

Book Reviews

Catching Goldfish

Formulation in Psychology & Psychotherapy: Making Sense of People's Problems

JOHNSTONE, L. and DALLOS, R. (Eds). London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 241.

Making sense of people's problems involves reaching into a strange and elusive medium and trying to grasp something that lives and moves there, preferably without causing any damage. Recently, UK clinical psychologists have been revisiting the issue of formulation in papers from the Liverpool course (Kinderman, 2005) and now this largely South Western collaboration, led by staff from the Bristol and Plymouth clinical courses.

Much of the work described comes out of deep knowledge of clinical practice, and of teaching it. The editors build an excellent observation platform by introducing eight ways to view formulation: collaboration, reflective practice, therapeutic relationships, context, integration, diagnosis, evidence and whether we need formulation at all. Two case vignettes are outlined for discussion by all contributors. This has the merit of making differences between approaches more visible, although from roughly half-way through I found it increasingly hard to stay curious about each new intervention proposed for Jack and Janet.

From this innovative start the book moves into more predictable waters, with a review of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) followed by chapters on psychodynamic and systemic approaches. The first two provide useful introductions and updates; the systemic chapter was not quite so current. In particular, Leiper provided a persuasive and humane account of psychodynamic work. He argued against discussing formulation with clients, in contrast to most contributors, because clients may experience it as an 'impingement or imposition which stands in the way of the client's autonomous self-exploration and discovery' (p 69). For Leiper, formulation is a tool that enables therapists to tolerate their failure to understand as much as it encapsulates their evolving understanding; it may function best as a teddy/transitional object which offers security and enables therapists to think, until they can discard it and move into deeper human understanding.

Chapters 5 and 6 return to less frequented waters, with two welcome accounts of clinical practice framed by social psychology. Harper and Spelman offer a concise introduction to social constructionism before exemplifying its expression within narrative therapy. This is the version used by systemic therapists; a more individualist account of narrative therapy is described by Dallos in Chapter 8 as a component of cognitive analytic therapy (CAT). Miller and McClelland's engaging description of community clinical psychology draws social context into the therapeutic process and into community interventions designed to address social justice. They make good use of Smail's cautionary tales while avoiding the tone of hopelessness that sometimes accompanied his critique.

The next two chapters explore whether integrating different types of formulation is useful/effective. *Catching goldfish* certainly looks easier with a big net, which is one way to describe Weerasekera's grid: the Predisposing, Precipitating, Perpetuating and Protective processes that interact with individual (including biological) and systemic factors to influence coping style and choice of treatment. Dallos, Wright, Stedmon, and Johnstone deftly point out the conceptual gaps which allow goldfish to slip through this net while you collect a lot of pondweed. They also caution against pressing a psychological formulation in conflict with medical diagnosis if the client is likely to be caught in the middle. Dallos' next chapter outlines the elements of CAT and offers a new integrative formulation which he calls attachment narrative therapy. This 'idiosyncratic' (his term) approach to formulation is still in the early stages of conceptualisation; for me, the description leaves his case

for ANT 'not proven'. Perhaps it was included to encourage all of us to combine perspectives and ideas creatively.

Johnstone's final chapter on controversies and debates lists helpful ways to evaluate a formulation and includes well-judged reflections on psychologists' more grandiose claims, not least because a reasonable number of the interventions employed by psychologists were developed by people outside the profession. There are proper warnings against formulations that make people feel 'seen through' or 'rumbled' rather than understood.

Of course I have some caveats. In terms of presentation, it is a moot point whether Routledge's characteristically cool and stylish cover compensates for printing the text on relatively poor paper. Some figures (2.2) contain so many arrows, pointing in so many directions, that they indicate nothing substantive; others (4.6) were so simplistic that they can only have been included as visual relief from too many words. The general tone of collegiality is occasionally marred by a contribution that slips into '*This is only the tip of my iceberg-like knowledge which you can never match*' persona. In terms of content, although the vignette of Janet refers to child and family work, most contributors made relatively brief mention of it; the book is largely embedded within, and limited to, adult mental health literature and practice.

There are also absences. Johnstone quoted Rosenbaum's goal of entering therapy with no desire apart from the effort to cultivate compassion and joy for the client, but dismissed this Zen-like detachment as unattainable for most clinicians. I would have liked to see more discussion of *being* as well as *doing*. The therapeutic relationship was one of the eight themes each contributor was asked to cover, but it was not very apparent outside discussion of psychodynamic work. Clinical psychology may need to be more attentive to this if we are to take on street-level critiques that we are a profession so focussed on method that we become specialists without spirit. Context was another of the eight themes that was not very visible outside the chapter on social inequalities: I missed a review of influences on the form and content of clinical psychology practice in recent years, not least resulting from a key government advisor's enthusiasm for CBT. Finally, my interpretation of the editors' implicit message was that integrative approaches to formulation are appropriate, if not desirable. If that is their position, it would have been helpful for them to discuss the advisability or otherwise of eclecticism from the outset, as opposed to mastering one approach thoroughly before trying to incorporate others.

Despite these cautions, it is heartening that psychologists are revisiting the matter of formulation. The book will be invaluable to people entering training, and to specialists who want to update their knowledge of other approaches. It provides succour to psychologists whose practice is informed by approaches other than CBT, as well as updating those who use it occasionally. It suggests a rubric for evaluating the utility of psychological formulations that could inform a revealing audit. Most important, the book provides a refreshingly critical perspective on various claims made about clinical psychology, without undermining clinicians' concern to do something useful.

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Forensic Psychology—Emerging Topics and Expanding Roles

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This is the most impressive looking academic book to grace my shelf. It is a large volume with an alluring title which most of my forensic psychology colleagues would not be able to resist—*Forensic Psychology, Emerging Topics and Expanding Roles*. As a group of professional psychologists there