

UNDER BLUE SKIES: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

E. Cocks, C. Fox, M. Brogan & M. Lee, Eds, (1996), 334 pp., \$27.00

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Despite the title, the central theme of this edited book is a chronicle of events in the history of the treatment of people with intellectual disability in Western Australia. The recording of these events and their analysis and interpretation makes fascinating reading. The contributors to the book cover particular aspects of the 'system', including justice administration and the professions as well as particular time periods beginning in 1829.

Such detailed analyses of various aspects of the social systems that impinge on the lives of people with intellectual disability are very welcome. Similar analyses are waiting to be done in the remaining states and territories in Australia. As in any edited book, some chapters stand out by virtue of their subject matter, presentation style or the reader's particular interest area. I particularly like the chapters that not only present the system or institutional view but intersperse these views with short descriptions of the lives of particular people with a disability. There is so little available in Australia or elsewhere that assists us, as outsiders, to understand the lives of those people who our profession and many others across the health, education and welfare attempt to serve. A particularly telling chapter in relation to occupational therapy is that by Carman-Brown and Fox entitled 'Doctors, psychologists and educators: The professions and intellectual disability'. This should be required reading for occupational therapists working with people with intellectual disability to provide the necessary historical perspective on their current practices.

The value of this edited book is that it provides a cross-sectional analysis of many of the systems and organizations involved in service provision. An unfortunate omission from my perspective is the story of the parent organizations that have had such a profound influence on policy and practice in Western Australia. The stories of these organizations told in the words of the parent-founders would add a much needed family perspective to how the concept of intellectual disability is socially constructed.

Under Blue Skies will make a valuable contribution to reference lists for practising occupational therapists and students. The book will provide an extremely useful historical perspective, albeit from one state, from which to reflect on their own values and beliefs and their current or future practice. Where I believe the book falls short is in presenting a case for the social construction of the concept of intellectual disability. The final chapter by Cocks and Allen, entitled 'Discourses on Disability', goes some way towards the task of the book's subtitle. However, the chapter primarily relies on a description of contemporary disability discourses with little application to the historical analyses so persuasively presented in the earlier chapters. Indeed, the final chapter appears to lead more to the presentation of a polemic against what the authors name the 'contemporary discourse of rationality' rather than to *deeper* understanding of why the events reported in the earlier chapters happened in particular ways, carried out by particular 'custodians' in Western Australian society. However, I look forward to further writings on the concept of intellectual disability by the contributors to this book and I believe the editors have begun the much overdue task of exploring our Australian responses to people with intellectual disability.

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