



Book Reviews

In this edition we have a smaller number of reviews than usual, but each is excellent and the books themselves are as diverse as ever, covering cognitive psychology, school-based mental health and the role of cognitive neuroscience in education. Many thanks to Paul, Carmel and Sarah for taking the time to read the books and perform the reviews. I am in the process of collecting a new set of texts for review in the next edition, and as usual will email ENSEC members requesting volunteers to perform the reviews (don't forget, you get to keep the book by way of thanks for your help) in the near future. In the meantime, please enjoy the three reviews below.

Neil Humphrey, book reviews editor

1. *The Brain At School: Educational Neuroscience in the Classroom*

Author: John Geake
Publisher: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press
Year of Publication: 2009
ISBN: 0335234216

John Geake tells us in the first sentence of this book about his belief that 'it is important for teachers to know about how cognitive neuroscience might inform their work' (p1). Some readers might consider such a declaration superfluous. Surely, it is self evident that teachers would be interested in understanding the processes of learning. How can a teacher begin to approach his or her craft without such knowledge? The proverbial Martian would almost certainly assume that a species, such as ours, which devotes such enormous resources of time and money to a formal system of education, would want to ensure that such resources were being used in accordance with the best available information about how to bring about learning, which would have to include something about how the brain works in relation to learning. Wouldn't it? Clearly, some teachers are interested in accessing such information, and Geake illustrates very early in this book that there are teachers who have important and penetrating questions to ask about the relationship between biology and learning that are also interesting to cognitive neuroscientists. These include questions about the interactions between brain difference, gender and learning styles, and the relationship between cognitive performance and emotion. On the one hand Geake is eager to show that cognitive neuroscience has much to offer in addressing these issues in ways which will be of interest and value to educational policy makers and practitioners. However, he is clearly concerned (and not a little frustrated) by what he sees as barriers to accessing this knowledge. He complains about the contemporary 'antiscientific postmodernism of much academic discourse about education' (p2) and concludes the book with by reflections on his own 'boredom and annoyance... and

extreme irritation' (p191) at the lack of intellectual grit which he perceives in many of the presentations he encounters in international education conferences, where limp, hackneyed ideology passes for knowledge.

A less optimistic writer might despair at the shades of indifference and hostility which accompany references to scientific discourses in parts of the world of educational studies. But Geake is nothing if not optimistic. The book is suffused with an enthusiasm for his subject that is only matched by his breadth of knowledge and erudition. With remarkable economy, he takes us through the basics of cognitive neuroscience, including an account of the basic questions which drive this area of study and then provides a comprehensive introduction to the research methods used by researchers in this field. Importantly, in the setting the cognitive neuroscience scene, Geake is careful to point out both the exciting possibilities revealed whilst reminding us of the inevitable limitations of an area of scientific study which is not only concerned with 'the most complex object in the universe' (p9) (i.e. the brain), but that, in its relative brief life span as a sub discipline, employs relatively new and, therefore, crude instruments. One of Geake's main points here is that cognitive neuroscience has a very long way to go, and this journey will be all the more fruitful if it is informed by the kinds of questions that are of central concern to educators. Having said this, one Geake's central aims in this book is to deflate certain 'neuro-myths' which have been promulgated by less well informed enthusiasts, such as those who have developed educational approaches based on simplistic and inaccurate ideas about hemispheric specialisation in the brain, or the relationship between certain kinds of physical activity and brain development.

Seven of the 10 chapters deal with key educational topics, including: memory, cognitive ability, creativity, social and emotional functioning, literacy, numeracy and expressive arts. Each chapter outlines key educational issues relating to the topic and gives an overview of the related neuro-scientific evidence before going on to discuss the implications of this for policy and practice. Chapters conclude with suggestions as to how the educational neuroscience agenda might be furthered in relation to the chosen topic through the presentation of potential research questions. The final chapter looks to the future and draws together key issues which have been raised in relation to the developing education neuroscience agenda.

This thoughtful and well-researched book manages to be stimulating, and even entertaining in places, without ever talking down to the non-specialist reader. This is not to say that it is always an easy read, though readers can be assured that their efforts will be rewarded. As a result the book will be of value to anyone who has a genuine interest in the improvement of teaching and learning, whether they be practitioners, policy makers or academics.

Paul Cooper

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2. Cognitive Psychology: Connecting Mind, Research, and Everyday Experience – Second Edition (International Student Edition)*

Editors: E. Bruce Goldstein
Publisher: Wadsworth
Year of Publication: 2009
ISBN 9780495103530

As a introductory text, Goldstein provides a whistle-stop tour of major themes encompassed within the domain of cognitive psychology; beginning with two foundational chapters addressing the historical development of the discipline and links between cognition and neurophysiological processes, the content then proceeds to introduce key constructs, theory and research pertaining to perception; attention; memory; knowledge; visual imagery; language; problem solving; reasoning and decision making. This second edition sees updated source material throughout and the addition of bulleted chapter summaries to enhance

consolidation of the material. Extension of each chapter's core coverage is facilitated by the inclusion of 'if you want to know more' and 'something to consider' sections, which provide the reader with notable references and brief resumes of current advancements in topic-specific research. 'Method' sections are also now included within each chapter which, as standalone reference points, provide an overview of key experimental procedures, methods and paradigms that coincide with first mention in the main body of text (e.g., dichotic listening; brain imaging). Moreover, this edition is supported by access to a bank of online resources; 'Coglab 2.0' which enables participation in a range of experiments referred to in the text (e.g., lexical decision making; serial position effect in short term memory), and a companion website including sample essay questions.

Goldstein's text is pitched at a very basic level and assumes no prior knowledge of the material described. Technical description and specialist terminology is minimal and, where possible, examples from everyday experience are provided to aid understanding and reinforce key concepts. Whilst in one respect this can be interpreted as a relative strength of the work which will no doubt increase its appeal for a subset of the target audience (i.e., A-level/foundation year undergraduate psychology students), the content is rather too superficial and limited in scope to satisfy those seeking a thorough grounding in theory and current perspectives pertinent to cognitive psychology. Despite receiving an update, the majority of the commentary is focussed upon 'classical' findings from the literature (i.e., empirical work drawn from the 1960s, 70s and 80s), and whilst these are clearly important for contextualisation and exploration of the underpinnings of many key principles in the domain, more focus might have been given over to recent developments in the field which too often appear as 'afterthoughts' tagged on to the end of chapters (e.g., cursory mention of the 'episodic buffer' as part of discussion on working memory), or in the guise of 'if you want to know more' sections (e.g., mirror neurons). A developmental/lifespan perspective on key cognitive processes is similarly under-acknowledged.

Nevertheless, the book follows an accessible organisational framework; chapter outlines and summaries serve well as quick reference guides to topic coverage and lively, within-chapter formatting promotes engagement with content, through various 'demonstrations' of classic experimental paradigms (e.g., Stroop effect), the inclusion of intermittent 'test yourself' sections and the use of the various elaborative and generative learning devices noted previously. However, certain improvements to the layout would likely enhance reader experience; for instance, despite their utility, 'method' section inserts tend to interrupt narrative flow and might have been more clearly demarcated from the main text to indicate supplementary vs. compulsory reading if required. Similarly, the reader is directed to refer to a batch of coloured images located on a supplementary insert in the centre of the book in order to fully comprehend portions of the commentary – inclusion of these images alongside the relevant text would have been preferable for ease of reference and continuity.

Aside from these issues, the clarity of this instructional text alongside the provision of ancillary online material for enrichment, signals its suitability for an entry-level psychology audience for whom it should serve well as a springboard to more challenging literature in the area.

* A revised, third edition of the main text (though not an 'international edition') has now been released (July 2010) which may well have addressed some of the issues raised throughout the course of this review; interested readers should also consult this newer format.

Sarah Davis

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3. Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being: Completing the Picture

Editor: **Brett Brown**
Publisher: **Lawrence Erlbaum Associates**
Year of Publication: **2008**
ISBN-13 978 0 8058 6313 0

The ‘measurement’ of well-being in children and young people through social indicators across a range of domains has been developing and growing in sophistication since the 1960s. ‘Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being’ presents a collection of updated papers from a 2001 conference focusing on the development, dissemination and application of key social indicators of child and youth well-being, that Land et al (in chapter 14) argue are increasingly used to describe the conditions for children, monitor child outcomes and set goals for children’s well-being.

In Parts I and II the contributors critically evaluate key indicators in the areas of health and education. In Part III the chapters that discuss social and emotional development indicators would be of particular interest to IJEE readers, focusing respectively on middle childhood, adolescence and young adult years. Part IV contextualizes development indicators through analysis of the family environment, the peer environment and school and community. Part V discusses the practical applications of social indicators as tools to inspire change and promote policy development; and Part VI looks at the complexities of developing composite index of child well-being, focusing particularly on the development of the Child Well-Being Index (CWI).

Each chapter, representing as they do individual contributions to what must have been a highly motivating conference, are designed to ‘stand alone’ mostly including their own conceptual definitions of key indicators, identification where possible of reliable and valid measurement tools and suggestions as to how further research in the area. The contributors are exclusively researchers in the field of child and youth well-being located in American Universities and Organizations; so colleagues working outside of the United States of America would find the theoretical base of great interest but would have to in many instances locate equivalent studies and indicators in their own national settings.

Aimed at policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics in the social indicators field and associated disciplines; this book is accessible, logically presented and it is easy to navigate around the relevant sections. A clear introductory section by the editor introduces some of the key themes that run through the book; the need to develop more commonality across disciplines, the need for more culturally sensitive indicators and a greater emphasis on the development of indicators of positive well-being.

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4. School-Based Mental Health. A Practitioner Guide to Contemporary Practice

Author: **Christer, RW and Mennuti, RB**
Publisher: **Taylor and Francis**
Year of Publication: **2009**
ISBN: **9780415955584**

The rapid changes taking place in the world today are presenting children and young people with ever new challenges and pressures, including amongst others commercial pressures, violence, stress at school,

family break ups and emotional distress, peer pressure and bullying, and relative isolation from adults. Education needs to reflect these current realities and challenges for it to remain valid and relevant to the lives of children in the 21st century. It needs to move beyond simplistic performance indicators and become more engaged in the challenges faced by children today, helping in the formation of academically, socially and emotionally literate young people. As Maurice Elias put in one of the chapters in this book, we must prepare our young people for the tests of life not for a life of tests.

School Based Mental Health is promoted as a practitioners' guide within this broader, holistic approach to education, 'reframing, reshaping and restructuring' what schools are about. It seeks to provide a framework for mental health professionals on the promotion of mental health in school at multiple intervention levels. More specifically the book aims to "provide practitioners a broad overview of school-based mental health services, to review different theoretical orientations for clinicians to use in their practice, and to offer a discussion and integration of the commonalities and differences in approaches" (p.4). In seeking to address these three objectives, the editors take a multi-level intervention framework, presenting various and different intervention approaches and perspectives at universal, targeted, and intensive interventions. The book is divided in three major sections. The first section discusses universal interventions for the promotion of mental health in schools, with chapters on integrating mental health in school through a comprehensive approach, on building resilience in schools, on adopting schoolwide positive behaviour supports, and on promoting social and emotional learning in school. I think this is one of the stronger sections of the book, with four excellent chapters on how the promotion of mental health may become integrated and infused into the life of the school.

The second and third major sections deal with targeted and intensive interventions, with various chapters on specific forms of interventions for children and young people in difficulty, namely rationale emotive therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, behaviour modification, reality therapy, systemic family therapy and Adlerian therapy. The third major section discusses non traditional interventions such as art therapy, play therapy, dance therapy and mindfulness therapy. This section might have considered other non traditional approaches such as drama therapy, animal assisted therapy and narrative therapy amongst others. The chapters in these two sections are presented within a common framework, namely a brief overview of the theoretical orientation of the therapeutic approach, its applications to school settings, and an analysis of the evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention. At the end of each chapter, the respective authors apply the therapeutic intervention to the Case of Todd, a ten year old African American boy experiencing social, emotional and behaviour difficulties at school. This provides the reader with the opportunity to compare the commonalities and differences between these various therapeutic approaches, with the intention to help the practitioner decide on which approach to pursue further in his or her practice. The further readings at the end of most of the chapters are very helpful in this regard.

On the whole this book provides an easy to read and useful guide for mental health professionals and practitioners on the different therapeutic interventions they might use in school at universal, targeted and selective interventions. Most of the contributions in the book are by academics and professionals in the area, particularly university-based school-psychologist trainers, school-psychology doctoral students, and clinicians. Indeed the book is targeted mainly for mental health practitioners working in school as well trainers of school and child psychologists. As the subtitle of the book itself indicates, this is not a manual for clinicians. It is a practitioner guide to various theoretical orientations in mental health practice in schools, with the aim of helping practitioners to develop a sound theoretical style. Practitioners are then referred to further reading and training in that particular orientation. Even as a guide, however, the book would have benefitted from more practical examples, more illustrations from school settings, and practical and reflective activities for the reader in each chapter.

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