
BOOK REVIEWS

"The Child-Care Crisis The Thinking Parent's Guide to Day-Care"

Fredelle Maynard,

Penguin Books Canada Limited 1985.

\$9.95 285pp

"Caring for Australia's Children - Political and Industrial Issues in Child-Care:"

Deborah Brennan and Carol O'Donnell, Allen & Unwin 1986. 177pp

\$24.95 HC \$14.95 PB

Reviewed by Denise Michie and Debra O'Connor.

Denise Michie is an Industrial Relations Officer with the Commonwealth Public Service. She has also been a Director of a Melbourne parent-run co-operative for a number of years.

Debra O'Connor is a social worker and works as a student unit co-ordinator at a Community Health Centre.

Both Debra and Denise are currently researching a book on motherhood and careers.

In her book "The Child-Care Crisis" Fredelle Maynard sets out to analyse the issues around child-care as she sees them and also to detail and evaluate the options available in North America. The major aim of the book however seems to be to deter anyone contemplating using child-care for any reason other than sheer necessity.

This is a very disturbing and unsettling book for anyone about to embark on using child-care or currently using it. Any "thinking" parent reading this book and taking it at face value would surely not be able to consider day-care for their child except in the most dire circumstances. Maynard strongly urges parents, (especially mothers), to stay at home with their child until the child is at least three, preferably five, if they possibly can. Her views are also in contrast to today's climate where the mother's right to resume her career soon after having a child is widely accepted, and often expected.

The first part of the book is given to examining the issues around child-care. Maynard recommends that people reconsider having children if they intend using child care. She then goes on to consider all the different forms of child-care, (day-care), available in North America (not altogether comparable to the Australian situation), and finds them all lacking. She does concede that it may be possible to provide acceptable substitute care, however in her view, it does not exist widely yet (in Canada at any rate).

Maynard frequently refers to her own, idyllic

experience in bringing up her own children some twenty years ago, and also draws on numerous studies to support her hypotheses. She presents a frightening picture of the possible effects of child-care (especially full-time) on a very young child, often with very vague evidence. For example, one commonly held assumption, that is often seen as a plus for child-care, is that it fosters independence and social competence in a child. Maynard turns this around and feels that this can in fact be seen as a "negative sense of separateness". The child may feel cut off from the parents and the parent, anticipating early surrogate care, may resist the formation of a close bond. She goes on to suggest that, in general, child-care stifles creativity and imagination, increases aggression (especially in boys), and inhibits the development of autonomous behaviour in girls. Child-care children are said to be more prone to sickness, less likely to internalise parental values and to inappropriately rely on peer groups for support. Without being familiar with all the research upon which Maynard draws, it is difficult to comment on her conclusions, however, it is interesting to note that in their introduction Brennan and O'Donnell (see below) draw on studies to SUPPORT the advantages of child-care.

Two major differences exist between the Australian and American/Canadian child-care scene; they don't yet seem to have our excellent system of parent-managed neighbourhood centres, (indeed there seems to be a lack of parents' involvement in creches); and secondly we seem to have escaped here the worst excesses of commercial "chain" child-care centres. These latter, called "Kinder-Care" or "Mini-Skool" proudly apply a McDonalds approach to their marketing with uniform buildings on the city bound side of the road, for convenience, and capitalise further by selling everything from clothes to insurance policies to their "consumers".

Some of Maynard's criticisms of child-care could equally be applied here, in particular: poor status and low pay child-care workers leading to high staff turnover and hence upset children; exploitation of family day-care workers and lack of uniform standards; potential exploitative aspects of work placed child-care etc. It is useful to consider these when selecting child-care.

Towards the end of the book Maynard does provide some very sound practical advice on choosing and evaluating child-care to help you meet the needs of your child. She suggests questions to ask potential nannies or minders and what to look for in centres which would be very useful, if you have the luxury of a choice.

True to her original aim, at the end of the book

Maynard suggests ways of finding support if you do decide to stay at home, most of which are also available here.

If, despite all her urging, you are still determined to go back to work, and to using substitute care, Maynard resorts to shock tactics with an Appendix entitled "A note on sexual abuse in day-care". This book is obviously not for the faint-hearted and guilt ridden, but it is well written and draws to the forefront issues easily suppressed and not often aired today. However, it should not be used as the sole basis for making a decision about child-care, especially in Australia. It fails to recognise the many positive aspects of good quality non-commercial pre-school care. More significantly, it in no way acknowledges that women return to work for more complex reasons than "necessity" or "selfish indulgence" and that there ARE many happy well adjusted day-care survivors.

The book by Brennan & O'Donnell provides a detailed look at the political and historical issues that lie behind the current situation in Australian child-care today. While it is aimed primarily at students of sociology and social policy, it would certainly be a useful reference handbook for all those connected with child-care.

Brennan & O'Donnell are particularly interested in the policy development leading to the Child-Care Act 1972 and the various shifts in policy that followed on through the Whitlam and post-Whitlam years. Detailed attention is given to the complex tapestry of views that encompass the roles of State Governments, and the role and training of child-care workers.

Each State has developed its own response to the question of child-care and training, and have had a different way of integrating its services with those provided by the Commonwealth. For instance, in Victoria, the most widely available type of service is the preschool kindergarten, whereas in New South Wales, the State provides 20 per cent of the award wages in community-based child-care centres.

The question of why women work, and who uses child-care is also covered with statistical information provided and a sociological/feminist analysis of women and equality. Industrial issues for working parents that are examined run the gamut from work-based child-care, parental leave, time off to care for sick children and special provisions for pregnant women. Brennan & O'Donnell take a strong stance against tax deductibility for child-care costs, arguing that the benefits would be uneven and mainly favour high income earners.

Finally, the authors look ahead to future

developments. While child-care is now an important issue compared to fifteen years ago, it is still a vulnerable item politically. In many eyes it is still seen as a luxury rather than as an essential community service. The book concludes with a 10 point political manifesto of policies to be established, including adoption of a national child-care policy, commitment to universal service provision, central employment of child-care workers, and affordable child-care rather than tax deductions.

The recommendations put forward form a radical blue print for future directions but are not all totally realistic in terms of today's political climate. For example, the employment of all child-care workers by a central authority, while no doubt effecting economies of scale would require a massive shift in public's view of the role of central government. Many of the recommendations would of course cost a great deal, and the author's point to defence spending or the dependent spouse rebate as areas where funds might be obtained. Such shifts in priorities would seem unlikely in the foreseeable future.

The authors have examined child care from the basic premise that it is necessary as a precondition for equal opportunity for women and while they have also examined some background research on the benefits of child-care for children, it is all from this perspective. This is not intended as a criticism of the book, but one needs to bear this in mind, as when reading the book one could almost forget that there are authors who hold the views of Fredelle Maynard (see the first book reviewed).

Brennan and O'Donnell have provided a comprehensive work that draws together the many issues related to child-care in Australia into one handy reference.



"Give and Take In Families"
(eds) Julia Brannen and Gail Wilson
Allen & Unwin, London, 1987
\$69.95 HB \$29.95

Reviewed by: Thea Brown, Acting
Professor Department of Social Work,
Monash University, Clayton, Vic.

As a child, dear reader, this reviewer was castigated constantly by her older cousins for being prepared to read anything. They said that it did not seem to matter to her whether she read the Women's Weekly or the washing machine manual. She read and enjoyed everything! They were right and this state of affairs endured for years, until this book

Give and Take in Families, an edited collection of mostly English articles, derives from the feminist research tradition in terms of the book's subject matter and in its research design. It concerns itself with an important issue, the way resources travel around family members,

especially between the female and male members, and, also, between family units, especially female and male units. Furthermore, the research reported in the nine articles uses qualitative data in order to obtain a detailed picture of resource exchange. Therefore, it should be significant and exciting, but it is not.

In the introduction the editors, Julia Brannen and Gail Wilson, set up the theme and argue that each article illustrates it. Unfortunately, while some articles are central to the theme, such as "Money : Patterns of Responsibility and Irresponsibility" and "Being Poor : Perceptions and Coping Strategies of Lone Mothers", others are not.

This may not have mattered so much if the articles had been well written. Alas, the contributors are career researchers who present their work in thesis format - problem definition, followed by research design and research instruments, followed by presentation of data, then conclusions. Their writing styles are similar - dull and hard to understand, even for academic researchers.

Work covering some of the same area has been published by Melbourne's Institute of Family Studies. This work shows the desirability of inter-relating local and international knowledge and is written so that it is lively and easy to understand.

In addition, the English work touches on major issues such as the powerlessness of the poor without either knowing of, or utilising, the extensive research in this area, such as that published by the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence in Australia or the War on Poverty research published in the U.S.A.

Notwithstanding these comments, the two particular articles mentioned do show new pictures of family life, most notably women's silence as a strategy of conflict reduction and women's perception of the power of single parent poverty. It does go some way towards linking the public and the private but it does not go far enough.



"The Complete Guide to Contraception and Family Planning."

Gabor Kovacs and Ann Westmore
Hill of Content. 1986. Melbourne. \$9.95, 126 pages (paperback)

Reviewed by: Patsy Littlejohn, Lecturer in Social Biology, School of Social Work, Phillip Institute of Technology. Plenty Road. Bundoora, Victoria 3083.

This is an excellent Australian book on contraception and family planning. The material presented in the book is based on a series of reviews and recommendations produced by the National Medical Task Force of the Australian Federation of Family Planning Associations. The Task Force was established in 1980. A list

of reviews produced by the Task Force is contained in the appendix of the book. This is a most useful reference list on the many aspects of contraception, family planning and human sexuality.

The book provides a most comprehensive discussion on all aspects of contraception and family planning. The only omission is information on community resources and organisations in Australia providing family planning services. If this material had been included, as an appendix, I feel that the book would have fulfilled the claim made in the title: "A Complete Guide to Contraception and Family Planning".

The text very clearly explains the various methods of contraception, and provides a most valuable and sensitive discussion on family planning for all age groups. The main strength in the presentation on the use of contraception is the clear message that, not only do different couples' contraceptive needs and preferences differ, but also birth control requirements can change during the reproductive years. The reader is given all the information on which to make an informed choice regarding contraception and family planning. The text is clearly written and well illustrated. It includes all important biological and medical information. However, no previous knowledge of the subject is required as each section is well presented, without being over-simplified. A comprehensive glossary is included at the end of the book.

The chapter on "Know Your Body" gives a clear description of human male and female reproductive anatomy and physiology. It includes line drawings which are well labelled and show the sites of action of the different types of contraceptive. There is also a summary of how the various birth control methods work. This chapter leads into the main part of the book which discusses all methods of birth control.

The various methods of birth control are grouped into immediate short-acting, medium-term, and permanent methods. This classification is appropriate and fits well with the theme of the book that the type of birth control should fit the needs of the users. These needs will change depending on the type of sexual relationship and stage of reproductive life. A summary of the information on types of birth control and suitability for the users, depending on their situation, is presented in a chart at the beginning of the book.

For each contraceptive and birth control method an historical perspective is presented on the development and use of the method, followed by the mode of action and effectiveness. The advantages and disadvantages and any relevant side-effects are included, as well as a discussion on myths associated with the method and any contra-indications for use. Where relevant, the discussion is illustrated with diagrams.