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Book reviews

by *Mary Mountstephen*

Tackling Selective Mutism: A Guide for Professionals and Parents

Edited by Benita Rae Smith and Alice Sluckin

Jessica Kingsley Publishers
£19.99
ISBN: 978-1-848905-393-8

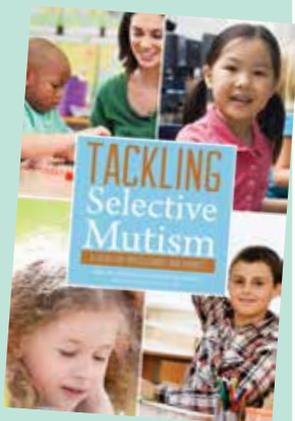
Rae Smith is a speech and language therapist and lecturer and her co-editor is a psychiatric social worker and founder of the Selective Mutism Information and Research Association. (SMIRA). Both have published widely and this book is aimed at professionals and family members.

The book is divided into four parts, opening with a historical perspective covering the last 50 years and the founding of SMIRA. The contributing authors then cover aspects of this condition in relation to comorbidity, autistic spectrum disorders and stammering. Issues such as medication and other approaches are described as well as the treatment of selective mutism in other languages.

The book includes a number of case studies and provides examples of how therapies such as music therapy and play interaction have helped.

The authors make a plea for all health visitors, social workers and nursery staff to have basic training in the recognition and management of selective mutism in young children to avoid them developing a “costly and harmful long-term condition”.

This is a well-written and practical book which provides sound advice for those working or living with children with this condition. It would also be useful as a reference book for mainstream schools and early years settings to raise awareness.



Cues for Learning and Teaching in Flow

Bill Hubert

Bal-A-Vis-X
£16.99
ISBN: 978-0-9908488-1-3

Bill Hubert is a teacher by profession who developed a passion for helping disadvantaged students failing in school. This is his second book outlining his findings and experiences and it is a practical and insightful book about how he believes children's learning can be improved through a physical programme. It has been

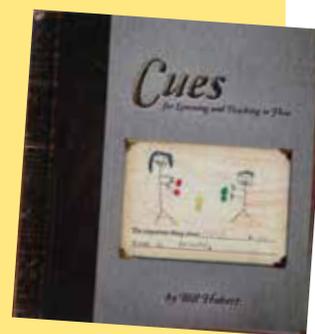
written for teachers, occupational therapists, parents and “everyone who works to benefit anyone who struggles”.

Hubert draws on the work of Temple Grandin, Antonio Damasio and Oliver Sachs, among others, in providing a context for his approach; he stresses that this book arose out of observations which prompted him to search for answers.

Hubert has a background in martial arts and has developed a programme called Bal-A-Vis-X. This brings together balance, auditory and visual exercises that use beanbags and balls rhythmically. The exercises have been developed and extended over many years of working with students of all ages and a number of students assist in training workshops.

He explains how subtle balance disturbances can impact upon sensory and cognitive processing, attention and sequencing of information and then proceeds to outline the components of Bal-A-Vis-X, which are based primarily on tracking activities and rhythm sequences.

The book does not cover the exercises themselves, but acts as a primer to raise awareness of and interest in this type of approach. It is well written and researched and I enjoyed reading it.



Touching A Nerve: Our Brains, Our Selves

Patricia S. Churchland

W.W. Norton and Company

£16.99

ISBN: 978-0-393-34944-3

The author of this book is Professor Emerita of Philosophy at the University of California where she specialises in neuro-philosophy.

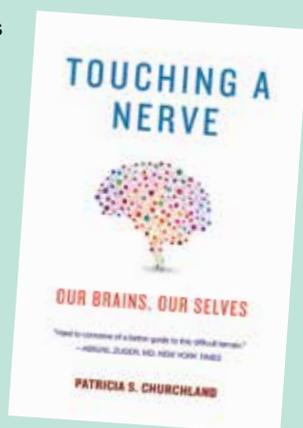
In this interesting book she explains the latest brain science and explores its ethical and philosophical implications in relation to concepts such as identity and free will.

The book is written in a very accessible style and the author draws the reader into her exploration of how the brain has evolved and how our understanding of it has also evolved. She explores historical ideas about the brain and the mind and how these were linked to the understanding of emotions such as fear, distress and aggression.

In a chapter devoted to habits and self-control, Churchland uses examples from her childhood and from the animal world to illustrate her points and she describes the now well-known “marshmallow test”, which indicated that children who could defer gratification or rewards tended to be more successful in later life.

Churchland describes very vividly what is known about how the brain functions in relation to individuals, and how we function physically, emotionally and mentally. It provides great and readable insight into these weighty subjects.

For those seeking further reading, each chapter is extensively referenced at the end of the book.



Sensation and Perception

John Harris

Sage Publications

£39.99

ISBN: 978-0-85702-2

This wide-ranging textbook covers perceptual processes relating to the senses and it also explores theories and research relating to the perception of emotions, attractiveness and the recognition of faces.

Each chapter opens with a series of questions that are then discussed, and closes with an overview and summary, together with suggestions for further reading. There is also a companion website which provides access to multiple-choice questions.

The author is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Reading, where he has taught about perception for over 20 years. The book is aimed at students, but there is much in here for the reader or student interested in subjects such as attention and awareness, taste and smell, touch and pain. Harris describes the ways in which much of the brain is implicated in processes such as vision and how the sensory systems develop over time.

Harris writes in an academic style, but the layout is attractive and enables the reader to access the text more readily. There are a number of colour illustrations to clarify points and each chapter encourages the reader to reflect on their understanding by providing “Test Yourself Questions”.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter on attention and awareness as it adds to the current debates about different kinds of concentration and whether it can be improved.

