

Book Reviews

Editor: Dr. Paul Downes, St. Patricks' College, Ireland

The books reviewed in this edition engage with quite diverse themes, ranging from models of working with people with Asperger's Syndrome to cognitive-behavioural approaches to stress management for young people, to a framework for understanding domestic violence, as well as analysis of children's language acquisition and development. Both Bradshaw's account of Asperger's Syndrome and Saxton's book on language acquisition are complimented for their accessibility facilitated by personal stories and humour, with Saxton's work in particular encompassing a range of cross-cultural examples. Laing et al.'s interrogation of domestic violence is interpreted as weaving important conceptual dimensions together with vignettes to inform practice. Both Collins-Donnelly's approach to coping with stress and Saxton's language development tend to prioritise cognitive dimensions over wider emotional and social aspects. A number of the reviewers suggest that the contexts of relevance of the books traverse broader domains of education and health professionals than perhaps initially anticipated by some of their authors.

Paul Downes
Book Reviews Editor

1. Child Language: Acquisition and Development

Author: Matthew Saxton
Publisher: London, Sage Publications Ltd
Year of publication: 2010
ISBN: 978-1-4129-0231-1
978-1-4129-0232-8 (pbk)

It has long been recognised in psychological and educational circles that language and socio-emotional development are intricately linked in children. The Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) for example, notes that it is through the process of *expressing* thoughts and feelings that the child can clarify concepts and explore emotions. As such, language can greatly contribute to the child's cognitive, emotional and imaginative development through expression of feelings, instincts and reactions; equal emphasis is placed in the curriculum on what the child *experiences*, and what he or she *expresses* as they are encouraged to explore every-day experiences and feelings through talk, writing, play and drama, in order to facilitate understanding of emotion. This also allows children to give order to their feelings and reactions to people and events through their developing linguistic skills.

Child Language: Acquisition and Development by Matthew Saxton is a comprehensive exploration of the impressive faculty for language in children, and how this develops into the complex linguistic system evident in adults. It guides the reader from the earliest foundations of human language development in the womb, through the precursors of language in infancy such as babbling and specialisation towards the native language, on to the development of first words and the acquisition of grammar. Throughout, the book explores in detail key theoretical debates in the study of child language, such as whether animals can acquire human language (chapter 2), the 'critical period hypothesis' (chapter 3), linguistic 'nativism' (chapter 7), the 'usage-based' approach to language development (chapter 9) and the 'nature-nurture' debate (chapter 10). The book draws on a rich base of research on child language, from seminal work in the 1960's, '70's and '80's right up to the present day, to explore various concepts in the development of phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax. Unfortunately, however, the book refers only in passing to the reciprocal relationship between emotion and language development in children. While the author recognises that:

Very early on, at about 5-6 weeks, infants demonstrate an interest in attending to the mother's face and voice, together with an increase in smiling and cooing. This social awakening in infants is reciprocated by mothers, with increases in their own displays of interest and affection (p. 213).

The book nevertheless gives limited attention to the importance of emotional engagement as the basis for developing communication between parents and children. The author instead views key socio-emotional skills (such as intention-reading and shared attention) as developing in tandem with language rather than necessarily being linked. As an overview of child language, the book is weakened by this.

However, this is in some measure offset by the strong cross-cultural, cross-linguistic focus of the book, which refers to the acquisition and development of languages as diverse as Finnish, Yucatec Maya (Central American language), Thai, Hindi and Nthlakapmx (North American language), rather than just the writer's native English. Where the preponderance of research is based solely or largely on English, such as in relation to the development of morphology, this dominance and the potential limitations it implies are acknowledged, and as such, the author shows good cultural awareness throughout. Individual differences in the course and pace of language development are also interrogated, and the investigation of potential cultural and individual differences is particularly strong in the section on Child Directed Speech (CDS), where Saxton persuasively debunks the idea that CDS is the preserve of Western middle class parents with little else to do. Instead, he proposes that the evidence supports a strong role for CDS in first language learning. In this regard however, the book would benefit from greater exploration of cultural differences in the development of linguistic 'pragmatics'.

Saxton's book is aimed largely at undergraduate level, and it is highly appropriate for this population. The author adopts an engaging, accessible style of writing that brings humour and wit to material that, due to its complexity, is often delivered in a dry, inaccessible style elsewhere. His descriptions of interactions with his own son bring to life the fascinating process of language acquisition and development in young children in a way that sole reference to academic research could not, and the presentation of interesting questions such as whether children can learn vocabulary from television provide potential platforms for debate and discussion. In spite of the benefits of this, one caution for those intending to use this book in an undergraduate setting is that due to its conversational style, in parts it fails to model the academic language and convention that one perhaps requires of students. Nevertheless, the book is well structured to strongly support the learning of undergraduate students, with an introductory section ('overview') at the beginning of each chapter signalling to students what they should expect to learn in the following pages, and a concluding summary ('In a nutshell') that could be very useful to guide their development of study notes. While the author indicates that the book has been written with undergraduate psychology students in mind, I feel it would also be useful for students in other disciplines with an interest in child language acquisition and development, such as, for example, Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Speech and Language Therapy, or Child Development.

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2. Social work and domestic violence: Developing critical and reflective practice

Authors: Lesley Laing & Cathy Humphreys with Kate Cavanagh
Publisher: London, Sage Publications Ltd
Year of publication: 2013

All three authors have worked to make the book and its content “user friendly” and helpful for a wide spectrum of “audience” such as practitioners, educators, trainers and students. The authors’ main belief and aim is to encourage critical, reflective and research-minded practice in domestic violence and abuse, and to identify and reflect on some of the complexities and controversies encountered by practitioners as they work with survivors and perpetrators. This book “provides students and practitioners with knowledge of theory, research and policy to put directly into practice across a variety of legal and service-user contexts”.

Each chapter of the book contains “a vignette (most of the vignettes describe client situations) to layout the context, raise questions and highlight a variety of social divisions and social issues” or – especially in Chapter 5 (chapter on children) – “the vignette is used to highlight the ways in which current policy approaches have created challenges for social workers in developing new ways to work with children and their mothers in the context of domestic violence.” A wide range of topics is closely examined and is directly researched by the authors, including: child protection, interprofessional collaboration, the policy and legal context, working with women and men. Especially helpful are the summary point boxes at the end of each chapter, as well as the reflective questions that enable social workers to build deep awareness of the effects of the contemporary policy and practice in the field of social work and domestic violence. The further reading boxes are explaining the contributions made by selected scholars and theorists and they are extremely useful for those planning further and deeper studying of the relevant issues.

A key point of the authors’ work is their evidence-based assumption that different “ways of seeing” domestic violence lead to different “ways of knowing” and that different “ways of knowing” frame our “ways of doing”. The authors argue that “while most social workers will not be involved in specialist roles in responding to domestic violence, all social workers need to have a framework of understanding that they can draw on when they inevitably encounter domestic violence in their work”, in order to be effective. The effective intervention system therefore, “is recognized as a critical source for both safety and autonomy for victims and accountability and responsibility for perpetrators of violence”. In the first chapter, “a number of key concepts are outlined to provide the framework through which the interface between social work and domestic violence can be analyzed. These concepts include working definitions of social work and domestic violence; an exploration of intersectionality and the significance of social location; attention to knowledge to support practice.” Chapter 2 outlines fundamental issues related to domestic violence. Chapter 3 examines the levels of effectiveness of the function of legal and policy contexts for dealing with domestic violence. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide the reader with details of the practice context on the social work with women and children as victims of domestic violence and men as “both perpetrators and victims of violence and abuse in intimate partner relationships”. In chapter 7 the authors take a closer look at the ways in which a multi-agency approach and work enhances clients’ safety and personal efficacy. The last chapter of the book suggests that social work practice with domestic violence could be treated as a specialization which provides the professionals with the appropriate “tools” in their job.

In my view, this book is a clear overview of social work practice with domestic violence and it is a

well-structured “manual” that raises important debates and asks thought-provoking questions from the point of view of a feminist researcher, enabling the reader to combine theory and practice into a meaningful ready-to-use context, that is the improvement of women’ lives through secrecy, responsibility and protection/loyalty.

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3. Asperger’s Syndrome – That explains everything. Strategies for education, life, and just about everything else

Authors:	Stephen Bradshaw
Publisher:	London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Year of publication:	2013
ISBN:	978-1-84905-351-8

In his book, Stephen Bradshaw shares his experiences of setting up and developing residential special schools for pupils with Asperger’s Syndrome (AS). He suggests that these experiences have developed into a model, a way of working with these young people, which other practitioners might also be enthused by. The account he offers will disappoint if one is looking for a prescriptive, content based model. His approach is, as he describes, centred on individual needs. He acknowledges the individual constructions of each student with AS and also acknowledges the need to scaffold their learning and help bridge the student’s social frameworks with more orthodox frameworks enabling them to function in the real, sometimes messy, social world. In referencing Vygotskian socially mediated approaches to learning, Bradshaw nods to his theoretical influences and although not explicitly stated, his model seems to be an account of process with some ‘ideas about ideas’ rather than rigid content.

This book is not, however, a dry theoretical textbook. Bradshaw’s principles are clear; despite sharing a common label each person with Asperger’s syndrome is unique, “The lives of people with Asperger’s Syndrome can be made immediately better if they are provided with the appropriate education and support from an early age” (p. 24) and working to reduce anxiety has to be the starting point for appropriate support. His epistemological stance is subtly referenced as social constructionist. But what Bradshaw really provides in this book is a broad framework for other professionals to explore and make their own, and be energised to construct their own solutions.

The book is clearly an account of a journey and I have to admit that after the preface which includes Bradshaw’s chronology of the schools and colleges he has led, and into Chapters 1 and 2, I was wondering where the journey would take me. Initially, there is some quite general information about AS, and quite a lot

of detail about Bradshaw's career. However, having read the book I can see why Bradshaw chose to start it in the way he did. His journey was not easy, there were trials and tribulations which to some degree might reflect the bumpy road travelled by many of his pupils, their families and other professionals.

Sections 2 and 3 cover some big issues relating to Asperger's Syndrome ; its presenting features and strategies for social care and education support and intervention that have been used to good effect by Bradshaw and his staff. He does not, however, claim that his way is the only way forward describing it as 'work in progress'.

Throughout the book, the stories and quotes from students and Bradshaw provide its real heart. The accounts range from the poignant -"The day I got my diagnosis was the best day of my life. It was the day my mum stopped locking me in the cupboard" (p. 68) - to the more surreal and amusing. That Bradshaw notes his approach is guided by some theory and a lot of experience (p. 158) does not really do justice to the humanity and warmth of the book which is evident on almost every page. The personal accounts offered have a powerful impact; they draw you in, engage you, inform and entertain, and above all remind you that we are talking about people and not a syndrome.

The book is a journey and a celebration of the people he has known, but it is also really very useful. Whilst the students he has known do, for me, steal the show, we are regularly reminded of the theory and a pedigree which underpins Bradshaw's approach, with clear reference to the work of esteemed figures in the world of Autism and Asperger's Syndrome, such as Baron Cohen, Frith, Gray, and Gilberg.

The book clearly leaves an impression and an appreciation of what can be achieved. Whilst the book is rich in detail about process and content the 'model' is perhaps sometimes lost in the detail of the anecdotes and the journey. There is much illustration about approaches that were generally effective over time, and the principles which underpinned this practice. However, it would have been helpful perhaps to have had a clear description of the key elements of the model in the conclusion, in the same way perhaps as Bradshaw identified 16 key points for consideration in the section on 'Culture of the school' (p. 158-9).

Whilst the focus of the book is support and education in a residential specialist setting, I think there is much to merit this book for a wider range of professionals across education (mainstream and special) and social care. It is full of useful information ranging from grand philosophy and how to set up a school, to simple everyday interventions, but it does not feel highly prescriptive; elements of content can be taken and adapted and aligned with the constructions of different practitioners in different contexts. This is perhaps why it is likely to appeal to a broad readership. Although Bradshaw is clearly passionate about what he does, he does not claim to have all of the answers and as such gives space to the reader to engage with the ideas and possibly motivate them to set their own goals. For some readers, it will provide a wide ranging, interesting introduction to the topic of Asperger's syndrome. For more experienced practitioners, it provides an engaging read and reminds you about what you are doing, what else you might do, and why.

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4. Starving the stress gremlin. A cognitive behavioural therapy workbook on stress management for young people.

Authors: K. Collins-Donnelly
Publisher: London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Year of publication: 2013
ISBN: 978 1 84905 340 2

This book is recommended for young people experiencing difficulties in coping with stress. Based on principles of cognitive behavioural therapy, it aims to assist the reader in identifying and changing negative thought patterns that have a maladaptive influence on behaviour. Through various tasks, the reader is supported in taking an active role in examining personal stress levels and developing effective coping strategies.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction of what stress is, the physical changes that occur in the body and associated signs and symptoms. In Chapter 2 common sources of stress are identified and accompanied with examples from young people on their experiences of stress-provoking situations. This serves the purpose of communicating to readers that such events are not unique to them nor are they alone in experiencing these difficulties. Chapter 3 facilitates an indication of one's current stress level by incorporating measures of various sources of stress, physical feelings, thoughts, behaviours and subsequent outcomes. As such it provides a useful tool for learning more about one's own stress and serves as a reference point from which one can progress.

The stress gremlin is introduced in chapter 4, depicted as feeding on our negative thoughts and behaviours and growing in size, this character is analogous to the process and experience of stress. The ultimate aim is to 'starve' the stress gremlin by providing strategies to assist in controlling our responses to stressors and changing negative thought patterns and subsequent feelings and behaviours. The author emphasises that it is one's thoughts in relation to a stressor, rather than the event itself, which impacts on feelings and behaviours. Emphasis is placed on the idea that one has control over their thoughts. This key idea is further illustrated through an example of three students' responses to an exam and their differing thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

In chapter 5, attention is directed towards the negative impact of stress on oneself and significant others. Possible outcomes are listed alongside personal examples provided by children and adolescents, which assists the reader in identifying consequences of stress in their own life. In chapter 6, the key principles of cognitive behavioural therapy are elucidated in relation to managing one's stress-related thoughts and behaviours. Readers are encouraged, in preparation for the upcoming chapters, to think of a time they responded well to a stressful situation, the various thoughts feelings and behaviours that resulted and possible implications of this approach for managing stress in everyday life.

Chapter 7 subsequently aims to assist the reader in identifying and becoming aware of problematic thoughts that serve to ‘feed’ the stress gremlin. Negative thought patterns are described and strategies to assess and challenge these thoughts specifically in relation to considering evidence and reality are outlined. This process may prove useful in providing insight into one’s thought patterns which the reader can then work on changing. The significance of building self-esteem is highlighted through various activities that necessitate the reader to reflect on their personal strengths and attributes culminating in the construction of a series of positive affirmations.

In chapter 8, the focus shifts to the management of actual behaviours that are contributing to stress such as avoidance of certain situations. Positive coping strategies such as problem solving and talking are subsequently introduced as means of replacing said behaviour to effectively ‘starve’ the stress gremlin. Practical techniques such as visualisation and relaxation are outlined in easy to follow steps. Other skills such as being assertive, maintaining organisation, engaging in healthy lifestyle choices and successful sleeping practices are addressed. The chapter concludes with a stress diary that provides a practical means of implementing all the strategies discussed throughout the book. In the concluding chapters 9 and 10, readers are encouraged to apply what they have learned about managing stress into practice in everyday life.

Focusing exclusively on cognitive behavioural principles, this book does not engage with existential, psychoanalytic or other depth psychological approaches to stress and as such it is of somewhat limited ambition. While attempts are made throughout to identify various thought patterns and behaviours, less attention is directed towards individual differences pertaining to stress. Consequently, it may be viewed as providing a more generic approach to stress management. Throughout the book, examples from similar-aged peers are typically presented alongside more practical tasks, to reinforce key concepts. While in theory this works, the excerpts are typically restricted to pressures experienced within an academic setting. Inclusion of more culturally diverse situations may therefore serve to enhance relevance and accessibility. In view of these considerations, this book may prove most suitable for the novice reader who wishes to gain a more general overview of stress and associated coping strategies.

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