

Tavistock Clinic and Anna Freud Centre unite

MIRIAM STEELE reports from a conference on the clinical relevance of research in child psychotherapy.

THE first joint conference to be held by the Tavistock Clinic and the Anna Freud Centre was described by one participant as 'an historic event', and it certainly had that feel. The conference, funded by the North Central London NHS Workforce Development Confederation, grew out of a series of meetings between the two institutions over the preceding year.

Opening the conference Peter Fonagy (Anna Freud Centre) discussed the vital need for empirical research in child psychotherapy. He presented compelling evidence for the need for child psychotherapists to respond to the debate currently in the public domain. As an

example of this debate he cited the recent *British Medical Journal* article by Jeremy Holmes, which argued that the lack of evidence for efficacy of psychodynamic approaches does not necessarily show that these approaches are not effective.

Michael Rustin (Tavistock Clinic) approached his introduction from a different perspective with an address titled 'Research in the consulting room'. Taking a sociological approach, he urged child psychotherapists to remain vigilant to ensure that what they were hoping to study was indeed accessible to empirical scrutiny. He argued that much can be gained from a qualitative approach.

Mary Target (Anna Freud Centre) then highlighted her work on the Child Attachment Interview and its usefulness in the clinical domain. Having collected hundreds of these interviews from a wide range of ages, Target provided compelling evidence for the utility of a systematic interview approach as a way of gaining a window on the child's representation of attachment figures. Judy Shuttleworth (Association of Child Psychotherapists), discussed the presentation, pointing out the clinical relevance of the approach.

The second paper of the morning was presented by Judith Trowell (Tavistock Clinic) and Maria Rhode (Tavistock Clinic) and focused on their work on a prospective outcome study of childhood depression. This study, with links through its European funding in Athens and Helsinki, is a unique initiative to investigate psychodynamic psychotherapy through audio-recording and extensive use of empirical measures. The results of three children's therapeutic interventions pointed to diminishing symptoms.

In the afternoon Marguerite Reid (Tavistock Clinic) presented a qualitative piece of work on 'replacement babies' with mothers who had all suffered the loss of an infant. The moving clinical material provided Viviane Green with an opportunity to address the issue of the way in which the mind of the clinician brings a unique perspective to a research endeavour.

In the final presentation I presented an ongoing longitudinal study of attachment representations in a group of newly placed adopted children. This highlights the way in the use of empirical methodology can aid understanding of the characteristics of both adopters and the maltreated child. My presentation was sensitively discussed by Meira Likierman (Tavistock Clinic).

The day was a marked success with over 200 participants, spanning the range of child psychotherapists from trainees to heads of services. Whether the next step is to make this into an annual event or whether it will lead to collaborative research efforts by the two institutions remains to be seen. In any event, the important dialogue will leave many new doors open.

■ Miriam Steele is at the Anna Freud Centre.

Memory matters

SUSAN CRAWLEY reports on a weekend seminar organised by the Institute for Cultural Research.

HOW much do we understand about memory? How are memories formed, distorted, lost? How can memory be improved? How does memory shape our perceptions and sense of identity? These questions were among those explored in a lively seminar held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) that brought together experts from various areas to introduce this complex but fascinating topic to an audience composed mainly of non-psychologists.

In the opening session Steven Rose (Open University) argued that the popular analogy of the mind as a computer is both inadequate and inaccurate. We have to study the brain to really understand the mind. New neuroimaging techniques have recently identified the brain's 'shopping centre', which is activated when preferred items are spotted.

Martin Conway (University of Durham) drew attention to the importance of autobiographical memory for our sense of self, while Michael Eysenck (Royal Holloway) outlined some of the ways in which amnesic patients have provided a vital insight into the workings of a healthy memory system. The ability of such patients to perform certain tasks but not others has provided the strongest evidence for the existence of separate memory systems, and in particular the distinction between short- and long-term memory.

World Memory Champion Dominic O'Brien brought the first day to a close by demonstrating

some of the ways in which memory can be improved. Just to show that his techniques worked, he recalled the names of the 300 or so members of the audience from a list studied briefly earlier that day.

Appropriately for those unaccustomed to an early start on Sundays, the opening session was concerned with sleep. Mark Blagrove (University of Swansea) presented conflicting evidence about whether sleep and dreaming help us to form memories. Next Amina Menon (University of Aberdeen) examined factors that might impair eyewitness testimony, and discussed methods for reducing errors with appropriate investigative procedures. Menon reported a longer look at the offender produces more confident (but not necessarily more accurate) identification.

Chris French (Goldsmiths College) used examples from parapsychology to demonstrate types of memory error; namely eyewitness accounts of real events, and fantastic memories of events that almost certainly never happened. In the final lecture of the weekend Graham Wagstaff (Liverpool) questioned the popular belief that hypnosis can assist people to produce full and accurate memories. Wagstaff argued that generally a cognitive interview produces fewer errors, but hypnosis may in effect give the person 'leave' to talk about previously undisclosed matters.

■ Susan Crawley is a postgraduate at Goldsmiths College, University of London.