EDITORIAL

ELIZABETH S. REVELL, PH.D.

Some years ago a client of mine in her early forties became pregnant for the first time. Her pregnancy triggered recollections of the emotional starvation she experienced as a child in the home of her parents. She greatly feared being unable to meet the needs of her child. For the first few years after her daughter’s birth, I periodically received frantic calls from my client who didn’t know what to do with the child. Each time I told her first to look at the child. Though I was not a child therapist and was childless myself, I believed that if my client could tell me what was going on, then she and I could strategize. To my amazement, each time I directed her to look at her child she said, “Oh. Thanks.” Then she said goodbye and ended the call. The simple act of looking at her child had given her all the information she needed to know what to do next. And I never learned what triggered any of the calls.

As parents, our hopes, fears, and introjects can get in the way of the simple act of seeing our children, of making genuine contact, just as it can for therapists working with children. We are fortunate to have a model of working with children that reminds us to see the obvious. Violet Oaklander, the pioneer in applying Gestalt theory to therapy with children, uses visual metaphor in her seminal work Windows to Our Children: A Gestalt Therapy Approach to Children and Adolescents. Through this work, she describes her use of tools such as puppets, music, drawing, clay, and sand to enhance a child’s self-expression, giving us “windows” through which we can see our children more clearly. She does this as she also reminds us of the central roles of contact and relationship in doing therapy with children.

At Gestalt Review, we have been fortunate to feature articles describing the best of

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Gestalt work with children. Dr. Oaklander’s article, “The Therapeutic Process with Children and Adolescents,” appeared in the first volume of *Gestalt Review*. Since then, there have been a number of articles on therapeutic work with children and adolescents. A particularly interesting one appeared two years ago: “The Story of Daniel: Gestalt Therapy Principles and Values” by Sandra Cardoso-Zinker, with commentary by Anna Marie Norén and Violet Oaklander. Cardoso-Zinker also uses visual metaphor, saying that we need to bring “‘pure’ eyes” to the act of witnessing our children (p. 81). She goes on to describe her process of “phenomenological diagnosis” (p. 84) and then illustrates it with an inspiring study of her work with a child between his third and seventh years of life. In the same issue, Oaklander comments:

I have found that the work with children is so obvious that it is often seen as too simple, or “playing around.” I think that in our search for more and more didactic theory, we tend to “overlook the obvious.” The obvious here is actually quite profound.

In the case of my client who telephoned, it wasn’t didactic theory but rather her desperate wish to be a good parent that caused her to need reminding to look at her child, to see the obvious.

Cardoso-Zinker was for years part of a group of child therapists in Brazil (including also Myrian Bove Fernandes, Claudia Ranaldi Nogueira, Eviene Abduch Lazarus, and Teresa Cristina Ajzemberg) who decided to study Gestalt therapy as it is used in work with adults to determine how the approach could benefit their work with children. In 1997, this group produced an article in Portuguese in which they applied Gestalt therapy to human development. With this issue we have the good fortune of being able to publish the English translation of this article, “The Development of the Baby and Gestalt Therapy.” Also in this issue, Peter Mortola has given us a vivid portrait of Violet Oaklander’s two-week summer training program in child psychotherapy, “Learning from Experience: The Oaklander Approach to Teaching Child Psychotherapists.” Through Mortola’s writing, Oaklander’s distinctive style of working with children comes through, particularly in that it is echoed in her work with trainees. In this issue, these two articles are introduced by Violet Oaklander.

In the organizational realm, this issue includes a fine piece of work by Jon Frew, “Organizational Leadership Theory Has Arrived: Gestalt Theory Never Left.” Dr. Frew compares contemporary Gestalt leadership with organizational leadership models, particularly transformational leadership, emphasizing the field and relationship orientation of both of these approaches. He concludes with an experience of his own in which his leadership style reflected the transformational leadership model, demonstrating the benefits of this approach as well as its parallels with Gestalt. Frew’s contribution is enriched by commentary from Bill Critchley and Mary Ann Rainey Tolbert.

The Back Pages includes two book reviews, one by Susan Partridge of Eric Whitton’s book, *Humanistic Approach to Psychotherapy*. In her review, Partridge provides an instructive analysis of current psychotherapy while sharing Whitton’s nostalgia for the time when the humanistic movement was new. Renate Becker reviews the book, *The
Bridge: Dialogues Across Cultures, edited by T. Levine Bar-Yoseph. Becker appreciates the worth of this endeavor, citing the diversity of contributors and themes as well as the richness of the articles. Most of all, she applauds the passion for cross-cultural dialogue reflected in all of the articles.

We are fortunate to have received permission to reprint an article from T. Levine Bar-Yoseph’s book. The article, entitled “Mind the Gap” and written by Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph and Nahi Alon, focuses on therapy across a cultural gap and includes two case studies, a format we would like to include more frequently in Gestalt Review. In the first, Alon describes how carefully he works in the context of the culture of a Buddhist monastery as he does therapy with one of the monks. The second case study details therapy conducted jointly by Alon and Levine Bar-Yoseph with a survivor of Auschwitz. It discusses how two native Israelis were able to work as male and female co-therapists while bridging the divide between their culture and that of their European-born client who had a personal experience of the Holocaust that neither of the two therapists had.

Finally, and sadly, Back Pages includes Milan Sreckovic’s tribute to his friend Reinhard Fuhr, Gestalt Review’s Associate Editor who died last winter. We miss Reinhard and greatly value the contribution he made to Gestalt Review throughout its history.

REFERENCES


