

context of child abuse and predicting child abuse amongst others.

Chapter 10 is a timely reminder of the central role and importance of the child in child abuse and child protection with discussion on interviewing children who may have been abused, the child's participation in legal proceedings, and children with disabilities. Once again, the reader is invited to consider some of the controversies such as children who abuse and the Cleveland affair in England.

Chapter 11 is devoted to the circumstances surrounding the life and death of Daniel Valerio, who was killed by his stepfather, Paul Aiton, in Victoria in 1990. It was the media response to Aiton's trial which largely prompted the Government of the day to introduce mandatory reporting. The conclusions drawn by Dr Goddard from Daniel's death are that, even with the introduction of mandatory reporting, even when the community awareness of child abuse is raised, even when better training is provided to enhance the skills of workers in detecting and treating child abuse and even when community support services and resources are improved, children remain amongst the most vulnerable in our society because of their position of powerlessness. In the short, final chapter, he follows through on this theme by emphasising the crucial role played by health, education and welfare workers in the prevention of child abuse and the aftercare of children and families where abuse has occurred.

The style of the book is an interesting one. The text is liberally sprinkled with short discourses on topics, sometimes surprising, always contentious. So, for example, just as the reader is comfortably considering the discovery of child abuse in the 1960s, their attention is diverted to a short presentation on arguments for and against child care. The style reflects the very nature of child abuse and child protection. It is high-risk, multidimensional, complex and stressful. One day, a worker

might learn that many perpetrators of child sexual abuse have themselves been sexually abused as children. The next day they need to consider why then are the majority of perpetrators male and the majority of victims or survivors female? The following day, they must reflect on the possibility that there may be a high level of sexual abuse of boys which goes undetected and unreported. Then they must seek explanations or reasons for this apparent gender imbalance. And on it goes.

The book has much to commend it. It is a text with an Australian focus which targets a group, vital to the effective protection of children who have largely been poorly served by the literature. It is a comprehensive introduction to a complex subject which manages to combine the practical with the philosophical in a way which avoids oversimplification and encourages the reader to explore further. With this in mind, there are useful pointers to further reading at the end of each chapter.

Many social work and welfare graduates become child protection workers with little or no formal training in the field. *Child abuse and child protection* should be recommended reading for them, as well as for police officers, magistrates and politicians who are involved in the frontline of child protection. The book has highlighted a further gap in the literature. In Australia, as many as 50% of all reports of suspected child abuse may come from nonprofessional sources. How do we reach this target group?

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## Who calls the tune?

### A psychodramatic approach to child therapy

Bernadette Hoey

Routledge, London & New York, 1997

This beautifully written book will appeal to parents and professionals alike. It not only speaks to the head and the heart but to the soul as well. Bernadette Hoey, social worker, therapist and trainer, describes her use of psychodrama with vulnerable and troubled children through ten case studies in which the voice of the child can be seen in action more than heard in words. Drawing upon the psychodrama of Jacob Moreno as its foundation, the author integrates a broad range of theoretical insights such as Jung's and Milton Erickson's use of metaphor, and marries these with her practice wisdom and deep sensitivity. The text is enhanced by the superb photographs, some taken by the author herself, and the selection of poetry and prose which opens each chapter.

Knowing a little of Bernadette Hoey from a long time ago, I guessed that this book was going to have a special quality and so it was left for many months, waiting for a tranquil place and time in which I could savour it in peace rather than devour it in between the incessant demands of the Fax and phone. I am glad I waited. At that exquisite time of year when winter transforms into spring, bringing forth new life and hope, I read it as I sat in a courtyard at the Australian National University, with a glorious blue sky and the ethereal songs of magpies above.

Permeated with a profound respect for the uniqueness of each child and an empathic capacity to perceive the world as they might, Bernadette Hoey describes her use of puppets and story telling to enable the child to express the meaning of

their experiences. Her practice cannot be reduced to a simple checklist of steps or a 'how to' manual of interventions which, unfortunately, are now so prevalent in the current literature, especially in relation to child abuse. Play, a natural vehicle of children's construction of meaning, is purposively harnessed by Bernadette Hoey for its therapeutic potential, as one might harness water or wind as a source of energy, transforming its nature in the process.

Moreno recognised the human infant as possessing an innate capacity for spontaneity and that this was the source of human resilience and plasticity. The book begins with a rigorous but highly readable overview of Moreno's ideas and other key conceptual frameworks derived from humanistic psychology and psychodynamic theory. These are the filters through which the author makes sense of her practice. Unlike some of those in the contemporary therapy scene who write about narrative and metaphor, Bernadette Hoey pays her debts to her ancestors, showing how she is connected with the inter-generational links in an historical chain of ideas and innovation. At the same time she is not uncritical of the received wisdom of her predecessors, nor does she hide the original quality of her own work.

One of the refreshing aspects of the book is her description of the way she draws in the parents or the significant adults in a child's life, helping them to prepare the child for therapy and allowing her to learn something of the child's family context. There are also some excellent descriptions of the way in which she directly draws parents into the therapy session itself. She emphasises the importance of affirming parents' knowledge of their own child and treading a fine line between the child's need for confidentiality and the parents' need to know something of what is happening in the therapy. It is obvious that the time she spends with parents also enables them to assess her integrity and develop trust in her. No doubt this is a critical therapeutic ingredient and we are sometimes inclined to forget just how much trust is required of parents to allow their child into the unknown and foreboding world of therapy.

Another impressive aspect of her practice is the tentative nature of her 'working hypotheses' as she critically reflects upon her practice and keeps an open mind, seeking disconfirming evidence of her interpretations. This resistance to premature closure is the hallmark of an exceptional therapist. Too often we seek only that which confirms our theoretical or ideological filters.

Bernadette Hoey vividly captures the uncertainty of therapy and avoids the neat 'post hoc reconstruction' which distorts the reality of practice by pretending that the therapist was confident and knew what they were doing at all times. There is nothing tentative about her style of practice though. She is highly active in the therapeutic encounter, much more so than would be typical in traditional play therapy. She writes of the shifting balance between the child and the therapist as each takes the lead – hence the title of the book 'Who calls the tune?'. In her verbatim accounts of therapy sessions, one sees a very interventionist practitioner at work, as one would expect in psychodrama, and I can easily imagine a petite Bernadette Hoey leaping on to tables and projecting her voice

as she and the child act out the drama which they create together using puppets, toy animals and dolls. At the same time she conveys an acute sense of being very open to the child's tune and never drowning it out with music of her own making.

One of the most interesting elements in the book is her description of crafting stories in collaboration with the child so that they parallel the child's own experiences and then weaving in therapeutic messages without sermonising. She is careful to create a structure for the story which is sufficiently distanced from the trauma of the child's experiences so as not to threaten their defences and she resists any temptation to offer an interpretation of the story. 'That would be like turning a hose on to a fire' she says.

The heart of the book, literally and metaphorically, are the case studies. Written in the present tense these verbatim accounts of therapy sessions are vivid and powerful. Some of the children described are caught in the child welfare system and bring with them a long legacy of loss and instability. While immersed in the use of fairy tales, Bernadette Hoey knows only too well that she does not have a magic wand for these children. There was one which touched me deeply, reminding me of children in the child welfare system whom I had known and could not help. While it is clear that she believes that she helps most of the children she sees, of 'Jessica' Bernadette Hoey is not so confident but still tries to leave her with something to hold on to.

Jessica remained a shadowy figure for me. In deference to her extreme fear of revealing herself, I shall leave her own story untold, except to say that it had been full of changes and moves that were all outside her control. I was one of a long line of professionals she had encountered. She played with me with great caution, and her need to control every aspect of our time together remained immutable. There were circumstances in her life that made it difficult for me to offer anything of great value to her, so I gave her this story.

I shall not retell the story – that is best told in the storyteller's own words, but it is about a little echidna who is deeply hurt and finally uncurls a little to allow the sun's warm rays to reach its soft body. The sadness and tenderness which this story captured and the hope which it sought to sow within this child left me with tears running down my face for the children I have known like 'Jessica'. I looked up to the clear Canberra sky, closed my eyes and let the sun dry my tears. This is an exceptional book by an exceptional woman. Try and find a tranquil time and place to read it.

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