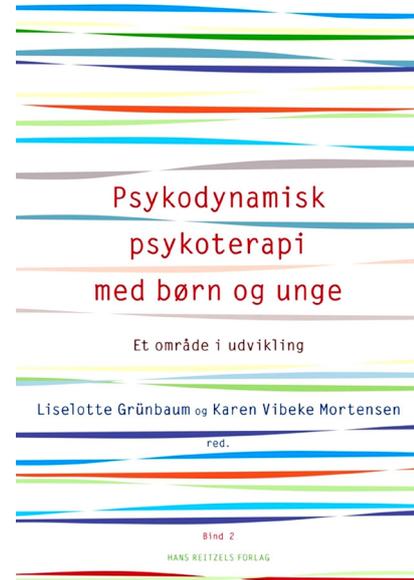


Book Review
Bokanmälan
Bokanmeldelse

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Olso



Psykodynamisk psykoterapi med børn og unge

by Liselotte Grünbaum and Karen Vibeke Mortensen

An exceptional textbook on psychodynamic psychotherapy

Liselotte Grünbaum and Karen Vibeke Mortensen have written a most unusual textbook on psychodynamic psychotherapy with children and adolescents. This is very encouraging and must be warmly welcomed. “Psykodynamisk psykoterapi med børn og unge” consists of two volumes and is the first of its kind in Scandinavia. The book was published by Hans Reitzel in 2016. (Volume I was published by Karnac in 2018 under the title “Psychodynamic Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy – Theories and Methods”). The book is signified by the authors’ long and extensive clinical experience. They are both psychologists with advanced studies in psychoanalytic child and adolescent psychotherapy, and they are both experienced in training, supervision, and research. Liselotte Grünbaum also was a central figure in the development of a training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy in Denmark

that fulfills European standards (EFPP).

Volume I “En grundbog om teorier og arbejds-metoder” contains a review of psychotherapeutic work with children and adolescents, giving a thorough description of the foundation for this kind of treatment. Volume II “Et område i udvikling” (“A field in development”) contains articles based on research and descriptions of interesting clinical psychotherapy cases. The book is edited by the authors, and many of the articles are written by young psychologists.

In the introduction, the authors emphasize that psychodynamic child psychotherapy is a well-documented, effective form of treatment which can help both children with less extensive disturbances and children with early and comprehensive problems. There are many myths about the method, and an aim of the authors is, among other things, to make the approach better known. The book addresses first and foremost professionals and may well be used as a reference book. The clearly way in which

it is written, makes it possible also for people without having special qualifications, to profit from reading it.

The authors give a historical presentation of the development of psychodynamic understanding and treatment of children and adolescents. Child psychotherapy has its roots in early psychoanalysis when Anna Freud and Melanie Klein created the theoretical and methodological foundation for the treatment of children. It is emphasized that since then a tremendous development of the *modus operandi* of psychodynamic child and adolescent psychotherapy has taken place. New theories and methods have gradually been integrated, e.g., newer object relations theory, attachment theory, and neuropsychological theory.

Volume I, “En grundbog om teorier og arbejdsmetoder”

Volume I, offers a thorough presentation of psychotherapeutic work with children and adolescents. The authors' language is easy to understand, managing to extract the essence at the same time as dealing in depth with the themes they want to emphasize.

The first three chapters describe what psychodynamic psychotherapy means and which conditions are necessary to be present before this way of working can be initiated. The reader gets the impression that all children can make use of psychodynamic psychotherapy, except when the problems predominantly exist outside the child itself. It is emphasized that a good working alliance with the parents is decisive for a successful therapy with a child, and that the necessary time to work with parents must be taken.

A good description is provided of what is important in the assessment of the child. The authors emphasize the necessity of a thorough assessment in order to know what will be the best approach to a certain child. The dilemmas of psychiatric diagnostics are discussed, and it is underlined that, probably, the most important thing is not the diagnosis, but the understanding of the nature of the problems, how comprehensive they are, and where and in what way they present themselves.

The frames and setting of the therapy, as well as

the therapeutic relationship, are emphasized. We get here a careful description of the importance of creating a good external setting, before starting psychotherapy with a child.

The attention paid to the transference-countertransference relationship between therapist and patient is emphasized as the main factor distinguishing this kind of psychotherapy from other forms of psychotherapy. The reader gets a thorough description of how the transference can be worked with, how it influences the therapeutic relationship and how it has great implications for this kind of work.

The concepts of projective identification and containment are central to the understanding of the therapeutic attitude and the psychotherapeutic work. This is well described, as is the development of the capacity for thinking and symbolizing.

The authors describe therapy as a circular and progressing process of recognition. Therapists test the validity of their intuitive ideas about the child's inner world through verbal interpretations and subsequently observe the effect of these by waiting to see how the child responds.

Children in therapy often use drawings and other forms of symbolic expression. Themes of which the children themselves are not yet conscious of, may be touched on, and it is therefore important to be careful with interpretations, making space for the children to explore and work through in play their experiences and feelings.

Work with parents is accentuated as central for the outcome of a successful child psychotherapy. Without a good alliance with the parents, therapy with the child is not possible. It is, therefore important to take time to describe the method to the parents so that they understand the implications of it, and together with the parents, work to find a mutual understanding of the problems and the objective of the treatment.

Psychotherapy with adolescents differs from work with children and adults. Adolescents do not play in the way children do, and most often they do not make use of words to express themselves to the same degree as adults. Perhaps you may say that adolescents repose in a place between play and dream. Adolescents are in a process of separation, and the attachment to a therapist implies a challenge. The therapist must be able to tolerate quite

a bit of rejection, cancellation of sessions, or simply that the youth fails to turn up.

Beginnings and endings of therapy are thoroughly treated. The importance of the first meeting is accentuated, and the authors give good suggestions of important themes to be aware of. For example, what are the children's expectations of therapy, how is their motivation, sufferings, and understanding of themselves and their situation.

The importance of endings is treated in a chapter of its own. Endings activate themes of separation, loss, letting go, and, ultimately, the irrevocable, death. During a long therapy, pauses and unplanned breaks will happen. This may intensify and elucidate central object relationship themes and derived defensive phantasies and relationships, thus giving rise to material for further work in the therapy. The child's reactions to such occurrences may indicate how the child may handle the final termination of the therapy.

The authors have wide experience with trauma and treatment of traumatized children, adolescents, and families. They offer a thorough description of psychotherapy by early neglect and abuse and psychotherapy by complex trauma.

It is emphasized that therapy with traumatized children implies great challenges for the therapist. Besides emotional instability, acting out, and withdrawal, the child may demonstrate insufficient capacity to accept care and may avoid any engagement in the trauma. The work with traumatized children and adolescents is a very emotionally straining work, and the necessity of supervision is emphasized. Good clinical examples are introduced as illustrations of the themes the writers focus on. Furthermore, they describe psychotherapeutic strategies that may be useful by complex trauma and emphasize that the therapy must be of a sufficient length and frequency in order to be effective.

Volume I, also contains a chapter on research, showing that psychodynamic child and adolescent psychotherapy is effective. Emotional problems may be treated with less intensive psychotherapy while therapy with traumatized and neglected children needs more time and increased frequency. Volume II contains several qualitative studies, which throw new and fascinating light on central themes in the field.

Volume II: "Et område i udvikling"

Volume II, offers the reader a view of psychodynamic child and adolescent psychotherapy as a field in development, nationally as well as internationally. The book starts with a chapter about the development of and the present state of psychodynamic child psychotherapy. Several chapters are based on research; one is about therapeutic alliance in child psychotherapy and discusses the research that has been done in this area during the last 30 years. Another chapter is dedicated to work with parents. The research into this subject has been sparse, although EFPP-studies and the Swedish EPOS-project in recent years have offered useful contributions to the field. An interview study with parents whose children are in therapy is presented, illustrated with clinical examples.

Liselotte Grünbaum writes about traumatized children in tortured families. In such families, it may be tabooed to speak about anything that may give associations to the trauma. She describes how this "conspiracy of silence" often is found together with uncontrolled and incoherent behavior. This creates great fear and confusion in the child. Parents may also project traumatic experiences into the child, which may cause frightening and silent areas in the child's inner world. This may appear as watchfulness in the child, together with problems with dependence and separation. In such families, it is therefore necessary with a parallel assessment and treatment of the parents besides psychosocial measures for the family and a good cooperation with a multidisciplinary network.

The book contains several chapters about psychotherapy with special problems. One of these is about psychotherapy with autistic children. The chapter builds on a review of Tustin's and Alvarez et al.'s work with autistic children at the Tavistock Clinic in London. In combination with infant research and newer neuroscience, this gives an understanding that the foundation of a possible autistic development may be laid in early infancy – that it may be brought about by too overwhelming experiences of separation very early in life.

An analysis of 16 therapists' case-descriptions of psychoanalytic play psychotherapy with neglected children is also described in a chapter. The authors refers to play and drawing and describe how

this may be worked with in the transference. It is concluded that especially these children need to be met with psychoanalytic understanding, and that they have a great need for intensive psychotherapy.

Two chapters are devoted to psychotherapy with refugees, exemplified by a traumatized child and a traumatized adolescent, whose capacities for symbolization have broken down. This capacity may be brought back to life through drawings and dreams in a close psychotherapeutic relationship. The reading of this shows how important it can be to start a psychotherapy, even if the setting may be far from optimal.

The last chapter in volume II is about endings in child psychotherapy and is a qualitative case study. This illustrates how the themes that developed during the first sessions are intensified towards the end of psychotherapy, namely dependence, separation, and fear of change. The importance of parallel work with parents is emphasized. The chapter focuses on both the child's and the therapist's relationship to the ending.

Concluding reflections

We have read these two volumes with great pleasure and are impressed by the authors' management of the balance between the didactic and the literary mode by extracting the essence of the material, structuring it, and, at the same time, preserving the depth and spirit in their theoretical presentation. The text is also seasoned with clinical vignettes, which help to clarify the complex phenomena described. The authors have a good description of the assessment of children, and the therapeutic method is thoroughly described. We also find a thoroughness in the description of both assessment and treatment and wonder why the authors, when referring to play observation as an assessment-method requiring special training, give no information about this central method in the assessment of children.

The study of these two books makes us look around, and it strikes us that, in Norway, psychoanalytic thinking and work methods were very much alive and had a natural place among psychotherapeutic interventions for children and adolescents until the beginning of this century. In recent years, the psychodynamic approach has

gradually lost its natural position, and other understandings have been added. In many ways, this has enriched the field, but with the risk that the thorough knowledge and understanding offered by a psychoanalytically rooted theory gradually will be trivialised and lost.

The fact that a textbook in psychodynamic child and adolescent psychotherapy now has been written may signify that the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic fields again position themselves in the center of the professional arena. It may be of interest to mention that, in the same year as "Psykodynamisk psykoterapi med barn og unge" was published, a book was also published in Norway, written by Anders Landmark and Line Stänicke, "Det uforståelige barnet", where the authors accounted for the benefit of a psychoanalytic understanding in the meeting with the child's emotions and acts which may appear as irrational and inexplicable. It is also encouraging that the Norwegian journal, *Tidsskrift for Norsk Psykologforening* has dedicated the June- and September-issues this year to psychoanalytic theory and treatment, and where the last issue is about children and adolescents.

As a final reflection, we claim psychoanalysis with all its branches of development, to be the theoretical platform of understanding that offers the most thoroughgoing theoretical understanding of normal and psychopathological development. The loss of this anchorage would be a tremendous loss for the field. The publication of this book raises a new hope that psychoanalytic treatment and theory will continue to be a living and most vital and relevant approach for all the children and adolescents who are in great need of this particular and valuable way of working and understanding.

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