

Cradling the Chrysalis: Teaching/Learning Psychotherapy

MacCallum Sullivan, M. and Goldenberg, H. (2003). London: Continuum

This is a useful book in that it is one of the very few I have ever found that take seriously the experience of training in psychotherapy and argue (and demonstrate) that it is something to reflect on. I have seen much course material *instructing* trainees to reflect on the experience and the odd chapter in supervision texts drawing attention to the amount of learning that can occur when we train in psychotherapy. But a slow, considered deliberation of the process, of the challenges, the joys and the dilemmas is not something I see very often. The authors tackle a range of issues in the seven chapters that constitute the book. They consider the place of ‘*meaning*’ in this profession and in our lives; the complex phenomenon of teaching and learning; relationality; Frames and the place they have in training; the content of training; and while there is a dedicated chapter on ethics, this is a concern that runs throughout the book.

By using their own conversation (which is physically outlined in print throughout the book), Sullivan and Goldenberg invite us in to their own conversation about the process of learning and teaching psychotherapy. The book is organised around this conversation where the authors talk to each other about theory and practice, ethics and experience. I came to really enjoy this strategy and found myself thinking and almost commenting out loud in a way that I seldom do when following the ‘*straightforward*’ explication of theory. What is particularly heartening about this book is the way that the authors allow us into their dilemmas rather than simply explaining the right way to do something. This is a much more authentic, not to say convincing, approach especially when tackling topics such as ‘*Being-together*’ (and when tackling it in this culture of regulation that seems to be based on the assumption of rampant incompetence and deceit in psychotherapy – a view that the authors do not subscribe to).

A question that may be relevant to readers of this journal is whether or not this is a useful book for existential practitioners? Absolutely! The fact that the authors come from different perspectives and make no claim to have written a book on the existential issues involved in training in existential psychotherapy is in some respects irrelevant. For me, the authors have tried to produce a much more inclusive text than one that would be possible if it limited itself to one theoretical position. And, I was pleased to see the authors tackle the issue of allegiance to one mindset head on. They remind us that the essence of psychotherapy is the search for meaning inherent in that which we see, rather than a practice that diagnoses and imposes meaning on a phenomenon. The fact that the authors come from different theoretical models (at least on paper) is one of

the ways that they shed light on the challenge of this profession, being open to the unknown, to what is unfamiliar. They carefully run through the ways that they attempt to engage ... whether that be in the consulting room, in the classroom or in the pages of the book.

This is not to say that I had no difficulty with this book. I did at first, in fact I found myself being strangely ambivalent to it. So much so that I put it down after a quick scan. The second time I picked it up I realised quite clearly what a little gem this book is. My initial mistake was to do with the mindset with which I approached the first reading. At the time of requesting and receiving the book I was slap bang in the middle of preparing for the new academic year and had gotten into a functional, unthinking place. In essence my relationship with the readings I was seeking was characterised by a sense of '*I-It*' (I know a book is a legitimate '*It*' but equally we all have our favourite texts that '*speak to us*', ones we engage with in a fluid, responsive manner). At that time I wanted a chapter that would **explain** to trainees what they were getting into (hmmmm I hear the voices of HPC accreditation materials singing rather too loudly in my ears!!). I was looking for a chapter to refer trainees to that would explain the process and get them ready for the journey ahead. If you turn to this book in that functional manner, I suspect that you, like me, will find it sadly lacking. When I regained my senses, I realised that I have to thank the authors for rising above that limited, mechanical aim. While to have written the recipe book on training might have been lucrative (and would certainly have fitted with the current zeitgeist about consumers' rights to choose the 'right' brand), it would have made for a text without the soul, creativity and imagination that this book has in abundance. So for anyone ready to ponder the fascinating, scary yet wonderful process that teaching and learning psychotherapy is, you could do a lot worse than sitting down, putting your feet up and really engaging with MacCallum and Goldenberg.

Martin Milton

Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us

Karl Sabbagh, (2009) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Originally a student of experimental psychology at Cambridge, Sabbagh has pursued a career as a journalist, documentary television producer and writer. Here he explores what memory is and is not, what it is for and to what extent we can rely on it. He draws on interviews with several experimental psychologists, working in the field of memory, and on a review of literature and research findings. He goes on to argue against the safety of much recovered memory of childhood sexual abuse drawing on court cases in the US and UK where serious miscarriages of justice were subsequently found to have occurred.