BOOK REVIEWS

Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

The first glance at the book’s cover reveals dynamism, hinting towards the nature of the contents within. The editor mentions that she brought together the contents in an attempt to dissolve steadfast disciplinary boundaries to better understanding of the nuances in the area and to outline a shift in perspective for mental health of children and adolescents towards child rights. At the outset, she states that universally children seek a nurturing environment to develop themselves, their self-confidence and identity. Her assertion follows that more vulnerable children require adequate support. This is a frequent assertion by mental health practitioners, working with children and adolescents, and one wonders how the book might do justice to the assertion.

A look at the contents reveals that contributors are from across the globe reflecting the perspectives and contexts that the book spans. This reflects the professional network of Nayar, who is currently on the faculty panel of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India and The New School University, New York, USA. Her involvement with child and adolescent mental health at the national and global levels is reflected in the various focal areas of the book. The paucity of Southeast Asian and non-Indian Asian perspectives is disappointing in a volume of this quality.

The very first chapter of the book is about understanding the costs and cost-effectiveness of mental health interventions at various levels. Several thoughts regarding the economics of interventions that may have transiently crossed a clinician’s mind are defined, explained and discussed in detail. The chapter puts important economic issues and concepts under the spotlight, providing greater clarity about these issues to the reader.

The next section is titled ‘Clinical case studies’. With this title one expects that case studies would be central to the thesis of the chapters on depression and on suicidality; however, they are presented as adjunct. The case vignettes, however, are helpful as illustrative snapshots. ‘Clinical contexts’ may have been a more apt section heading. The content of the chapters presents an overview of depression and suicidality with enough detailing.

Following this are special contexts which include HIV/AIDS; violence and antisocial behaviour; mental health for the media generation – some of the issues that mental health practitioners working with children and adolescents may find challenging in their practice. The lucid lists and flowcharts in the chapter on HIV/AIDS, serve as points to consolidate the reading on existing and proposed pathways to care and policies for care that are presented. The sensitivity to social, cultural and economic factors that is evident in many chapters focusing on complex issues, is also evident in understanding violence and antisocial behaviour in Norwegian youngsters. Attention to the national ethos in understanding the contribution at meso and micro level factors is evidence of this sensitivity. Current day children and adolescents have better know-how of media and gadgets. This gives adults an opportunity to learn about the same by following the youngsters’ lead. This is important before attempting discussion on benefits and risks of media usage.

A section on schools and school climate in a volume on child and adolescent mental health indicates the need for practitioners and all other stakeholders to understand the school-goer’s psyche. All three chapters in the section facilitate an awareness of the issues and processes involved in optimally supporting the school-goers’ overall development albeit in the context of the school, through different perspectives. Cornilissen’s thesis on why the current Indian educational system is the way it is opens enquiry along unconventional yet essential lines. One error that catches the eye is the explanation of negative reinforcement. The section highlights the inherent potential to damage the developing younger with insensitive and imbalanced school/practice. It leaves the reader with questions about the imminent action that is urgently required to contain or reverse this situation.

Effective child welfare through upholding the rights of the child and family through cultural sensitivity and greater participation in making decisions about child welfare for the child concerned, are strikingly concordant themes in the chapters on ‘Child welfare’. Traditional and novel approaches to child welfare have been described and discussed here. The reading is informative on multiple perspectives for those professionals who may not be actively involved in the process of child welfare. It also naturally leads to a curiosity to know more about the Indian scenario. It would have been invaluable to have a chapter in this section about current policies and practices in India.

A crucial issue in today’s world – the capacity to care, has been addressed in a comprehensive manner by the “equilintegration” (EI) theory in the section on ‘Interventions and innovative practices’. It is remarkable to know of a modern theory that attempts to address the socio-emotional issue of care with due sensitivity to formative and contextual variables. Ancient Indian concepts and constructs, such as Yoga find a prominent mention in the proposed and executed interventions reflecting not just a national, but global trend to rediscover cultural and traditional wisdom under layers of industrialization. Appreciating the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of youngsters and actively using the same in theorizing and planning interventions is a common recommendation for mental health practitioners. This book provides live examples of the recommendation in action. The concluding section on ‘Country focus – status, policies and children’s voices’ strongly reiterates how vulnerable children are and how responsible adults are for them, at all levels.

The sense of advocacy for the rights of the child and adolescent that the editor evokes in the Preface is a prominent vein across the chapters. Poverty and difficult economic situations have been significant lenses through which many issues and interventions have been sensitively viewed. I infer that the editor and the
contributorshave done justice to the
editor’s initial assertion that more vul-
nerable children require adequate sup-
port, as succinctly as possible in 363
pages.

As I close the book, I feel like I have
had a personally guided helicopter tour
across the globe gaining perspective on
focal and generic issues imperative for
sensitive practice of child and adolescent
mental health. The reader’s horizons are
left expanding with reference to mental
health practice with children and adoles-
cents with excellent opportunities for
cross-cultural learning. Nayar’s state-
ment that ‘This book is a personal and
professional journey of understanding
mental health concerns of children and
adolescents’, rings through the volume. I
consider this an essential addition to the
reading list of any child and adolescent
mental health practitioner.

NITHYA POORNIMA

Sampurna Montfort College,
Indiranagar,
Bangalore 560 038, India
e-mail: nithya.s.poornima@gmail.com

Higher Education in the Digital Age
William G. Bowen

William G. Bowen. Princeton University

William G. Bowen, President of Prince-
ton University during the years 1972 to
1988, has first-hand experience of a
range of issues in academics. In addition
to his career as an economist at Prince-
ton, after his years in academic admini-
stration Bowen joined the Mellon
Foundation where, among other things,
he helped develop the on-line digital
journal archive JSTOR. His leadership of
one of the major centres of learning in
the world, his involvement in initiatives
that have been at the forefront of the
digital revolution in academics world-
wide, and his scholarly analysis of many
issues in education make this book not
just insightful and deep, but also impor-
tant and essential reading for all those
with a concern for access and equity in
higher education.

For the main part, this somewhat un-
usual book is a transcript of the Tanner
Lectures on Human Values that were de-
ivered by Bowen at Stanford University
in 2012. In addition to two lectures – that
are reproduced here with their conversa-
tional informality, there are additional
sections that include the reactions and
responses of a number of other distin-
guished academics.

The first of Tanner Lectures by Bowen
deals with the ‘cost disease’ of the US
higher education system. Over the years,
there has been a steady increase in tu-
ition fees both in private as well as
publicly funded institutions at all univer-
sities. How the rising costs have impact-
ted the access to education and its
efficacy form the various themes ex-
plored in the first chapter. The second
lecture focuses on effective methods of
using the internet for carrying out in-
struction as a way of addressing the cost
issue through MOOCs, the ‘massive
online open courses’, that have been
sweeping the internet in the past few
years. Such a drastic change in peda-
gogic style has wider implications, and
Bowen discusses various points that
range from mundane issues like certifica-
tion, validation and credit transfers, to a
deeper discussion on the role of techno-
logy in educational transformation.

The commentaries on the lectures
bring in additional points of view. How-
ard Gardner, professor of psychology at
Harvard, draws attention to the value of
the peer group, where learning is rein-
forced in a community of students spend-
ing time together. Stanford’s President
John L. Hennessy analyses the cost issue,
with particular reference to how rising
costs effectively debar students from
completing a degree. Andrew Delbanco,
professor of literature at Columbia, com-
ments on the lower efficacy of MOOCs in
the light of the loss of the classroom
experience. The last of the comments, by
Stanford professor of engineering
Daphne Koller, extends the second Tan-
nor Lectures by bringing in the perspec-
tive of a teacher who more or less
devised the MOOC and who is playing
such an important role in implementing it
on such an impressive scale through
Coursera, the company she co-founded.

The central message of the book, one
that is made repeatedly by Bowen and
reinforced by the commentators is that,
the only way in which education will be
both affordable and effective in the com-
ing years is if we learn to use technology
efficiently, to blend on-line instruction
with traditional styles of pedagogy. This
message is simple enough – even self-
evident in some ways given the manner
in which the classroom has evolved in
recent years; but as other reviewers of
the book have noted, the discussion is
relevant not just within the higher educa-
tion community, but also among policy-
makers. It is therefore important that the
arguments that are articulated by some-
one as insightful and as concerned about
education as Bowen have a wider audi-
ence.

The diverse audience that should find
this book interesting would include
teachers of course, but also those inter-
ested in the organization of education,
university administrators, government
and potential employers. And indeed
anyone with a concern for the future of
ducation itself, and its evolution at this
time.

Ramakrishna Ramaswamy
University of Hyderabad,
Hyderabad 500 046, India
e-mail: rr@uohyd.ac.in

Fauna of Maharashtra: Parts I and II
Published by the Director, Zoological
Survey of India, Kolkata 700 053. 2012.
480 and 1129 pp. Price: Rs 1900 and
Rs 2250 respectively.

The fauna of a region is important not
only from systematics and ecological
viewpoints, but also from agriculture,