



Book Reviews

Reviews Editor: Dr. Paul Downes, Dublin City University, Ireland

Hope is an abiding theme throughout all four of the reviewed books. It is a precondition for the relationality of restorative practice, the core theme of Slezackova's book, with resonances also in the mental health promotion concerns of Cefai and Cooper's book interrogating these issues across diverse cultures. Moreover, Hood's interrogation of system complexity in social work to meet the needs of those experiencing a range of adversities, traumas and despair rests on the precondition of hope as the fuel for change, whether at individual or system level. Hope does not give the bland assurance that things will work out, it is not a quasiHegelian telos that treats the future as being etched with inexorable paths. Hope offers the chance that things can work out, it gives the breath of possibility, rather than the false ground of certainty. Hope is not the flat certitude of optimism, it is a more subtle dimension of human experience and system development in education, social work and beyond.

**Paul Downes
Reviews Editor**

1. *Restorative Theory in Practice: Insights Into What Works and Why*

Editor: Belinda Hopkins
Publisher: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London & Philadelphia
Year of Publication: 2015
ISBN: 978-184-905-468-1; 978-184-905-468-3

The rapidly rising interest in Restorative Practice (RP) is an alternative approach to responding to issues of conflict and discipline which naturally occur in working with young people. The approach centres on what might be categorised as a practice based collaboration by (i) enabling a proactive stance in creating a climate conducive to the building of relationships and (ii) offering a responsive intervention in helping resolve conflict and/or address harm done. The emerging evidence indicates the effectiveness of RP in promoting significantly calmer, safer and more just and equitable places of learning for young people. As knowledge of restorative practices becomes more diffuse this book seeks to explore the ‘critical core ingredients’ in the ancestral lineage of the field (p.8). Belinda Hopkins, the editor of this book, identifies seven such core ingredients and subsequently the ten different ‘lens’ presented in the book as individual chapters from various authors provide the reader with a specific theoretical framework (either psychological or sociological) to understand how one might approach a restorative encounter. These are:

- Affect and script psychology: restorative practice, biology and a theory of human motivation (Margaret Thorsborne)
- Attribution theory (Juliet Starbuck)
- Critical relational theory (Dorothy Vaandering)
- Depth psychology and the psychology of conflict (Ann Shearer)
- Nonviolent communication (Shona Cameron)
- Personal construct approaches (Pam Denicolo)
- Towards a relational theory of restorative justice (Mark Vander Vennen)
- Resonant empathy (Pete Wallis)
- A social constructionist approach to restorative conferencing (Wendy Drewery)
- Transactional analysis (Mo Felton)

In describing the process of editing this book Hopkins remarked that it felt like an ‘action research project’ and in this analogy she testifies to the praxis nature of the book in bringing together the practice and theory of RP underpinned by the critical reflections of the 10 contributors.

A unique aspect of this book is the editing structure of the text which maps what Hopkins calls the ‘Circle process in book form’. Each contributing author was invited to first check-in by way of self-introduction but in a manner which is personally self-disclosing yielding trust and openness with the reader. The main body of the book represents the go rounds of the process with each author offering their own theoretical perspective on RP. Their respective positions on RP are then applied using two case studies with

the ten authors commenting on how their theory can deepen our understanding of what might be happening and why in each of the case studies. And finally, the check-out stage offers the reader an insight on what each author has learned from reading each other's contributions.

This circle process as an editorial arrangement of course mirrors a common practice in using restorative approaches with groups and is a unique exemplar of how restorative theory and practice can influence how practitioners think, learn and write about restorative practice. As editors know only too well, editing a book so that it retains both the unique perspective of contributors and yet bridges these contributions with an overarching unifying and coherent theme is not an easy task. However, the reader is not duped into this circle process method as a mere literary device and the evidence is clear that each author remains faithful to their own theoretical framework in responding to the case study presentations with integrity and honesty.

In reading each of the presentations one is struck by the necessity to have an underpinning theory to guide one's practice. With the rise in popularity of RP this responsibility to have a coherent framework deeply challenges the notion that it is merely sufficient to follow with integrity the 'scripted approach' synonymous with RP in order to be an effective practitioner.

The title of the book proposes to offer 'insights to what works and why'. The book offers an excellent window on some restorative processes without claiming these to be definitive. However, this reviewer believes it falls short in critically presenting the precise nature of the what and why. In the introductory part of the book the editor explains her omission as a contributor on the basis she utilises an eclectic approach. The use of an eclectic approach in a field as complex and multi-faceted as restorative practice has obvious merit and the editor returns to this claim in the final chapter. However, the book might have benefited from the richness of her eclectic perspective and practice in the field and as a distinctive lens would have offered an equally valid theoretical perspective alongside the ten others in the book. Perhaps this might be a contribution for a volume 2 presaged in the final chapter?

This will be an invaluable resource for restorative practitioners working across sectors including education, social services, youth offending or policy.

Paul King

Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Ireland.

2. Hope and Well-being: Psychosocial Correlates and Benefits of Hope

Author: Alena Slezackova
Publisher: Centre for Resilience & Socio-Emotional Health, University of Malta, Malta
Year of Publication: 2017
ISBN: 978-99957-890-2-2 (electronic); 978-99957-890-1-5 (paperback)

“I hope ...” uttered so casually in everyday parlance is evidence of a person’s struggle to muster courage and resilience in times of life crises and the aspiration to better his or her life situation. But the same expression can have deep underpinnings of existentialism and spirituality.

In her monograph, Prof Alena Slezackova embarks on the challenging task of looking at the phenomenon of hope in all these complexities: tracking the phenomenon over the ages and across disciplines, expounding the recent developments in hope theory and the varying approaches to hope and measurement methods used by international researchers, and touching briefly on the hope-enhancing framework within which to intervene in education, psychotherapy and counselling. At the centre of this monograph is the presentation of the findings of the investigation carried out by Prof Slezachova on the role of hope in relation to mental health and well-being among different population samples.

The phenomenon of hope is set within the field of positive psychology which posits that the spectrum of the human experience is not only about human suffering and dysfunctional relationships and systems, but it is also about the urge of people to flourish, to feel joy and to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Slezachova presents the depth and width of how the area around hope is growing through the extensive literature review of a wide range of international studies. Chapter 2 presents research on hope in its facets as both a cognitive process and a positive emotion besides being a character strength. It also lists the several scales which have been developed to assess various aspects of hope, including the Adult State Hope Scale and the Children’s Hope Scale.

Hope is a human experience that is constructed and evolves over the life course. For example, studies, including those undertaken by Slezachova herself, reveal the significant impact hope has in the lives of children in the way they forge relationships, build their internal resources and cognitive strategies as well as the energy with which they pursue their life goals. Consequently, the degree of hope in a child can also be indicative of the difficulties he or she may be going through. This links up to the significance of hope for mental health since it is seen as being central to human adaptation, resilience and, importantly, recovery from mental disorders. It even has the potential of turning traumatic stress into traumatic growth. This is amply shown in the next chapters.

This monograph is not only a good example of scholarly research in the new field of positive psychology, but also embodies an effective exercise in the infusion of its readers with a healthy sense of hope. It manages to bring out the dynamism of hope and its far reaching influence also on one’s connection to the

world away from limiting self-centredness. Prof Slezachovea enables readers to reverse Cicero's axiom that "Where there is life there is hope" into a new focus on the importance of hope for a fulfilling life experience: "Where there is hope there is life".

Pauline Bartolo

University of Malta

3. *Complexity in social work*

Author:	Rick Hood
Publisher:	Sage, London
Year of Publication:	2018
ISBN:	978-1-439-9381-5

The interplay between social work, social policy, on the one hand, and developmental and educational psychology, on the other hand, is increasing in part due to the work of Michael Ungar and his colleagues in their broadening of understanding of resilience from an individualistic psychological focus to one that interrogates systems. Rick Hood's helpful book deserves to be read in similar vein, though this is not the direct goal of his book that is situated predominantly in the domain of social work.

Hood's focus on systems in social work and social policy offers a broader account of systems than the staple diet of the early and later Bronfenbrenner's systems theory framework that dominates so much in developmental and educational psychology. Significantly, Hood addresses the key issue of complexity, of people's complex needs in circumstances of risk and adversity. It is this aspect of complexity that requires accelerated emphasis, not only in a post-Bronfenbrennerian systems theory but in developmental and educational psychology more generally. He analyses need in terms that are akin to the important public health model distinguishing universal, selected (moderate risk) and indicated (chronic need) prevention – a model requiring much more consideration in educational contexts (Downes, Nairz-Wirth & Rusinate 2017). Hood describes these different levels of need in equivalent terms, as universal, specialist and complex needs.

As Hood highlights, complexity requires factoring in an analysis of unintended consequences of interventions. The uncertainty and volatility of interconnected complex needs requiring complex systems responses are brought to the fore by Hood's impressive book. He addresses themes of high relevance to a range of disciplines across the social sciences and caring professions, including interprofessional working and relationship building with clients.

This book outlines key concepts in a nuanced yet highly readable way, combining practical examples as case studies, with empirical research and theoretical understandings. It is suitable not only for practitioners

and students but is well worth a read for researchers across a variety of disciplines seeking to meet the needs of vulnerable populations.

While this book undersells its relevance to both developmental and educational psychology contexts, one angle of critique of the book is with regard to its drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs in chapter 1. This Cartesian framework of Maslow, splitting bodily from psychological needs, is one that requires much firmer criticism even as a reference point and point of contrast for engagement. Maslow's rigid model, based on questionable methodology, treats needs as developing in linear fashion and higher needs as appearing only when the lower ones are fulfilled. This is scarcely credible now as a universal theory of motivation, even on cursory examination, such as through examples of anorexia nervosa and suicide, that exemplify motivations where supposedly lower needs are excised in order to meet supposedly higher ones. This slight quibble aside, Hood's book is a must read for advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students across areas of social work, education and psychology – and a useful reference point also for researchers in these disciplines.

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Paul Downes

Educational Disadvantage Centre and Institute of Education, Dublin City University, Ireland.

4. *Mental Health Promotion in Schools; Cross Cultural Narratives and Perspectives.*

Author: Carmel Cefai & Paul Cooper
Publisher: Sense Publishers, Netherlands
Year of Publication: 2017
ISBN: 978-94-6351-051-6

Mental Health Promotion in Schools (2017) should be seen as reference book which can read as a complete and coherent series of papers on the subject of mental health promotion or as individual stand-alone chapters that provide more than a cursory overview of the subject matter. The authors' enthusiasm for their subject is palpable throughout. Described tautologically on the back sleeve as being of 'particular interest to those involved in mental health promotion in schools', I believe this description undersells the wealth of knowledge and skill that has gone into this treasure trove for practitioners of all persuasion and positions.

At a time when the language of psychopathology is in the ascendant, thanks to the latest version of the DMS-V and in an era characterised by the mass medicalization of normal childhood experience, this book speaks the language of hope, while doing so in a critical and meaningfully self-reflexive way.

Woven together with first hand practitioner narrative, reference to evidence based research and a myriad of perspectives (including the all important voices of the student and teacher) the book flows across numerous contextual influences seamlessly. The respectful eclecticism shown here is exemplified through the competing and contrasting epistemologies which inform the narrative, cognitive, systemic approaches, etc., each sitting comfortably side by side in the book. This mix of ideas feels more like a dialogue of contrasting perspectives than a range of competing ideas.

What influenced me more as I read the book was the European flavour of the work, it was truly refreshing to read research and practice that was not solely completed in the USA, for me, this grounded the work in my own experience, having worked across numerous EU countries in the past decade.

A review on the inside of the book alludes to the mixed methods used in the research and practice throughout the book and I believe this to be a real strength of the work for those teaching and practicing at the 'coal-face'. 'Policies are supported by guidance, ..collaboration, working through prevention and management..of mental health..through a variety of approaches are used to achieve change' P.231. This systemic perspective of human engagement in the field of schools based mental health promotion captures the essence of this book, as the anthropologist Gregory Bateson reminds us everything is connected and as soon as we begin to 'cleave nature at its joints' and disconnect the aesthetic that weaves the web of school, home and professional life, then we fail those we are trained to serve, this book avoids the absurd reductionist approach to whole school engagement.

There was something I found, (that may seem trivial) which made reading this book a bit off putting and it's a basic formatting issue. With the size and density of the font, alongside the deep and dense display of knowledge contained in the book, I feel the data could have been given more space to breathe here, alongside

some miniscule but very important tables and graphics combined with small type face the book felt a bit cramped. However, it is a highly recommended read and a welcome scholarly addition to the field and I am sure it will become a reference text for policy makers, head teachers, practitioners and clinicians alike.

Padraic Gibson

Clinical Director, Bateson Clinic Dublin.