frankness and readiness to be self-critical make this book a very effective teaching tool.

I found this book immensely enjoyable and readable. Its title is disappointing in that it does not do justice to its breadth and interest. It should be mandatory reading for all trainee child psychiatrists and mental health professionals, and for anyone struggling with implementing the recommendations for copying all clinical letters to patients in the ‘new NHS’.

Gillian C. Forrest

Family therapy: Concepts, process and practice.

In the foreword Allan Gurman, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, suggests that this is two books for the price of one – an excellent basic text in Family Therapy and an articulation of Carr’s particular model for the formulation of problems. Alan Carr, a psychologist at University College Dublin, is a well-respected writer on family therapy topics. His clinical experience and ability to express complex ideas clearly are evident throughout this excellent family therapy text, published in the Wiley Series in Clinical Psychology.

In the first section he presents a thorough overview of the key concepts in Family Therapy. His exposition of the family life cycle model includes consideration of some of the main criticisms made about it. Within the family therapy world there is a tendency to marginalise ‘old’ ideas and it is refreshing to see the way in which Alan Carr traces the development of the field and includes schools, models and key ideas. Some will consider that he does not spend sufficient time on the later, social constructionist approaches but there is plenty written about these elsewhere and he certainly does not ignore context.

The issue of ‘formulation’ is always contentious in the systemic field because of the fear of obscuring the uniqueness of individuals and risking the worst effects of ‘labelling’. Alan Carr presents an interesting 3-column formulation system which focuses on contexts, belief systems and behaviour patterns. This provides a useful model which could be very helpful for therapists (and other mental health practitioners) whether experienced or in training. It helps to pinpoint areas for intervention. The third and fourth sections give examples of work in both child and family, and adult settings. The fifth section provides a very welcome overview of some of the evidence base for work with families. Added value is provided by an excellent reference list, glossary of terms and guides to further reading. This book has great breadth and, inevitably, there are occasional sections which seem slightly superficial. However, there is plenty of guidance on where to read more. I highly recommend it to anyone wanting to know more about the field and to develop more effective ways of working with families. It also provides an essential and reliable resource for students and their teachers.

Judith Lask

The social context of cognitive development.

For those of us trained in a more individualistic approach to cognitive development, there is much to learn from Mary Gauvain’s book, The social context of cognitive development. The central thesis of this book is that social experience is a key mechanism of cognitive development. In Part 1 of the book, Gauvain attempts to explain the nature of this mechanism. In Part 2 she reviews research findings which illustrate the possible way that social experience might bring about cognitive change. Unfortunately, as she warns us at the beginning of the book, the aim of specifying the social mechanism of cognitive development cannot be realised, because as yet there is a lack of research directed to investigating what the specifics of such a mechanism might be. However, what is important at this stage is to be able to open up this question more fully and to suggest ways that it might be investigated.

An important aim of the book is to bring more clearly into view the social and emotional contributions to cognitive growth. This is achieved in the second part of the book. Clearly organised into sections on attention, memory, problem solving and planning, the literature is well reviewed and provides a positive wealth of empirical work. As well as reinterpreting traditional experiments originating from other theoretical positions, examples of the social basis of attention and memory are also offered from ethnographic studies and we are taken from examples of children’s knot-tying in Piaget and Inhelder’s problem-solving experiments to knot-tying of the ancient Inca people as examples of symbolic activity and planning. The literature is clearly presented and well summarised and the discussions about the joint contribution of biology and social influences are particularly interesting.

The aim of delineating the nature of the social mechanism of cognitive development, by its own admission, succeeds less well. Nevertheless, the book does bring to our attention what traditional individualistic approaches need to consider if they want to investigate the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in organising and structuring mental development. What I find compelling about the socio-cultural approach is not only its emphasis on the influence of the wider context, including family members, peers, community and social history, but its emphasis on social values and goals. The way that the specific values and goals of people
might be instantiated in cognitive performance seems to be particularly important to understand in the study of attention selectivity, symbol acquisition and cognitive strategy.

As the author points out, we still know very little about the exact way that social interaction and cultural practice facilitate cognitive growth and there are many areas that need attention if we are to obtain more complete understanding of the social context of development. One obvious area that she mentions is the study of how particular kinds of social and cultural experiences operate to facilitate and structure the child’s theory of mind. This question has been surprisingly neglected in research to date.

This book has a gentle way of provoking thoughts and raising ideas that you’ll want to question further. This is a book for laying the ground. A jumping-off point. Use it for teaching. Lend it to your students. But make sure that you get it back.

Sue Leekam


Pat Crittenden has long cut an independent figure in the field of attachment studies. This book is permeated by her thinking and its dominating themes are travel and questioning. Crittenden has developed an anthropological sensitivity to the diversity of cultural patterns and continually questions here whether common developmental assumptions may be culturally relative. At its best the book contains echoes of Erickson’s classic Childhood and Society in its impressionistic and theory-driven account of how diverse social goals are embodied in different child rearing practices across cultures. In this volume there are studies of parental sensitivity and family size in Soviet Russia; differential treatment of boys and girls in modern Egypt; avoidant styles of attachment related to national self-protection in post-war Finland; day care in Germany; institutionalisation in Poland; and children of depressed mothers in Utah. For Crittenden and her coeditor the cultural perspective opens up many questions about traditionally presented attachment theory; they point out the common difficulties in cross-cultural use of standard instruments and a tendency for cultures to overrepresent their own parenting style as normative and their own infants as ‘secure’. The notion of maternal sensitivity is also put into its cultural context; they argue that ‘sensitivity’, like ‘security’, may not always be adaptive in situations of hardship or crisis. Around these cultural perspectives, Crittenden organises her central idea of how different attachment patterns in children are essentially adaptations to different degrees of perceived or actual danger in their environment. It is a theory that addresses the realities of ‘high risk’ populations in a way that many clinicians find helpful and illuminating.

This challenging and often suggestive theorising is, however, linked to a very uneven and disparate collection of scientific papers, which do not really serve either to support or advance the thesis. Many of the studies are marked by extremely small sample sizes and generalising from them to a social theory (as is often done here) is clearly highly dubious (generalisations about Poland are made from a study of 20 children; about Egypt from a study of 30; and Russia from a study of 38). The work from Finland, Germany and the US is more solid (this fact alone perhaps reflecting other important cross-cultural issues of funding and research tradition). Also, disappointingly, there is no real overview of other existing cross-cultural attachment research, of which there is a now a good deal. The book contains a comprehensive representation of Crittenden’s views and is often refreshingly provocative in theory; but it can hardly stand as an authoritative overview of cross-cultural attachment research. For this, readers are urged to look out the scholarly (more ‘mainstream’ but fascinating) account by van Ijzendoorn and Sagi in the recent Handbook of Attachment (ed. Cassidy and Shaver), where the culture-bound and the universal in attachment studies are also weighed together.

Jonathan Green


This book was originally published in German in 1997 (Psychotherapie im kindes-und jugendalter, Verlag). Many different treatments and clinical problems are covered in the 34 chapters. Thirteen contributors prepared the chapters. The editor has authored or co-authored 14 (41%) of the chapters.

The first section of the book, Principles of Psychotherapy, includes four excellent chapters that focus on common or guiding principles of therapy, treatment planning, psychotherapy research, and ensuring quality of treatment implementation and documentation. These chapters alone would form an excellent basis for a book. The second section, Psychotherapeutic Methods and Settings, focuses on major approaches to treatment, with chapters on psychodynamic therapy, behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, play therapy, individual and group psychotherapy, family therapy, parent training, and combined treatments. The third section, The Practice of Psychotherapy for Specific Disorders, provides separate chapters on