

The Trout and the Fly: A new approach
Brian Clarke & John Goddard (1987)

“For a long time, I thought that the difference between the expert angler, and the inexpert, was that the former possessed knowledge, whereas the latter did not...

I suppose I took some minor, perverse consolation in the fact that I was not alone: in the realization, indeed, that the great majority of all anglers were, like myself, modest performers at the waterside; and that their problems - the reasons that they performed so modestly as they did, and had a minimal level of knowledge - were almost certainly similar to my own.

But then I had a stroke of what for me, at least, seemed inspiration: I realized that the critical difference between the expert at anything and the inexpert, is not information at all but understanding. I came to see that the inexpert angler fails most of the time because his success depends upon meeting conditions which coincide with a fixed, and usually limited, range of mentally catalogued techniques; whereas the expert angler, because of his fundamental understanding of what he is trying to achieve, in relation to the fish he is after, think more in terms of how and why, than of what; and thus is able to devise specific techniques in response to the demands of specific conditions. Through understanding, as it were, he achieves a kind of infinite flexibility.

The realization that this was so, changed my own approach utterly. Up to that point, I had been reading books in search for information, in a raw sense: information on tackle and techniques, and knots; information on casting, and flies, and fish. And so, however I looked at it, my problem seemed to be a need to commit to memory an impossible series of only tenuously-linked, separate pieces of fact and folklore. Now, I could see, that wasn't the requirement at all. The requirement was understanding, the first glimpses of which would presumably stem from a sensible rationale relating the most important of these individual, separate pieces of information, to one another. If I could find that, or even something approaching it, I would be in a position to work out and meet the demands of changing conditions for myself, rather than to have to thumb through my memory to see what techniques it contained, and fail if there was nothing appropriate...”