

11-2020

Book Review - The Solution Focused Approach with Children and Young People: Current Thinking and Practice

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Recommended Citation

Macdonald, Alasdair J. (2020) "Book Review - The Solution Focused Approach with Children and Young People: Current Thinking and Practice," *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 13. Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol4/iss2/13>

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BOOK REVIEW

The Solution Focused Approach with Children and Young People: Current Thinking and Practice

Denise Yusuf (editor)

Routledge, 2020, 206 pages, ISBN 978-0367187620, £24.99 paperback (Kindle edition available)

Review by Alasdair Macdonald

Retired psychiatrist and freelance trainer

Denise Yusuf is a qualified social worker and a solution-focused coach and supervisor. She has worked in a variety of settings, including a long relationship with the internationally known training practice developed by BRIEF in London.

This book contains 26 chapters by a variety of well-known authors in the field of solution-focused therapy. There are a total of 27 contributors drawing on their own work and experience with children in many settings. There is also an interesting foreword by Michael Durrant from Australia, highlighting children's interest in the future. The contributors report experience in 12 different countries around the world, including but not limited to the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Hungary, Belgium, Finland, Cyprus, Singapore, New Zealand and of course the United Kingdom.

One of the special features of this text is that the contributing experts come from many different backgrounds and fields of study. The book opens with a concise series of snapshots of each author. You will find teachers, educational psychologists, counsellors working with young offenders, social workers, specialists in communication and linguistics, speech and language therapists, psychiatrists and others, many of whom have international reputations as trainers and therapists.

In her introduction Denise Yusuf emphasises the value of scaling in work with children. Ben Furman, a Finnish psychiatrist, describes the development of his fifteen-step protocol 'Kids' Skills' which has become internationally famous, including regular teaching in China and the Far East. Felina Heart reports her innovative work with parents, children and teachers in an English-speaking international school in the Ukraine. Elliott Connie from Texas provides an excellent metaphor for our work, helping children grow from caterpillars to butterflies. Evan George comments on the reluctance of young people to be involved with 'therapists' and describes some of his methods for engaging their interest.

Harvey Ratner of BRIEF presents an interesting discussion of the link between the miracle question and the use of scaling, referencing both Steve de Shazer and Harry Korman. He offers some sequences of dialogue from his own practice.

Harriet Conniff provides examples of the use of solution-focused thinking when working with young people with chronic or life-threatening conditions. She suggests the use of 'solution-focused injections' in which a few solution-focused questions can promote new thinking and positive developments for children and families in such difficult situations. The offering by Anita McKiernan reports her experience as a speech and language therapist working with selective mutism, often with very young children.

An impressive project in Hungary is described by Arpad Barnai and Viktoria Soregi. The Roma communities in many European countries live in conditions of significant poverty and neglect. The project aims to provide informal and non-formal learning situations for some of the adolescents in these situations. The application of solution-focused ideas as proposed here appears to have had very significant benefits. The model has been supported by the European Union and is being extended to the Roma communities in other countries.

Elke Gybels and Rik Prenen work in Belgium. Their favoured tool is known as 'Figuring Futures'. It consists in using visual aids such as Lego figures or decorative boxes as a method of extracting details and supportive ideas during interviews with children, thus stimulating visualisation and imagination. Pamela King's article about solution-focused play therapy follows some similar themes. She also proposes methods of developing useful conversations after traumatic

experiences. Xenia Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous reports her use of solution-focused conversations in bereavements following the loss of a parent.

There are two contributions which address work with young offenders. Emma Burns works extensively with the police force in New Zealand, producing both effective help for the young people referred to her and valuable training experiences for police officers. Joe Chan reports his experience of coaching for youth offenders in an institutional setting in Singapore. Like Felina Heart (see above) he confirms the value of solution-focused methods in cross-cultural practice.

Michael Petersen and Rikke Ludvigsen, working with high-risk child protection cases in Denmark, highlight the value of solution-focused concepts in these families. They specifically report on their use of the Signs of Safety approach developed by Turnell and Edwards for indigenous peoples in Australia. Jeff Chang's paper presents material from similar family situations in Canada addressed in a different way.

Most of the contributions include references to other authors quoted in the text. The book is therefore also a useful summary of the overall field of solution-focused work with children and young people. Space does not permit commentary on every piece of work included. However, I found the book interesting from start to finish, and I strongly recommend it to anyone working with children and young people.

The reviewer

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