there are important differences between the two roles and in how a person-centred approach might be applied within them. Additional text boxes draw attention to issues relating specifically to working with children and young people, and useful exercises are included to stimulate self and group reflection on attitudes, experiences, values and feelings whilst emphasising the importance of self-awareness for the therapeutic practitioner. In addition to an extensive bibliography and list of useful organisations, a list of ‘feeling words’ is appended to provide a useful resource for facilitating the development of emotional literacy.

In keeping with Rogers, Prever focuses primarily on the relationship between the client and the helper, emphasising the practitioner as a person and the importance of direct experience over theory, knowledge and technique. Given this approach, as well as Prever’s extensive experience as a practitioner, it is perhaps unsurprising that the strongest sections of the book are those drawing directly on personal experience and relating to practical application. The chapters on the three ‘core conditions’ of unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy and their application to working with children and young people are particularly insightful, as are the examples of how young people experience and articulate the core principles within the therapeutic relationship. Another particularly thought-provoking chapter covers the political connotations of the person-centred approach, perspectives on the unconscious, issues of difference and diversity and the importance of cultural awareness.

In a chapter on the causes of unhappiness, Prever makes some excellent remarks concerning the unhelpfulness of ‘labelling’ and ‘diagnosing’ young people, and advocates a focus on the self-defined needs of the child, stating that too often ‘well-intentioned interventions miss the mark because they represent the adult’s solutions to the child’s difficulties’. The sections on boundaries and relevant legal and ethical frameworks are also clear, concise and effective.

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3. *The yellow book of games and energisers: playful group activities for exploring identity, community, emotions and more!*

Author(s): Jayaraja and Tielemans, E.

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

Year of Publication: 2011

ISBN: 978-1-84905-198-7

The preface of *The Yellow Book of Games and Energizers* orientates us to the fact that learning is not solely the result of didactic practices within the formal setting of the classroom. It can be a seemingly unstructured process that entails joy, fun and laughter. As the authors note, the most vital learning often occurs at school break times rather than during timetabled lessons; it occurs when children and young people are playing games, concocting plans and telling stories. Armed with this knowledge, the authors have devised an array of games that aim to harness the energy and pleasure that characterises break time learning yet can be used by practitioners in formal settings. Through these games we can hope to see the enhancement of participant's life skills, such as cooperation, communication and reflection, and observe their social, educational and personal development.

By drawing on their extensive experience in the field, Jayaraja and Tielemans have written an accessible handbook that offers an excellent range of practical tools and ideas that can enrich the experience of working with groups. Whilst the games are not targeted at a specific age group, the book's most apparent audiences are teachers, youth group leaders and trainers, although it may have utility in a broader range of contexts, particularly amongst academics who wish to engage children in the research process.

The book has a very simple and logical structure. The games are categorised into five central chapters that progress through the different stages of group activity that practitioners want to facilitate. These include: icebreakers; subgroup formation and the development of intimate relationships; fun games; communication activities; and evaluation and parting games that aid the group completion process. Some of these games will be familiar from many people's childhood, whilst the authors have developed or brought to light many more.

Each game comes with succinct, yet sufficiently detailed explanations that are enhanced by illustrations. The requirements of the games comprise useful technical points such as the recommended number of participants, minimum age (there is no maximum), suggested length of activity, required materials (that can be downloaded), energy level, and most importantly, the level of risk, which states whether the game can be used with new groups or experienced ones that are well versed in this type of activity. The facilitator is supported throughout this process with optional variations and clear statements that can be read out by inexperienced group leaders.

Overall, this book can be considered an extremely useful resource that has the potential to invigorate

the learning experience of young people in a range of contexts. However, the extent of this learning experience should not be overestimated. Whilst the games may serve as a gateway to further educational processes, if you are looking for a detailed programme of exercises that comprehensively explore and develop competencies such as emotional literacy, you may need to supplement this resource with more thorough and theoretically driven activities.

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4. *Social skills, emotional growth and drama therapy: inspiring connection on the autism spectrum*

Author(s): Chasen, L. R.
Publisher: Jessica Kingsley
Year of Publication: 2011
ISBN: 978-1-84905-840-7

Social skills, emotional growth and drama therapy: Inspiring connection on the autism spectrum is written by Dr. Lee Chasen, a drama therapist and founder of Kid Esteem Inc. This engaging book focuses on a programme to develop social skills specifically in children with high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome between the ages of 5 and 11. While primarily aimed at those interested in delivering a similar programme, the book will be of interest to anyone involved in helping these children to develop their social skills, including parents and teachers. The book is divided into two clear sections: the first is more theoretical, describing the background to the programme, an overview of pervasive developmental disorders and the theory underpinning drama therapy, while the second section is more practical in nature and describes in detail the 30-part programme.

Rather than launch straight into theory in the first section of the book, Chasen instead captures the reader's interest by introducing a number of children as mini case studies, describing their particular challenges and celebrating the progress they make during the programme. It is difficult not to be captivated by these children's stories, and this "sets the stage" for the two more theoretically driven chapters that follow.

The chapter on pervasive developmental disorders provides a general overview of the autism spectrum including possible neurological and environmental causes and approaches to treatment. The author acknowledges the range of behaviours that these children and young people may display, including the more challenging aspects. In a theme that is maintained throughout the book, he is critical of overly punitive behavioural approaches, arguing that more positive management systems are of greater benefit to the individual.

The final chapter in this section explains the principles of drama therapy, in particular the Process Reflective Enactment approach that the author espouses, and how this links to recent developments in neuropsychology: the mirror-neuron system. Mirror neurons are a specific type of brain cell that fire not only when an action is performed, but also when that action is observed. This has led scientists to believe that humans understand others through feeling as well as logical reasoning, which importantly has implications for social interaction.

As some research suggests that people with autism may have a dysfunctional mirror neuron system, Chasen argues with conviction that structured drama therapy can help to create missing pathways in this system, thus enhancing social skills. The explanation of the mirror-neuron system is not at a scientific level (although references are made to key research findings), but this is not the author's intention. Instead, with the emphasis firmly on the therapeutic benefits of drama, appropriate and timely comparisons are made, reminding the reader that the programme may have valid scientific underpinnings.

Having covered the theory, the second part of the book details the 30-part programme devised and delivered by the author. He explains how each section of the programme is linked to aspects of drama therapy and also how it may benefit the development of the mirror-neuron system, stimulating connections and facilitating social skills in the children. The week-by-week sub-chapters describe how the programme progresses, from teaching children basic skills, such as using names and greeting others, to understanding how to play games (including winning and losing), and articulating situations that are or have been difficult for them.

What makes this section of the book so engaging is that the reader is able to follow the progress of some of the children in the class from the beginning to the end of the programme, so that it is possible to not only gain a valuable insight into the programme, but also to be involved in the journey upon which these young people embark, celebrating progress, no matter how small the steps, while also acknowledging difficult and challenging times.

The author does not propose a cure for autism, but is passionate about his aim to try to empower these children to participate more fully in the social world around them. This is a book that is able to incorporate theory and practice in one concise volume and should be a useful stimulus to anyone interested in understanding how the social skills of children with high-functioning autism may be developed in a supportive and positive environment.

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