

Reviews

Needs-ABC: Acquisition and Behaviour Change
A model for groupwork and other psychotherapies.

Tom Caplan

London, Whiting and Birch, 2008.

ISBN 9781861770530 (pbk) £19.75.

There are already several hundred types of psychotherapy and Tom Caplan has added another to the list. He calls his approach, the Needs ABC model. This stands for Needs Acquisition and Behaviour Change, abbreviated to the more 'catchy,' Needs ABC. In fact, it probably should be more accurately referred to as, Needs *Identification* and Behaviour Change, but this clearly doesn't have the same ring to it. What's it all about?

The approach that Professor Caplan articulates in this book is one of

identifying clients' unmet relational needs; needs that can create a negative feeling which can, in turn, produce a maladaptive behaviour as a coping strategy . . . Until these unmet needs are fulfilled, the maladaptive behaviour will continue. (p.2)

Therapy consists of the therapist and the client working to identify these unmet needs and then developing more functional ways of meeting needs. In Chapter 5 Caplan introduces these universal needs. These are:

- Abandonment: the need for emotional reliability, predictability and consistency.
- Loyalty: a need to trust other's motives and for unconditional support.
- Intimacy: the need for emotional connectedness.
- Respect: the need to feel valued and acknowledged.
- Competence: the need to feel adequate.
- Power: the need to feel in control of one's environment.
- Grief/Loss: the need to accept finality.

In the next chapter he adds Responsibility, making a total of eight needs

The key to solving the issue of the problematic behaviours that have brought the client to therapy will not be found by addressing the behaviours head on, but by finding out what unmet needs lay behind them and devising new unproblematic ways in which these needs can be met,' (p.82).

This is the 'old chestnut,' 'the symptom is not the neurosis,' but in different clothes. The book provides ample clinical material of the Needs ABC approach in action, with plenty of vignettes from individual, couple, family and more importantly for readers of this journal, groupwork applications. The author says the approach derives from four main sources. These are Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and the work of Albert Ellis (its most famous son, Aaron Beck is not mentioned), motivational therapy (I think more commonly referred to as motivational interviewing), narrative therapy and emotion focussed therapy. The author states 'fundamentally human beings are more similar than they are different,' (p. 37). This reminded me of a comment supposedly attributed to Albert Ellis. A patient once asked Ellis how he coped with the fact that patients were all so different. Ellis is alleged to have replied, 'You'd be surprised how boringly similar you all are!'

This is really an approach which has grown out of the author's clinical practice over many years, so it is grounded in clinical experience. Professor Caplan has now distilled all this wisdom into the Needs ABC model. Some readers will find this a helpful introduction to conceptualising a wide range of client problems. Whether this approach now expands will depend on how helpful the Needs ABC model proves to be and of course ultimately, on whether any evidence is brought forward as to its efficacy.

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Empowering Children through Art and Expressions
Culturally sensitive ways of healing trauma and grief
B. St. Thomas, B. and P. Johnson
London: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2008, 176pp
ISBN: 9781843107897 (pbk) £19.99

Most of my social work career has been focused on older people and groupwork practice, so it may seem odd that a gerontologist would review a book that focuses on children and does not have groupwork anywhere in the title (or the book summary for that matter). Though the book is written about children who have experienced extreme trauma and loss in their lives, it transcends childhood and has much to say about how creativity can be healing for people across the life course. Though not a 'groupwork' book, groupwork permeates almost the entire book. As such, I found the book to be fascinating and it made me reflect on my use of art and expression with groups of older people who also had very traumatic lives.

The book begins by setting a context of a dangerous and scary world where bad things can happen to good people. Across cultures people have developed stories and myths that illustrate this scary world but also provide a roadmap for coping and resiliency. Children, the authors propose, have an innate ability to use play, imagination and activities to cope, flourish, and find meaning. They state that 'children naturally seek an imaginative course of exploration and play when they feel supported and reassured.' (p.22).

The book presents the authors' groupwork framework for working with traumatised children. They believe that using creative expression in a groupwork context helps children feel supported and reassured so that their natural inclinations to creatively explore and play and heal their grief and loss can be realised. After a brief overview of some trauma theory, the importance of self-healing and mythic structures, the authors present their phases of dealing with trauma and loss. Subsequent chapters then illustrate how these concepts can be applied in clinical and community settings. The authors give poignant examples of art and expression along each phase of their groupwork grief and loss framework.

The authors' group phases of dealing with trauma are a mix of various stage theories of group development as well as stages of grief. For

example building trust, dealing with anger and conflict, ambivalence, and the ability to do in-depth work flow from one phase to the next. Grief concepts such as anger, ambivalence, letting go and hope also feature stage like. The authors do make a footnote that the phases are like a game such as Chutes and Ladders, however, as the caution is only a footnote readers must remember the critique of linear approaches to development of any kind.

This is not a 'how to' book as it does not describe groupwork skills, nor does it tell the reader how to do creative and expressive work. However, it does present numerous examples of how creative and expressive work was purposefully used within several different group based programmes. The examples are presented in such a way as to illustrate the growth and development of the children as they heal through creative work. For example, in the chapter describing the penultimate phase, 'Letting Go, the artwork of a Sudanese boy is described. Over time he draws a lot of war pictures but letting go is represented by a picture which is a memorial to his aunt and uncle who were killed. By including pictures of the artwork the reader can feel the power of this type of work.

Though the book was fascinating and inspiring to read, I found the first several chapters confusing, as the introduction and first chapter tried to cover a lot of important and necessary ground, but they did not always flow coherently. Chapter 2 then moves to describing an agency where a lot (but not all) of the groupwork practice occurred. I would have liked to see a better description of the various ways of working within the agency described, and the inclusion of the other places where the groupwork was done could have been explained better. Setting the context for the practice described was important, but the way in which it was done detracted from the book. Readers should not let the confusion stop them reading... as the practice described is inspiring and will likely get their own creative juices flowing. Finally, the group process described has a lot of face validity and I would encourage the authors to research the approach further.

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