Pragmatic support for practitioners

This excellent book is a timely contribution to the field of educational psychology. It largely succeeds in its ambitious central aim of developing ‘a coherent approach to assimilating, understanding and applying necessarily complex theoretical perspectives with equally complex practice methodology’. This is an important ‘why we do what we do’ aim that has occupied educational psychologists since, as I sometimes read with amusement in essays, ‘Cyril Burt invented educational psychology’.

The authors, from the University of Strathclyde, highlight, and are mindful not to add to, the ‘ivory tower versus real world’ schism that has often troubled the profession. In fact they succeed admirably in building robust bridges between the two by linking theory and practice in a variety of elegant ways. Thus, their book is not just a welcome addition for trainees and tutors on professional training courses, who will probably consider it a ‘core text’, but an invaluable resource for practitioners delivering psychological services in complex and demanding contexts.

The book is arranged in six sections that signpost structure and purpose. The overall aim is summed up in Part 6, ‘Developing an Integrated Methodology for Training and Practice’, and is based on a system of complementary frameworks. The 12 chapters mostly focus on these frameworks. Highlights include Geoff Lindsay on ‘Ethics and Value Systems’, Ioan Rees on ‘A Systemic Solution-Oriented Model’ and Patsy Wagner on ‘Consultation’, summarising a massively influential but often misunderstood way of working. Wagner reminds the reader of the importance of ‘behaviour as a function of person and situation’ by citing Lewin’s B = f (P x S). There is also reference to Gergen’s view that ‘a psychology that simply contributes to the status quo has little to offer the culture’, perhaps inviting more critical engagement with practice. Interestingly, the two chapters by Rees and Wagner are rooted in a ‘therapeutic tradition’ yet emphasise ‘systems thinking’; and this book has much to offer trainees and applied psychologists from other fields including clinical, counselling and organisational psychologists.

Every chapter makes a contribution, and this text would be welcome simply as an interesting collection of papers outlining models such as the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA), Six Phased Problem-Analysis Cycle (a meta-conceptual framework to guide thinking and action), as well as chapters on activity theory, positive psychology and illuminative evaluation. However, it is much more than this because of the skill of the editors in systematically presenting these approaches within an inclusive epistemological, theoretical and conceptual framework that provides pragmatic support for practitioners working with children, adults and organisations. In true gestalt spirit, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and it succeeds in offering direction during a time of significant challenge and change.

Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology: A Textbook for Trainees and Practitioners
Barbara Kelly, Lisa Woolfson & James Boyle [Eds.]

What Should I Believe: Why Our Beliefs about the Nature of Death and the Purpose of Life Dominate Our Lives
Dorothy Rowe

Dorothy Rowe writes passionately about her concerns for how our beliefs about death and the purpose of life may lead us to live our lives in ways that may be unhelpful, uncompromising and disrespectful. At worst, our beliefs can be inhuman for ourselves and others, if we consider our beliefs to be right and better than other’s, we may try to force them on people or punish those who don’t share them.

Rowe places these concerns in the context of the current world state-of-play of religion and politics and the inhumanity these have spawned, and also in the detailed descriptions of the beliefs of clients, friends and public figures, to illustrate how our beliefs develop. She refers to Greek mythology, various scriptures and a wide literature to confirm how stable, widespread and sustained these beliefs are held through different eras and cultures. When it feels so easy to despair about the inhumanity carried out in the name of belief, Dorothy encourages reflection, self-understanding and respectful self/other belief as the only possible panacea in order that we might peacefully co-exist, should we find the courage.

Reviewed by Marie Stewart
who is a Principal Clinical Psychologist
Win–win situations

Women at the Top
Diane F. Halpern & Fanny M. Cheung

Sex differences in careers outcomes remain vast. This introspective book offers a realistic portrayal of how female leaders have managed to balance both the pursuit of a professional career and caring for a family. It provides extensive information on self-management, character building, leadership style and the crucial role of mentoring.

Through extensive personal testimonies, 82 women recount the steps, events and strategies that led them to their current position and status, providing inspiration without discounting the difficulties and pitfalls. While there appear to be strong commonalities in the way dually-successful women organise their lives in both Eastern and Western cultures, ultimately this text shows that outcomes remain vast. This book is open, honest and direct. It primarily deals with grief in young children. Although the title may suggest the book deals more generally with grief in young children, it primarily deals with the difficult task of explaining death to pre-schoolers.

I found the chapters provided calm, step-by-step advice. Each statement is explained using psychological explanations of child development. Case studies and regular examples help illustrate the advice in practice. Atle Dyregrov signposts other specific or more comprehensive texts and resources throughout the book.

The book is open, honest and very direct. This is in line with the approach Atle Dyregrov believes one should take when telling young children about death. He reinforces the message that children often know more than you think and that it is imperative for their development to be told honestly about death.

I would certainly refer to it in the future and recommend it to those who may need it. At only 90 pages long it is a handy, comforting and inspiring read.

Reviewed by Helen Henshaw who is a PhD student at the University of Leicester

Open, honest and direct

Grief in Young Children: A Handbook for Adults
Atle Dyregrov

Written with an audience of carers and parents in mind, this accessible book makes a rewarding read for all those involved in working with children. Although the title may suggest the book deals more generally with grief in young children, it primarily deals with the difficult task of explaining death to pre-schoolers.

I found the chapters provided calm, step-by-step advice. Each statement is explained using psychological explanations of child development. Case studies and regular examples help illustrate the advice in practice. Atle Dyregrov signposts other specific or more comprehensive texts and resources throughout the book.

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Reviewed by Hannah Nelson who is an assistant psychologist at Greater Manchester West Mental Health Foundation Trust

Expertly dealt with

How to Write in Psychology: A Student Guide
John R. Beech

How to Write in Psychology: A Student Guide does exactly what it promises. With helpful pointers such as, ‘Starting to write: Ten ways to get you on your way’, to detailed explanations of APA formatting styles, Beech generously conveys the key elements of the writing techniques required by the discipline.

The friendly and humorous approach provides an enjoyable read, whilst at the same time being both highly informative and well-structured. Writing within psychology frequently requires students to adhere to predefined formats and styles which they are not initially familiar with. This text offers assistance at every stage of the process, from essay writing, to lab reports, to answering exam questions and more. Many of the common questions faced by those embarking on an undergraduate psychology degree are expertly dealt with in a clear and direct manner, which is accessible to students whether in the early stages of study or preparing for a third-year project.

Wiley-Blackwell; 2009; Pb £9.99
Reviewed by Hannah Nelson who is an assistant psychologist at Greater Manchester West Mental Health Foundation Trust

Sample titles just in:

The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time
Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd

Methods in Social Neuroscience
Eddie Harmon-Jones and Jennifer S. Beer (Eds.)

The Sapient Mind: Archaeology meets Neuroscience
Colin Renfrew, Chris Frith and Lambros Malafouris

In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond
Jonathan St. B.T. Evans and Keith Frankish (Eds.)

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Ian J. Deary, Lawrence J. Whalley and John M. Starr

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