

REVIEW

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WORKING WITH TROUBLED CHILDREN, by Victor Savicki and Rosemary Brown, 408 pp. Human Sciences Press, 1981 Cloth, 1985 Paper.

No single book on child care, whether oriented to training or practice, can be all things to all people. No book can address every issue, identify every skill, describe all possible treatment approaches or all possible motives and responses of children in care. We are engaged in a helping profession and are limited as are all the helping professions by our own humanness and our ability, at best, to understand but a portion of the array of variables which produce behavior in ourselves as well as in the children for whom we care. This book is a useful contribution. It is not meant to be a handbook of child care.

Savicki and Brown present a very detailed and concrete counseling approach to the development of an individual's practice skills in "Working With Troubled Children." Their material was developed out of their training experience with staff and parents of disturbed children between 3 and 12 years of age. The book consists of an excellent and perhaps imperative introduction describing the contexts and caveats of its use, six parts, 29 chapters, references and an index. Chapter One, which dwells quietly between the Introduction and part One, addresses the "Effects of Training" and is not to be missed!

The first five parts are devoted to personal and managerial skills. Parts One through Three invite the worker's attention to such matters as the development of his ability to observe self and others, the use of self, communications in helping relationships, the uses of language, understanding cues, skillful probing, self-disclosure, confrontation, and nurturance. Section Four of Behavior Management is also extensive. The authors present an important orientation to the application of behavior therapy. It is highly detailed, explaining many concepts with useful examples, and clarifying frequently misunderstood or poorly practiced behavioral notions such as contracting, extinction, shaping, increasing and decreasing behaviors. Part Five is concerned with areas of physical and psychological volatility such as tantrums, separation and loss, daily transitions, problem solving and the use of physical restraint.

At the beginning of each of the chapters within parts one to five, the skills and concepts to be mastered are identified for the student. Many chapters contain check lists through which the worker can monitor his progress. Part Five, being more abstract, offers guidelines and suggestions.

Part Six, Treatment Contexts, is concerned with illustrating the impact and interrelation of context with treatment process. The authors chose the Group as a chapter to illustrate social context, Play to illustrate activity context and Environment for physical context. These chapters do not identify skills and concepts to be mastered, nor are they sprinkled with checklists. However, they are most welcome to this reviewer because matters of context too often are taken for granted, being viewed as immutable. We need to be alert and able to examine context for opportunities for useful and considerable alteration, be it in group structure, activity or physical environment. These too are variables which can be tailored to the enhancement of treatment and deserve independent academic attention in our field.

In reading through this detailed textbook, I found myself becoming increasingly relieved by the authors' cautions to the student as expressed in the book's introduction and throughout the text itself. Although this is not a practitioner's "cook book," it does use a "nuts and bolts" approach frequently supported by research. However, in practice administrators and supervisors as well as workers will take "nuts" or "bolts" from a book and promote practices out of the context of the book for purposes of control or in a futile, often self-delusional, effort to obtain simplicity of management or supervision. Our field is very broad, our practices are as broad and paradoxical as human nature. This book is one of a growing number of documentations of the body of knowledge in the field of child care. Perhaps the greatest value of these textbooks is that they provoke us to rethink what we do, to examine and expand the array of possibilities, to observe ourselves and each other; what we do, how we think, our conscious and unconscious motives, to compare our interpretation of theory and recommended practice.

"Working With Troubled Children" is a useful training resource when used among an array of texts which address developmental theory, residential and milieu work and applied psychodynamics. As any text in our field, it might also be valued for the thought and exploration it can provoke among students and between students and their mentors in the context of a clinical apprenticeship. Getting it all together as professional child care workers requires a variety of resources, mentor models and peers to grow on. It is no less a "passage" for us than it is for the children and youth with whom we work.