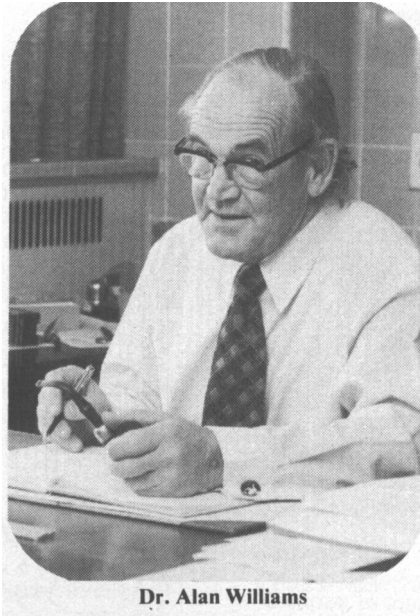


editorial



Dr. Alan Williams

I have always had an ambition to write an editorial. However, as I read learned Journals like Australian Child and Family Welfare I wonder if I have the necessary skills. I must confess right at the start that I am not sure what some of the terms and phrases used in many of the articles are getting at.

Such terms as “transactional relations”, “vertical and horizontal planning” (I do a lot of planning whilst I am in a horizontal position). And yet surely I must have learned something about child and family welfare, for I have worked professionally with children for the last thirty years as has my wife. And after all we are grandparents! So pardon me if I overlook “transactional relations” and “conceptual frameworks” for this once.

As I have said, children have been important in my life but then I think that could be said for the majority of us. They are an important bond in the happy family and they are an important factor in the family that disintegrates. There is surely no one more important than the child.

And yet who understands children? No! Let me ask another question. Did the professional training which you received, — you who work with children and their families, give you a basic understanding of the needs of children? Of the physical, emotional, social and educational needs for their growth as individuals? Certainly you would have received precious little in current courses in medicine, social work, welfare work and even many child care courses. And yet we all believe we are trained to work with children and their families.

Dr Alan Williams who has contributed this editorial has a long standing reputation as an advocate for inter-disciplinary co-operation in the child and family welfare field.

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AMBITION FULFILLED

Most of us would agree with Wordsworth that “the child is father of the man”. From the lips of social workers, doctors and many others I have heard “inadequate children become inadequate parents”, “institutional children breed institutional children”, “battering parents have had a battered childhood”. There is no dispute about that amongst us, and yet, despite our apparent acceptance of this we have neglected Plato, Pestalozzi, Piaget and Pringle, not forgetting Montessori, Froebel, Isaacs and Erikson. They have all urged us to concentrate our efforts

on understanding the early years, even the early months, of life. For without a sound basic knowledge of the young child we can never understand the individual he becomes. “The child is father of the man”. Who amongst us without the adequate training and understanding in this area is trained to deal with people?

But unless we are too professionally proud we can always call for help. No one of us can “go it alone” in child care. No one of us has a prerogative of knowledge regarding children and families. The best paediatrician I know leaned heavily on his infant welfare nursing friends, his kindergartener colleagues, social workers, school teachers, parents and of course his own medical colleagues, respecting each for their expertise in their individual field. And it often distresses me that other people cannot do that. For many years I have preached the doctrine that when one gets a degree or diploma one also receives a set of blinkers. I was delighted to read Professor Ronald Davie's statement in the “Needs of Children” by Pringle (Hutchinson 1974) (buy a copy if you haven't got one — nothing novel, but excellent commonsense for anyone working with children). Davie states “the blinkers of professional training tend to produce different vocabularies and different concepts which often lead specialists in these fields either to ignore entirely the common ground between them or else to neglect opportunities to establish fruitful links”.

To which I, writing to those people who work with children and their families, can only add “Amen”.