

Book review

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This is a fascinating and well-structured overview of the work of The Mulberry Bush School and is easily accessible and offers illuminating content to both workers in the field of therapeutic residential care and education or indeed to the wider public. It is helpfully set out in three sections – history, current core practice and finally how this is being broadened beyond the boundaries of the school itself.

The opening chapter by the Editor, John Diamond, himself a long-standing Practitioner of the school and its current CEO, provides a rich description of the early origins and context for residential education provision for traumatized children. It sets out very clearly the key theoretical ideas that shape the school – drawing on the work of Dockar-Drysdale the pioneering Founder of the school, but also the key concepts of systems theory, the primary task, managing violence, projections and the use of groups. These are all helpfully illustrated with short case studies.

This really “sets the scene” for additional chapters exploring the wider socio-politic context at the time the school was formed and considering how this has evolved subsequently and then a very engaging narrative on the sequence of the school forming and becoming established in its very early years.

The second and biggest section of the book really breaks down the current day-to-day practice through a series of specific papers which each look at a different aspect of provision. There really is something here for everyone and for the wider public and this really helps give insight into the day-to-day task of being alongside trauma and acting out behaviors and how this impacts on the delivery of provision by different roles.

There are specific perspectives from teaching staff, the role of speech and language therapy, considerations of family work and an operational evolution of the behavior support team – again, all supported by short case vignettes to be able to connect the theory to the lived experience. Particularly illuminating were two chapters with significant case study material. In one, a specific case and presenting need is considered from the different perspectives across the multi-disciplinary team. This really allows the reader to see how an individual child can succeed and struggle in equal measure within different elements of a single placement.

Another chapter gives a real observational account of the subtle approaches to practice in one of the residential homes and gives an almost minute-by-minute account of the children coming back home from school and that late afternoon/early evening transition and the issues the staff team have to think about in the moment. For any practitioner reading this, it cannot help but trigger all sorts of reflections and connections with one's own experience and practice.

The third and final section considers issues in the wider system and focusses on three themes – staff training, outreach work with mainstream schools and the use and application of observation. Again, this helpfully allows the exploration of core elements of the underpinning theory and practice but through the lens of specific application or operational considerations.

This was a very engaging and stimulating read – fascinating to have a synopsis of where the ideas first emerged and the ways in which pioneers first brought them to life, but then equally engaging to understand the modern practice in action. The use of “role-specific” perspectives was a useful way of conserving the system and team around the child and then to have this

70 Years of the Mulberry Bush School

helpfully linked back to the inner workings of the child's experience.

I would highly recommend this to any staff members working with traumatized young people but it offers an accessible

insight into this specialist work that any reader would enjoy.

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