Further praise for Learning from the Unconscious

"A must read for all those who recognise the impact of emotional data in consultation, in assessment, and in systemic work. The argument for educational psychologists to re-engage with psychoanalytic theory is compelling. Excellent theoretical descriptions along with useful applications of the theory address the common arguments held regarding psychoanalysis and open your mind to the fact that perhaps you have been using it all along – and if you haven't maybe you should. An essential text, shining a light on what is unique in our contribution within education."

Dr Rhona Hobson, Principal Educational Psychologist, Halton Borough Council

"This book is a direct descendant of the work in psychoanalysis and education pioneered by Anna Freud, Susan Isaacs and August Eichhorn. Educational psychologists need the Bionian quality of courage under fire, to be able to think when thinking is impossible. The chapters in this collection explore what this means in an educational context, providing insights into the 'emotional undertow' of teaching, and how to make use of reflective supervision. The volume makes an important contribution to the developing significance of psychoanalytical thinking in educational psychology and is immensely useful to practitioners."

Dr Kay Souter, Professor and Associate Dean (Retired) Australian Catholic University

"We need this book! We learn here about the roots of applied psychology in psychoanalytic theory, current applications, and the significant developments essential to modern, accountable practice. Psychologists need to ensure that broad and relevant theory translates into practice, making sense of experiences and improving outcomes. Work discussion, coaching, and newly developed relational models for consultation and supervision exemplify how psychodynamic perspectives can be integrated with other key perspectives, helping us support colleagues and service users, increase depth of understanding, build rapport and reverie and achieve improved equilibrium."

Dr Brian Davis, Deputy Head Of Psychology and Director for Professional Doctorate Training in Child, Community and Educational Psychology, Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust

"Learning from the Unconscious is a unique example of a book that can completely change your view about things which seem to be obvious (like Psychoanalysis itself!). It makes you think about the 'unconscious' elements of educational psychologists' interventions – working with emotions (including the emotions of the psychologist!) – and understand their causes. This book will be of interest not only for practitioners in educational psychology but also for educational scientists."

Dr Anastasia Sidneva, Faculty of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University

"The experience of reading this book was like staring at the wrong side of woven cloth, seeing chaotic combinations of thread with colourful knots here and there. The book showed me that I had only to flip the cloth over to find a wonderful piece of embroidery design. It takes us through the application of psychoanalytic theory in educational psychology and anyone who works in the educational system will gain a comprehensive understanding of how thinking and feelings are linked to action in oneself and in the school system. The realisation that we are both a container for others and a collaborator in understanding this process can be an exultant experience."

Gracy Jebastina, Principal School Psychologist, Sukrut Therapy, India

"I welcome this publication aimed at supporting educational psychologists and others working therapeutically with children and young people. This volume brings together an impressive range of expertise across a number of related areas, all with a purposeful and coherent core, namely the application of psychoanalytic thinking. Presenting a range of diverse contexts, settings and emphases, the authors here have both benefitted from and contributed to the development of the profession and beyond. The blend of tradition and heritage with innovation and a contemporary lens makes this publication particularly welcome to coincide with the Tavistock Clinic's one hundredth anniversary."

Brian Rock, Director of Education and Training, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Learning from the Unconscious

Psychoanalytic Approaches in Educational Psychology

Edited by Christopher Arnold Dale Bartle Xavier Eloquin



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A note on confidentiality

All identifying features in the following chapters have been changed to protect anonymity.

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requires. Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

I hate and I love. Why I do this, perhaps you ask. I know not, but I feel it happening and I am tortured.

Catullus (Poem 85, 84–54 BCE)

'Then how long will it last, this love?' (in jest). 'I don't know.' 'Three weeks, three years, three decades ...?' 'You are like all the others ... trying to shorten eternity with numbers,' spoken quietly, but with real feeling.

Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (1957)

Foreword

Dr Mark Fox

Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most.

I felt privileged when I was asked to write this foreword. Having worked at the Tavistock and Portman Foundation NHS Trust for over ten years I was aware that considerable thinking would have gone into such a simple request – complexity compounding complexity. Behind this innocuous request I knew there would be layers of unspoken assumptions that connected with my career as an educational psychologist and, dare I say it, extended even further back into my childhood. I knew I had to deal with such fantasies and projections – before I began to write.

My earliest remembered encounter with psychoanalytic thinking was as an 18-year-old. My mother, a psychiatric social worker, was working with adolescents in care. She had taken me to a psychoanalytic conference hoping, I think, to stimulate my interest in psychology. In the evening the conference watched the film of the *Lord of the Flies*, which was followed by a discussion. I remember to this day the anger I felt as all these 'adults' enthusiastically endorsed the truthfulness of the film's portrayal of the adolescents' disintegration into anarchy and violence. I was too insecure to say anything – but I remember the anger.

Like many other undergraduates, I tried to read some Klein and Freud. I found Klein almost incomprehensible, but gained shards of psychological insight from Freud's single case studies – even though these stories about people with complex emotional difficulties seemed from a different era and more akin to literature than to science. I moved on to Erich Fromm's *Fear of Freedom* and his insights into the eight basic psychological needs. This led to Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology and Eric Berne's transactional analysis. So, my early experiences were eclectic but, unfortunately, I never had a warm and secure relationship with psychoanalysis itself.

However, like a distant and powerful uncle, I knew that psychoanalytic thinking – and, in particular, the centrality of our unconscious – was important, especially from a cultural perspective. The one thing I knew for sure, even then, was 'that the causes of human actions are usually immeasurably more complex and varied than our subsequent explanations of them'.

The question for me was, and still is, how can the complexity and power of psychoanalytic thinking be integrated into our work as educational psychologists (EPs)? Gradually I learned, as an EP, that clients often did not want solutions to the problems they were initially presenting. More crucially, they also did not want to be told that they did not want solutions to their presenting problem. What they wanted was their story – especially their pain – to be heard. Only when it was heard were they able to think about what was behind the pain. Over the years I have heard people's anger that psychoanalytic thinking has ignored, rather than illuminated, their pain-filled reality. I felt it most sharply and powerfully when I worked at SCOPE. Managers and colleagues with a disability were deeply angry about their problems being interpreted from a psychoanalytic within-person perspective. First and foremost, they needed their experiences of the inequalities and unfairness in society to be heard before they thought about their own hurt. This was a similar anger to the one I had experienced when, as a teenager, 'adults' had attempted to tell me what was true, thereby denying me my own emotional experiences. I realised that for many of us 'To go wrong in one's own way is better than to go right in someone else's.'

And so to my ten years at the Tavistock and Portman Foundation NHS Trust, where I was fortunate to work with many of the authors of these chapters. My work here was not as a therapist, but as a teacher and supervisor of psychological research. Much of my thinking about evidence-based practice comes from this time, when I attempted to reconcile teaching on medically orientated courses at the University of Essex with the concept of research from a psychoanalytic perspective. I am pleased to see that some of this thinking is reflected in this book, where the issues of what is an evidence base for psychoanalysts is further developed.

I wrote at this time about the importance of practice-based evidence and of turning the evidence from the experience of professional practice into research, through the process of self-reflection and self-knowing. The three strategies that experienced professionals use to enhance their practice (as outlined by Dutton, 1995) can all be enriched by psychoanalytic thinking:

Pattern recognition: recognising familiar psychoanalytic mechanisms can help EPs make sense more quickly of an individual client's story.

Knowing-in-action: knowing-in-action is what gets the busy EP through the day – by not having to think through every consultation from first principles. The danger here, of course, is becoming locked unconsciously into repetitive ways of intervening, simply to keep anxiety at bay. Taking time to think, however, will help EPs reflect on our unconscious biases; for example, our projections onto others and the issues of transference and countertransference.

Naming and framing: framing a problem with a psychological theory gives us the language with which to communicate our assumptions to the client.

I have always been interested in encouraging EPs to use multiple frameworks that acknowledge the diversity of clients we work with. I would like EPs to stop ostensibly recognising, intervening and framing problems in the same way time and time again because they only have one way of seeing things. This book will encourage EPs to use psychoanalytic thinking as one frame – among the multiple frames – that we need to be effective.

For too long, much of psychoanalytic thinking has been lost to EPs. As this book acknowledges, part of the reason for this is that psychoanalysis has often been, or been seen to have been, defensive, privileged and elitist, for those with the time and money. Concepts can appear dated, obscure and wrapped in language that is unintelligible to the uninitiated. This book goes a long way to rectify these criticisms.

Paradoxically, the most important thing that I learned at the Tavistock was not about psychoanalytic thinking, but about another approach: narrative psychology. Narrative psychology gave me a framework into which I could then integrate psychoanalytic concepts. Narrative psychology is underpinned by the belief that we need to create a coherent story about our experiences to bring coherence to our own fragmented world. We each seek to develop a sense of order by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories.

We all have stories to tell – and stories we choose not to tell. Psychoanalytic thinking gives us a way of gaining new perspectives on these stories, so that we can tell new stories about our emotional reactions to innocuous situations, like watching a film.

In every man's remembrances there are things he will not reveal to everybody, but only to his friends. There are other things he will not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and then only under a pledge of secrecy. Finally there are some things that a man is afraid to reveal even to himself, and any honest man accumulates a pretty fair number of such things.

A narrative approach seeks to question established narratives and to explore alternative narratives, which may at the present be unconscious. I think EPs have a responsibility to develop new narratives that allow the profession to take up new positions. Psychoanalytic thinking can do this – but it needs to do it in a way that is modern, open and transparent. It needs to do it with a warm and loving heart, rather than appearing like a distant and powerful uncle or cold, controlling aunt. This book provides a bridge to rebuilding a positive relationship with EPs and a way of opening up psychoanalytic thinking to a new generation.

I am sure that this book will put psychoanalytic thinking back into the daily practice of many EPs. But I also suspect that it will be ignored by some who want the profession to move to a reductionist, neurobiological narrative. This route led us, in the 1960s and 1970s, into radical behaviourism and a rejection of the importance, not only of the mind, but (crucially) of the unconscious, too. So, the book may also annoy EPs who do not wish to consider if there may be hidden stories behind their own masks. The world is coming out of lockdown – but are *we*?

Dr Mark Fox June 2020

Note All quotes in this foreword are from Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Introduction

This book owes its existence to a series of workshops and discussions among educational psychologists (EPs) interested in applying psychoanalytic thinking to EP practice. After a one-day workshop on just this topic at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in 2017, a resolution crystallised: 'Let's get these ideas out there!' Thus began the slow, often crooked, path to the book before you now.

By 'there' is meant the vague and ever-changing (and expanding) territory of EP practice. And the ideas refer, of course, to psychoanalytic theory in its diverse forms. There is not, to our knowledge, a book like this for EPs at present and our primary aim has been to introduce readers to the numerous ways psychoanalytic thinking can be woven into the practice of an EP, working in hectic and preoccupied settings where need far outweighs the time available: a far cry from the cloistered tranquillity (or so it might be presumed) of the 50-minute analytic hour. And yet it is our belief, borne from experience, that psychoanalytic theory has a great deal to offer EPs.

Indeed, it is no bad thing, we argue, to hold on to the psychoanalyst W.R. Bion's encouragement, when in the midst of a tense consultation, to be able to 'think under fire' (as a former First World War tank commander, this was no casual metaphor), or to ask of oneself, when caught up in higher than usual levels of emotionality, *what is it about this case that hooks me*, or to return, given that EPs are 'skilled in the management of the moment' (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Squires, Rooney and O'Connor, 2006, p. 72), to the here-and-now of emotional experience. In short, for the writers in this book, these ideas work. They have helped us to bring about effective change in complex cases and to support others to bear circumstances where change is not possible and where the chief source of strength and resilience is gained from a deeper understanding of the situation as it is.

In this book, psychoanalytic thinking has left the confines of the consulting room and demonstrates its utility in a range of settings. As Kurt Lewin once observed, 'there is nothing as practical as a good theory' (Lewin, 1945), and for us, as applied practitioner psychologists, engaged with strong emotions in complex systems, this has proven to be the case. We have come back to these ideas again and again, not – as some might have it – as if seeking out the tenets of some faith, but as tools to fortify and expand our sense-making capacity in the face of forms of confusion and uncertainty (we write this in the midst of the coronavirus shutdown), which prove impervious to more reductive, rational and measurable approaches. These ideas make a difference. It is an emotionally rewarding and intellectually satisfying experience to work with a dynamic unconscious and engage with it in the lives of children, parents, teachers – and ourselves. To share this with others has been the chief impulse behind the writing of this book.

Aims of the book

As noted, we are psychoanalytically informed EPs, not psychoanalysts or therapists, and we are not proposing that EPs take up the stance of the latter – even if we could. Rather, we want to demonstrate the general practicability, based on practice-based evidence (see, for example, Hellerstein, 2008), of psychoanalytic ideas to the practice of EPs. Consequently, the aims of this book are as follows:

- 1. To introduce readers to some of the key tenets and principles of psychoanalytic theory. While there are many psychoanalytic schools (see Lemma, 2016), this book draws primarily on Kleinian and post-Kleinian theory.
- 2. To demonstrate ways in which EPs have used psychoanalytic theory and practice in their roles as EPs. The contributors of this book each bring a valuable perspective to approaching a number of recognisable EP activities.
- 3. To contribute to the wider EP theory/practice discourse.

As practitioner psychologists, we are aware of the various discourses within educational psychology and assert that psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories have a part to play in how the profession serves the individuals and institutions with which we work. We are well aware of the way psychoanalytic thinking is viewed by some of our colleagues and fellow EPs; we believe that psychology is more than able to hold divergent perspectives and discourses. Our use of these ideas in our thinking has been winnowed by applying a psychoanalytic perspective in the field and observing that they make a difference. They also serve to deepen our sense of what it is to be human and to relate to others, individually and in groups. If this book is in any way successful, we hope that part of that success rests in shifting perspectives with regard to how EPs relate to and use psychoanalytic ideas and practice in their everyday work.

What is psychoanalysis?

What, then, is psychoanalysis? Before moving into a theoretical overview in the next chapter, we thought it would be useful to outline and clarify our conception of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic thinking. In simplest form, psychoanalysis holds that the human mind is comprised of a conscious and unconscious aspect and that many of our formative experiences and current mental processes operate outside of our present awareness. Furthermore, our personality, motivations and behaviours are shaped by these experiences and processes, in ways that are not easily accessible to introspection, as they are out of conscious awareness. Such is the nature of the dynamic unconscious that the past works on the present in countless ways, leading to distress and dysfunction at times, but also to creativity and wonder. This is an incomplete description but serves our purpose here. Expanding this general principle, Bell (2010) separates psychoanalysis into three broad categories: as a treatment, as a model of the mind and as an epistemology.

Psychoanalysis's inception was as a treatment and, for all the ensuing criticism of this nascent psychotherapy (see Chapter 1), there was something genuinely radical in Freud's determination that listening to his patients might lead to an improvement in their health and psychological well-being. Since Freud's time, psychoanalytic theory and practice as a treatment has progressed, developed, refined and diversified. There are now numerous psychoanalytic 'schools', but for all their differences they still had this initial conception of a dynamic unconscious informing, moulding and/or intruding upon one's present life. From its therapeutic origins, psychoanalysis evolved a complex and multi-part theory of the human mind. We argue that its origins in therapeutic practice are a strength and not a weakness, in that psychoanalysis strives to engage with the totality of one's experience, including thoughts, emotions and unregistered (unconscious) processes that contribute to a complexity of motivation and relationship. The quote by Catullus in the epigraph captures this nicely How can one hate and love a person at the same time? Psychoanalysis offers a compelling reason for this, tracing these emotional torrents back to infancy, when the need for safety and satiety collides with a longing for freedom and independence. The psychoanalytic psyche is not one devised in laboratory tests, which have successfully hewn away all of the unnecessary mess of life.

Finally, psychoanalysis is an epistemology in its own right (Devereux, 1967), with a novel and compelling explanation for human motivation. It has moved beyond an account of individual functioning to be used as a hermeneutic device, a 'tool of cultural enquiry' that allows one to contend with the complex interplay of the self, the other and the world at large. Through society, culture and the institutions that are produced, these intra- and interpsychic tensions can be passed on to subsequent generations. For applied psychologists, psychoanalysis as an epistemological tool can be an invaluable methodology for understanding what might be going on and for exploring what forces might be at play when we engage in any of the challenging and emotionally loaded activities that make up our role.

We believe that, in this, psychoanalysis holds relevance for EPs as we go about our business. Put simply, we hold that there is a dynamic interplay between and within the conscious and unconscious aspects of an individual, as well as in groups and organisations, and it is this interplay that influences how people relate to themselves, others and the world at large.

Psychoanalytic or psychodynamic?

We have wrestled with this question over and over. Which term is suitable to our venture? The answer is not clear. Some hold that 'psychoanalytic' refers only to those ideas that originate with Freud, while all others (including Klein, Bion, Jung and their adherents) fall under the 'psychodynamic' heading. This seemed overly reductive and constricting to us. After much discussion, we have decided that, for the purposes of this book the two terms may be used interchangeably. We recognise and accept that this is an imperfect conclusion.

Chapter outline

The book has been organised into seven sections.

Part I, 'Orientation', presents an overview of the interrelationship of education, educational psychology and psychoanalysis. It looks at the shared history and subsequent divergence, and introduces the reader to psychoanalytic theory, chiefly Kleinian theory with its focus on object and part object relations. It discusses some of the chief criticisms that EPs level against psychoanalysis and also responds to these criticisms. Finally, it considers the issue of evidence and what it constitutes.

Part II is entitled 'Theory to practice' and its chapters consider the practical application of psychoanalytic thinking to the world and work of an EP. In her chapter, Olivia Kenneally explores the use of psychoanalytic concepts in EP practice. She begins with a discussion about the use of emotional data as a form of evidence, making links to evidence-based practice in the work of EPs. She then discusses how psychoanalytic concepts can be applied in educational psychology, with reference to several in-depth case studies.

In 'Thinking matters: how can Bion's theory of thinking help educational psychologists think about the task of formulation?', Kay Richards considers how Bion's work can help in exploring experiences with others. Gemma Ellis's chapter reflects on unconscious processes in the work of an EP, asking, 'What's yours and what's theirs? Understanding projection, transference and countertransference in educational psychology practice'. Bartle and Eloquin then illustrate some of the ways that psychoanalytic theory can help teachers, focusing on the ways in which emotional experience, when reflected on rather than reacted to, can provide powerful 'data' about what may be occurring in the inner worlds of their pupils. They introduce the concept of a classroom-in-the-mind, and consider the interrelated experiences of the inner world, external world and experience in role.

Part III presents two chapters that discuss the psychoanalytic

applications of a central activity for all EPs: assessment. Elizabeth Kennedy and Lee-Anne Eastwood consider what a psychoanalytic approach can bring to an EP's assessment. As well as reviewing important psychoanalytic ideas, they discuss the dynamics implicit in an assessment referral, as well as the fact that assessment is also an interventional act. They go on to consider several examples of psychoanalytically informed assessment approaches. This is further taken up by Isabella Bernardo in her chapter, 'The use of projective techniques in educational psychology assessments'. She describes a number of projective tests that will be of interest and use to an EP and provides a historical and theoretical rationale for their use.

Part IV looks at how psychoanalytic thinking can inform consultation and supervision, two key EP activities. Emma Kate Kennedy and Vikki Lee examine consultation as a 'distinctive helping relationship' and provide 'historical and contemporary perspectives on psychodynamic thinking in consultation'. Xavier Eloquin follows this with an exploration of how psychoanalytic theory and practice allow for the use of self in the act of consultation, developing a model for how emotions, as part of the 'total situation', can be used as a form of information. In 'Feelings, relationships and "being held" – experience of psychodynamically informed supervision', Chris Shaldon and colleagues discuss the 'relational model of supervision for applied psychology practice' and reflect on the psychoanalytic aspect of this way of working.

Part V focuses on working in groups. Dale Bartle explores experiences of group facilitation in 'Reverie groups: space, free association and the recovery of thought', and Katharine Ellis describes a project in which she, as an EP, offered a series of work discussion groups for designated safeguarding leads from a number of schools in her area.

Part VI considers organisational perspectives. Beverley Clarke introduces the reader to a psychoanalytic approach to coaching school leaders. Drawing on her own experiences as a leader, an EP and an executive coach, she provides an outline and rationale for the use of psychodynamic approaches to coaching – and argues that coaching school leaders is an activity that EPs (properly supervised and trained) could contemplate taking up. Dale Bartle and Xavier Eloquin, in their chapter on social defences, provide an introduction to social defence theory and then present extended case studies to explore organisational defences to anxieties related to the task of the schools where they are located. Part VII, 'Postscripts: widening the horizon', concludes the book, with Christopher Arnold offering an analysis of psychoanalytic ideas viewed through the lens of chaos theory. He describes phenomena found in complex and unstable systems and concludes that some of the criticisms of psychoanalytic theory are based on linear assumptions that are unlikely to be met in this field. Understanding elements of chaos theory can be very helpful in linking psychoanalytic ideas to more positivist assumptions and suggests new ways of gathering evidence and, ultimately, methods of evaluation.

PART I ORIENTATION

CHAPTER I

Psychoanalysis and educational psychology: context, theory and challenges

Dale Bartle and Xavier Eloquin

This chapter considers the relationship between educational psychology practice and psychoanalysis. Section I places the current relationship between the two in a historical context, looking at how psychoanalysis, education and educational psychology were at one stage far more intertwined. Section II offers the reader a general introduction to psychoanalytic theory, drawing mainly on Kleinian and post-Kleinian theory. It is not an exhaustive account, but seeks to introduce the reader to the theory and terms they will encounter in this book. Section III provides a critique and defence of psychoanalysis, focusing mainly on objections relevant to educational psychology. Section IV, the last of the chapters considers the issue of evidence from a psychoanalytic perspective and how this might be thought of in relation to a wider epistemological canon.

I

Psychoanalysis, education, educational psychology: a brief history

Psychoanalytic theory has had a significant influence on education almost from its inception (Hinshelwood, 1995), with educationalists

keen to make use of a more benign therapeutic approach to working with the most disaffected. The Little Commonwealth, established by George Montagu (later the Earl of Sandwich) in 1913, was one of the earliest forms of 'therapeutic community' for boy, and then also girl, delinquents from as young as 9 months up to 18 years (Bazely, 1928). In the 1920s and 1930s, Summerhill School, set up by anti-authoritarian educationalist A.S. Neill, used Freudian and Reichian principles to underpin its radically different education philosophy (Neill, 1962).

In Austria, elementary school teacher August Aichhorn was tasked with setting up education centres for 'difficult' adolescents after the First World War (Mohr, 1966). Anna Freud encouraged him to enter analytic training in 1922 and he is recognised as a key founder of psychoanalytic education, which rejected contemporary forms of discipline with 'wayward youth' (Mohr, 1966). Anna Freud, who also was a teacher before training as a psychoanalyst, applied and developed psychoanalytic theories of child development at the Hampstead War Nursery during the Second World War. It was here that her observations on child stress and peer affection in place of absent parents were conducted (Young-Bruehl, 2008). After the war, she went on to oversee the Bulldog Banks Nursery, where a number of Jewish child refugees whose parents had been murdered during the Holocaust eventually resided. Freud's meticulous observations were able to show that the violent and aggressive behaviours they displayed were not a result of learning difficulty or psychosis, but an adaptation to the horrific environments they had grown up in (Freud and Dann, 1951).

Child and educational psychologists working with children and adolescents were also influenced by psychoanalysis at this time. Fritz Redl, like Anna Freud, trained first as a teacher before entering psychoanalytical training in Vienna in 1922. Working under Aichhorn, and then with Bruno and Gina Bettelheim, he applied his psychoanalytic insights to summer camps for socially and economically deprived students in Austria, before emigrating to the United States in 1936. There, in Detroit, he developed the Life Space Interview (Redl, 1966) at Pioneer House, a residential home for boys aged 8 to 12 with behaviour problems. Eschewing conventional discipline and punishment for affection and compassion, his approach may be more in line with the demands of an EP role, where he advocated for 'therapy on the hoof' (Redl, 1966), engaging with young people in the midst of their lives as opposed to