

Bettelheim charges fly

When we published the obituary for Bruno Bettelheim in ARRI (4/2), we mentioned that the *Chicago Reader* had carried letters by several former students at Bettelheim's "Orthogenic" school for children with severe behavior disorders. The letters contained charges and accusations of beatings and other mistreatment by Bettelheim.

More former students are coming forward with charges of abuse.

As it has turned out, those few letters were merely the tip of an iceberg. Charles Pekow, another former Bettelheim student at the Orthogenic school, wrote a long and detailed account published in the *Washington Post* (Aug. 26), describing how he and other students were beaten and terrorized by Bettelheim. The Pekow story was picked up and carried nationwide by other newspapers, and within a short time similar accounts were seen in national publications such as *Newsweek* ("Beno Brutalheim," Sept. 10), *U.S. News and World Report* (Sept. 10), *Commentary Magazine* (Oct. 1990), the *New York Times* (Nov. 4), *Chicago Tribune* (Oct. 1 and Nov. 11), *Chicago Sun Times* (Sept. 16), *Washington, D.C. Times* (Sept. 16, 21) and many other newspapers and magazines.

As these accounts have appeared in the press, revealing more and more of the sordid details of Bettelheim's treatment of the children under his care, additional supporting letters have been appearing in these publications. Alida Jatich, the woman who as an adolescent was dragged wet and naked out of a shower and beaten by Bettelheim in front of a roomful of people for reasons she still does not understand, has responded to many of these articles with her own letters about Bettelheim's long-term abuse of his students.

Jatich backs up Pekow's assertion that the few truly autistic children at the Orthogenic school during their stay did not improve in any noticeable way—despite claims by Bettelheim (the most famous proponent of the "psychogenic" theory of autism) to have cured these children by removing them from their mothers, whom he compared to Nazi concentration camp guards.

"Why," Jatich asked in a recent letter in the *University of Chicago Magazine*, "is the University [under whose auspices Bettelheim's school was and still is run] still planning to establish a Bettelheim Center for Research and Training, now that so many shocking revelations have come to light?"

The *Chicago Tribune* article mentioned that Bettelheim desired, above all, "never to be forgotten." It seems his wish will be granted.

Editorial: sound sensitivity

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psychophilosophical concepts quite different from Berard's, may involve 100-150 hours of listening to electronically modulated music, over a period of several months. Frankly, I am rather uncomfortable with the Tomatis approach. Not only is it far longer and more expensive than Berard's, but Tomatis invokes a number of assumptions that I found hard to accept—such as the significance he places on the sound of the mother's voice on the auditory and emotional development of the fetus.

To my knowledge there have been no scientifically controlled evaluations of either the Berard or Tomatis auditory training procedures, as they are applied to autism, or for that matter, any other of the various disabilities for which the Berard and Tomatis methods are recommended, although a number of small clinical trials are reported in the literature supplied by Berard and Tomatis.

The Institute for Child Behavior Research has been in contact with a number of parents in the U.S. and elsewhere whose autistic children have been treated by the Berard and Tomatis methods, and, as noted above, the parent evaluations are surprisingly favorable. At the time of this writing, a double-blind, placebo-controlled evaluation of Berard training on a sample of autistic children is being conducted by my colleague Dr. Stephen Edelson and myself. The results of this first experimental evaluation of auditory training are expected to be available by mid-1991.

During my three decades of work in the field of autism, I have met quite a number of high functioning autistic adults, including some who have earned college degrees and even postgraduate degrees in various fields. In all cases but one there were residual behavioral eccentricities and oddities. The only

exception was a young woman who had graduated from college with honors and was working toward her Ph.D. when I met her. After spending several hours with her I could find no sign of autism, yet this young woman as a child had been hospitalized on the autism ward in Bellevue, and her records indicated clearly that she had been diagnosed autistic—appropriately so—as a child. This woman's family attributed her recovery entirely to her having been treated for 10 hours by Dr. Berard. Her story is told in the book *The Sound of a Miracle* by her mother, Annabel Stehli, which is in press at the time of this writing, and which is condensed in the December 1990 *Readers Digest*.

If the reader is skeptical that something so simple as 10 hours of auditory training might be sufficient to bring even a small minority of autistic individuals to full recovery, over a period of time, I can assure you that I am no less skeptical. On the other hand, to permit such skepticism (prejudice) to remove a treatment modality from consideration without thorough investigation, would be inexcusable, in my view.

Dr. Berard retired in April 1990. At present, his method of auditory treatment is not available. However, we at ICBR are working on several options which we hope will be helpful, but which it would be premature to discuss at this time. Parents of autistic children and adults with hypersensitive hearing will find further information about treatment options in the ARRI, as such information becomes available. If the problem is acute, write to ICBR, and we will send the information more quickly and in greater detail. In the meantime, any readers with additional suggestions on methods for dealing with hyperacute hearing are invited to share them with ARRI readers.

Toxic waste site: link to autism?

A state task force in Massachusetts is conducting tests to determine if a toxic waste site in the town of Leominster may be linked to what parents there says is an unusually high incidence of autism.

Twenty-two cases of autism have been identified in families who live near the site, or have lived there in the past. (The percentage of cases in the total population of the area has not been determined.) Most of the cases identified live or lived downwind from the toxic site, formerly a Foster Grant sunglass manufacturing plant. The site has been scheduled for cleanup, but currently is not considered a high priority problem.

No cases of autism have been specifically linked to exposure to toxins. However, there has been some speculation that Rett Syndrome, a disorder which resembles autism at some stages, may be related to pollution, since cases have only been identified in the past few decades. There are no previous reports of autism "clusters" at a

particular location, but researchers Michelle Zapella and Mario Cerioli reported a high incidence of Rett syndrome in a rural area in northern Italy (ARRI 2/4). The reason for the large number of cases there is unknown.

ASA Conference

The 1991 conference of the Autism Society of America will be held July 9-13, 1991 at the Westin Hotel in Indianapolis, Indiana. The conference theme is "Setting the Pace—Reaching the Goals."

For information about the conference contact the Indiana Resource Center for Autism at the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, Indiana University, 2853 East Tenth Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, (812) 855-6508.