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Intelligence and the Brain: Solving the Mystery of Why People Differ in IQ and How a Child Can Be a Genius

Dennis Garlick
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Dennis Garlick takes a novel and perhaps risky approach in writing *Intelligence and the Brain:* He discusses material that even experts may be unfamiliar with, yet he opted to write the book for a general audience. Why? Because, says the author, “We will see that up until now, psychology has failed to explain intelligence because some of the most basic assumptions made by psychology are wrong. Only by rejecting these assumptions can serious progress be made in understanding human intelligence.”

This makes for a particularly intriguing work, since the average reader is getting an inside look at advanced theories about intelligence from an expert. While at times the book may be challenging to read, it is written in everyday language, which does much to make complex material relatively easy to comprehend.

Garlick begins with what he calls “a surprisingly new definition of intelligence,” which involves the ability to understand abstractions. He points out that the process of forming a “mental representation of the abstraction that is independent of the context” is what leads to an understanding of human intelligence.

Garlick then explores understanding through measurement, IQ, and brain science, demonstrating how brain science helps to explain differences in the ability to understand.

The second half of the book addresses the manner in which the brain produces human intelligence, including the all-important “sensitive period,” which the author defines as “a certain age range during which experience is most effective.” This leads into a fascinating discussion of the “true importance” of school, which, Garlick believes, is “not in the facts or knowledge taught to children,” but rather in teaching “the ability to understand abstractions.” Relating this to the workplace, Garlick contends that employers view a college graduate’s good grades as evidence that the individual is adept at understanding abstractions—meaning the person would likely be successful at a job, even if the job requirements do not directly relate to the field of the graduate’s degree.

The author closes with a compelling overview of “how a child can be a genius” and what that means for childhood education. He concludes that “improving intelligence is possible, but it is more likely to occur if children are given the right experiences at the right ages.”

Intelligence and the Brain is a fascinating and important work that offers new information about intelligence and, just as important, makes it available to the public at large in a digestible form. Dennis Garlick’s extremely well-written book will provide much to ponder for experts and for anyone with an interest in the latest research on intelligence and genius.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (August 23, 2010)

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