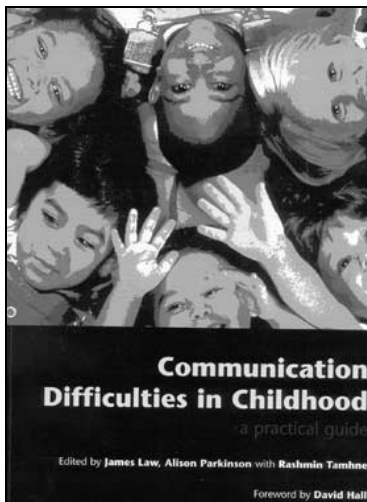


Audit project coordinators will also find it a practical guide to the area.

Stuart McLaren, Consultant Psychiatrist in the Addictions, South Devon Drug and Alcohol Service

Communication Difficulties in Childhood. A Practical Guide

By J. Law, A. Parkinson & R. Tamline (eds). Radcliffe Medical Press Ltd. 2000. 338 pp. £19.95 (pb). ISBN: 1-85775-098-5.



The objective of this book is to serve as a text and practical guide for a range of professionals who may have a role in the assessment or management of a child with a communication difficulty. Following the introduction the book is divided into two sections. Part 1 begins with a clear overview of the nature of communication in children followed by epidemiological data and the implications of these for services. This is followed by descriptions of methods for assessment and a discussion of general management strategies. The inclusion of multicultural issues is very relevant given the anxieties that parents have and misperceptions among professionals of the consequences of bilingualism.

Part 2 consists of sections each focusing on a particular clinical problem or disorder including its assessment and management. Problems range from children who have been abused to pervasive developmental disorder. If appropriate, the diagnosis in relation to DSM-IV is given.

The book is written in a clear and readable style. The content is divided into sections and use is made of tabulations, boxed text to enhance understanding and facilitate learning. As the book is presumably intended for use in the UK as well as in other countries, including developing countries, I was sorry that the DSM classification system was used rather than the

ICD system. Advice on management and referral to other agencies seemed at times too prescriptive and not reflecting the diversity of service systems that in reality exists.

However, I thought the book a valuable text certainly of use to the professionals for which it was written and for trainees and clinicians working within child mental health services.

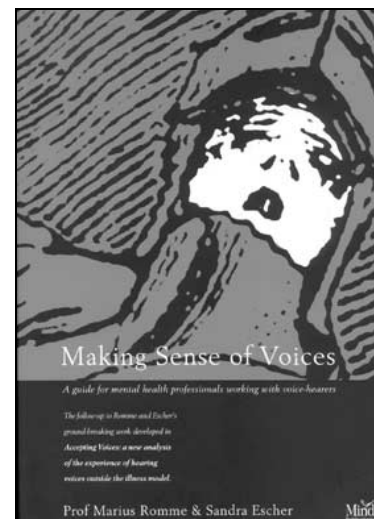
A. D. Nikapota

Making Sense of Voices

By M. Romme & S. Escher. London: Mind Publications. 2000. 143 pp. £25 (pb). ISBN: 1-874690-86-3.

The recognition that people in the general population hear voices is at the foundation of Romme and Escher's work. They are leaders in setting an understanding of voices in a mental health context within this wider framework, with the important consequences of understanding that hearing voices is not by itself a problem or a symptom of mental illness. For Romme and Escher, voices are only a problem when the person hearing them has difficulty coping with them. Their research has found that ordinary people who hear voices accept them and find them predominantly positive in impact, whereas psychiatric patients who hear voices are more likely to find them distressing and to feel powerless in relation to them.

This 'practitioner's handbook' is about helping those who find their voices difficult and distressing. In some respects it takes a radical approach: it is not concerned with psychiatric diagnosis, it is decidedly lukewarm about the benefits of medication, it emphasises self-help and social empowerment and it treats seriously the contributions of alternative therapies. But the heart of the book draws heavily on the more mainstream approaches to voices developed in the past decade within social psychiatry and clinical psychology. The social psychiatric perspective (Romme and Escher's own approach) proposes that difficulties coping with voices are best understood by examining the person's life history, in particular traumatic life events thought to be related to the onset, and the wider context of often overwhelming social difficulties, such as housing, work or relationship problems. However, the authors also draw very extensively on psychological, in particular cognitive-behavioural, approaches to helping people with distressing voices. Such approaches also set the voices in the context of a person's life circumstances and consider the role of triggering events, but emphasise the appraisals made of the voices – for example, as powerful and



malevolent – as mediating between the voice experience and the way the person responds. Both approaches require a very detailed assessment of the voices themselves, their onset, the person's life history and circumstances. Both also see the content of the voices as important and meaningful, usually pointing to the person's concerns.

The handbook is divided into three parts. The first part is introductory, providing some of the background research on the authors' understanding of voices. The second part, on the assessment process, provides a full description of the authors' assessment interview, as well as an exceptionally detailed set of instructions on writing a report and deriving a formulation (called here a 'construct'). This is certainly useful, but strangely prescriptive given the open-mindedness evident elsewhere in the book. For example, using case material, the reader is instructed on every element of writing a report, including the choice of first or surnames (always use first names) and what to include about a person's occupation ('the fact that she followed a chiropody course . . . [is] not relevant'). Nevertheless, the interview and the method described for deriving hypotheses about the development and understanding of voices, coupled with case descriptions, evidently stem from extensive experience of working with voice hearers. Drawing on this will enrich my clinical practice.

The third part is on interventions. For me, this part was less convincing and strikingly different from the previous section. It lacks an essential feature of a handbook, in that it does not point the practitioner to a coherent set of methods with guidance on their use. Rather, it surveys a range of approaches, generally quoting directly and at length from others' work. This covers cognitive-behavioural, and alternative therapies (with an intriguing more detailed description of reincarnation therapy), self-help and