

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Paré, D., & Larner, G. (Eds.). (2004). *Collaborative practice in psychology and therapy*. New York: Haworth Clinical Practice Press. ISBN 0-7890-1786-5. 278 pages.

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In assembling this book, the editors, David Paré and Glenn Larner, obviously intended to showcase the “exhilarating range of ideas for approaching practice with an openness to mutual exploration and discovery” (p. 1) that, collectively, have led to the development of collaborative approaches in the helping professions. To this end, they have solicited contributions from an eclectic group of counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and community members engaged in “collaborative practices” (i.e., endeavours that attempt to redress the power imbalance between helping professionals and the populations with whom they interact).

The book’s four sections introduce the reader to a variety of collaborative initiatives including theory building, therapy, supervision, and research. Despite space limitations, a few contributors must be singled out. In the theory section, Lois Shawyer manages in a few well-written pages to (a) show the bankruptcy of the therapist-as-expert stance, (b) differentiate an affirmative postmodernism from its more well-known pessimistic twin, and (c) suggest some of the intriguing possibilities of collaborative therapeutic conversations.

In the therapy section, we are given a number of demonstrations of how a collaborative “relational stance” can lead to useful and unusual interactions. For example, Donald McMenamin questioned his high school clients about what does and doesn’t work in his counselling. In another chapter, Manning and Parry invited a child into the observation room with one of them during a session so he could observe his other family members. Another author describes how student members of a New Zealand anti-harassment team became the *preferred* negotiators in the most difficult mediations.

Perhaps the supervision section should have begun with the strongest contribution, Gridley’s rather devastating deconstruction of typical supervision practices. She characterizes supervision as an activity in which, predominantly, men supervise (i.e., evaluate and control) women trainees, supposedly for the protection of clients “via procedures that remain beyond their awareness, consent, or control” (p. 189).

On the whole, I found the research section less satisfying than the others. Several articles were flawed by a sanctimonious tone, a smug assurance that by adopting collaborative practices the authors were occupying the high moral ground. In contrast, I found Tom Strong’s article to be one of the best in the book. His nuanced discussion clarifies the many ways in which researcher and subject constantly interact to modify the “research conversation” in new and, hopefully, more generative directions.

There are two separate ways to approach this book: (a) as a polemical argument in favour of collaborative practices, and (b) as a compendium of interesting ideas and fascinating innovations. Implicitly or explicitly, many of the authors here assert two propositions. First, counselling and psychological practices are inherently exploitative because of the power imbalance in the relationships, and second, this imbalance can be alleviated or overcome by adopting a collaborative relational stance. Such an argument can never be conclusive because it rests on accepting a *formal* quality of the relationship (i.e., the power imbalance) as the defining one. Many therapists, however, would disagree, arguing that their (helping, non-exploitative) *intentions* are more salient to therapy than the power differential. Therefore, I suspect that the persuasiveness of the argument is mostly a matter of temperament.

Ironically, given the mistrust of technique and therapist expertise voiced by many contributors, the book is perhaps most valuable to readers as a compendium of interesting ideas and fascinating innovations. Nevertheless, because the ideas, methods, and attitudes that constitute collaborative practices form an intellectually coherent, strongly ethical base, we can confidently expect to see these practices continue to increase in importance in the near future.