Understanding and sound

I AM a simple-minded person at heart, a true believer in Occam’s Razor (the principle states that the explanation of any phenomenon should make as few assumptions as possible, eliminating those that make no difference in the observable predictions of the explanatory hypothesis or theory; that is to say, the law of parsimony). This is the first technical research-based work that is simple to understand, simply because it follows this principle and makes the complex easy to understand.

I suggest academia reference this book for every student of psychology, not only as a course aide-memoire, but also for exam revision. Frith has produced an enthralling discussion on the subtle links between mind and brain, sometimes with humorous liaisons between himself, as narrator, and others who might be labelled as sceptics, unbelievers.

Psychology has struggled to ‘stand upright’ as a science in its own right; it has been termed a soft science; a science that has, until now, not had the information or machinery to put credence to the many theories, hypotheses and models that psychology has postulated over the years. Such have been frowned upon, even scorned and dismissed by the ‘pure’ sciences, philosophers and the like. What Frith has succinctly achieved is to state fact, bounded by hard scientific research in neuroscience (brain science) and psychology, on one of the many subjects that need to be aired scientifically; and done it such a way that someone with a minimal understanding of the ‘workings of the mind’ can comprehend.

The author opens his writings by saying that the book describes how the brain makes (this) magic. When I studied psychology, I was forever confounded by the complexity of how academic and research psychology discussed and described the varying aspects of the brain (and the mind) and the interfaces with the world as we perceive it. How are we aware of moving or not moving a limb? How do we perceive a face? What is ‘me’ or the ‘I’? What is free will or determinism? What is real or not? Is there a real world outside – or what?

After serious, though easily understandable, discussion and argument, based on extremely sound science, Frith leads the reader to understand how we are embedded in the mental world of others (yet another interesting discussion) just as we are within the physical world. That what we do and think is moulded by whomever we are interacting with. However, by contrast, this is not how we experience ourselves; we experience ourselves as agents and with our own mind.

Interestingly, Frith puts forward that all is an illusion created by our own brains; and from this review point of view, how do we experience that scientifically? Read the book!

Whilst the book is excellent in my view, it is regrettable that the publisher has allowed ‘Americanism’ to invade the obvious Britishness of the text, which I do not believe is what the author conceived, and a significant number of typographical errors that spoilt an otherwise excellently written book on one aspect of the mind.

Ian Clancy is a consulting psychologist with Orchard Counselling Practice, Oxfordshire.

ADHD – A basic introduction

GIVEN that ADHD occupies a substantial quantity of child and adolescent research, this 103-page book is an ambitious undertaking. Based upon Lesley Hughes’ PhD research, the content serves as a broad-brush introduction to the complexities of the problem, with a particular focus on the school setting. It has a number of strengths, including clear presentation, relaxed communication style, incorporation of case studies, identification of relevant research, and a summary of the key points from each chapter. The need for working in a multidisciplinary manner is also emphasised repeatedly throughout the text. As a basic introduction this book is useful, but it provides little additional information for those educationalists working daily with children with ADHD.

Fred Gravestock is with New Horizons Childcare.
In fMRI we trust

This review is proving challenging. I want to applaud a book that is packed with ‘empirical truth’, but at the same time I want to contend its indisputable tone. Della Sala and colleagues have laudable intentions in their desire to separate out the academic wheat from the hackster chaff and provide an up-to-date account of what we know, or think we know, about the mind and brain. The authors are clearly top-quality academic wheat and present evidence to deal with a large number of mind and brain myths, but as a reader I drifted between moments of self-gratulatory smugness, through to feeling like an uncomfortable novice.

I knew about the ‘dual-brain’ and NLP myth; after all, who doesn’t? But I soon realised I had got the bilingual/cognitive ability link all wrong and let’s not go into my understanding of ‘foreign accent syndrome’. So, am I wheat, or chaff? It was comforting to know that noteworthy workers in this area validate some of my understandings.

Less comfortable was the manner in which my ‘chaff-ness’ was handled. The use of evidence from hard empirical science is presented as the authoritative means to understand the human experience, and I felt this often demeaned other views. For example, I am not sure if postmodernists would regard their methods of enquiry as ‘anything goes’. This book is certainly written in the language of the convinced by those who work in the world of a declared and knowable objectivity.

I am sympathetic to the evidence presented here and clearly want to use it to facilitate the debates about mind and body, but also want to be able to step back and be cautious about the findings. After all, it took almost 40 years for Einstein’s general theory of relativity to be backed up by empirical findings. Obtaining the evidence does not always mean we have the answer, but rather some more insight assembled by using an alternative measuring technique. I wonder, hypothetically of course, that if a brain scan were to indicate that the ‘language’ part of the brain was more active during the night, would we wake up children for a nocturnal vocabulary learning experience. I doubt it. Equally I expect we only accept, or at least pay attention to, the findings that validate our own values and assumptions about the complexity of being human. That said, the book is a fabulous resource and often compelling read, and I am heartened by the clear attempt to provide information to protect ‘us’ from pseudo-psychologists and hacksters. Surely this is an important work for psychologists, not just to fix the broken but also to prevent more becoming broken.

Tall Tales... builds on an earlier Della Sala (1999) edited volume on the same theme of dispelling the myths people hold about the mind and brain. The present volume repeats some of the content but significantly adds to this to provide 29 chapters designed to meet most interests. Anderson’s chapter on race and IQ is sensitively written and provides a useful synthesis of science and politics and ends by reminding us that ‘the misery of the poor is always caused by social institutions and never by the laws of nature’. Although not the intention of researchers many neuro-findings appear in the national media as a deterministic fait accompli. Academics do not see it as such, since findings offer only probabilities that depend on a profusion of variables.

The discussion on ‘The truth about deception’ first worries and then soothes as we are first led to reject and then accept our deceit. Foreign accent syndrome is exposed as a misrepresentation of more common linguistic conditions and vitally highlights that the distortion into an ‘accent’ may in fact be due to the perception of the listener. Solm’s and Turnbull’s chapter at the end of the book on sleep and REM attempts to reconcile neuroscience within Freudian theory and in doing so banishes a myth and, for me at least, opens up the debate again to let in a little more subjectivity. Now that can’t be a bad thing.

Alan Bainbridge is a senior lecturer in childhood studies at Canterbury Christ Church University.

A NICE antidote

The Therapy Experience: How Human Kindness Heals

Roger Kingerlee

Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books; 2006;
PB £14.00 (ISBN 978 1898059 78 3)

Reviewed by Rudi Coetzer

ELT like dullness was on the verge of getting me into a half-nelson. Or perhaps it was the weather. Things were looking rather bleak in health care. Guidelines, evidence-based practice, 10 sessions of this to cure that, algorithms to structure everyone’s practice, psychotherapy at arm’s length, meta-analyses, and so forth. You get the picture. The times we live in? A familiar aspect of many practitioners’ gradual adjustment to managed health care? And then I got to
read Kingerlee’s book about psychotherapy. What an antidote for NICE and all that.

Yes, of course we need science to inform practice. I really do believe in this. And guidelines to ensure equity and standards of care. Very important also. But what about the role of humanity when delivering care? When science starts to dictate everything, the art of practice may be at risk. Fortunately, Kingerlee reminds us of the often forgotten generics that make a humane (and I suspect more effective) psychotherapist: the ability to recognize our developmentally hard-wired self-centredness; seeing that self-awareness is a prerequisite for us to become more mindful; being prepared to be mindful and give kindness to people; understanding that despite our best efforts, sometimes this may be the most valuable thing we can give to people. These are some of the points Kingerlee makes in his book, excellently illustrated with case studies and applied to different populations.

However, don’t be alarmed, Kingerlee’s book is not a rudderless ship when it comes to theory and evidence; he very eloquently provides the theoretical underpinnings and evidence from several different academic disciplines (e.g. the neurosciences) for what he has to say. Some of the data presented are more robust than others, but overall it makes a lot of sense, without becoming a theoretical overview disconnected from practice. The practitioner perspective remains paramount throughout.

Finally, Kingerlee’s writing style is congruent with the content he covers – demonstrating throughout the text the role of warmth, therapist transparency, openness and honesty. This book is for everyone who works with people experiencing difficulties, irrespective of the practitioner’s specialization or level of experience. Even the best scientist-practitioner has to learn and relearn the art of psychotherapeutic practice. Without kindness, empathy and warmth it is perhaps not possible to effectively apply the techniques for which evidence of efficacy may well exist. I loved reading this book.

■ Rudi Coetzer works for the North Wales Brain Injury Service, Conwy & Denbighshire NHS Trust.

Zeal and hard work required

**The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance**

K. ANDERS ERICSSON, NEIL CHARNESS, PAUL J. FELTovich & ROBERT R. HOFFMAN (Eds.)

CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2006; Pb. £35.00 (ISBN 978 0 521 60081 1)

REVIEWED BY Remco Polman

Extraordinariness, genius or prodigious performance has fascinated mankind over the centuries. Our thinking on what it takes to achieve the highest level of performance in domains as diverse as music, medicine, sport or mathematics has been greatly influenced by Galton’s tripartite theory of human achievement: capacity, zeal and ability to work hard. In the past, capacity (basic endowments) has been used to explain individual differences in performance – the ‘nature’ view of expertise. This handbook, however, provides the reader with well-supported evidence that nature’s influence on the development of expertise or expert performance is limited, thereby echoing Darwin’s view that ‘excepting fools, men did not differ much in intellect, only in zeal and hard work’.

Many of the chapters of this excellent handbook advocate the idea of becoming an expert is a learning process for which one has to engage in years of deliberate practice. However, it is more than just experience of participation. Most people who achieved expert status in their chosen domains do not have some inborn ‘talent’ but show zeal and a capacity to work hard.

What this handbook also makes clear is the specificity of expertise. Indeed, there are very few people who reach elite levels of performance in more than one domain. The opportunity to learn and an exceptionally supportive social environment (e.g. parental support, socio-economic conditions and personal interest) appear to be prerequisites to becoming an expert.

This book is suited to academics, parents, educators, trainers, coaches and politicians, or any who foster the development of individuals. In every domain of life the study of expert performance will be an integral part of the science of learning, human adaptation to training, as well as the identification of constraints on achieving the highest level of performance.

■ Dr Remco Polman is in the Department of Sport, Health & Exercise Science, University of Hull.

**SMALL AND PERFECTLY FORMED**

The Psychodynamic Counselling Primer A Concise, Accessible, Comprehensive Introduction

MAVIS KLEIN

ROSS-ON-WYE: PCCS BOOKS; 2006; Pb. £10.50 (ISBN 1 898059 85 3)

REVIEWED BY Sharyn Smith

HOW can anyone claim to provide a ‘comprehensive’ introduction to psychodynamic counselling in only 122 pages (including index, glossary, appendix and series introduction)? Klein can. Her scope is wide-ranging. Beginning with a detailed description of traditional psychoanalysis, she moves on to post-Freudians providing a synopsis of how each theory differs from Freud’s. She cogently explains the relationship between transactional analysis and psychoanalysis. Transcriptions enliven the text. There is even a courageous attempt to address the criticisms faced by psychodynamic counselling in the Brave New World of evidence-based approaches.

Know someone who wants a simple, concise description of psychoanalysis or transactional analysis? Get them this book.

■ Sharyn Smith is an educational psychologist in West Sussex.
UCH like its predecessor, *The Psychology of Love* (1988), this is an edited collection of essays each of which attempts to analyse the whole phenomenon of ‘romantic’ love from a certain theoretical perspective, rather than focusing on a single aspect of the topic. This approach makes for a broad introduction to the young field of the scientific study of human love relationships, although it unfortunately also leads to many studies or concepts being discussed in similar terms in multiple chapters. The hands-off editorial style, with no cross-references to other chapters or other such apparatus, compounds this problem and leads to a slightly anarchic feel.

However, these issues do not detract from the value and interest of the research presented here. A number of the contributors approach love from what could be broadly called evolutionary perspectives, discussing the adaptive function of the various forms of love and their relationship to other evolved behaviours, such as maternal attachment. Others discuss the cultural and social factors that shape our understanding and perhaps experience of love, although the authors appear to all agree upon the fact that love exists, in a more-or-less uniform manner, across the globe. Other topics covered include the fascinating new field of the neuroscience of love, and a number of different, although converging, attempts to provide a taxonomy of the various forms of the phenomenon.

There is no doubt that psychologists have only really begun to understand human relationships. As is mentioned in the sadly brief concluding essay, almost nothing is known about why a certain person falls in love with a certain other, for example. Yet a basic consensus seems to emerging, and this book provides a strong overview of the foundations to what is certainly a rapidly developing body of knowledge.

Jamie Horder is a graduate student at the Department of Psychiatry, Oxford University.

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**Developing three elements of creativity**

**Feinstein** presents a comprehensive discussion concerning the basic concept of creativity and the patterns of development for individuals engaged in creative endeavour. This text has clearly been the fruits of many years of questioning in the field and demonstrates a well-grounded empirical basis to the author’s line of enquiry.

The core of creative development consists of three elements, and this text adopts this same structure: the formation of creative interests; the process, exploration and development of the interest creatively; and the defining and execution of projects rooted in this interest and growing out of its development. The book is filled with case study material of individuals who have achieved across a wide range of creative fields. Individuals famous in the arts and social sciences, technology and business include Virginia Woolf, Thomas Edison, Charles Darwin and Piet Mondrian. This rich contextualised information is integrated with the creative development of contemporary individuals interviewed by the author.

The author himself acknowledges that some may see his text as too sweeping and an attempt to seek a false generality regarding the development of creativity. However, I consider the text to be an important step in attempting to understand individual differences in the creative process. Feinstein adopts a theoretical framework which integrates both rich case study detail regarding the individual, and the wider cultural and environment place of these individuals in society. The text is highly affordable and a recommended read for any professional interested in the field.

Dr Ruth Hewston is a Senior Research Fellow at the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, University of Warwick.