

Books of Interest

Working with Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children: A Spiritual Perspective to Guide Parents

by Henning Köhler

Introduction by Philip Incao, MD

AWSNA Publications

Reviewed by Ann Pratt

Note from Joan Almon - Ann Pratt urged the Kindergarten Association to make an informal English translation of this book available to help kindergarten teachers who want to develop a therapeutic outlook in their work. We couldn't afford to pay a translator for a book we couldn't publish, so Ann asked Marjorie Spock if she would translate it. Marjorie agreed and does all such work for free. We had Marjorie's manuscript typed, and distributed ten or twenty free copies. Then David Mitchell of AWSNA asked if we had a book we'd like to see in print, and we said this was the one. David negotiated with Floris to get the rights, and now it's out!

In my travels into early childhood programs over the last 25 years, teachers have repeatedly asked questions about specific children, and what the teacher can do for children who are “difficult,” who do not fit into the routines of daily life in the kindergarten, and who disturb the group. Henning Köhler's book, a work arising from many years of study and therapeutic experience with such children, will be an inspiration and help to us all. This is a disciplined and inspired work, full of practical ways to approach the issues confronting every early childhood teacher today, a book that is perhaps more timely now than when it was first published in Germany in 1995.

As the book is addressed to parents, written to and for them, I found it to be sensitive to parental feelings of distress about their child. It has a gentle yet firm approach to helping parents find solutions for themselves. It is not a series of recipes, but is an insightful guide for all of us, parents and teachers alike.

Some key sentences under the heading “Education and Self-Esteem: The Positive Outlook” (pp. 74-75) may help to illustrate the point Köhler makes throughout that he is seeking to sharpen our perceptions and discipline our observation so that we do not prejudge or form conclusions, but be interested in—and love—the phenomena that confront us. “My chief concern is to encourage you to work on your own, to use thorough, exact observation and the kind of meditative practice already recommended, and to acquire the intuitive insight that will guide you in helping your child. . . With difficult children, one easily falls into the trap of seeing everything that happens as a confirmation of the fears one has been entertaining. Children thus negatively prejudged by their disappointed elders are imprisoned in their displeasing roles; parental behavior actually tends to become an unreceived electing of the very things the child is supposed to stop doing.”

Mr. Köhler's insightful remarks and profound approach help us use what is known from Rudolf Steiner about the lower senses. He presents practical ways to take us beyond mere information into actually working with the lower senses. In, “Is the Body Too Chilly for the Soul?” he explores the different kinds of welcoming warmth necessary for incarnation. “A Cool

Hand and a Warm Heart,” refers to the coldness of intellect so promoted today to the detriment of soul warmth. And in the section “Imitation and Yearning for the Good,” the following statement appears: “I can assure you from my many years’ experience as a remedial worker and medical-educational consultant that there is a striking connection between restlessness and poor concentration in children who, for whatever reason, have done too little imitating in their first four or five years. Therapy, in the case of these jumpy, nervous children, consists of exposing them to an intensive remedial course in imitation that includes pantomime, recitation, rhythmic activities, copying all sorts of sounds and the like.” (P.19)

Perhaps the most unusual approach is Köhler’s asking parents to work consciously with the child’s angel. He says we have no right to think we can help these children without working with the higher self of the child. He goes on to describe how to create an objective question to be asked of the child’s angel before sleep, and how to listen for answers that come to us in the morning upon waking.

It was a pure joy to read this helpful book, and now I look forward to studying it with teachers and friends, for much is contained that cannot be conveyed in a review or gathered in one reading. It is a book to be reread and studied by early childhood teachers. Because of its approach, it can be shared with parents when they are prepared to work with these thoughts. It is intimate and reassuring for parents to learn this information from a medical-therapeutic professional. Often we as teachers have a difficult time sharing what we know intuitively yet cannot put forth with authority.

Personally, I would like to thank Marjorie Spock, a curative eurythmist, teacher, artist, and friend, for translating this into English. She has done us all a great service.

Ann Pratt was a kindergarten teacher and she led the early childhood program at Antioch New England for many years. Currently Ann lives in Arizona.