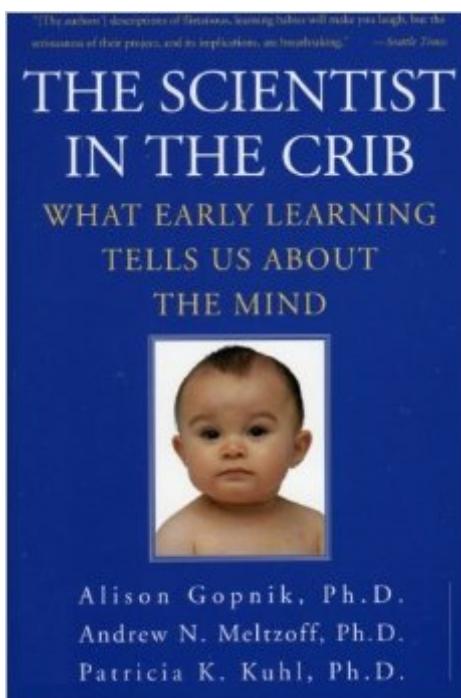


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# The Scientist In The Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About The Mind



## **Synopsis**

This exciting book by three pioneers in the new field of cognitive science discusses important discoveries about how much babies and young children know and learn, and how much parents naturally teach them. It argues that evolution designed us both to teach and learn, and that the drive to learn is our most important instinct. It also reveals as fascinating insights about our adult capacities and how even young children -- as well as adults -- use some of the same methods that allow scientists to learn so much about the world. Filled with surprise at every turn, this vivid, lucid, and often funny book gives us a new view of the inner life of children and the mysteries of the mind.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks; Reprint edition (December 26, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9780688177881

ISBN-13: 978-0688177881

ASIN: 0688177883

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (72 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #28,747 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #21 inÂ  Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Developmental Psychology #29 inÂ  Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Developmental Psychology #89 inÂ  Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Child Psychology

## **Customer Reviews**

This book presents the latest research concerning child development, but does so in an accessible and friendly way. This is not a how-to book, rather containing information about how children learn and develop over time. Chapters include: What Children Learn About People; What Children Learn About Things; What Children Learn About Language; What Scientists Have Learned About Children's Minds; What Scientists Have Learned About Children's Brains. To a small extent the book suffers from the usual dilatory effects of having multiple authors. They also try to be a bit too cute sometimes, but this does not overly detract from the book's success as a layman-friendly introduction to child development research. There is a very useful Notes section, References, and a good Index. My advice, for all it's worth: If you are going to get one book about child development

research, get Lise Eliot's 'What's Going On In There?', which is less precious, more extensive, and better organized. If you are going to get two books, add this to your list. I find myself referring back to the former book fairly often, but I do browse through this one occasionally as well.

If you want practical advice on child-rearing, check out Penelope Leach or Dr. Mom. But if you're interested in reading about the latest research in the mental development of infants, this book is absolutely wonderful. It's full of surprising information about how observant and analytical babies are(at less than an hour old, they mimic faces), and gives details about the structure of the experiments used to deduce such information, allowing you to decide for yourself how much weight to give it. Much of the information confirms those of us who have always suspected two day old kids are as intelligent and tuned-in as, say, the typical graduate student -- they just have fewer ways to express it, and less experience to build on. Better yet, the book is written in a thoroughly engaging and often humorous style that possibly owes something to the first named author's brother, the New Yorker writer Adam (or, more likely, both Gopniks inherited the same literary genes).But don't expect pointers on burping technique.

I read this book for a book group and began without much interest. I was caught. This is a beautifully crafted piece of writing. Some of the reviewers seem to be treating it as though it were a manual or reference book for young parents. Rather it is an examination of the status of research into the development of the mind -- research at the trickiest and most preconception-filled level, at the level of the youngest brains -- written for anyone interested in how we learn to perceive and make sense of the world around us. The presentation is enlivened by the authors' own observations. Is there a more accessible analysis and ultimate rejection of the whole nature vs. nurture controversy? A wise and wonderful book I have recommended to friends, and I've been thanked for recommending it. Incidentally, I've recommended it to friends who do not have young children, the hardest to interest in books about young children! The science is formidable when you pause to think about it, yet this remains a humane and accessible book.

As the father of a nine month old boy, I have been enthralled with this book. It is not a "how to" book on helping your child learn, but rather is a readable introduction to the current state of the study of cognitive development of babies. If you don't believe that it is possible to know what a baby is thinking, you will be fascinated at the clever experiments that have been constructed to tease out information from a baby's brain. It is surprising who much we can find out about how babies' brains

work, and how much that can teach us about the adult human brain. The tone of the book is chatty, but the content is substantial. The authors discuss the philosophers as well as the scientists who are working in this area. I don't suppose that the average new parent is interested in wading into Chomsky, Ryle or Descartes, but this book actually makes it interesting and compelling. The book is broken down into the acquisition of particular mental skills. The authors thesis is that babies learn using, more or less, the scientific method, forming hypotheses and then testing them empirically. (The title of the book is a clever word play, referring to this theory, while simultaneously demonstrating what adult scientists are learning from their empirical studies.) While this may seem pretentious, the authors actually make a pretty good case for this theory. The acquisition of language deviates somewhat from this general theoretical method, but the authors have some fascinating experimental data to illustrate the way babies actually learn language. In short, this book is highly recommended, not just to new parents, but also to anyone interested in childhood cognitive development or what can be known about the workings of the human brain.

I bought this book because, having recently become a father, I wanted to get a better idea of what my baby thinks about and feels from people who make a living studying just that. I also wanted to know how scientists organize and practice the study of infant development; how do you observe an infant's actions and draw information about them based on what they do? (or don't do.) While *The Scientist In The Crib* is full of a lot of interesting anecdotes, and I certainly wouldn't question the authors' credibility, it is disappointingly organized around very general concepts as opposed to chronology, so that the thread of actual development is difficult to follow from one section to the next. This book really seems more like a series of articles, some more and some less interesting. The chapters examine what children learn about people [chapter 2], things [chapter 3], and then language [chapter 4], and then what scientists have learned about children's minds [chapter 5] and then what scientists have learned about children's brains [chapter 6] (the distinction between minds and brains is probably much more meaningful if you're working in the field). There are two different sections entitled 'what newborns know.' I found myself skipping around looking for information relevant to my son and the age that he is now. I suppose if I was not so personally invested in these questions I could examine things in the lofty and generalized manner of this book, but, really, parenting is more a practical than a philosophical pursuit, and a chronological approach would have made the information (and there is a lot) much more accessible and interesting for parents.

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