

Book reviews

Assessment for Learning in the Mentally Handicapped. Institute for Research into Mental Retardation Study Group No. 5. Edited by PETER MITTLER. (Pp. x + 313; illustrated + tables. £5.00.) Edinburgh and London: Churchill Livingstone. 1973.

This is the record of the 5th IRMR study group. Participants were divided between psychologists practising in hospital or educational settings and workers in applied areas of research.

Three major areas within the overall theme were explored: assessment strategies; content of assessment; planning treatment programmes for children and adults. Recent and future developments in these areas were also discussed. In all, 12 papers are presented with their following discussions and 3 general discussions are transcribed. Important themes were the limitations of traditional approaches to psychological assessment and the vital need to link assessment to remediation plans. Some alternative methods of assessment are discussed including observation techniques, functional analysis of behaviour, 'mini-learning' experiments, and techniques of automated assessment. Several contributors pointed out that though thorough knowledge of processes underlying normal development was essential for remediation plans, the most useful help would be that promoting relevant adaptive behaviours and not rigid programming through normative developmental stages inappropriate to that particular child in his situation.

Much information was exchanged about training programmes in development or current use by participants and others covering modification work in the areas of language, cognitive growth, work and social skills, and interaction. Selection of suitable aims and methods for programmes in these areas was thoroughly discussed. Implicit in many of the exchanges was an awareness of the present changing role of the psychologist in relation to the mentally handicapped.

This volume demonstrates an excellent blend of theoretical exploration and concern and practical implication and action. The clear impression is given that there is currently much very high quality thought and work in this field. The interests of the mentally handicapped, at least in the areas covered by this study group, seem to be being worked over by experienced workers with diverse but reconcilable approaches, constructive in intent and effect. Many issues raised here have relevance also outside this field. For all those concerned with assessment, placement, and training of

disadvantaged or even normal individuals the book is valuable and enlightening reading.

Clinical Studies in Childhood Psychoses. 25 Years in Collaborative Treatment and Research. Edited by S. A. SZUREK and I. N. BERLIN. (Pp. xix + 780; illustrated + tables. £9.95.) New York: Brunner Mazel; London: Butterworths. 1973.

One growing point in paediatrics over the past decade has been the increased interest on both sides of the Atlantic in the challenge of childhood psychosis. This has intrigued the community paediatrician, developmental neurologist, child psychologist, and psychiatrist, no less than those professional workers perhaps more immediately involved, as for example the child psychotherapist and teacher in special education.

Autism, it might be claimed, is a sphere of multi-disciplinary concern. Predictably, therefore, there has been a corresponding increase in the relevant literature, impressive in volume if not always in substance. Among leading English contributors Michael Rutter stands out as of international repute, while in the United States Stan Szurek, the senior editor of this book, with his focus on the problems of therapy has earned the stature of a pioneer, especially in the field of conjoint treatment with parents and psychotic child. The volume in a sense is a concerted tribute to his work, compiled by colleagues and disciples at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute in San Francisco, where Professor Szurek is the distinguished director of the Children's Service. Indeed, his co-editor, Dr. Irving Berlin, is himself a former pupil and collaborator. This background is germane to the book's potential readership.

While some attempt is made to reconstruct historical background, evaluate outcome statistically, and discuss certain theoretical constructs, the orientation as implied in the title is essentially clinical, liberally interspersed with detailed illustrative case studies. However, with more than 20 contributors subscribing to this collection of essays, uniformity of presentation has not been easy to sustain, which makes for selective reading.

Overall, this is a publication for the specialist already familiar with the field at first hand, rather than the general paediatric bibliophile. At £9.95, its price is a shade prohibitive, making it perhaps more fitting for the libraries of postgraduate centres than for the shelves of most individual readers.