

Dore closes on controversial dyslexia treatment

All 13 UK-based Dore treatment centres for dyslexia have gone into administration, with the company citing funding difficulties. Every clinic has closed and all staff have been laid off.

Founded by Welsh paint tycoon Wynford Dore, the eponymous treatment programme was inspired by the idea that the root cause of dyslexia lies in irregular function of the cerebellum (i.e. the 'cerebellar deficit hypothesis'). The cerebellum is a cauliflower-like structure at the back of the brain known to be involved in learning and movement. Clients on the Dore Programme undertook a series of physical exercises designed to improve their coordination and cerebellar functioning, with the effect, it was claimed, of aiding reading ability.

Opinion is divided on where this news leaves the psychological theory underlying the cerebellar deficit hypothesis and the exercise treatments it inspired. The evidence for both is, at best, 'weak', according to Professor Margaret Snowling at York University. She tells us the company's closure 'marks the end of a six-year dispute between Dore's proponents and scientists from the field of dyslexia and related disorders'.

However, Professor Rod Nicolson of the University of Sheffield, who, with his colleague Angela Fawcett, developed the cerebellar deficit hypothesis, tells us it is important to distinguish between the idea that cerebellar dysfunction plays a causal role in dyslexia, for which he says the evidence is strong, and the further claim, made by Dore proponents, that this dysfunction can be alleviated through exercises.

Nicolson says: 'It is now clearly established that the cerebellum is a key structure for development of language and verbal working memory, and that it is active during reading, and there is a growing consensus that at least half of children with dyslexia or ADHD show motor difficulties, though the motor-skill deficits do not cause the reading problems.'

According to Nicolson, there are neurological reasons why it might not be as straightforward as Dore hoped to alleviate cerebellar dysfunction using exercises. 'The regions of the cerebellum

involved in cognitive brain circuits are different from those involved in motor brain circuits,' he says.

So what went wrong? To critics, Dore's demise reflects the bad science it was built upon. But Professor Nicolson says the main reason Dore went under is that clients who paid the upfront fee of £2000 were subsequently entitled to remain in treatment until they were 'cured'. 'This was a very ambitious target given that inevitably clients would have suffered continuing failure at school, and are notoriously difficult to help by

conventional support,' Nicolson says. 'By comparison, traditional treatments, such as Dyslexia Action, require payment per treatment session, and give no guarantee, thereby ensuring financial viability.'

Professor Snowling says parents tend to be attracted to alternative treatments for dyslexia when their child's specific learning difficulty is not recognised by their school, and when their child has not responded well to the interventions they have been given. 'Thus, it must remain a key objective to improve teacher knowledge about the nature, causes and consequences of children's specific learning difficulties,' she says. 'Also, it is vital to consider, for any child who is not responding to an evidenced-based intervention – and we might expect some 20 per cent to fail to do so – whether there are additional problems that are not being taken into account; notably co-morbid conditions, such as language processing or attentional difficulties. Evidence suggests these affect learning and undoubtedly slow progress and generalisation.'

According to Snowling, it remains the case that the most effective interventions for dyslexia target readers' difficulties with phonemes, the building blocks of

sound from which words are formed. 'Such programmes include training in letter knowledge, training in phoneme awareness and making links between letters and sounds in the context of reading instruction.' Looking to the future, Snowling says there needs to be wider recognition of individual differences in cognitive skills and an educational system that is more inclusive. 'There is also an urgent need for a National Centre for Evidenced-Based Education,' she says, 'so that information about the interventions parents can

reasonably seek is publicly available and parents can have better access to scientific thinking when they are choosing to purchase a treatment.'

Meanwhile, Professor Nicolson stands by his heavily criticised studies, published in the journal *Dyslexia*, that provided equivocal scientific support for the Dore approach to treating dyslexia. Even if the benefits he observed were a non-specific positive side-effect from exercise, he says 'these were wholly

beneficial and contrast sharply with the potentially catastrophic side-effects of pharmacological treatments. This only serves to highlight the danger of uncritical export of the clinical trial methodology for educational evaluations.'

A press statement from the administrators at Kroll says: 'Current clients who have purchased the Dore Programme and require information regarding their current exercise set or who require additional exercises can visit <http://my.dore.co.uk>.' Professor Snowling advises Dore's clients to seek advice from their school, local authority or through the British Dyslexia Association. 'If they feel that the intervention was working well, they need to consider why. What has mediated the change in their child? Was it the treatment itself? Or was it something else like a change in morale or self-perception? Has the child become more motivated to read? How can progress be maintained and should other issues affecting the child be addressed?' CJ

Budongo Trail shows the way

A new chimpanzee enclosure has opened at Edinburgh Zoo, in partnership with psychologists at the University of St Andrews. Built by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the new exhibit differs from more traditional chimpanzee facilities in ways that make it particularly attractive both for zoo visitors and for scientists wishing to carry out behavioural research with these primates.

The 'Budongo Trail' aims to raise public awareness of the plight of our closest living relatives, and research conducted in full view of the public will allow them direct contact with ongoing science. Results feed into a range of interactive exhibits, and there is a large auditorium for public talks and lectures.

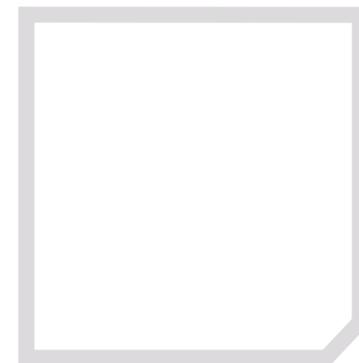
Klaus Zuberbühler, Professor of Psychology at the University of St Andrews and

Scientific Director of the Budongo Conservation Field Station, told us that 'the design of the building gives the primates an unprecedented degree of choice of environments, with various lighting conditions and spatial configurations. These match in some key aspects the chimpanzees' natural African forest habitat, enabling individuals to exhibit a more diverse range of behavioural strategies.'

The exhibit draws heavily on its namesake, the 'Budongo Conservation Field Station' (www.budongo.org) in Budongo Forest, Uganda. This is one of the few long-term field sites studying the behaviour of free-ranging chimpanzees. The Budongo Trail is also directly linked with the University of St Andrews' 'Living Links to Human Evolution Research

Centre' (www.living-links.org), a sister research facility within Edinburgh Zoo that has recently opened its doors to the public.

'Together,' says Zuberbühler, 'the two new primate facilities provide a research infrastructure, which is likely to enhance our capacity to search for what it means to be human. One key aspect of this concerns our extraordinary ability to communicate about events, thoughts and emotions. We rely almost entirely on speech for this – a unique motor skill that affords rapid assembly of simple vocal units into more complex utterances, the carriers of meaning. Evidence



AMAN R THOMSON, RZSS

suggests that our hominid ancestors may not have possessed such sophisticated vocal skills until very recently. How exactly hominids communicated before remains unclear, but one implication is that many of the required cognitive abilities must be significantly older than speech itself, rooted deeply in the primate lineage.' JS

Figure it out

Psychology experiments suggest that most of us associate larger numbers with the right-hand side of space, and smaller numbers with the left-hand side.

But where does this association originate from? New research by Martin Fischer at the University of Dundee indicates that at least part of the answer lies with finger counting – in particular, the tendency most of us have to start counting upwards with the digits of our left hand before moving onto the right.

Fischer first established from a survey of 445 people in Scotland that the majority (66 per cent) tended to begin finger counting with their left hand, with the same bias exhibited among both right- and left-handers.

Fischer then tested whether finger counting preference influences the 'SNARC effect' – the 'spatial-numerical association of response codes'. This is the fact that when instructed to use a right-hand key to indicate 'even' and a left-hand key for 'odd', most people are much quicker at categorising, for example, '8' and '1' than they are '2' and '9'. This is thought to be because for '8' and '1', but not '2' and '9', the hand used to respond matches the spatial association of the numbers.

Fischer's key finding was that participants with the unusual preference for starting finger counting on their right hand didn't show the usual SNARC effect. Writing in a special issue of the journal *Cortex* (tinyurl.com/5l9krz), Fischer said this supports 'the "manumerical cognition" hypothesis – i.e. the idea that finger counting habits influence numerical cognition in healthy adults'. CJ

GROWING COSTS OF DEMENTIA

A report published in May by The King's Fund predicts the costs of mental health services in England will spiral from £22.5 billion today, to £47 billion in 2026, largely as result of the country's growing population, but also because of the rising prevalence of dementia.

The report doesn't make entirely comfortable reading for psychologists. For example, regarding savings that may arise from interventions, the report says that 'increasing the number of people receiving medication provides much greater economic gain than psychological therapies, which may produce similar benefits compared to medication but are far more expensive.'

Yet recognising that psychological treatments may be more acceptable to patients than drugs, the report recommends a greater focus on cost-effective psychological interventions such as computerised CBT.

More welcome to psychologists, the report recommends an expansion of crisis intervention and early intervention services (including psychological care) for psychosis and bipolar disorder.

However, the report concludes that any mental health savings arising from interventions are likely to be in the order of millions of pounds while rising costs are predicted to be in billions. 'Future governments should ensure that funding for health and social care services for people with mental disorders is commensurate with expected future increases in mental health costs, including the real pay and price effect,' it says. CJ

The report, *Paying the Price*, can be downloaded from tinyurl.com/4umuwe

RESEARCH FUNDING NEWS

The Food Standards Agency, under its Food Choice Inequalities programme (Programme 14), wishes to commission research to investigate **influences on children's and young people's food choice within the family**. They are particularly interested in proposals that develop and/or test interventions designed to encourage healthier food choices. The closing date is 25 July 2008.

tinyurl.com/4eut6h

The Nuffield Foundation is offering **New Career Development Fellowships**. The Fellowships offer postdoctoral researchers the opportunity to make a change of research direction to acquire a substantive new body of knowledge, methodology or skill. Awards are made to research projects on issues of social significance developed and carried out in partnership with an experienced social scientist. Four awards of up to £170,000 over three years are available. £25,000 can also be claimed by the experienced research partner. The closing date for application is 1 September 2008.

tinyurl.com/obge8

The **BBSRC's Industry Interchange Programme supports short-term, full- or part-time industry/academic exchanges** that provide strategic advantage to the UK science base and industry arising from reciprocal access to facilities, expertise and/or knowledge. Awards are usually in the range of £10,000 to £30,000. The next closing date for applications is 1 September 2008.

inyu;l.com/3u;3gl

Psychology Beyond Borders, an international non-profit organisation focusing on the **psychosocial impacts of terror attacks, armed conflicts, and natural disasters**, is offering funding for research and action-oriented projects that engage with at least two of their five key areas of mission – research, psychosocial service delivery, education, public policy and building networks. Funding of between US\$5000 and US\$15,000 is available. The closing date for applications is 12 September 2008.

tinyurl.com/4ymp3d

info

For a list of current funding opportunities go to www.bps.org.uk/funds. Funding bodies should e-mail news to Elizabeth Beech on elibee@bps.org.uk for possible inclusion

Synaesthetic sensation

In recent years, the study of synaesthesia – in which people experience a mixing of the senses – has shifted from testing whether the phenomenon is real, to realising that it could provide fresh insights into the workings of the mind.

One example of this is highlighted in a recent issue of the journal *Psychological Science*, in which the British psychologists Julia Simner and Jamie Ward focus on people for whom letters and numbers evoke colours (tinyurl.com/6gze3b). It appears that many synaesthetes share the same, or similar, colour to letter/digit associations, following a rule of usage frequency. For example, the letter 'a', which is common, is often experienced with red, a colour used frequently in our language. The idea is that these kind of patterns could help elucidate the links between colours and language in all our minds.

Simner and Ward first made this observation in a paper published in 2005 (tinyurl.com/6jak3a), but now they've re-analysed some data published last year by Swiss researchers Gian Beeli and colleagues (tinyurl.com/5f2fq5).

Beeli's team presented German-speaking synaesthetes with various letters

and numbers and asked them to use a computer graphics package to generate the colour that these stimuli triggered. Their finding was that more common digits were associated with less intense colours. Simner and Ward allocated the appropriate German verbal labels to the colours the synaesthetes had generated, and, confirming their own earlier results, this showed that more common digits were associated with more frequently used colours. They also analysed data on colour word usage among the general population and found that more frequently used colour words tend to refer to less intense colours.

The pieces of the jigsaw seem to be fitting together to say something about the way we all (whether we are synaesthetic or not) carve up colour space into distinct verbal labels. 'Our research here is one study in a line of research showing that synaesthetic sensations are not the random pairings once thought,' Simner told *The Psychologist*; 'instead, we're learning that they are the surface manifestation of a wonderfully complex underlying system in which features in one modality are mapped very precisely onto those in another.' CJ

Thought-controlled robot

Scientists have passed another important milestone in the field of brain-machine interfaces – an endeavour that will one day allow paralysed people to manipulate objects in the world using just their thoughts.

Before now, patterns of brain cell activity have been decoded in a way that has allowed monkeys and humans to use their thoughts alone to control a computer cursor or even to move a robotic limb. But it hasn't actually been possible for that person or monkey to use a robotic arm to pick things up.

Now Meel Velliste at the University of Pittsburgh and colleagues

have taken things a stage further by training rhesus monkeys to actually pick up food and feed themselves with a multi-jointed robotic limb, using thought power alone (see the *Nature* website at tinyurl.com/5hx9t8).

The monkeys' intentions were recorded via a minute array of electrodes implanted in their primary motor cortex. At first, the monkeys' attempts to control the robotic arm were aided by computerised corrections. But within just a few days of training the monkeys were able to fluently control the arm themselves, and even

started reaching for another piece of fruit while still munching on the last.

Significant hurdles remain before this technology can bring freedom to paralysed patients. The viability of the implanted electrodes deteriorates over a period of weeks, and the technology requires a team of technicians on hand. Lastly, natural mental control of a prosthetic limb will require proprioceptive feedback of where the robot arm is in space and how much power is used in the grip, features not yet incorporated into brain-machine interfacing. CJ

Counselling complaints

An audit of complaints made against members of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has shown that male therapists are disproportionately complained against, and that a surprising number of complaints are made by other therapy professionals or trainees, rather than by clients.

Suky Khele, Clare Symons and Susan Wheeler analysed official BACP records for complaints made against members between 1996 and 2006.

Writing in the journal *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* (tinyurl.com/5ucgt8), Khele's team said their investigations of the complaints record, which are ongoing, could help provide the hard evidence needed to defend the therapeutic profession against unfounded allegations. CJ

HONOURS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

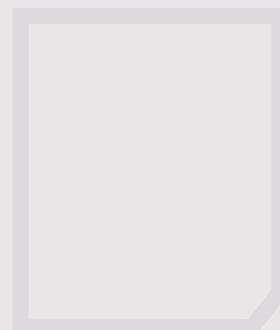
Fellowship of the Royal Society had been awarded to psychologist Professor John Duncan, assistant director of the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit in Cambridge. Duncan, who is described by the Royal Society as 'an unquestioned world leader in study of neural mechanisms underlying higher cognitive function', told *The Psychologist* that he felt honoured and gratified.

'When I first started research there were almost no Royal Society Fellows in psychology (perhaps only Donald Broadbent), but it's a sign of how far the field has come that this is very far from true now. I'm sure that strong bridging to neurophysiology and the brain is one reason for that, along with increasingly well-specified theoretical problems and solutions, and increasingly solid clinical applications.'

Duncan cites psychologist Mike Posner, Professor Emeritus at the University of Oregon, as a key inspiration. 'As my postdoc adviser, he persuaded me that it was time for cognitive psychology to meet single cell electrophysiology.'

Meanwhile, clinical psychologist Tanya Byron, who recently completed a government review of the effects of games and the internet on children, has become Chancellor of Edge Hill University. 'It was an honour to be asked to be the first Chancellor of this fantastic university and a privilege to accept,' Byron said.

Finally, clinical psychologist Professor Shirley Pearce is to be awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Civil Law this summer by the University of East Anglia (UEA). Professor Pearce led UEA's Institute of Health before her appointment as vice-chancellor of Loughborough University in 2005. CJ



Professor John Duncan

PROMOTING HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Employers should inform their staff about the health benefits of physical activity, including benefits to mental well-being, and should help them live more active lives. This includes providing information on local walking and cycling routes, posting signage to encourage stair use and introducing flexible working practices and incentive schemes to make it easier for employees to be more active. The recommendations come in new guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, to which health psychologist Professor Susan Michie (UCL) contributed. **CJ**

See tinyurl.com/6h7k3f

LTNC GUIDELINES

The Royal College of Physicians has published new guidelines on the management of long-term neurological conditions (LTNCs).

The guidelines build on the Quality Requirements in the National Service Framework to explore the interaction between specialist neurology, rehabilitation and palliative care services, and how they may best work together to provide long-term support for people with LTNCs and their carers. The guidelines also provide practical advice for clinicians when caring for someone with an LTNC, as well as outlining indications for specialist referral. **JS**

See tinyurl.com/6hy2ll

PUT OFF BY FRASIER

The way therapists and their clients are portrayed in American TV shows could be putting viewers off seeking professional help for mental health problems, according to David Vogel and colleagues at Iowa State University in a paper published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology* (tinyurl.com/4bzvnd). They recommend using 'counter-advertising' to combat the image of therapists propagated by popular shows like *Frasier*. **CJ**

The sapient paradox – can you dig it?

A new scientific field is emerging that combines archaeology with neuroscience to discover how the human mind evolved. Proponents argue that recognising the role of culture and man-made artefacts is vital if we are to fully understand how human cognition reached its current level of functioning. This means studying the history of how we interact with each

other socially, the emergence of technology and tool use and how these behaviours have a reciprocal relationship with evolutionary brain development.

Progress in the field is highlighted in a new special issue of the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, the contents of which are derived from the 'Sapient Mind'

conference held last year in Cambridge. At the project's heart is what Colin Renfrew at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge calls the 'sapient paradox': The fact that on the one hand the human genome has remained virtually unchanged for at least the last 60,000 years, while on the other hand the human mind has evolved rapidly through

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATING CHALLENGING CHILDREN

The UK government has announced plans for a major overhaul of the way the country's most challenging young people are taught. As many as 70,000 children are currently educated outside mainstream education as a result of their challenging behaviour or special educational needs. The new White Paper *Back on Track – A Strategy for Modernising Alternative Provision for Young People* places an emphasis on helping these children before their behaviour spirals out of control, and includes plans to encourage more private and voluntary sector providers for alternative education (tinyurl.com/5m9u6g).

Independent educational psychologist Kairen Cullen tells *The Psychologist* that she broadly welcomes the news, especially the government's acknowledgement that provision for young children in pupil referral units (PRUs; local authority schools run for excluded children) is generally poor. 'It's great that the government are talking the talk, but whether or not they're going to walk the walk is another matter,' she says. 'I'm not sure that they're going far enough.'

Cullen's reservations stem from her concern that many of the government's proposals are dictated by top-down, political aims, quite removed from the reality on the

ground. She'd like to see more detailed qualitative research conducted from the bottom up. 'It's actually difficult within our profession to get funding for this kind of practice-level research,' she says.

Educational psychologist Dr Jeremy Swinson says publication of the White Paper reflects the fact the government has a stark problem: 'PRUs are expensive and don't work.' He believes the government currently has no clear education philosophy beyond providing a place where very basic education skills are taught. 'Pupils don't like them and on the whole they do not attract good experienced teachers,' he says.

According to Swinson, context is the key: virtually all pupils behave well in good schools. Therefore the emphasis should be on making all schools better at delivering high-quality education and better behaviour. He says educational psychologists are at the fore in this regard; for example, his own research showed training teachers to be more positive towards pupils led to significant improvements in pupils' behaviour (tinyurl.com/5sonjy).

'There are a very small number of pupils that have become so disenchanted with formal schooling that you do need alternative provision,' Swinson says, 'but this should not be "more of the same", but provide a strong vocational emphasis with lots of work-based learning.' **CJ**

the last 10,000 years, in terms of language, numbers, cultural values and practices.

This means that the potential for language, technology and uniquely human values must be inherent in our genome, Renfrew argues, 'but that the material and social contexts of human societies, first effective around the time of the sedentary revolution [approximately 10,000 years ago], made possible their emergence and expression.'

Edwin Hutchins at the University of California San Diego builds on this theme in his re-examination of a study published in 1997 by Roger Thompson and colleagues that purported to show chimpanzees are capable of symbolic thought – the ability to recognise that one thing represents another. Hutchins disputes the idea that the chimps' performance can only be explained by their thinking symbolically, and posits instead that their apparent success at the task is a reflection of the cultural demands of the experiment.

The 'experimental activity elicits a set of practices that orchestrate the capacities of the chimpanzee in interaction with the material and social world', he argues. According to Hutchins, many of our own cognitive abilities similarly reside not in us as a property of our brains but may instead be a feature of our cultural practices.

'Many cognitive outcomes [e.g. reading] produced by human activity systems are properties of our interactions with material and social settings, but we routinely mistake them for properties of ourselves,' he writes. This perspective turns on its head the idea that biological evolution drove the progress



Dietrich Stout demonstrates tool-making techniques from the Early Stone Age

of human culture, and instead sees cultural and technological innovations creating 'new selective pressures to which biological evolution could respond'.

Collaborative work between archaeologists and brain scientists is testing these theoretical ideas. One example is provided by Dietrich Stout at the Institute of Archaeology. He joined forces with Thierry Chaminade at the Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging in London, and others, to find out what patterns of brain activity are associated with progressively more complex tool-making skills, as used by our ancestors.

Stout's team tracked down three archaeologists with the rare ability to perform two types of stone-age tool-making skill: the creation of Oldowan stone chips and more complex Acheulean cutting tools (techniques deployed during the Early Stone Age, between 2.6 to 0.25 million years ago).

Results showed these ancient techniques activate a raft of visuo-motor brain areas,

with the more complex Acheulean tool-making associated with a more extensive network. Importantly, both techniques activate areas that overlap with language-related brain regions. 'Archaeological evidence of Early Stone Age technological change thus traces a trajectory of ever more skill-intensive, bimanual toolmaking methods that overlap functionally and anatomically

with important elements of the human faculty for language,' the researchers explained. Their interpretation is that this shows these abilities evolved in a 'mutually reinforcing' way.

But if culture and technology played such an important part in our cognitive evolution, one question that is still left unanswered is what key mental faculty allowed our ancestors to race ahead culturally relative to other species in the first place. Among several speculative papers in the special issue, Chris Frith says he thinks the answer lies in the uniquely human 'meta-cognitive' ability to recognise when we are being taught. 'I speculate that it is this ability to recognize and learn from instructions rather than mere observation which permitted that advanced ability to benefit from cultural learning that seems to be unique to the human race,' he wrote. **CJ**

I The complete series of articles is available online, with some content free to view (tinyurl.com/6nvqxe)

STRESSING THE DIFFERENCE

Psychologist John Capitanio at the University of California and Marina Emborg of the Wisconsin National Primate Research Center have published an article in *The Lancet* (see tinyurl.com/4tdwrrr) in which they justify the continued use of non-human primates for research on stress, cognitive decline, hormonal effects on cognition, as well as other more biological topics. To take the example of work on prenatal stress, the pair argue that primates are preferable to rodents for experimentation because their level of brain maturity at birth is similar to humans, and because the long-term effects of stress often manifest in relationship problems for which rodents have no equivalent.

SOCIAL ROLE OF OXYTOCIN

A team of Swiss researchers have found the hormone oxytocin can dampen a person's aversion to betrayal. Thomas Baumgartner and colleagues used fMRI to identify which brain areas were activated when participants were betrayed in a financial game. Participants who sniffed oxytocin, but not those who sniffed a placebo, continued to trust a playing partner who betrayed them several times, an effect that was mediated by reduced activity in the brain's fear centre, the amygdala. When similar costs were presented as risks in a computer game, oxytocin made no difference to participants' behaviour, thus showing oxytocin has a specific role in social trust. The findings point to a possible intervention for social phobia. **CJ**

See tinyurl.com/5v67qd

For the latest on statutory regulation, including consultation responses and the progress of the Section 60 order, see www.bps.org.uk/statreg

More psychological expertise wanted

Harriet Gross on coverage of children and young people

Children and young people continue to feature regularly in news, television and other media coverage, though less frequently with reference to psychological expertise than has been the case previously, even on topics that lend themselves to psychological insight and research. For example, *Today* on BBC Radio 4 covered the issue of National Reading Week by talking to a writer and bookshop owner about the value of using different voices when reading stories to young children. For a change, the scepticism expressed by the presenter on this occasion was not directed at psychology researchers.

Earlier in the month, it was reported by the BBC and in the *Times*, *Telegraph* and *Guardian* that the evaluation of the government-sponsored Reading Recovery intervention pilot scheme showed the scheme was successful. According to coverage in *The Times*, it endorsed the existence of a six-month window between five years nine months and six years three months as crucial in the development of reading skills, reinforcing the concept of critical periods in development. Among comments on newspaper blog pages were some pointing out that dyslexic pupils did not necessarily benefit from the

scheme, and earlier in the year there had been findings from Australia that suggested it was not a miracle cure. Judging the effectiveness of interventions is notoriously difficult and is one of the reasons for training psychology students in research methods.

Another example this month is the Dore Programme, promoted as assisting people with dyslexia in reading and covered positively on Radio 4's *You and Yours* shortly before it went out of business (see *News*, p.570). The research on which the success of that scheme was based had already led to the resignation of members of the editorial board of the journal in which it was published, and it has received the attention of Ben Goldacre in his *Bad Science* pages (tinyurl.com/5yyqc7). More skilled psychologists needed, please!

By contrast, BBC's *Child of Our Time* series, staple output that has appeared in

these pages before, is now in its seventh year. The programmes provide evidence and illustration of features of children's development and of psychological topics and make watchable television. This time the topics include creativity, stress and fitting in, which incorporated a study of children's views about being overweight and a repetition of Asch's classic experiment. The close involvement of psychologists in the series and the production of supporting materials through the Open University continues to be a model of how psychology and the media can work well together in promoting public understanding of psychological issues.

As the world's media revealed horrific details of child abuse and imprisonment for 24 years in the quiet provincial town of Amstetten in Austria, there were many questions that demanded answers. When the story first broke and information was scant, there was much speculation about Josef Fritzl's motivation – from the unique nature of Austrian culture, to more individualised analysis.

As more details emerged the media looked to a wide range of psychologists to draw upon their expertise and knowledge of hostage-taking, incest, domestic violence and psychological trauma to provide answers. Questions were asked as to Josef Fritzl's mental state and how he kept up his double life for so long. James Thompson (University College London) said that Josef Fritzl 'must have had

delusions of grandeur and importance, wanting to dominate and have absolute control' (*The Guardian*).

Questions were asked about his wife Rosemarie. How was Fritzl able to cover his tracks for so long? And how did his authoritarian rule over the family affect her? 'Maybe it was to her advantage not to ask questions,' said Michael Berry, of Manchester Metropolitan University. 'He is in control. He tells her what he wants her to know. She knows her place and keeps her mouth shut. They live almost separate existences' (*Daily Telegraph*).

Answers were sought about the children and their mother who were locked away for so long – what would be the physical and psychological consequences of such trauma? Professor Jay Belsky from Birkbeck College tried to

offer a note of optimism: 'Potentially, the children could have led tolerably rich social lives – there were four people there, at least three of them for a long period of time... We've seen enough surprises in human development of children doing better than expected under seemingly atrocious conditions' (BBC News).

When stories of this nature first break, journalists ask psychologists to satisfy the public's need for answers. Psychologists have a wealth of expertise and evidence to draw on to attempt to provide a better understanding of events, but can be put in a difficult position when information is scarce and journalists desire answers. Nevertheless, we should welcome the fact that the public to turn to psychologists for answers when the truth is so bizarre and apparently inexplicable. **JEREMY HORWOOD**

contribute

This is the page of the Society's Press Committee, which aims to promote and discuss psychology in the media.

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have tips for others based on experiences, or if you know of a forthcoming programme or broadcast, please contact the

'Media' page coordinating editor, Fiona Jones (Chair, Press Committee), on F.A.Jones@leeds.ac.uk