Psychodynamics Perspectives on Working with Children, Families, and Schools.
Ed. Michael O'Laughlin. US: Jason Bronson,2013, xi + 335 pp., $80.00
Hardcover.
ISBN-10: 0765709198

Many years ago, perusing the stacks of the Erik Erikson Library in the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis, I came upon a small publication, a little monograph from the New York Review of Books, called Teaching the "Unteachable. (Kohl,1967)" It is the story of a young man, teaching in an impoverished area of NYC, who threw out the book and began to listen to his students, to ask them to write their own thoughts, about their own lives, and to read what they wrote. Herbert Kohl is not a psychoanalyst, rather, an educator, but he happened on one of the principles upon which clinical psychoanalysis is founded: we all need to be seen and reflected in the eyes and mind of the other in order to know ourselves (Winnicott,1975, Fonagy and Target,1996). I thought often of Herbert Kohl's small book of children's writings as I read this rich and complex collection of work from many different visionary practitioners of applied psychoanalysis, who, in their own ways, use their psychoanalytic training and thinking to better the lives of children, from the Outback of Australia to the UK, France and the US.

This collection ranges from clinicians whose work with parents draws on all of their clinical and theoretical resources(Wolf-Palace, Chapter 8;Chase, Chapter 9) to program builders (Hoffman, et.al, Chapter 11; Tracey, Chapter 7) who, like the composer of a symphony, hold all of the players in mind (administrators, educators, parents and most of all children) as they work to make their vision of the pragmatic and sophisticated psychoanalytic work that is possible with children real in the bricks and mortar world. I found it helpful in my reading to think of the contributions as loosely organized around clinical work, recognizable to any psychoanalyst practicing today, and work on the theory and practice of education. Throughout, however, these authors make strong arguments for truth and genuine interest in children's minds and selfhood, reminding us of something we know but forget: all learning occurs in the context of relationships, both internal and external. Growth can only be nourished with truth (Bion,1967). Too often, a stated wish to protect children by concealing truth disguises the adult's need to deny psychic pain, both the child's and their own (Keller, 2011). I will describe three chapters more fully, skipping around and following the thread of "truth."

Lombardi takes up the question of truth/lies, food/poison from the point of view of the child of divorce. In two cases of paternal desertion and return, the child is expected to take in the father as a father though he is unknown as a person. The mother is torn between understanding based on her intimate experience with her infant and young child and pressures in her own mind, as well as external pressures from the father and the court, to comply with the rights of the father. In both cases, the child becomes symptomatic in the ways children show troubles, through disturbances in eating, sleeping, toilet-training and/or behavior. Lombardi argues that children are too often presumed to be blank slates, written on by parents and without consideration of a subjective sense of themselves and of their own desires. She argues that, given an appropriate space within which to express themselves, children, even very young children, can show what they think and feel. Elaborating the dialectics of personal interior experience and markings from without, from parents, siblings, and schools, Lombardi makes a case for the capacity of children to develop a sense of self. She draws on Klein's identification of the epistimophilic instinct, which Klein puts on a par with love and hate, to argue that, as the theme running through very different chapters and descriptions of work with children and families in this book, truth is food for growth and lies are poison for the mind. She supports her assertion that children search for truth and understanding, exploring their parent's minds and inevitably becoming subject to their parent's disturbances, through the two case studies presented. Curiosity is not always driven by conflict and distress, though. Melanie Klein believed that the drive to know, to understand, provides primary pleasure and satisfaction as well as secondary gains of a feeling of safety in knowing. Lombardi includes a truly lovely description of a school program, organized by a philosophy professor, that recognizes small children as the philosophers they can be. This program is the subject of an article in the New York Times titled "The examined life in second grade." Philosophy students go into second grade classrooms over the course of a year and engage children in discussions of environmental ethics and the nature of courage using Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree" and "Frog and Toad Together" respectively, to give only two examples. As other authors in this book, Lombardi shows us that our ideas about children's limitations of understanding can be more driven by our own wish to believe they do not understand, to protect ourselves from the recognition of their pain, rather than inherent limitations of the child. "Adults impose their own desires and prohibitions on the child, attempting to repress the child's search for truth and unwittingly making her the bearer and messenger of the parental unconscious.....inter penetration is positively fostered through tenderness and love, and corrupted by denigration, evasiveness and hate."p.61

Taking note of the inscription on the child of intergenerational trauma, made more severe by the shrouds of mystery and denial is another underlying theme of this varied collection. In Chapter Five, O'Loughlin examines the fallout from unacknowledged or "unthought" traumas. He complicates the complexity of the development of the child in the family by adding the greater family (ghosts/ ancestors) and the social environment communicated not only directly through experiences with schools, teachers and other families, but communicated unconsciously by the parents and family of the child. We are all familiar with the clinical presence of the ghostly voices who order the patient "not to tell about that." O'Laughlin here is working to elaborate the inevitable trauma of the impact of the parental discourse on the infant and child. He draws on work with children of Holocaust survivors and intergenerational trauma dating back to the Great Famine in Ireland to show the ways the "unthought known (Bollas,1987) weaves into the child's sense of self. Again, self knowledge and historical knowledge interweave and are necessary to relieve the suffering from compulsive symptoms. Of course this is work squarely in the center of clinical psychoanalysis, since we presume that we often know neither the original sources of psychic pain, nor the pathways by which a symptom develops. This chapter as well as the two following, Ilinanoa (Chapter 6) on "The Family Unconscious" and Tracey (Chapter 7) on the massive intergenerational trauma of loss, destruction of families and the sequelae of abuse and alcoholism in the indigenous population of Australia bring Loewald to mind. In his work on therapeutic action, Loewald (1967) takes up the necessity of turning ghosts into ancestors: "Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost-life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow-life." None of these authors reference Loewald, just as few of these author's names will be familiar to an American audience, making this book of even more interest to any psychoanalyst who wonders about the impact of psychoanalysis on our modern world.

Continuing on both the recognition of the impact of "ghosts" and the need for truth in our relations with infants and children, Bunyard locates a little known French psychoanalyst, Francoise Dolto, in relation to the three major emphases in psychoanalysis of the later 20th century: ego psychology, object relations theory, most specifically Klein and Freud's, and Lacan, a close colleague of Dolto's. While many readers will appreciate the explication of Freud and two major streams of psychoanalytic thought, ego psychology and object relations theory, the center of her inclusion in this book on applications of psychoanalysis to schools lies in the description and explication of the Maison Verte, Dolto's late life, real life application of her understanding of the growth and development of the child's mind. Briefly, Dolto's vision of the Maison Verte was of a place "where the individual child could make a safe and unthreatening initial encounter with the exigencies of social life outside of the family." p. 84, a place where "truthful speaking about ever deeper understandings of the social world" (p. 85) can occur. Dolto had two main aims in the creation of the Maison Verte. First, a specific effort to reduce the trauma of separation inherent in the transition to school with all of its institutional demands by providing a transitional space for the child and the primary caretaker, most often the mother, to relate to other adults and children in a way that is intended to bridge the gap between home care and the intense and complicated environment of the school. Second, Dolto had grown to believe that early intervention, and specifically intervention in a nonclinical setting, was more effective than later treatment of children and conceptualized the Maison Verte as a kind of experience for a child and a primary caretaker that could provide a context within which anxieties could be identified, traumatic stories told, allowing for the development that takes off when truth can be spoken, thought about and felt about. While Bunyard only specifically references Bion in relation to his very early work on groups, he very much emphasizes Dolto's conviction that the "utterance of truth" (p.82) can ease the impact of inevitable traumas. Additionally, as in Bion's idea of the container/contained, that truth is located in the felt experiencing of thinking and speaking in the presence of the other. As does Bion, Dolto links anxiety to unarticulated (in Bion's term, undigested) experiences of loss and blockages and impediments to growth that result from failures of mourning. Dolto "concluded that infants often understood far more of their immediate domestic circumstances than was normally allowed, either by professionals or the child's primary carers"p.85 and that "the infant mind had access to an unconscious history of its place in the family setting where it was soon to be born."p.85 For Dolto, as the other authors mentioned, the truth of the ghosts must be inscribed into language in order to free the individual's capacity for creative and full development. La Maison Verte continue to function throughout France and Belgium, having become multidisciplinary centers welcoming parents and children to a kind of intermediate space that offers play space and receptive adults in ways that vary by the needs of the community.

The last three chapters of the book present different visions of the ways psychoanalysis can expand the educator's view of children. Thornberg (Chapter 14) makes a passionate argument for understanding transference as ubiquitous and momentous in student teacher relationships. As in clinical work, understanding of transference, and he includes the necessity for teachers to understand themselves and their own history in order to fully invest in relationships with their students, can facilitate the learning relationship. Not understood, there is risk of derailment. Galves (Chapter 15) goes on to describe his vision of a "Psychoanalytically

Informed School." An understanding of the power of drives, including the epistimophilic drive, the ubiquity of transference, and the necessity of developing an awareness of why one does what one does leads to a school structure designed to "mobilize the most powerful educational force in the world: the desire of human beings to learn what they want to learn." p.281 He emphasizes a commitment to truth: "To help the students become aware of what is really true about themselves, not what they wish were true or imagine to be true or make believe is true."p.287 Lastly, Frank (Chapter 16) articulates the necessity to understand and describe the dynamics of school life, characterizing this effort as "the School Romance Project, born out of the Francis W. Parker School, one educator that many American psychoanalysts are familiar with through the APsA discussion group on teaching psychoanalysis.

Many clinicians will find this book enriching and for psychoanalysts who believe that we have knowledge and skills with wide applications to the most entrenched social problems, especially the problems of current mores in education, this book will be both an inspiration and a guide to creative thinking about education. Additionally, I think many psychoanalysts will share my experience of unfamiliarity with most of the authors represented in this book. I found great value in the exposure to thinkers outside my ordinary realm of psychoanalytic thought.

Bion, W.R. (1967). A Theory of Thinking. In Second Thoughts. London. Jason Aronson, 1967, pp. .

Bollas, C. (1987). The shadow of the object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fonagy, P., Target, M. (1996). Playing with Reality: I. Theory of Mind and the Normal Development of Psychic Reality. International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 77: 217-233.

Goodnough, A. (2010) The Examined Life, Age 8. New York Times.

Keller, L.E. (2011) Repairing Links: Building Attachments in the Preschool Classroom. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 59:737-763.

Kohl, H. (1967) Teaching the "Unteachable." A New York Review Book.

Winnicott, D.W. (1971). Playing and Reality. , 1-156. London: Tavistock Publications.

L.Eileen Keller
5435 College Av #201
Oakland, California 94618
dr.keller@kellerphd.com

L Eileen Keller, Faculty, San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis.