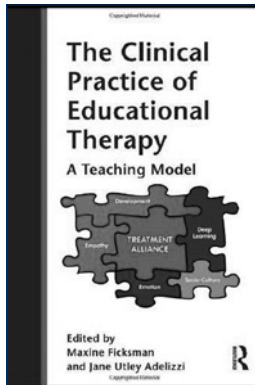


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## Book Review

David Fedo, PhD



***The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy: A Teaching Model***

Maxine Ficksman and Jane Utley Adelizzi, Editors  
New York, Routledge, 2010  
362 pages, \$60.00

What is educational therapy? What does an educational therapist do? These questions, and many other subsidiary ones, are answered in a remarkably detailed and insightful new book, *The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy: A Teaching Model*. Maxine Ficksman and Jane Utley Adelizzi, both with broad experience in the sometimes labyrinthine world of special education, are the perfect editors for this comprehensive and important book. (I've not seen a single work that covers the ground so thoroughly or that probes so deeply into the whats, whys, and hows of this growing profession.) Ficksman, now a practitioner in California, has 40 years of experience in the field and has long been an active presence and leader in the AET. Adelizzi, now professor emeritus at Curry College in Massachusetts, where for many years she was an important faculty member in the institution's Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL), which provides mentoring and support to students with language learning disabilities, has written widely on the subject.

Their book, with its wonderfully illuminating introduction ("The Dynamic of Educational Therapy: Theoretical Framework and Model"), and a wide range of essays by more than 20 other contributors, will be a valuable resource to ETs and professionals in associated fields. With its real-life case studies, it should also become an excellent guide for clinical psychologists, counselors, school administrators, teachers, and even parents who are searching, sometimes desperately, for answers to help their patients, clients, students, and children.

Thus, as Karen Kass, PhD, writes in the book, "The educational therapy process typically begins with a phone call from a parent wanting help with her child." How ETs help such children and others, according to Ficksman and Adelizzi, is to "provide individualized intensive intervention, formal and informal assessment, and case management for clients who present a wide range of learning disabilities and learning differences, including: dyslexia, AD/HD, academic difficulties, or failure."

Of course, as Ficksman and Adelizzi show in a very helpful table on page 17, these goals may overlap with the more specific objectives of clinical and educational psychologists, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists, and academic tutors, among others. But in their breadth and interdisciplinary reach, ETs are unique. Their training—with "extensive backgrounds in learning disabilities, special education, and/or other specific genres of learning difficulties, in addition to their training in educational therapy"—gives them a richer and more contextual understanding of the complex issues faced by their struggling clients.

The strategy through which these tasks are accomplished by ETs is termed "psychodynamic": as Ficksman and Adelizzi explain it, "it is the aim of the work to create change by alleviating fears, and boosting self esteem by providing opportunities for incremental successes, thereby improving the attitude and behaviors related to learning" In a task analysis approach, needs are identified and interventions which allow the client to experience success are applied.

As the editors and contributors show in painstaking detail, educational therapy, the seeds of which were first planted in Europe, is grounded in the theoretical work of many educators and researchers, including John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Lev Vygotsky. Pioneering work in the United States by practitioners concerned with children displaying serious learning disabilities was later carried out in California (by Sister Eileen Cronin, Barbara Cull, and Bill Coggins), in New York (by Anna Gillingham and Samuel T. Orton), and in Massachusetts (by Charles Drake and Gertrude Webb). Gail Werbach, MA, Barbara Kornblau, EdD, and Carole Slucki, MS, report in chapter 3, "Ancestry and Migration," that the psychologist Mary Kunst in Chicago, in the 1940s and 1950s, was one of the first "to use the term educational therapy to describe her work as a tutor of children with learning impairments within the milieu of a psychiatric hospital." Private practice in what would later become more commonly known as ET began, according to the authors of chapter 3, in the late 1950s. These professionals "were aware that their function went beyond the typical duties usually performed by academic tutors." And, most important, "Early in the development of the practice ETs regarded an individual in a comprehensive and holistic manner, within the contexts of family, school, and other settings and relationships." Later, in the 1980s, special training for practitioners and students was introduced by the AET, which was founded in 1979. The AET has since launched training programs around the country, with those in California and Massachusetts leading the way.

*The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy* gives a wide-ranging survey and analysis of how the ideal ET process actually takes place. Kass's developmental stages of the educational therapy process (chapter 2), in which she compares the stages of therapy to what an actor goes through "when landing a part in a play and performing the role until the play closes," is especially

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intriguing. Other chapters on the importance of the therapist's "empathic intelligence" (Roslyn Arnold, PhD, chapter 4), on the special needs of multilingual college students with learning differences (Patricia Mytkowicz, EdD, chapter 7), on the triage approach to therapy for adults (Linda Lawton, chapter 8), on the application of appropriate interventions (Phyllis Koppelman, MEd, chapter 10), and on ethics and etiquette in ET (Susan Fogelson, MA, and Ellen Opell, MA, chapter 14) are all instructive, dynamic, and in many cases, creative. And in the final chapter of the volume, Adelizzi, Marcy Dann, MA, and Ficksman boldly project the future of ET in a changing and increasingly technologically dominated world. This is all well and good; in fact, it is excellent. But does ET, whatever the theory that grounds it, and do ETs, whatever the strategy of diagnosis and treatment, really help those who suffer from learning disabilities (I prefer the term learning differences) and related problems? Are lives changed, even transformed, for the better, by the work of ETs? Where is the hard evidence? If young children, students, and other clients of all ages discover that, because of ET, their learning skills have been strengthened and their lives have been improved, that they feel more confident in their work and satisfied in their relationships, then clearly the ETs have been successful. If this transformation continues and is sustained over time, voila! So much the better.

Just one chapter near the end of what is an otherwise thorough book ("The Efficacy of Educational Therapy," chapter 17, by Phyllis Maslow, PhD, and Dorothy Ungerleider, MA) treats what I would call the critical assessment issue. The two authors conducted a survey in 2005 and 2006, under the auspices of the AET, with one question in mind: "Is educational therapy effective?" For the survey, 70 California clients of ETs, with an average time spent in ET of 3.8 years, were the subjects; 69 of these were reported to be children, all between the ages of 9 and 20 (the median age was 13.6), and their parents were the sole confidential respondents.

As reported by Maslow and Ungerleider, the results to the 13 main questions—for example, "The ET helped build confidence and a sense of self-competency in my child"—were mostly positive, indicating that "80% or more [of the parents] strongly agreed or agreed that the educational therapist provided a supportive setting, honored their input into goal setting, discussed and clarified assessments, assisted in building confidence and a sense of self-competency in their child, and helped them understand the strengths and challenges of their children." Further, "The educational therapist helped parents learn alternative methods for teaching their child, and the parents tended to agree that the findings of the educational therapist were consistent with their own perceptions of their child." There were two caveats: "Although 72.9% of the parents felt they learned what accommodations their children needed to acquire, it remains a concern that more than 25% of these parents often are not aware of how to incorporate these accommodations for the benefit of their children." And the researchers found that only 60.5% of the parents reported that their children had improved in writing ability.

This is useful information as far as it goes. But if I were to quibble about the survey and findings, I would make the following points:

*One*, a survey that was conducted over a wider age range—through the complete college and university ages and well into full adulthood—would likely have been more revealing and meaningful.

*Two*, the parents' perspectives on their own children, while obviously important, needed somehow to be supplemented by the perceptions, however inchoate, of the children (clients) themselves. Did the 69 children and 1 adult feel that their learning—and thus their lives—had been improved? Did their feelings match their parents' perceptions, or not? Could not the responses of at least the older children have been tactfully sought?

*Third*, as with almost all therapies, much more research needs to be undertaken about the short- and long-term effectiveness of ET on clients, whether they are young children, teenagers, postdoctoral students, or working adults. Are the benefits from ET sustainable over time? How can former clients maintain the level of skills, confidence, adaptability, awareness, and meta-cognition that they may have learned from their ETs? In my view, this latter question needs systematic exploration and research by the profession.

Still, having said the above, I found *The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy* enormously informative, thoughtfully and clearly written, and well-documented. The book—362 pages, including the index—is handsomely designed by Routledge. I predict that it will be a standard in the field of ET for many years to come.

*Dr. David Fedo, former Academic Dean of Curry College in Milton, MA, is Executive Director and Visiting Scholar for Boston's Wheelock College Center for International Education, Leadership, and Innovation, located in Singapore. David, besides being a scholar and administrator, is also a poet, and he recently published Carrots and Other Poems.*

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## Collaboration Between Educational Therapists and Their Potential School Partners

*Continued from page 10*

- Those individuals who had experience collaborating with ETs felt more positive about the idea of collaborating with ETs than those who had no experience with ETs. In fact, even those participants who had interactions with ETs who were considered noncollaborative still felt more positive overall about collaborating with ETs than those who had no interactions with ETs at all. Additionally, more participants who knew at least one ET felt positive about collaborating with ETs than those who did not know any ETs.