



MEDIA

'Media' is the page of the Society's Press Committee. This section of *The Psychologist* aims to promote and discuss psychology in the media. If you would like to comment on a recent newspaper article, TV programme or radio broadcast involving psychology, if you have tips for others based on recent experiences, or if you know of a forthcoming programme or broadcast, please contact the 'Media' page coordinating editor, Harriet Gross (Chair, Press Committee), on H.Gross@lboro.ac.uk.

Too few, too many, too long...

WITH the government review of the educational psychology profession due to report in April, *The Guardian's* Education section ran a large article on 7 March claiming that 'a desperate shortage of experts on children with special needs is about to get even worse'.

The article says that 'changes to the training route will almost certainly see no educational psychologists qualifying in the next two years'. A BPS spokesperson is quoted as saying: 'We have worked towards the introduction of three-year doctoral training since 1997 because we want to implement the highest standards and have a unified training route. Raising the standards of training in educational psychology reflects changes in national education policy and takes account of developments in Europe.'

Political realities are well reflected in the piece. Charles Ward, general secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists, says that 'educational

psychology has the opportunity to flourish under the Every Child Matters agenda', but his optimism is tempered by the government's refusal to consider allocating additional resources: 'In terms of the global budget, it is a measly amount of money that could easily have been found.'

The article says that providing the money for the new training route would cost less than building a single primary school, but that even current funding is under threat. Currently, money is given to the educational psychology clearing house and grant scheme, which uses the money to fund ed psych training, but 'EducationGuardian has been told the government intends to change the system, leaving local authorities to pick up training costs.'

Expert witnesses

Following the recent high court ruling in the case of Professor Roy Meadow, a QC (Patrick Phillips) wrote to the *Times* letters page with the following view on expert witnesses: '...too many are professional "experts", who practise too little and give evidence too much.' He argues that in early cases where 'experts' were involved 'they were invariably leading (and often outstanding) practitioners. Nowadays this is rarely the case.'

Psychologists are increasingly involved in expert witness work, some in highly sensitive areas. Do any of our readers think the change that Patrick Phillips describes is happening in our field? And are courts 'reaching verdicts on expert opinions that are little more than speculation', as a solicitor said in a piece in the *Times* on the same day? What will be the effect of the ruling that it is contrary to public policy for expert witnesses to be subjected to disciplinary proceedings unless a complaint is made my a trial judge?

Are we there yet?

The training of educational psychologists and the engagement of expert witnesses are serious issues for psychology to consider. But so too are the demands of young children on their world-weary parents. Psychologist Dr Billy Lee (University of Edinburgh) is quoted in *The Scotsman* reporting on a survey that will reassure

parents everywhere that their children are like everyone else's and that you are not losing your grip of what is an acceptable version of family reality. Specifically, Dr Lee's survey found that children sitting in the back of a car will wait on average just 12.5 minutes before asking 'Are we there yet?' To some this may sound like heaven-sent amounts of infant patience. To others this respite may be only too brief. Portable DVD players can extend the 12.5 minutes considerably.



Fans of Thorndike's law of effect must have been positively reinforced and made more likely to read the *Daily Telegraph* in the future by its reporting of Dr Jeremy Swinson and Emeritus Professor Alex Harrop's study of the effects of praise and criticism on classroom behaviour. Increases in teacher praise combined with decreases in humiliating criticism were found to reduce disruptive behaviour four-fold. These psychologists from Liverpool John Moores University must get full credit for underscoring and reminding us of the benefits of the carrot rather than the stick.

Moving on, the Society's free Research Digest service (see <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com>) is increasingly being used as source material by journalists. Websites all over the world have picked up on several recent items, and there are 12 subscribers at the BBC. The March edition of the magazine *Psychologies* refers to the Digest in a brief article on a study in which it is reported that men on their way to a meal (who are therefore assumed to be hungry) tend to rate larger women as more attractive, while ones who had just eaten found slimmer women more attractive. It can only be concluded that this shows the truth about consumptive behaviour is often stranger than fiction.

Jon Sutton and Mark McDermott

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