



CONDUCTIVE EDUCATION

Maria Hari and Karioli Akos

(translated from the Hungarian by Neville Horton Smith and Joy Stevens)

Routledge, London (1988)

375 pages. Price £40.00

For some years messages have reached us through the media about a revolutionary method of treating children with cerebral palsy. The Peto Institute for conductive education of the motor disabled and the associated college for conductors in Budapest assess children from all over Hungary and are responsible for the continued surveillance and education of children seen at the institute and also for overseeing the continuing education of the conductors.

The institute is apparently besieged by British children and their parents who have no faith in methods of treatment used in the UK, but information of what goes on at the institute has been hard to obtain, partly because of the language problem. However, here at last is the first English translation of a book originally published in 1970 in Hungary. The book describes something of the theoretical background underpinning the systems used in treatment, a day in the life of a child at the institute, the training of the conductors, and the use of group dynamics, and has 142 pages of photographs illustrating the various aspects of a child's life at the institute.

The description of the neurological basis for the theories behind 'the treatment' is just recognizable as that taught me as an undergraduate in the late 1950s and the last references are dated 1971. The revolution that has occurred in our understanding of the workings of the central nervous system since then makes much of this section look very dated.

The conductors work over extended periods of time with the same group of children. Group dynamics are consciously used to encourage children to work towards the constantly changing goals. The discipline is rigorous: 'The group is woken by the conductor at 6.30 am for the first event on the days programme — conditioning (toilet education). The conductor knows very well that from the point of view of conductive education it would be a serious mistake simply to sit the child on the pot. The child must sit down on it beginning by climbing down from the slat bed and pulling down his pyjama trousers' 'if it cannot do this successfully it is missing an important opportunity for learning'. There then follows an agonizing description of how a severely athetoid three year old managed to achieve such a feat.

This book is essential reading for those of us with a responsibility for advising parents of children with cerebral palsy. However, the book as it stands does no good to the cause of the Peto concepts. Coercion, strict discipline and group dynamics are among the techniques used by the conductors to achieve their objectives. I wonder if parents would allow their normal son

or daughter to attend a school which used such methods. The fact that their child is handicapped must make a difference, I suppose.

In this country the Birmingham Institute for Conductive Education has now been set up using conductors from the Peto Institute. The children being treated are having their progress monitored by an independent research team and are being compared with a group of similarly disabled children treated in more conventional ways. If conductive education is to be fully introduced into this country, once the necessary research has been done, then let us hope that the method can be tempered and adjusted to suit the needs of our children. In a loving, caring environment the harsh and rigorous regimen may just have a place but only when the state can be persuaded to set aside enough money to run such a programme.

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THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO FOOD ALLERGY AND INTOLERANCE

Jonathan Brostoff and Linda Gamlin

Bloomsbury, London (1989)

356 pages. Price £9.99

We often have no explanation of illnesses and how our treatments for them work. My bias is towards thinking that we should at least give food allergy and intolerance a fair hearing.

This book, I think, is written for the medically unqualified who have the determination to read 356 pages including nine appendices; there are no references. The arguments are fairly put and are backed up by interesting anecdotes and some intriguing theories. The lack of evidence in many areas is freely acknowledged. In addition to food allergy and intolerance, chemical sensitivities, candidiasis and vitamin and mineral deficiencies are discussed.

Patients are encouraged to consult their general practitioners before starting any of the regimens, which are fully explained but which would require perseverance to carry out. This book should be in the patient's library but might be read first by the less sceptical partners.

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PREVENTING MENTAL ILLNESS

Jennifer Newton

Routledge, London (1989)

275 pages. Price £9.95

Helping people to cope with stressful life events and identifying those most vulnerable to such events should be part of every-