creatively in collaboration with parents and children.. For example, Hedi Argent writes (p. 24): 'There is an alternative family somewhere for every child – if we haven't found it, we haven't looked hard enough', but also questions: 'But can every child use a family?' and 'Is it always preferable to live in a family, even for a limited period?'

The information in *Taking extra care* on assessing children's needs; publicity; recruiting, preparing and supporting substitute families; residential care; and working with children and their birth families, is presented in excellent short chapters, illustrated by case examples.

Some of the things I particularly liked about this practice guide were:

- The emphasis on supporting birth families to keep their children;
- The presentation of creative shared care arrangements between birth and alternative families;
- The sections which look at what birth parents, children and substitute families 'have a right to expect';
- The fact that residential care is looked at as a possible choice and not dismissed out of hand;
- The list of some of the most frequent conditions which are associated with disability;
- The checklist in Appendix B which reminds social workers of the organisational attributes (including attitudes) necessary for a good service.

While *Taking extra care* is written for professionals in the UK, with sections on legislation and key organisations, this guide is highly relevant to practice in Australia, not only in the area of disability, but also in the areas of foster care, permanent care and adoption.

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Taking children seriously

Proceedings of a national workshop

Edited by Jan Mason and Marie Wilkinson

Childhood & Youth Policy Research Unit, University of Western Sydney. 385pp.

I have been a supporter of, and contributor to, *Children Australia* for many years for one reason: Australia needs more writing and research on child welfare in Australia. It is one of life's ironies that we are more likely to learn about child welfare initiatives in the UK and the USA than those in Queensland or WA. Another irony is that we continue to listen to experts from the USA even though that country is so full of such awful lessons and contradictions. America is so rich, yet so violent with so many children living in poverty and dying of violence. Surely, Americans should be paying more attention to us.

For these reasons alone, the publication of the proceedings of the *Taking Children Seriously* conference is welcome. Organising a conference is hard enough work and publishing the proceedings is often the straw that breaks the organiser's back. Jan Mason and Marie Wilkinson are to be congratulated for seeing this conference into print.

Before turning to the content of *Taking Children Seriously*, I must declare an interest or four. I attended and contributed to the conference, one of the published papers on 'physical discipline' was written by Bernadette Saunders and me, I acted as one of the panel of international referees, and I attended the launch by Justice Marcus Einfeld. The following review must be read in the light of this declaration.

After the opening address by Chris Sidoti, NSW Human Rights Commissioner, three papers in particular set the scene for the other conference contributions. The first, by Berry Mayall of the University of London, is entitled 'The social condition of UK childhoods: children's understandings and their implications'. As Jan Mason writes in her introduction to the papers, Mayall is a leader in the area described as the 'new sociology of childhood' or 'new childhood studies'. Mayall suggests that a major obstacle to improved childhoods is the view of children as 'incomplete persons', and 'projects for adult attention' (2000:9). Other obstacles include a view of children as lacking sufficient experience and reasoning. Children, according to Mayall, are too often seen as 'morally suspect and unreliable' (2000:10). Furthermore, children are not seen as a priority in social policy terms, with adult perspectives given more weight.

After a brief review of the division of responsibilities between the public and the private, and a comparison of UK and European policies, Mayall moves to the core of her paper. She is undertaking a study of nine to twelve-year-olds in London. The study seeks to explore children's views about, and experiences of, childhood. Mayall briefly summarises the material obtained on mothers and fathers, the social position of childhood, free time, responsibility, negotiation, apprenticeship and moral status.

Mayall concludes by drawing on the Save the Children agenda and its proposals to make children more visible. Jan Mason provides another keynote paper, a contribution that builds on Mayall's paper and that reflects on the policy implications of taking children seriously. The focus of Mason's contribution is that the new childhood studies provide the 'analytical tools' necessary 'to unpack the concepts used by professionals and...the community' (2000:27). Mason suggests that three concepts are central to

the dominant paradigm explaining the construction of childhood:

> These are the conceptualisation of children as 'becomings', the notion of a universal child and the emphasis on the normative family as the mechanism for ensuring development of children into mature, acceptable adults. (Mason 2000:28)

The alternative paradigm, new childhood studies, places emphasis on children as individual 'actors in their own right' with 'the social context in which they live' assuming importance (Mason 2000:28). Mason suggests that a new approach allows us to see more clearly that viewing children as lesser or becoming adults leads to particular child welfare policies:

> This focus on children as society's future has legitimated policies where children's subjectivities in the present have been trivialised and discounted by practices which have considered them in terms of their symbolic value...(2000:29)

Mason proposes that in this way children are objectified in the child welfare system:

> In Australian policy it was evident in the 1911 statement of the Aborigines Welfare Board, that removing children from Reserves was justified in order to prevent them becoming, as adults, 'a positive menace to the State' (Reed ud, 7) (2000: 28-29)

Children are thus discounted and marginalised and the asymmetry in child-adult relations is institutionalised.

Allison James provides another keynote paper that outlines the paradigm shift that involves research 'with' rather than 'on' children (2000: 172). James points out that from the 1970s the traditional view of childhood espoused by developmental psychology was being challenged. It is this that touches on my concern about what James calls *'the new social studies of childhood'* (2000:172, emphases in original). In many ways, sociology was slow to adjust to changes elsewhere (even in developmental psychology). At one level, the new childhood studies are merely sociologists catching up with everyone else. That is not in any way intended to take anything away from these papers: the more adults there are who take children seriously the better life will be for many children.

There is a wealth of material in this publication. Much of it is extremely thought provoking. As in all publications derived from conference proceedings, there are different perspectives and emphases in the papers, as Jan Mason points out in her introduction. This is what makes these papers so stimulating. Contributions that I particularly enjoyed included one on 'The voice of the child in the family decision-making model' by Patricia Kiely and another paper by a practitioner (Neriman Osman) on 'Children's view of school'.

Per Miljeteig's paper on children's democratic rights presents several major challenges in addressing child labour from a child rights perspective, while Roger Holdsworth challenges schools and teachers. Toni Downes examines children's use of computers (a subject close to my heart especially when the children, and the computer, are mine) and Susan Danby stresses that play is a serious business. Leena Alanen's keynote paper draws out the links (and differences) between women's studies and childhood studies, while Marie Wilkinson draws on her thesis and historical descriptions of child welfare services and policies in New South Wales.

There is discussion about community attitudes to young people (in Natalie Bolzen's paper), there are reflections on the conflicting discourses on childhood and sexuality (in Kerry Robinson's contribution), and an examination of how children and their views might be included in future political action (by Toby Fattore and Nick Turnbull). Helen Woodward stresses that children should be included in educational assessment and Donna Berthelsen and her co-researchers examine moral education from an educational perspective.

Many people are speculating about what will become of childhood in the coming century (see, for example, Buckingham 2000; Goddard 2000). As Buckingham notes, the changes will be 'more complex and ambiguous' than many people realise, making generalisations difficult (2000:192). There is something in *Taking Children Seriously* for everyone who believes that children should be taken seriously. As the Honourable Justice Marcus Einfeld said at the launch, the book will challenge many readers and prompt them to reflect upon their assumptions. It will also serve as an excellent Australian resource for academics, their students, and practitioners in a range of disciplines.

References

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