



## **Book Reviews**

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All of the reviewed books in this edition are relevant to an international dialogue between educational and health domains. Together they address a cluster of related themes relevant to teachers and parents, as well as to many other professionals working with children and young people. These themes include Social, Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (SEBD), Attachment Patterns at preschool and primary level, Anger expression and management, as well as individual differences in sensory processing.

Cooper and Jacobs' book offers a panoramic view of evidence to inform which approaches to promoting the educational engagement of students with SEBD, are most promising, with distinctive arguments therein in relation to labelling and interprofessional collaboration. Golding and her colleagues offer accounts of observational tools as resources for preschool and primary teachers, respectively, to identify attachment difficulties in children. This raises a myriad of issues for exploration. Irving Henry and her colleagues offer a resource for teachers and parents on anger, mainly within a cognitive-behavioural frame of reference. O'Connor identifies a range of theoretically informed, practical strategies for improving children's concentration and learning through sensory processing. A common theme across most of these books is the need to go beyond a 'one size fits all' approach to more differentiated, interdisciplinary strategies for meeting children's complex array of needs.

**Paul Downes**

## ***1. From inclusion to engagement: helping students engage with schooling through policy and practice***

**Author(s):** Paul Cooper and Barbara Jacobs  
**Publisher:** Chichester, UK, Wiley-Blackwell  
**Date of Publication:** 2011  
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*From inclusion to engagement: Helping students engage with schooling through policy and practice* makes for both challenging and informative reading. Bookended by what the authors refer to as the “ideological element” (p. xiii) of their work, Cooper and Jacobs begin by offering a no-holes-barred critique of “...the diversionary discourse which privileges ideology over understanding, and rhetoric over action (2011, p. 194) in special and inclusive education.

With specific reference to debates about labelling of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), they argue that the proposed dismantling of categorical thinking, which they hold is based on little more than “...its proponents’ commitment to it” (p. xi), should be rejected in favour of a “pragmatic ... view based on available evidence (p. xiii), a theme on which they subsequently expand. As argued, whether objectively ‘real’ or not, SEBD refer, *inter alia*, to individual affective, cognitive and behavioural traits deemed to be ‘inappropriate’ and/or maladaptive by society at large. However, the attachment or removal of a label of SEBD neither reduces nor eradicates negative societal perceptions, or indeed, the potential exclusion, marginalisation and stigmatisation that typically attends to such labelling. Hence, the authors suggest that to focus on the issue of labelling detracts from the more fundamental challenge, taken up in this book, of promoting understanding about how SEBD may be variously interpreted and how, in turn, such understandings give rise to very different approaches to assessments, diagnoses and interventions.

Whatever one’s take on the authors’ presentation and interpretation of the labelling issue, the unapologetic and very forceful manner in which Cooper and Jacobs lampoon the universalist position invariably challenges the reader to reflect on his/her position on this debate, and the views consciously or unconsciously held that underpin day-to-day action, an exercise, which, in and of itself, is worthwhile.

Chapters 1 through 9 address the main purpose of the book and “... draw attention to the best available evidence for determining which approaches to promoting the educational engagement of students with SEBD are most promising” (p. 24). In the context of a very clear articulation and endorsement of the bio-psycho-social approach in Chapter 1, that serves to highlight how different ideologies influence both how SEBD is defined and approached, the authors trace the aetiology of SEBD with reference to some of the key theoretical perspectives, before chronicling how these models informed scholastic and therapeutic interventions. This paves the way, in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, for a comprehensive review and synthesis of

evidence-based research in the area. Adopting Nathan and Gorham's (2002) hierarchy of study types to their research review, the authors undertake a very detailed analysis of interventions in which educational and therapeutic studies with proven empirical warranties are privileged, which, arguably, represents the defining contribution of the volume. Of particular note in this review are considerations of the role of the education system, and teachers in particular, in supporting pupils exhibiting SEBD in terms of both the centrality of the roles teachers play and the limitations of their potential influence arising from limited professional development in the area. The recommendation that health and education practitioners work more closely together, "...to go beyond multi-professional approaches in order to embrace trans-professionalism..." (p. 190), characterised by inter-agency and inter-professional engagement that is not straight-jacketed by professional norms and systems is very welcome.

In strongly recommending this book to policy makers, researchers and teachers, two suggestions are advanced. First, that Irish readers complement their reading of the Cooper and Jacobs' text with consideration of the report compiled by the authors on the same theme on behalf of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in Ireland on which, they readily acknowledge, a significant proportion of *From Inclusion to Engagement* is based. In particular, attention is drawn to the concluding sections of the NCSE (2011) report that considers the relevance of the evidence-based interventions reviewed by Cooper and Jacobs for the Irish system.

Second, the reader is encouraged to consult a review undertaken by Evans, Harden, Thomas & Benefield (2003) on behalf of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (*nfer*) that examined interventions in mainstream primary school classrooms. This review, when considered in tandem with that of Cooper and Jacobs, provides the reader with an extended, evidence-based analysis of interventions spanning the period 1971 to 2009. That said, Popham's (2008) caution - albeit regarding meta-reviews of empirical studies - that they should not be interpreted as "some sort of sanctified scripture...or holy writ" (p. 17) is noteworthy here; it serves to remind the reader that many studies of SEBD were omitted from these reviews because they did not satisfy the specific inclusion criteria applied by the researchers.

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[http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/7\\_NCSE\\_EBD.pdf](http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/7_NCSE_EBD.pdf)
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### ***2. Observing children with attachment difficulties in preschool settings: A tool for identifying and supporting emotional and social difficulties***

**Author(s):** Kim S. Golding, Jane Fain, Ann Frost, Sian Templeton  
& Eleanor Durrant

**Publisher:** London, Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley

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This book seeks to provide a checklist rather than formal assessment guide to young children's attachment styles. Impressive concrete examples of how such checklists can be used are provided throughout. In chapter 10, the detailed attachment profiles of children who are insecure ambivalent, insecure avoidant and disorganized-controlling offer an especially helpful concretization of a range of coping modes. These are combined with specific recommended interventions for each coping style that are highly relevant and useful for practitioners.

Particular strengths include the nuanced discussion of shame in moving beyond narrower behaviour management approaches (in Chapter 11), analyzing the shift in children, who initially came across as independent and avoidant, towards relationship-building trust (in Chapter 7) and its well-informed accounts of attachment theory, combining academic research with user-friendly summaries and examples. There is an enormous amount to admire in this book. It is clearly written, practical, well-researched and nuanced in a range of ways. Nevertheless, the book would be significantly improved through addressing a number of neglected issues.

The book offers little examination of the physical environmental setting and children's responses to colour, space, numbers of other children and available resources in the setting. An approach to problematise the child's reactions in the childcare environment tends to deflect attention away from the physical limitations of a particular childcare environment in supporting the needs of a child. Yet it does hopefully invite focus on the relational approaches of that environment to better meet the children's needs.

A concern arises as to whether such an attachment checklist invites not only an intrusive judgment by childcare workers of parents' parenting skills but additionally whether it invites them to make judgments regarding attachment histories which are neither verifiable within the scope of their work nor even, in principle, observable. Even if a child displays repeated features of, for example, ambivalence or avoidance, it is a major inferential leap for the childcare worker to produce a causal conclusion that these features are due to the attachment bonding problems with the child's parents. This objection is a first cousin of Grunbaum's well-known critique of Freud, in *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, that even if symptom B is shown to be subsequent to antecedent problem A, it is not an observation but a hypothetical link to conclude that A caused B, the causal claim is not an observation but an inference. This applies *a fortiori* to childcare workers making causal inferences based not on the actual parenting interactions in early childhood but on the child's later behaviour in a different environment than home. A principle of proportionality arguably needs to be adopted here – the children can be helped with important supportive strategies (such as those developed in chapter 10) even without such a global judgment on whether their emotional needs derive from attachment issues or otherwise.

There are many other mediating variables that would need to be borne in mind, especially, though by no means exclusively, in contexts of poverty. Children's emotional states may be affected by their going to preschool hungry, by trauma unrelated to attachment issues or by loss of sleep on a regular basis. A number of individual differences are recognized in the book, including children with ADHD, autism, generalized learning difficulty, sensory integration difficulties. Another one worthy of recognition is that of giftedness, while children with special educational needs and especially those with language development problems would require more than a cursory exploration as intervening variables affecting such a checklist. The authors do recognize the need for acknowledging cultural differences in attachment styles. They cite an example from Japanese culture. Yet they do not explain why many other subcultures may or may not also be exceptions to their specified pattern. Lakatos discusses the problem of what he terms 'exception barring' to a rule or norm in explanation of a theory. He argues that allowing for exceptions without incorporating them in some way into the explanatory framework of a theory makes one lose confidence in the rule or norm being applied, as once one exception for a subculture or culture is allowed, other exceptions based on subculture grounds cannot be excluded.

A range of other issues would merit further explication. There is a need to clarify the role of parental consent to such checklist observations being made, the scope of the confidentiality of such checklist information, as well as the adequacy of the cultural diversity training of early childhood practitioners,

including their sensitivity to overcoming social class biases in their adoption of such a checklist. A fundamental assumption is that childcare workers can at least partly compensate for emotional nurturance and attachment difficulties experienced by the child. While the danger of secondary attachment is acknowledged, where the child treats the childcare worker as a kind of substitute parent, the focus of this basically compensatory model requires further questioning – is there not a primary need to work with agencies to help foster improved connection between the child and his/her parents/guardians more than this attempt to fill an emotional gap in the child’s life through an adult who will not be in a sustained relationship with them over a long period of time after the child leaves the preschool environment? Do insightful emotional nurturance approaches in preschool really need to become a commentary on perceptions of attachment histories?

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***3. Observing children with attachment difficulties in school: A tool for identifying and supporting emotional and social difficulties in children aged 5-11***

**Author(s):** Kim S. Golding, Jane Fain, Ann Frost, Cathy Mills, Helen Worrall, Netty Roberts, Eleanor Durrant & Sian Templeton

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This is the companion book to the preschool observation checklist for attachment. It is identical in structure and approach though focusing on the older age group of 5-8 year olds in primary school settings. A vitally important point it makes is that while schools often develop individual education plans (IEPs), these need to be integrated with targets for providing increased social and emotional support for vulnerable children. This broader role for teachers than simply cognitive development is a key – and sometimes neglected - step forward and this book offers a largely insightful contribution to templates for teachers to engage with the social and emotional development of children at primary level. It draws attention to a range of important

themes for children with attachment difficulties, including their needs for safety, relationship building, empathy and discipline, emotional development and fostering development in cause and effect thinking. It operates within the key insight that all behaviours are a means of communication. As with the preschool book, there are specific recommended interventions for each coping style that are highly relevant and useful for practitioners. The framework being applied is that of the four distinct attachment styles rather than the alternative Dynamic Maturational Model (DMM) of Patricia Crittendon. However, it is not a formal assessment tool of the child's attachment style but is more to increase awareness of the way secure and insecure patterns of attachment impact on the child's day-to-day functioning in the school.

This book offers much potential as a resource for the development of a relational, authoritative teacher. Nevertheless, a number of issues would benefit from further clarification. It would be important to more firmly demarcate the boundaries between a teacher's role in mental health promotion and emotional support, including stress prevention, from that of a therapeutic role for deep-seated, complex traumatic emotions. As with the preschool checklist, there are concerns about the proportionality of (often middleclass) professionals making judgments about vulnerable parents and their parenting styles with regard to childhood attachment; much of the coping styles of ambivalence, avoidance, disorganized could be simply taken as present day coping mechanisms without placing the teacher in an intrusive role of making hazy judgments and inferences about historical parent-child interactions affecting attachment bonding.

Another concern arises with regard to the interpretation of temperamental differences in children, especially for those with strong introverted dimensions. While there is a recognition of individual differences in temperament in principle, in the practice of the examples of the observation checklist, features of introversion and creativity are treated not as positive features in their own right but as deviations from typicality. For instance, checklist criteria are given of a child as 'overly absorbed in imaginary world', 'concentration can be intense', 'asks personal questions even though does not mean to be rude'. All of these could be features of Jungian introversion, though Jung did not offer a detailed analysis of such temperamental differences in children. From a Jungian perspective, it is not a matter of problematising dimensions of introversion but recognizing their need for expression in a repressive, extraverted culture that may be blind to their gifts. This issue is particularly pertinent given that teachers tend to overlook the needs of more withdrawn children (Doll 1996). It is also worth highlighting that US research by Bolger and Patterson (2001) observed no association between shyness/withdrawn temperaments and parental maltreatment. This avenue for critique of the book is an aspect of a wider concern with a deviation-from-typicality approach taken as the foundation of the checklists. Such an approach that starts from the 'typical' child as reference point - and then classifies children who deviate from this as leaning towards either ambivalent or avoidant poles - is vulnerable to a critique of wider cultural bias in taking the typical and normal as healthy. It may be simply a bias towards affirming the dominant culture over other cultural forms and individual temperaments. Such a cultural bias type critique is by no means exclusive to the particular attachment checklists being developed in this book, but

are well-recognised criticisms of Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure that have been so influential in attachment theory.

Viewed from a prevention perspective, the strengths of this book are at the level of universal and indicated (intensive individual) prevention. There is less at the level of selected intervention approaches to employ with groups of children and through groupwork in primary school settings.

A significant point is made by Louise Michelle Bombèr in the foreword to this book, 'At this time we have become overly concerned with diagnoses when what these pupils really need is our time, patience and sensitive care in view of where they are at.' The opportunity and value of these checklists are as a guide to meaningful supports for the children, rather than as a categorization of attachment styles, even when characterized more loosely as a checklist than an assessment. The danger is that preoccupation with modes of partially informed categorization could blur teachers' relationality and also respect for engaging with vulnerable parents without judgments and preconceptions. Nevertheless, once these *caveats* are borne in mind, this resource represents a valuable contribution to both preservice education and professional development of teachers, to develop their key role in providing social and emotional support for vulnerable children.

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#### **4. *The Anger Toolbox***

**Author(s):** Tricia Irving Hendry, John Taylor Smith and Jenny McIntosh

**Publisher:** Skylight, New Zealand

**Year of Publication:** 2011, second edition

**ISBN:** 978-0-9582655-8-4



Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. Nevertheless when anger gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to a plethora of problems for the individual impacting all areas of their life. When not managed, the effects can be quite harmful. Whatever, your age or demographic learning how to handle anger is an important life skill; it is part of everyday life. Anger can arise at home, at work, at school, in the supermarket and we often feel this occurs without warning, thus gaining insight into how to recognise and manage anger is imperative for all of us. In recognising anger in others, we are placed in situations that force us to question how we manage our own anger, the challenge is to learn how to deal with your anger constructively.

The Little Toolbox is one of the most useful resources I have read for identifying with and managing anger. It is a handbook that is easy-to-digest and accessible to all, without requiring the reader to have extensive psychological knowledge. It is an insightful, clear and concise manual that entirely fulfils its aims. It is born out of the authors' collective knowledge and skill acquired through teaching, community work, school leadership and counselling, and also personal experiences as parents and grandparents. The collaboration between these three authors allows for a well balanced response to anger management that would appeal to an array of carers, from parents, to professionals. While the authors address the young persons' anger, they also address the needs of the parents and caregivers. Anger is often a complex emotion, with a lot of solutions focusing on more explicit behaviours, such as tantrums; however, the Anger Toolbox manages quite cleverly to address the implicit elements of anger, unpacking the many intricacies of this emotion for the reader. It contains clear and applicable situations for teaching a young person about feelings, prior to, during and after anger arises. The information provided is founded on evidence based practice, draws on self-reflection and highlights the need for collaboration between the young person and their care giver. The text cleverly emphasises the adult's position as caregiver and underscores the importance of self-reflection when attempting to teach another person how to manage anger.

An essential message drawn from this text is how important it is for caregivers to acknowledge the significance of allowing a young person to experience anger and in turn to teach them 'how to be angry'. The focus of which is on encouraging the adult to guide the young person toward understanding and managing their anger. The text takes on many perspectives, with quite a nonjudgmental tone throughout, and we are given insight into the experience of anger from the young person, siblings, parents and grandparents. Moreover, influencing factors such as gender, developmental stage, substance use and special needs are clearly addressed and given the attention that they need for the remit of this text.

I would not hesitate to recommend this book for anyone working in schools, as it provides easily accessible practical advice to support those working with children and young people experiencing issues with anger. Nonetheless, there are a couple of shortcomings. The pitch and tone of the text is quite pragmatic throughout. It is inclined toward a Cognitive Behavioral approach addressing anger and accompanying maladaptive behaviors and cognitive processes, through a number of goal-focused and explicitly logical procedures. The text ignores the more Psychoanalytic and Developmental approaches, with no real focus on

concepts relating to early childhood such as attachment theory and its possible relationship with anger. However, perhaps this is necessary delimitation given the scope of the book?

In addition, in terms of the family, one area that is not addressed is the quality of child-parent relationships in foster and adoptive families. A discussion of the fostered and adopted child and their specific vulnerabilities, along with practical advice to support these children and their caregivers would complete this book for me. As there is quite a useful chapter dedicated to grandparents that raise their grandchildren the discussion of the fostered and adopted child would have been a natural progression. Notwithstanding this, 'The Anger Toolbox' is an excellent resource for parents and adults caring for and working with young people.

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## **5. *Success in School***

**Author(s):** Colette O'Connor

**Publisher:** Roundstone

**Year of Publication:** 2012

**ISBN:** 10-095705050X

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*Success in School* is a valuable, theoretical and experiential work that anybody who works with children-at home or in an educational setting, can employ to inform their practice. O'Connor sets out to document a range of effective and simple strategies that help children to concentrate and thus learn more effectively. These strategies are based largely on her experience as an Occupational Therapist who, in addition to having expertise in working with children with attention difficulties, O'Connor specialised in 'sensory processing'.

Sensory processing theory is outlined concisely and comprehensively in the opening chapters. O'Connor focuses very much on what she refers to as 'The Secret Senses' – the vestibular and proprioceptive senses. Significantly, O'Connor details how everyone has individual preferences when it comes to both of these senses and that different people need different levels of movement to function at their true capacity. This information cements O'Connor's central argument: that sensory processing has a major impact on the way

children learn (p. 12). Movement, which encompasses both the vestibular and proprioceptive senses, can have both an alerting and calming effect on how an individual feels.

O'Connor highlights this need for movement and the possibilities to provide such movement for children within the classroom setting and homework sessions. She attempts and succeeds to dispel common perceptions that movement is disruptive to learning. She challenges educators and parents alike to explore and consider sensory processing as an approach to improving children's concentration and capacity to learn. O'Connor provides examples of case studies regarding movement and learning which put her theories into context and are both practical and accessible.

O'Connor depicts clearly how some children's brains may not interpret information coming from their senses accurately. This inaccuracy manifests itself in behaviours that are often deemed as bold or fussy—whereby a child may not like certain foods or the feeling of particular fabrics against his/her skin. She describes children who did not like certain types of movement such as swinging or tilting their heads and others who craved spinning and intense movements. These differences, she attributes to the unique way in which information from the senses is interpreted by the brain.

In turn, O'Connor argues that fully understanding and utilizing the potential of sensory processing offers a fundamentally different way of developing and improving concentration strategies that help children to learn. O'Connor endeavours to dispel nine commonly held beliefs about how children behave when they are paying attention, for example 'If a child is fidgeting, he's not listening' (p. 56). She does so most effectively by providing a theoretical rationale of the said behaviours in relation to sensory processing. The beliefs, or 'myths' as O'Connor refers to them, are common behaviours displayed by children such as fidgeting or chewing, that teachers and parents alike often assume hinder children's ability to concentrate. She outlines that while this may be the case, the reasons for such behaviours may also be attributed to sensory processing and can be remedied simply and effectively through an understanding of sensory processing and how it impacts learning.

It is evident that O'Connor's vision is for teachers and parents alike to build a solid knowledge base about sensory processing as an integral part of understanding children's learning. The strategies are laid out in an extremely reader friendly style that cleverly reflect the ease with which they can be implemented. They require little to no equipment and can be easily integrated into the classroom or home setting, for example, chair sit ups (p. 69) and classroom stretches (p. 70). O'Connor's list of alerting and calming activities provide children with key vestibular and proprioceptive input respectively and can very easily be incorporated into any child's daily routine.

Given the high diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) across different international contexts, O'Connor's work is undoubtedly highly relevant. She challenges the reader to look again at what we consider poor attention and bad behaviour displayed by children. Through her theoretical, methodical and detailed analysis of the links between poor concentration behaviours and sensory processing, O'Connor enlightens the reader. She forces educationalists and parents alike to question how many of these

behaviours can be reduced or eliminated completely, through careful modification of children's environments and an understanding of sensory processing. Providing a 'fidget tool' at homework time (p. 59) or removing colourful displays from the area behind the teacher or the whiteboard (p.82) could potentially transform a child's capacity to pay attention.

The strategies O'Connor promotes are by no means revolutionary; they are simple, fast and inexpensive. What shifts O'Connor into ground-breaking territory is the significant and progressive link she has detailed between sensory processing and children's learning.

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