

Nurturing a Healthy Mind: Doing What Matters Most for Your Child's Developing Brain

Edited by Michael C. Nagel Exisle Publishing, 2012, 240 pp., \$32.99, ISBN: 9781921966026
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Neuropsychological research is uncovering a wealth of knowledge about how the brain works and develops. This research is often reported in hard-to-understand scientific language within academic publications. Generally, the main findings are not communicated or made accessible to the general public. Nagel attempts to address this communication divide by producing a book that seeks to inform parents and caregivers about our current understanding of the workings of the brain and how this shapes the ways a child develops.

Nagel attempts to reconceptualise the way one looks at how the growth of a child's brain impacts on their physical, cognitive, language and emotional development. He outlines the neurological processes underlying some of the key developmental changes, such as learning to talk, walk, socialise, read and write. These neurological changes are described across various cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions in a chronological order throughout the book, covering development from the neo-natal period through to middle childhood.

Importantly, this book shows that children's brains grow and change in various ways, with some parts developing earlier than others. For example, the amygdala, where our emotions are largely controlled, develops early in a child. The prefrontal cortex, which is important for reflecting on one's actions, develops later, and is not fully mature until adolescence. This neurological development explains why children begin acting out emotionally before they learn the skills to control those emotions. This suggests that parents' expectations of their child's behaviour should be based on a better understanding of the child's brain development.

Refreshingly, Nagel uses this book to debunk the claims of the many 'early enrichment' fads, such as 'Baby Einstein', and to reassure parents that all a child really needs to develop a healthy mind is a safe environment, secure attachments and the freedom to explore the world around them.

With that said, this book is limited in its writing style and accessibility. The density of the information is often not well translated for accessibility to the wider community. This is illustrated in chapter 2, where the reader is asked to absorb the breadth of neurobiological structures and processes in one small chapter. Moreover, the accessibility of the material is limited by complexity of the language used, with sections of the book having a reading level rated as 'difficult' and a readability at university level.¹ The segregation of topics and themes makes it difficult to navigate through the book and identify which are the important facts. A final criticism, when explaining the neurobiological structures of the brain, Nagel attempts to cover a breadth of complex scientific information without making it clear why knowing the scientific processes of the brain is important for parents and caregivers. This book would benefit by having a summary

of the main findings at the end of each chapter written in plain language with practical implications for parenting and teaching, to make it a more accessible and meaningful book for its intended audience.

While *Nurturing a Healthy Mind* does bring together much of the important research in the field of neuropsychology, it does not manage to successfully bridge the communication gap between the field and the wider community. Its overall message does give parents the reassurance to follow their own natural parental instincts, but offers very few practical implications or advice that parents and caregivers can easily follow. So while this book remains a reasonable introductory summary of the field, its shortcomings limit its value.

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Endnote

1 Flesch-Kincaid method. The readability level was measured using a sample of 208 words from pages 23–24 (Harvey, 2006).

Reference

Harvey, V. S. (2006). Variables affecting the clarity of psychological reports. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(1), 5–18.