

book reviews

The family of adoption

Joyce Maguire Pavao

138 pp. Beacon Press, Boston, 1998

Joyce Pavao was a keynote speaker at the Adoption and Healing Conference in New Zealand in 1997. Hers were memorable presentations, simply because she told us stories – wonderfully evocative stories about some of the birth parents, adoptees and adoptive parents who have worked with her as a therapist over a period of many years. As she says in *The Family of Adoption*, 'stories are a tool I use over and over again in thinking and teaching about adoption, because I believe we learn best when we are moved intellectually *and* emotionally' (p. 6).

This book, which is full of such stories (one of which is Joyce's own story), takes us to the heart of adoption.

The Family of Adoption is written simply and very clearly. There are individual chapters which look at the meaning of adoption, separation, identity and reunion for birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees of various ages. However, the overall flavour of this book is not of separation into the three parts of the 'adoption triangle', but more of wholeness and a sense of joining together.

I particularly enjoyed reading Joyce's accounts of the gentle and innovative ways in which she has consulted with those affected by adoption – from young children to grandparents. Her approach to therapy is based on a belief in strength and health, rather than one based on pathology. This is demonstrated throughout the book.

Adoption in Australia and New Zealand these days almost always involves a significant degree of openness. The only part of this book which therefore might not seem particularly relevant to adoption here is the chapter which emphasises the importance of maintaining connections between child and birth family. However, the relevance of this chapter, as elsewhere in the book, lies in the stories which illustrate the *meaning* of secrecy, connection and openness for those who are affected.

The Family of Adoption concludes with an epilogue entitled 'Adoption 2002', which contains recommendations, and hopes, for adoption practice in the future. While an Australian or New Zealand 'Adoption 2002' would be different in some areas, there are key issues which are the same here, particularly the emphasis on the need for comprehensive post-placement services.

This is a gentle and sensitive book which is highly recommended reading for all those interested in what adoption feels like from the inside.

(This book is available from Platt Books, tel/fax: 03 9842 5283.)

Reviewed by:

Cas O'Neill

Patterns of adoption

Nature, nurture and psychosocial development

David Howe

226 pp. Blackwell Science, Oxford, 1998

Anyone who has written a literature review for a thesis, or indeed any other kind of research report, will no doubt remember that last minute concern as to whether all the relevant literature has been covered. Have we inadvertently left out the most relevant book or article in the field? Will our research efforts be tainted forever by somehow not referring to the 'right' bodies of literature?

Patterns of Adoption was published at a very opportune time for me – just as I was writing the second draft of the literature review for my PhD thesis! It covers a broad (and therefore very reassuring to someone in my situation) range of research on the social and psychological development of adopted

children – those placed as babies, as well as those who join their adoptive families later in childhood.

Professor Howe has written this book primarily for adoptive parents and adoption workers and researchers. However, it has broader relevance for foster parents, residential caregivers and the professionals who work with them, as the children who are cared for in these kinds of placements tend to have similar disrupted backgrounds to children placed for adoption after infancy.

The interplay between heredity and environment is an important theme in the book and is the lens through which research findings are viewed. For example, there are very detailed chapters, for both infant and older child adoptions,

on the research undertaken into adoption outcomes, as well as the pre-placement and post-placement factors thought to influence outcomes and the children's long-term development.

The summaries at the end of each chapter are excellent, as are the five chapters on attachment, which give a theoretical and practical understanding of secure, anxious, angry, avoidant and non-attached patterns of attachment, well illustrated by case examples.

The book concludes with a chapter entitled 'Patterns of Practice', which brings together the implications of the research cited in earlier chapters, for parents and workers. This is clear, concise and realistic, although it leaves out some important issues. For example, in a short section on assessment, while Howe states that adoption workers have not generally been adequately trained to assess intergenerational patterns in potential adoptive families, he does not address the issue of whether assessment of any kind is predictive of outcomes.

There are two disappointments in this book for me. Firstly, it is very much centred on American and British research, with a few references to research undertaken in Europe. I was

unable to find any reference at all to Australian or New Zealand research.

Secondly, the research cited is overwhelmingly quantitative, with outcomes seen largely as 'rates' and 'percentages' of particular cohorts of children and parents. While this perspective undoubtedly provides useful information on trends, I believe that the richness of qualitative research is also needed to give meaning to the figures.

Nevertheless, despite these two misgivings, *Patterns of Adoption* covers a broad overview of adoption research and presents the sometimes confusing patterns of research findings with considerable clarity. The chapters on attachment are likely to be particularly helpful to both parents and workers. It is therefore recommended reading.

(This book is available from Platt Books, tel/fax: 03 9842 5283.)

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Cas O'Neill

Fostering the Future

11th biennial International Foster Care Organisation conference

19-23 July 1999

University of Melbourne

This conference consists of five themes:

- **Indigenous children in care**, which will explore over-representation and best practice
- **Celebrating success**, which will examine areas in which we are achieving our aims
- **Partnership - The caring team**, which will allow delegates to explore how to make partnerships work
- **Today's tough issues**, which will allow delegates to prepare for and meet the challenges that lie ahead
- **Looking forward - into the year 2000 and beyond**, when we hope to see fewer children entering institutional care and more children accessing home based care.

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