

HEART CENTERED MINDS

Learning Differences, Not Disorders

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HEART CENTERED MINDS **LEARNING DIFFERENCES, NOT DISORDERS**

AN INTRODUCTION

Heart centered minds are those governed more by the right brain. It is the right brain that connects us empathically, spatially and inspirationally to our individual worlds and beyond, and thereby it is our heart connection as well. Those with this orientation are giftedly bright, and due to their heightened gut-empathetic connection, they are deeply compelled to discover solutions, discern and follow a purpose, and make contributions to those around them or the world.

Instead of predominantly using the left brain, which organizes incoming information and stimuli in a filtered, sequential fashion, these individuals are aligned more with the right brain, which works like a satellite dish receiving wide and subtle degrees of information all at once.

While this right brain reception allows for connection, insight and great creativity, the sensitivity of this very subtle open perception can cause stimulation overload and overwhelm, since these individuals lack a left-brain filter, and along with this orientation, have very sensitive nervous systems.

These minds have always been around, although they have been increasingly less recognized in the last 400 years when more and more focus and reliance has been put on the functions of the left brain. However, even during this very long period of left-brain dominance, there has continued to be countless numbers still oriented to the right/heart brain and its extraordinary gifts of insight and connection.

Many famous individuals, such as Newton, Mozart, Lincoln, Grant, Edison, Churchill, Poe, Dickens, Roosevelt, Dali and hundreds more, excelled beyond the norm, calling upon their right brain strengths to discover, create, or serve in some way, they also balancing this with the appropriate use of the left brain.

Individuals with heart centered minds are on the increase, and they are being categorized by these labels: ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, and autism, these mistakenly seen as neural/learning disorders. Heart centered individuals, even before, seemed a little different than the general population, but as the left-brain control of our world has increased, the reactive and sensitive differences of right/heart brain minds has intensified.

Being a mainstream classroom teacher working with many children over the years, I found the need to examine in depth the alarming increase in learning 'disorders,' which I have known are **actually gifted differences**. As a result of both what I knew from experience and what I have researched, I am writing this paper in an attempt to bring greater awareness to a situation that has only worsened as we continue to see it from a perspective that is inaccurate. It might be likened to telling all the reasons why helicopters are ill equipped to travel on land, until we are told they are meant for a different purpose.

What I have found is a basic paradigm-shifting answer hidden within the complexities of what we call ‘disorders.’

I begin this paper with a general description of the major characteristics of these learning ‘differences,’ occurring throughout the world, and propose this major paradigm shift attributing the symptoms not to disorders but to a right brain/heart orientation.

After looking more closely at the attributes of right and left brain functioning, a discussion then follows of Jean Piaget’s description of the right to left brain development of thinking in children. This development is normally relatively smooth, unless a child is more predominantly right brain oriented.

I relate that it was while teaching many, many of these children with assumed ‘disorders’ that I discovered they have extraordinary gifts, inexplicable to the scholars, and yet undeniable. I describe these gifts to you in the context of how they showed up each day in my classroom.

My desire to advocate for these kids, **they being hard-wired toward this different orientation**, drove me to do research, where I found supportive evidence of these gifts in the textbooks and reference books written to address disorders, which I share here. The authors of these books were compelled to also site the scores of great people throughout history who excelled despite being labeled learning-disabled in their youth.

I explain the shared and comprehensive qualities of the right/heart brain that all these learning ‘differences’ embrace, describing also the basic differences between ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, Asperger’s Syndrome, autism, bipolar disorder, and non-verbal learning disorder, going into a few of these more in depth, in separate sections supported by specific research or ‘life’ histories.

I close with, seeing things in relation to this right/heart brain perspective, how can we support these children in school and in life, and finally, I assert my contention that these children are here to help bring about change.

THE SITUATION

‘Learning problems’ for children have been steadily and quickly on the rise in our schools. In particular, the world’s attention has been drawn to the alarming increase in the number of children being diagnosed with autism: in 2009 said to be one in every 166 children (updated in 2011 to 1 in 110, and again in 2018 to either 1 in 59¹ or 1 in 36.² See “Notes” at end of paper). Some autistic children begin to speak much later than what is considered normal, and others, although having started to develop normal language skills, then stop speaking and withdraw from verbal and emotional interactions with others.

These autistic behaviors can be accompanied by repetitive physical actions, called stimming, such as spinning, and/or the flapping of arms and hands, a marked impairment in social

interactive skills, abnormal preoccupation with a restricted focus of interest, along with other autistic tendencies. These symptoms have and are creating difficult challenges for families, and great concern and search for answers in the medical and educational fields.

Most of the world, now, is very aware of autism, as well as the many other disabilities, as they are categorized, affecting children including ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, autism (which will refer to as the ADD—autism spectrum), nonverbal learning disorder, and bipolar disorder.

Updating in 2018, currently, Asperger's Syndrome and autism have been grouped together in a category called Autism Spectrum Disorder, many saying that Asperger's Syndrome is so much like autism in many ways that they can be joined together in this category. Looking for clarification regarding "**Autism Spectrum Disorder**," one can Google the American Psychiatric Association publication called the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition).

I instead found the following general statement at the CDC (The Center for Disease Control) website:

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. CDC is working to find out how many children have ASDs, discover the risk factors, and raise awareness of the signs.³

This statement then branched off into 900 or so articles much more abstract than needed here. So, wanting a more general statement that describes the difference between Asperger's Syndrome and autism, I found these basic descriptions at WebMD, The Brain and Nervous System > Autism:

Asperger's syndrome: This is on the milder end of the [autism](#) spectrum. A person with Asperger's may be very intelligent and able to handle her daily life. She may be really focused on topics that interest her and discuss them nonstop. But she has a much harder time socially.

Autistic disorder: This older term is further along the autism spectrum than Asperger's. It includes the same types of symptoms, but at a more intense level.⁴

I prefer referring to all spectrum learning differences as being on the ADD—autism spectrum, for what I see is an increase overall from mild to more pronounced strengths and difficulties which are all very similar to each other, but with each category having its own particular level of characteristics. Also, I see all of these categories 'caused' by the same overall situation: having an open right/heart brain orientation, lacking a left-brain filter, and accompanied by very sensitive nervous systems.

Looking at all these learning problems overall, one or more of the following general characteristics can be seen with each of these 'differences,' in lesser or greater degree:

increased sensory, emotional and physical sensitivities, a lack of left-brain-linear filtering and processing skills, language and/or attention difficulties, inabilities in social interaction, and for some, disruptive or unusual physical movement, and/or diminished small and large motor skills.

These learning disabilities have become very prevalent not only in American schools, but in other countries as well. Some people question whether these disabilities are increasing or whether accurate diagnosing has increased.

As a teacher for fifteen years and the mother of grown children, I and other teachers and families have been exposed to the normal breadth of children out there in the world for quite some time. In our own youth, we knew other students, next, our own children, and now our grandchildren, and for some, great grand children, as well as the overall school general population, and the adult population during these four or five generations.

Most of us have not seen many *very* special needs children, as they would have been placed in special educational and social situations. But, in this ‘normal breadth’ of the childhood population, there are definitely more children now showing intensified signs of difficulties socially and academically. However, regardless of the answer to this question of the increase in occurrence, we are still left with the same situation that we must address. **How do we understand and remedy these learning differences?**

And bringing our focus straight to this question over and over....

Amending this writing now in 2018, Mental Health has once again very strongly come to the focal point of American, and the world’s attention as a potential cause for mass shootings. And for myself, and others who are aware of it, I am very concerned because ADD—autism spectrum health is a part of the picture in many school shootings.

It may not be well known but the perpetrator who shot seventeen individuals at the Margery Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, 2018 had been treated for autism spectrum symptoms in the past, and it had been a spectrum perpetrator also at Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook Elementary. In the 2009 first edition of this paper, I mentioned Columbine and Virginia Tech and addressed reasons for these behaviors of young people on the ADD – autism spectrum, circumstances that I believe drove them to these horrendous acts.

Dealing with spectrum differences for years, and having done much research, I came to a viewpoint early on that would profoundly change the dynamics of **our approach, that can end this violence that starts with the deep misunderstanding of who these individuals are and how they function. Our misunderstanding leaves them open to prejudice and painful isolation for years and years, they being the original victims.**

Mine is a viewpoint that would bring them all into the fold of acceptance and appreciation, to a sense of having a place to belong, to be understood and to contribute. Without these things, each of their lives has been marginalized and constrained to a significant degree, and for some so marginalized that they desperately resort to such horrific expressions of their inner screams.

So, what has been our great misunderstanding and what is the change in our view that we must correct immediately?

This is the perceptual shift of which I have spoken: **that these children are having great difficulty, not because of some deficit, but because they are hard-wired toward a different orientation**, not predominantly to the left brain, as is most of our society, but to the right/heart brain. **I know this sounds too impossible to be true if some of them can turn to such violence and end the lives of others.**

There is talk of what are the signs that will alert us to their troubles? **If we wait until they are old enough that we recognize the signs when they are on the absolute edge, this is far too late.** The system has then already abused and lost them. We must understand what we do not see or correctly perceive about them early on, for some of their misunderstood behaviors are the very reason that they become exactly what we fear about them, as we mislabel and marginalize them from the very beginning.

It is due to this different right/heart brain orientation that we find these children not able to cope, either easily or at all, with our left-brain-focused societal and educational systems.

These children do not have learning disabilities or disorders, but instead, a major learning difference. Not understanding this simple, alternate orientation is creating the huge repercussions for these children, their families, our schools, and our society.

So, what are the differences between the left and right brain functions that influence our lives?

BASIC LEFT AND RIGHT BRAIN FUNCTIONS

The picture of a spinning female dancer graced the internet in a not so recent year with the following question and information:

Do you see the dancer turning clockwise or counter clockwise?
If clockwise, then you use more of the right side of the brain and vice versa. Most of us would see the dancer turning counter clockwise (left brain) though you can try to focus and change the direction.⁵

There was a listing also of basic right and left brain functions, which I will use, modified a bit for clearer understanding:

Left Brain Functions

uses logic
detail/linear oriented
fact-based
words as delineators

Right Brain Functions

uses feeling, empathic
big picture/visionary
feeling/imagination-based
words as symbols and images

present and past
multi-discipline facts
fact, detail comprehension
acknowledges
linear perception
object label oriented
outward knowing
in-the-box strategies
practical
safe
enjoys thought involvement

present and future
multi-discipline principles
meaning-based comprehension
appreciates
spatial perception
object function oriented
inward knowing
out-of-the-box possibilities
impetuous
risk taking, impulsive at times
enjoys hands-on

All these brain functions are available to us all, and in the best situations, we would have a balanced use of our left and right hemispheres. Most of us do, however, have a predominant orientation toward either the right or the left brain.

We can easily think of those we have known who would probably be more right brain oriented: artists, musicians, park rangers, landscape gardeners, dancers, sports figures, poets...

Looking more generally at society, we can use the above characteristics to determine the orientation of individuals involved in other activities and professions, because in most activities there are both right and left brain skills involved.

Business: many visionary entrepreneurs are right brain oriented, but may be so enthused that the inspiration empowers them to tackle left brain linear functions, or they may depend on these skills in others.

Law/Government: fundamental philosophies can be based on large, big picture principles overall, but are delivered in a detail and fact-based format and process. Within this and all disciplines, both right and left brain functions can occur in single individuals or in the cooperative efforts among many.

Education: can be big picture, meaning-oriented if there is not an over focus on details and facts. Some educators are good at accessing both realms of the brain and creating lessons using both, or they may be more prone to one type of teaching or the other. (No Child Left Behind created a much greater, almost exclusive, focus on left brain learning, continued and heightened in 2010-11 with Race to the Top.)

Money management, science, sales, health care, car repair, etc.: Within all professions, one can fairly easily discern what types of activities in each would be more right or left brain oriented. Without both styles of brain functioning occurring within ourselves or as balances for each other, our world would not be operational.

It is interesting to note that children start out using a majority of right brain functions. Learning must be experience-based in the early years. The young child must build on the foundation of an actual physical experience to be able to move on to an abstraction of it, such as with a word or a

numeral. With formal schooling, children are introduced to more and more left brain skills, this being the present focus on written/read words, numerals and concepts, which are all thought-encoded information, processed in a sequential or linear fashion. Unfortunately, this linear processing has become the predominant focus of our educational system.

JEAN PIAGET AND THE STAGES OF LEARNING

The educational psychologist Jean Piaget studied the patterns of learning in children and came up with a description of the typical child's stages of the development of thinking. These stages basically map a child's learning progression from sensory interaction with the concrete world, to language symbols (words and thoughts) that stand for and show the attributes of concrete things, to finally a mental world of thoughts and abstractions, once based on concrete experience, that can now be lived in and manipulated independent of direct experience.

PIAGET'S FOUR STAGES: (Paraphrased from *Learning Disabilities and Related Disorders*⁶):

Sensorimotor Stage: Birth to age 2.

Activity is with the senses and movement in relation to the physical environment to learn properties of space, time, location, permanence, and causality.

Preoperational Stage: Ages 2-7.

Intuitive judgments are made about relationships. Language symbols begin and increase in importance to represent the concrete world, as learning continues about properties and attributes of the world. Thinking is dominated largely by the world of perception.

Concrete Operations Stage: Ages 7-11.

Thinking now also used in relationships, understanding consequences, and grouping things logically. Thinking is more systematized and organized. Thoughts are still shaped by former experiences and are linked to the concrete objects that have been experienced through the senses.

Formal Operations Stage: Age 11

There is a major transition in thinking processes. Rather than observations directing thought, thought now directs observations. Capacity is now to work with abstractions, theories, and logical relationships without having to refer to the concrete experience. Predominantly, there is thought-based problem solving activity.

This is the accepted understanding of the usual pattern of development for most children, although we can all remember individuals who had difficulty with the development of these

thinking skills, perhaps with reading, spelling, math, science or the social sciences, or that we experienced this ourselves.

This learning is maturational, that is, based on a firm foundation of the former gained abilities and leading to new developments in thinking. Adequate concrete experience is crucial. Quoting from Lerner's text for teachers:

Attempts to teach abstract, logical concepts divorced from any real experiential understanding on the part of the students may lead to inadequate and insecure learning...(with) surface responses...⁷

Leaving now the general description of Piaget and the additional information from the text, **I see a major problem for the development of these thinking skills in many of our children. This would be when the individual is primarily right brain oriented.** In right brain oriented individuals, it is often extremely difficult to adopt the essentially linear patterns of thinking that are necessary for written language and abstracted numeral operations removed from concrete experience.

I do explain later, however, there is not one model that fits every right/heart brain child, and where one can exhibit difficulty in adopting left brain skills, others can read or enjoy math, but may entirely stall with either of these things when done in drill fashion. **Motivation, challenge and interest are key components to the success of right brain learners, their brain literally going on 'screen saver' without these elements.**

However, in addition to this right/left brain discussion, **there is much more to add to what has been mentioned about our heart connection as well.**

THE INSTITUTE OF HEARTMATH

Written about also in my subsequent papers, and adding this as I update once again in 2018, important information has come to light about the heart as a neural transmitter to the brain. It has been proven that our heart and brain work in tandem. I am not speaking of merely what we might call our sentimental heart here, but of our physical heart that modern researchers are finding has a great many neural transmitters that communicate directly with our brain.

The Institute of HeartMath, located in Boulder Creek, CA, has been researching the connection between the heart and the brain since 1991. In the Institute's words regarding the Science of the Heart:

At the Institute of HeartMath (IHM) Research Center, we are exploring the physiological mechanisms by which the heart communicates with the brain, thereby influencing information processing, perceptions, emotions, and health...

We observed that the heart was acting as though it had a mind of its own and was profoundly influencing the way we perceive and respond to the world. In essence, it appeared that the heart was affecting intelligence and awareness...

The answers to many of our original questions now provide a scientific basis to explain how and why the heart affects mental clarity, creativity, emotional balance and personal effectiveness. Our research and that of others indicate that the heart is far more than a simple pump.

The heart is, in fact, a highly complex, self-organized information processing center with its own functional "brain" that communicates with and influences the cranial brain via the nervous system, hormonal system and other pathways. These influences profoundly affect brain function and most of the body's major organs, and ultimately determine the quality of life.⁸

For many years, there have been right brain/heart centered individuals in our schools, fewer before than today. Some, usually painfully, surrendered their normal right brain functioning and switched to left brain skills, perhaps excelling, just getting by, or maybe later in life, finally turning to new right brain professions or activities.

A great many with this right/heart brain orientation, as we can call it, have ended up dropping out of our schools, perhaps fortunate enough to find a job that did not require the same measure of left brain activity. And many other individuals with this orientation and difficulty in school have ended up on the street or in our penal system.

GENERAL GIFTS AND SYMPTOMS AND MY SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

Having briefly examined the basic left and right brain functions, Piaget's stages, and the heart's important influence on our brain's functioning, let's return and take a look at today's children who are seen as having trouble.

In this and the next two sections, I will be describing some mild to moderate characteristics of a shared pool of symptoms occurring generally in a continuum of increasing components for ADD, ADHD, and Asperger's Syndrome. Dyslexics share these basic more mild symptoms that will be described (as also with nonverbal learning disorder later mentioned), but characteristically dyslexics can have more severe problems being able to read and/or spell, and sometimes are seemingly quieter in nature.

The majority of the differences I discuss are based on my experience in a mainstream classroom and on research regarding 'mild to moderate' learning disorders. However, I do report on in-depth accounts of autism and touch also on bipolar disorder, two on the end of the spectrum which can be more 'moderate to severe.'

As mentioned before, I have been a teacher, for fifteen years and mainly of third graders. In that time, many, many students with learning difficulties were guided into my third grade regular education classroom. These individuals were placed there purposefully by administrators, parents, and teachers because it was known I could make a connection with these children. In addition to this teaching position in general education, I also spent three months as an aide in an intermediate school special education classroom in order to see, first hand, in this situation whether my theories were upheld. They were.

My knowledge thus began with what I experienced in the classroom. I worked with these children, within, and along with, the population of my other students, five days a week, six hours a day. Each class had a variety of types of learning differences, and a very large part of my teaching effort was devoted to finding and responding to each child's style of learning.

It is important to know at the outset that the learning qualities of each special student are varied and individual. For instance, **ADD (normally standing for Attention Deficit Disorder, which I call Attention Differently Directed)** is said to be an umbrella category that covers any number and combination of typical characteristics. A student may show evidence of a strong left-brain skill in conjunction with many right-brain characteristics, or not, but there is a 'tipping point' when one evaluates that a student is primarily right brain oriented, with perhaps a special talent to bring that inspiration forth through a left-brain expression.

As an example, I had a very talented boy in my class who read with skills far advanced beyond the third grade level. When this young man read, he was immersed in what he read, digesting it from his own rich basis of knowledge and experience, facilitated by his broad storehouse of vocabulary which continued to grow with each story he consumed.

These in themselves are outstanding qualities for any primary school age reader, **but it was his ADD spectrum talents that enabled him to connect intuitively and empathically with the passion of the literature as it explored and revealed the deep transformation of individual lives hidden within the events of the story.** An informed adult could see these deep themes, but to most others in the class, they were unseen below the story's plot. Most others, that is, except for the **ADHD kid, the dyslexic, the Asperger's student, and the autistic. These students also understood the personal drama at this deep level, being able to feel the character's inner dilemmas and even his or her harmony or disharmony with the deep moral truths of life.**

In addition to discerning and understanding the deep personal dimension in literature, this young man also reached out to every newcomer or underdog that came into our class. This was not just as an initial short-lived welcome, but as a total felt connection to that person, lasting through the year and, in some cases, on into the future whether in-person contact continued or not. Again, this wide-open expansive right/heart brain connection, joined him to others needing support. It was his nature to empathically sense where support was needed and to feel joy and well-being in himself as he nurtured the well-being in others.

It is the depth of these intuitive, beyond-their-age knowings and empathy, that signals the right brain orientation, for it is in the right/heart brain that we are joined in being and

feeling with others, wanting a sense of wholeness and health for all. It is also seeing where these children feel uncomfortable socially or academically that one can determine that they are right/heart brain oriented.

This same young man referred to above had noticeable difficulty staying on task as he sat in front of an assignment that required more of a linear approach: a practice page on multiplication problems, filling in missing words in questions about a paragraph above on space, working in the spelling book, listening to a subject presentation, while many others in the class would have no difficulty attending to these more linear or attention-requiring lessons.

We all function differently and a good deal of it depends on our basic right or left brain means of operation. The neighboring fifth grade teacher would occasionally wander into class and start an impromptu conversation with the students and myself. One day he asked my kids something of a brain teaser about Thanksgiving, (I can't quite remember his query). Everyone stumped and quiet, the young man of whom I have been speaking, considered and answered within just a moment, "The Mayflower." He had scanned the information and realized the question asked was actually a riddle, for which he had discerned the answer. The visiting teacher, who had the 'gifted' cluster of the 5th grade students in his class, retorted, "I want that kid in my class."

Right/heart brain-oriented kids are very bright.

A right brain orientation is indicated by any or all of: keen intelligence, a draw to nature, music, science, art, movement, intuitive and empathic understandings of people and 'moral' action, and also by just how difficult it is for a student to use left brain skills such as: to adjust to a changing schedule, to organize, to listen and keep their attention on, finish and turn in routine assignments. Very often poor small and large motor skills also accompany a right brain orientation, often evidenced in trouble with handwriting and a lack of physical coordination.

In the case of this young student I have just described, he had quite good social skills with all the other students, as well as having this caring quality of outreach for those less comfortable for some reason. However, lacking a left-brain filter for many causes difficulty with normal social nuances, leading to them being much quieter, often more reclusive, and playing with a few like them, or sitting and exploring the grass alone at recess. Yet, they are also empathic, almost at a gut level to those in need, and have a great desire for fairness and justice.

As I have tried to point out with the example of this student above, the characteristics of children with a right brain/heart tendency can be a mix, but it is possible to quickly realize their basic right brain mode of learning, and also to discern whether we are looking at ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, Asperger's syndrome, or autism.

It was in the joy and often great challenge of teaching to the range of these children's diversities that I first discovered what **I thought was a different orientation underlying it all, not 'disorders.'** And it was on the basis of this discovery that I wanted to branch out in search of support for what seemed to be happening.

Another very important belief that drove me to seek answers was that, while medication is sometimes very helpful or necessary, **I did not believe that most children being born were meant to be medicated.** Here is a telling comment by Dr. Castellanos, head of the NYU Child Study Center, and one of the speakers for the Frontline program, “The Medicated Child” regarding one of the difficulties for parents and all involved in the search for answers:

“The idea that not all children are born perfect, is a very hard one to deal with.”

Indeed it is an idea that either states and accepts that many, many children are imperfect, or it is the driving question that compels us to look deeper. Parents are having to face this apparent imperfection more and more, and it is this assumed ‘imperfection’ and its frequency, that made me feel we were missing what is truly happening.

SUPPORT FROM MY RESEARCH

Taking a year’s leave of absence to research and add to my own acquired knowledge about these children, what I found supported my theory. Attributing learning differences to a right brain/heart orientation is definitely a different perspective about these children, but there are numerous observable, otherwise unexplained gifts in these individuals, and in the great minds of history, to which the references below will attest.

These gifts and learning differences appear to be consistent with functions attributed to the right brain: gut-empathic, inspiration motivated, intuitive, big picture oriented, out-of-the-box thinking, drawn to physical or sensory activities, and/or seeking meaningful solutions through philosophy, science, social leadership, as well as trouble with the written word and the linear/repetitive aspects of math, organization, schedules, etc.

Referring again now to the textbook *Learning Disabilities and Related Disorders* written for teachers of students with ‘mild to moderate’ learning disabilities, the first page of the preface states:

This new title reflects the shifts in the field of learning disabilities. These shifts occurred with the realization that many students with learning disabilities exhibit coexisting related disorders, such as attention deficit disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, nonverbal learning disabilities, and other related conditions...

Learning disabilities can impede learning to talk, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize information, or achieve in mathematics. Described as a weakness among a sea of strengths, the condition of learning disabilities is especially perplexing because each individual has a unique combination of talents and characteristics, and of strengths and weaknesses. Students with learning disabilities are found in every classroom...¹⁰ (My bold highlighting)

And from a subsection titled “Gifted and Talented Children With Learning Disabilities” in this same textbook:

Some children with learning disabilities also may be gifted and talented. Characteristics of giftedness include spontaneity, inquisitiveness, imagination, boundless enthusiasm, and emotionality; and these same traits are often observed in children with learning disabilities. Often, children with learning disabilities, like gifted children, seem to require a great deal of activity...If their learning needs are not being met, they may respond by becoming fidgety, inattentive, and even disruptive....¹¹(Again, my bold highlighting)

Also, within that subsection and on the same page, this paragraph entitled, “Highly Successful Adults With Learning Disabilities”:

Successful adults with learning disabilities find the world of work is quite different from the world of school. Studies show that many highly successful people have learning disabilities. In fact, about 30% to 40% of 300 individuals who had achieved a high level of financial success had learning difficulties in school (West 2003). A major business magazine, *Fortune* (Morris, 2002), did a cover story on chief executive officers (CEOs) of major corporations who have learning disabilities. Thus, there appears to be a strong, positive side to learning disabilities and dyslexia that requires further research. (West, 2003).

Turning to another book:

In *Driven to Distraction*, a book about ADD and ADHD, author Dr. Hallowell describes these gifted traits that also apply to many other ‘learning disorders.’ I have joined quotes from a few pages into this summary:

You might describe many with ADD as having a “special something,” a hard-to-pin-down yet undeniable potential... In fact, there is a powerfully positive aspect to ADD, and learning disorders in general, a positive aspect that is as yet ill defined, something good... (These individuals) can be highly imaginative and empathic, closely attuned to the moods and thoughts of people around them... They also see new things or find new ways to see old things. They are not just the tuned-out of this world; they are also tuned in, often to the fresh and the new. They are often the inventors and the innovators, the movers and the doers. Good Do-Bees they may not always be, but we should be wise enough not to force them into a mold they’ll never fit... If that potential can be tapped, the results can be spectacular.¹² (My bold highlighting).

RIGHT BRAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ADD, ADHD, DYSLEXIA, ASPERGER'S SYNDROME, AND NONVERBAL LEARNING DISORDER

The inclinations of these students with 'differences,' across the board, seem to be toward the right/heart brain, an operation of the brain which education and society have been leaving behind with greater and greater speed. In the following paragraphs, I will describe more about the general pool of characteristics that can be exhibited by kids with ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome and autism. I will start with ADD as a general basis of all of these differences, and then go more into each. I will discuss Bipolar disorder and non-verbal learning disorder later in the paper.

As I mentioned earlier, for years I have known that **ADD should stand for Attention Differently Directed**, and this redirection of perception and redefinition of labels is needed for other learning differences as well. I have seen unique and extraordinary qualities in the students who show a right/heart brain orientation.

Uniformly, these children are gifted. Some say they do not finish things as consistently as children normally characterized as 'gifted,' but I would like to add that this is being spoken of in regard to a routine classroom setting.

Gifted in what ways? They, more than even the 'traditionally' gifted, understand the underlying theme of any subject, i.e. the intuitive, the whole, the empathic answers that speak of personal or societal connection, growth or limitation.

They play in the dirt at recess, sharing little critters they find with other kids, who might then step on them. An Asperger's student can defy our understanding by deftly intercepting the inadvertent sharing of a peanut butter snack with the child in class who has the life-threatening peanut allergy. Asperger's individuals are generally known to be less socially adept, and yet, a connective sense deep within can detect the problem and respond in a flash with the required, appropriate action. (This happened in my classroom.)

Often these children think in analogies and sometimes pictures. They also often need to move or do another task at the same time as being asked to learn what's at hand. They cannot become bored, for if it is simply a routine task, their brain goes on 'pause.'

Continuing...

Many individuals with a right/heart brain orientation operate with a speed like they are walking in a body of water. This is because their satellite dish-like exposure to life in a **very broad**, viscerally expanded fashion, prohibits dashing 'through that water.' Although, it is not commonly understood why these kids work more slowly, many of them have been/were given a '504 program' in school, which allowed them extra time to do their work. This time allowed them to draw their information and inspirations from the wide exposure base to which they are connected, and then to respond.

I'm sure an actual satellite dish is designed to take the mass of information coming in and make it accessible to scientists in a linear, and perhaps also, non-linear way. These children do not have the linear filter.

Lacking this discerning, linear-receiving 'filter,' it is hard for these students to take in information coming in a linear fashion, and it is equally difficult, or at least takes more time, for them to give the information back in the usually required linear form.

Related to this, when working in class it takes a bit longer for them to immerse and then to resurface from an activity or subject matter, and so quick changes in direction of study, or quick schedule changes can be very disruptive. Quick changes also involve changes in stimulation which can be overwhelming to those without a left-brain filter.

(Increased in the middle and at the other end of the spectrum to this, Asperger's Syndrome and autistic individuals, with more pronounced sensitivities due to increased right/heart brain subtle connection and nervous system sensitivities, characteristically depend on a much more rigid order for a greater sense of control and stability.)

These ADD individuals also generally live in a less organized fashion. Having a lot of things around and available to them is part of this broad experience on which they draw, and organizing, using the left-brain, is not their forte.

Additionally, very subtle within all this, is also the feeling that keeping things in order is a waste of time when one could be moving on to the next general idea or activity immersion. And finally, because these individuals are motivated by challenge, there is more willingness to direct energy to their surroundings once there is a mess, so as to then experience the satisfaction that comes with the newly recreated order.

All this is not to say that these individuals cannot also act quickly. Given a challenge they are drawn to, or their passion, they are unstoppable. In fact, this is how they are equipped. They scan all information for the depth of knowledge and connection to be found there, and then follow their deepest response to what inspires them. They do this with great involvement and commitment (that can be seen as negative fixation in autism), intelligence, and activity, resulting in completion and success, if they are given an encouraging and flexible environment in which to work.

I am going to jump ahead a bit here in regard to the category of different learner I am addressing, and give an example of the **inspired action** that would apply to all and any of the kids on the spectrum from ADD to autism. In this particular case, it is a story involving autistic individuals. Mine is a retelling of a CNN narrator/interviewer's amazing account, posted at the CNN website in honor of World Autism Awareness Day in 2009.

Japan has many housing and activity centers for individuals with autism. One such center, also doubling as a school, is a site where young adult autistic individuals live to help in the production of wine. For years, Japan had been making wine, but overall being considered too sweet, the wines had never gained much national respect.

In view of this situation, Bruce Gutlove, a winemaker in California's Napa Valley, was invited to Japan to give advice and direction at the Japanese winery for three months. Having no special training to work with autistic individuals, Gutlove just kept his usual standard and expectations for the workers as he addressed the challenges of making a good wine.

Since the winery was located on steep terrain, all had to be done by hand. However, autistics do well with routine and repetition, and the students were happy in their work, excited to be making a better wine for people.

Creating a good Chardonnay in Japan's harsh climate was a great challenge. The interviewer commenting: "But Gutlove said the students did not let the setbacks stop them from meeting his expectations. Even when Gutlove would get discouraged, the students kept pushing forward."¹³ And Gutlove, inspired by his workers: "Seeing their passion and their desire to create something of worth for other people is very, very impressive."

At the heart of this story, is another essential attitude that plays not a secondary but a primary part in creating successful outcomes for individuals with 'gifted differences.' In the appreciative and enthused words of Machiko Ochi, the daughter of the creator of Coco Farm & Winery: "Bruce considers all of the residents colleagues. This is a big distinction. Treated as equals, the residents meet his expectations on the job."

Hiromitsu Watanabe, 28 (in 2009), is one of the students who arrived several years ago at the winery, not able to communicate with anyone. Today he is happy, committed to his work, and is talking "non-stop." His favorite job is putting the labels on the red wine that he helps make. Support and honoring of individuals and their passions maximizes total brain development. (See my 2017 paper: "The Inside Out of Autism.")

Not only did the winery produce a Chardonnay that the Japanese critics acclaimed, but Gutlove was still there after twenty years and, he shared, it is not primarily for the wine.

After this wonderful story, we can return to the discussion of ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, and Asperger's Syndrome, and you will see the theme from this winery story of **longing to make a difference or improving something in life runs across the full spectrum.**

Without acting from inspiration, these learners can be bored or seem unorganized, and undirected. It can be like pulling teeth to get them to do routine homework. Or, if they have worked with real interest or challenge on some interesting or exciting homework, they can then, and often do, neglect to turn it in. This is because after finishing the work, the rest is anticlimactic to their brain. To now turn in the homework becomes a routine aspect and their brain actually stalls. These brains *are not fashioned* to simply do linear, routine tasks. Linking to a call from deep inspiration is the key to these children's success.

Those with ADHD can have all these characteristics in general that are possible with ADD. However, ADHD individuals have more of a need to be active physically, sometimes inclined with robust energy, for instance, on the playground or at home.

My thoughts regarding their physical needs in the classroom are that movement for the ADHD individual could be enhancing their ability to attune to their inspiration, or the learning at hand, and to ‘shake off’ the stress caused by a left-brain oriented curriculum, or over-stimulation in general. Many ADD and ADHD individuals are known to work better doing two things at once, the second, self-directed, erratic-energy-deflecting activity allowing them to focus more on the first. Examples would be needing background noise, such as music or TV, in order to focus on homework, and knitting in class in order to pay better attention to lectures. Moving could also be an anti-boredom measure, stimulating the brain with movement at times when linear input could cause it to go on ‘pause.’

There is a hunter/farmer analogy that applies here. The hunters, who came before agrarian cultures, were highly motivated by the immediacy and need of the hunt, the strategy and cooperative aspects of the activity, all motivations leading to high focus and an adrenalin increase. Later, with the agrarian society, individuals adapted to doing a series of more linear tasks in a repetitive cycle: plowing, seeding, irrigating, harvesting, etc. Both natures have their place and can be cooperative within a society. Who is to say hunters need be farmers or vice versa.

The students we are speaking of are born hunters, and I would say that autistics, as we saw, are motivated in this way, as well as Asperger’s Syndrome individuals, but both often also thriving on word, detail, and some repetition.

All of these learning ‘disorders’ have differences I will very generally site below, although it would take another paper to go into each learning type in more depth. The intent of this paper is to testify to an inherent right brain/heart-centered nature, as I have described, within all of these learning-different children.

For all of these students sharing fundamental right/heart brain gifted characteristics, here are some of the more **‘Problematic Differences,’ stated in terms of our school systems’ viewpoint.** These characteristics appear to occur in somewhat of a continuum from less to more, although there are no firm boundaries to a sharing of characteristics.

ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) is primarily characterized by what’s called a lack of attentiveness and organizational skills.

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). In addition to the ADD characteristics, includes more trouble sitting still and sometimes being physically hyperactive.

Dyslexia (discussed more later, as well as Nonverbal Learning Disorder), involves marked difficulty with reading and/or spelling, and in my experience the individual can be a bit more reserved.

Asperger’s Syndrome can include being much more vocal and physical about **likes**, e.g. strong desire to be who they are, not wanting to stop drawing, reading, enjoying music, or being very physically active in dance-like or karate type movements, and dislikes, such as having to

conform socially and organizationally in schoolwork or schedules. These individuals also have a penchant for being able to take in a large array of information to use, each in their particular creative way.

Autism (and in some aspects, Asperger's Syndrome), includes lesser or greater degrees of rigidity to ward off the outside world of challenging stimuli, this becoming the basis for the safety of habitual behaviors, routine, a rigid schedule, repetition, buffering, non-interaction and 'over-focusing,' the last four of these also caused by and assistive to a deep interest in what is being observed.

I will discuss autism in much more detail later, as well as how bipolar disorder also seems to be a right brain orientation.

One final prominent characteristic common to all these individuals is that they are less socially 'adept' by what some would consider our normal standards. This is because, as I briefly mentioned before, without a left brain filter they cannot 'read' the subtle nuances of social communications, fraught with idioms, current trending words and phrases, and also difficult-to-understand body language. Being alone, with another like them, or with a computer, is far easier for most.

However, judging by the deep commitment to serving others that all of these individuals have, **I believe we now have to consider what is it that makes our experience of 'normal' singularly preferred over what appears to be a new orientation for 'good.'** And, also what is it about human beings that creates an almost fierce defense against 'differences,' and change, thus preventing open-mindedness and possible acceptance?

I would say every person falling somewhere on the ADD – autism/bipolar spectrum that I have known, or known of and speak of in this paper, **has experienced some level of being labeled, shunned or rejected for their particular differences. Where is our acceptance?**

I see all this as a new diversity that needs to be embraced, and so all characteristics, those appearing to be 'positive' or 'negative,' are just *differences* in the way some individuals function, generated by their innate inclination. It is on the basis of old perceptions that we view any of these as other than a new 'normal' for some, and as such, we are still trying to have them change to former societal learning, and life styles.

When these differences are not recognized and honored early on, secondary symptoms can arise: low self-esteem, frustration, anger, deceit, and efforts to gain self/other control, acknowledgement, power or escape in other ways including substance abuse and even violence towards others and self (such as at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, and now Parkland). These are all attempts to fit in, control, retaliate for, or totally self-annihilate after many experiences of not fitting in and being brutally marginalized.

Proceeding...

GREAT PEOPLE IN HISTORY

Many great people throughout history have shown the paradoxical characteristics of a gifted and talented right brain orientation. These individuals have been geared away from just a left-brain focus, and often even showed an early or life-long disinclination toward the written word. Our recent history has predominately used words in left brain linear account fashion, and/or abstraction, rather than left brain word and world shaping of expressions arising from right/heart brain connective inspirations.

Many, and perhaps most, of these famous people found it difficult to survive in a normal educational environment. A great number of them worked in an artistic world, separate from domains defined by a practical or more rigid use of words, while others powerfully employed words to directly shape and express their arena of passion, their connection to inspiration, creativity and purpose through which they made great contributions.

In *Driven to Distraction*, Dr. Hallowell reports evaluations made about several individuals who achieved greatness after performing terribly in school due to undiagnosed “learning disabilities”¹⁴: Mozart: distractible, impatient, innovative, creative; Einstein, Poe, Shaw, Dali: these, expelled from school; Edison: at the bottom of his class; Lincoln, and Henry Ford: both considered to have “no promise.”

The textbook quoted earlier, *Learning Disabilities and Related Disorders*, also cites many great people who have excelled despite apparent left-brain “learning disorders.”¹⁵ Among them were: Nelson Rockefeller: severe dyslexia; Charles Schwab: reading problems; Thomas Edison: “mentally defective”; Auguste Rodin: “uneducable”; Woodrow Wilson: didn’t read until age eleven; Albert Einstein: persistent language (reading, writing) problems throughout his life. Einstein stated that he “rarely thought in words; it was only after an inspiration came that he tried to express it in words at a later time.” It is more likely that, like Temple Grandin, he thought in pictures.

Instead of left-brain skills and approaches, these great men relied on their gifts of insight and found their own successful route to express and excel, when coupled with the shaping abilities of their left brain.

The minds of several of the great men listed above, resisted the adoption of written word usage, or waited until an older age, after lingering in an experience-based realm for a longer period, finally, then, to adapt to reading and writing. Once accepting the world of words, they often used them to capture poetic eloquence or understandings of life that reached far beyond the norm.

The right/heart brain is the domain of inspiration, out-of-the-box thinking, risk-taking, innovation, and a need to solve important unanswered philosophical, scientific, mathematical, or societal questions and problems. All this was evidenced by the lives and contributions of those individuals that have just been mentioned.

The majority of the references above are about men. There seems to be a greater occurrence of these differences in males, but females also do exhibit symptoms. Women from the times of the men listed above may have been occupied more in the home, involving more right brain skills, and many women faced gender prejudice when it came to reaching for greatness.

In school, young girls can have a quieter nature than boys, and can be more adept at reading and writing skills. However, this not always true, they can strongly persevere at left-brain skills, trading away much of their right brain orientation in an effort to succeed in order to please and to not be noticed in a negative way.

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Asperger's individuals, like all the rest we have discussed, **are highly intelligent and inspired**. They very often have the ability to tap into the deep significance and profundities of life, particularly in literature, and in connective relation to the world and its relationships of peoples. They also have abilities to absorb, retain, and masterfully work with, manipulate, or wield large amounts of in-depth, detailed information, often seeming to have somewhat of a blank slate or semi-replicating memory for information they integrate within their brain. And they often avidly seek and find answers that will escape others' inquiries.

I will tell three stories here to give a picture of gifted Asperger's individuals.

These individuals, particularly, resist being put in a box, and yet, because of heightened sensitivities, do need days that follow a routine, with little room for deviation from their familiar perception of things. However, hand in hand with these differences, comes empathic gifts and sometimes genius.

One such young man in my third grade classroom loved to read, understood the deep thematic material in all we studied, loved to move his body freely, spontaneously, and wanted to just be 'himself,' without having to fit any imposed social or learning norms.

Carefully working all year to help him assimilate the traditional essay style of writing, with opening thesis paragraph, supported by body paragraphs with topic sentences, details, and the conclusion, etc., on the final district write that was to evaluate his progress, this student approached each paragraph with near 'sweat' effort toward the structure and function of each sentence. He was a third grader writing short words in fairly short sentences, in the required format, and with Asperger's, was still having trouble with the rules of spelling and capitalization, general punctuation, etc.

However, sitting in the middle of this composition exploded this sentence: "**Annie's heart blossomed like a lotus flower in the spring,**" drawn from within this student's well of rich language due to his deep love of literature and his very deep empathic understanding of Annie's triumphant feelings of success, she the underdog, the less talented individual in a field of daunting competition. This spontaneous, heartfelt burst of eloquence is not seen in the third grade, or for several grades thereafter, even from most other higher achieving students.

And now I'll share two life descriptions of adults with Asperger's...

A friend worked for a biomedical company which was led by a gentleman with Asperger's Syndrome. This man had been called eccentric in that he was driven tirelessly by his creative genius and desire to find remedies for illnesses, and did so with a very high measure of success, the company of employees all involved in the subsequent follow through with relevant secondary research, and whatever. However, when it came to the organizational, financial, scheduling, or involvement with employees in meetings or business related social gatherings, this man was painfully inept. With his genius and drive, however, allowed and supported by the employees handling the rest of what was needed, the company experienced great success in this arena of public health.

My third, long story, even shortened here from a *very* long and interesting telling (a little more in-depth in financial detail than I can easily keep up with), I found in Vanity Fair magazine. Leaving the money details for you to read in the magazine archives or in the book listed, I directly quote enough, with ellipses in between, to reveal most of the story, and to relate the hidden characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome that were present and instrumental in the very successful life and passion of Michael Burry, whom you will meet in this article.

“Excerpted from *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine*, by Michael Lewis.

“Betting on the Blind Side”¹⁶

“Michael Burry always saw the world differently—due, he believed, to the childhood loss of one eye. So when the 32-year-old investor spotted the huge bubble in the subprime-mortgage bond market, in 2004, and then created a way to bet against it, he wasn't surprised that no one understood what he was doing. In an excerpt from his new book, *The Big Short*, the author, Michael Lewis, charts Burry's oddball maneuvers, his almost comical dealings with Goldman Sachs and other banks as the market collapsed, and the true reason for his visionary obsession... (My bold highlighting and underlining)

His glass eye, Michael Burry assumed, was the reason that face-to-face interaction with other people almost always ended badly for him. He found it maddeningly difficult to read people's nonverbal signals ... The glass eye became his private explanation for why he hadn't really fit in with groups... It wasn't the sort of thing other kids ever allowed him to be unself-conscious about.

In his glass eye he found the explanation for other traits peculiar to himself. His obsession with fairness, for example. When he noticed that pro basketball stars were far less likely to be called for traveling than lesser players, he didn't just holler at the refs. He stopped watching basketball altogether; the injustice of it killed his interest in the sport... Even though he, himself, was a good athlete, he didn't care for team sports.... He preferred swimming, as it required virtually no social interaction... ‘My nature is not to have friends,’ he said. ‘I'm happy in my own head.’... His obsession with personal honesty was a cousin to his obsession with fairness.

Obsessiveness...His mind had no temperate zone: he was either possessed by a subject or not interested in it at all. Even as a small child he had a fantastic ability to focus and learn, with or without teachers. When it synched with his interests, school came easy for him—so easy that, as an undergraduate at U.C.L.A., he could flip back and forth between English and economics and pick up enough pre-medical training on the side to get himself admitted to the best medical schools in the country.

He attributed his unusual powers of concentration to his lack of interest in human interaction, and that lack of interest in human interaction? ... well, he was able to argue that basically everything that happened was caused, one way or the other, by his fake left eye...

He was genuinely interested in computers, not for their own sake but for their service to a lifelong obsession: the inner workings of the stock market. Ever since grade school, when his father had shown him the stock tables at the back of the newspaper and told him that the stock market was a crooked place and never to be trusted, let alone invested in, the subject had fascinated him. Even as a kid he had wanted to impose logic on this world of numbers. He began to read about the market as a hobby...

Late one night in November 1996, while on a cardiology rotation at Saint Thomas Hospital, in Nashville, Tennessee, he logged on to a hospital computer and went to a message board called techstocks.com. There he created a thread called “value investing.” ... Once he figured out he had nothing more to learn from the crowd on his thread, he quit it to create what later would be called a blog but at the time was just a weird form of communication. A few people grumbled about the very idea of a doctor having anything useful to say about investments, but over time he came to dominate the discussion, and signed off from his blog as Dr. Mike Burry....

There he posted his stock-market trades and his arguments for making the trades. He was working 16-hour shifts at the hospital, confining his blogging mainly to the hours between midnight and three in the morning. People found him. As a money manager at a big Philadelphia value fund said, ‘The first thing I wondered was: When is he doing this? The guy was a medical intern... He’s showing people his trades. He’s up 50 percent.’...

Burry’s ability to work and to focus set him apart even from other medical students. In 1998, as a resident in neurology at Stanford Hospital, he mentioned to his superiors that, between 14-hour hospital shifts, he had stayed up two nights in a row taking apart and putting back together his personal computer in an attempt to make it run faster. His superiors sent him to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed Mike Burry as bipolar. He knew instantly he’d been misdiagnosed: how could you be bipolar if you were never depressed?...

The actual practice of medicine, on the other hand, either bored or disgusted him....The deeper he got into his medical career, the more Burry felt constrained by his problems with other people in the flesh. He had briefly tried to hide in pathology, where the people had the decency to be dead, but that didn’t work. (‘Dead people, dead parts. More dead people, more dead parts. I thought, I want something more cerebral.’)

He'd moved back to San Jose, buried his father, remarried (he had lost his first Vietnamese wife due to over focusing on his work), and had been misdiagnosed as bipolar, when he shut down his Web site and announced he was quitting neurology to become a money manager. With that, Dr. Michael Burry opened Scion Capital. (As a teen he'd loved the book *The Scions of Shannara*.)”

(Fast forwarding now through the years of investing and investors....)

“In early 2004,...Burry immersed himself for the first time in the bond market...He wanted to know, especially, how subprime-mortgage bonds worked... By February 2007, subprime loans were defaulting in record numbers.

Not long before, his wife had dragged him to the office of a Stanford psychologist... A pre-school teacher had noted certain worrying behaviors in their four-year-old son, Nicholas, and suggested he needed testing... Burry agreed to have their son tested, thinking ‘It would just prove he’s a smart kid, an ‘absentminded’ genius.’”

Instead, the tests administered by a child psychologist proved that their child had Asperger’s Syndrome...

‘Marked impairment in the use of multiple non-verbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze ...Failure to develop peer relationships ...A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people ...Difficulty reading the social/emotional messages in someone’s eyes ...A faulty emotion regulation or control mechanism for expressing anger ...One of the reasons why computers are so appealing is not only that you do not have to talk or socialize with them, but that they are logical, consistent and not prone to moods. Thus, they are an ideal interest for the person with Asperger’s Syndrome ...Many people have a hobby.... The difference between the normal range and the eccentricity observed in Asperger’s Syndrome is that these pursuits are often solitary, idiosyncratic and dominate the person’s time and conversation.’ (My bold highlighting)

After a few pages, Michael Burry realized that he was no longer reading about his son but about himself. His glass eye no longer explained anything....

The diagnosis explained an awful lot about his abilities and how he did it: his obsessive acquisition of hard facts, his insistence on logic, his ability to plow quickly through reams of tedious financial statements... ‘Only someone who has Asperger’s would read a subprime-mortgage-bond prospectus,’ he said.

Late summer 2007. The Bloomberg News service ran an article about the few people who appeared to have seen the catastrophe coming....most conspicuously absent—one who had made \$100 million for himself and \$725 million for his investors—sat alone in his office, in Cupertino, California. By June 30, 2008, any investor who had stuck with Scion Capital from its beginning, on November 1, 2000, had a gain, after fees and expenses, of 489.34 percent. (The gross gain of the fund had been 726 percent.) Over the same period the S&P 500 returned just a bit more than 2 percent.”

Burry had studied thoroughly, more than any could, due to his Asperger's, and bet against the current trends and practices in the market, winning big!

LOOKING AT AUTISM

I would now like to talk about autism, which we know is of great concern. Many of autism's characteristics fit the right/heart brain orientation of which I am speaking, with more pronounced characteristics and potential symptoms than with ADD, ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome and the rest.

I will describe how autism's symptoms seem to be a reaction, sometimes an extreme reaction, to the stimuli coming from our left brain world. To help with our understanding, I will refer later to the life and writing of the adult autistic, Temple Grandin, (now better known in 2011, even more with this update in 2018, than when I first wrote this paper, due to her many public appearances, her books, and the HBO movie about her life titled: "Temple Grandin: Different But not Less").

All children with these learning differences have greater sensitivities to the world in one way or another. This sensitivity may be to sounds, smells, light, tastes, chemicals, touch, linear information input, all related to the fact that their brain and nervous system's responses to body sensations and stimuli are more acute, due to the lack of a left-brain filter, and due to their nervous system, itself, being much more sensitive than usual.

In the case of autism, these sensitivities can be very great. Autistics, like other children, long to be touched and interact, and yet, with autism symptoms present, they are extremely sensitive and can withdraw from touch and from the world of stimulation and communication.

I will discuss an incident now that illustrates the impact of having no left-brain filter. This is an extreme case likened to bipolar disorder (discussed later), but it is indicative of the overload that occurs on some level for all individuals with ADD through autism, and indeed for those with bipolar disorder.

Jill Bolte Taylor is a neuroanatomist who has shared with the world what she experienced as she witnessed her own left brain stroke from the inside out, an experience she now calls her "**Stroke of Insight.**"

Focusing her research to understand schizophrenia and other brain disorders, Jill awoke one morning to experience her own left-brain functions progressively slipping away over a four hour period, (her speech, word recognition, understanding, recall ability, movement...). When her right arm would no longer respond to her request to move, Jill realized she was having a stroke. As the left brain shut down, Jill finally found herself in non-differentiated experiential immersion with all that surrounded her.

At many times, Bolte felt a great euphoria of fullness and connection, but at other times her sensory system was totally bombarded by the stimuli present, due to the lack of her left-brain filter.

She relates:

The stimulation coming in was pure pain, light burning my brain like wildfire, and sounds so loud and chaotic that I couldn't pick a voice out from the background. I wanted to escape.¹⁷

Zeroing in here on this particular experience of Ms. Bolte-Taylor, I want to relate this symptom of her stroke to the nature of many over-stimulating experiences for autistics. Ms. Bolte-Taylor's brain malfunction led her to many understandings, one of which was to know what it was like to be autistic or bipolar, overwhelmed by a world of sensory intrusion.

If you are interested in seeing Ms. Bolte-Taylor's moving account of this event, you can find it through this link. You will see that, as a result of her stroke of insight, she also has much to say about how the right and left hemispheres of our brains function, and about peace, connection and empathy in our world, referring again to the euphoria of fullness and connection I first referred to here regarding her stroke experience.

She closes with:

I believe the more time we spend choosing to run the deep, inner peace circuitry of our right hemispheres, the more peace we will project into the world, and the more peaceful our planet will be. What do you choose?

The left brain is that which filters stimuli, and accesses and processes verbal communication. Lacking this filtering system, and being so sensitive, autistics find their own ways to filter out the world of over-stimulation. This is often done by spinning their body and flapping their arms or by the repetition of a verbal or musical phrase. These actions insulate the individual from the outside world, and he or she finds some semblance of peace within. Autistics are then in the quiet of the right brain, the place not only of peace but also inspiration, insight, and a protected space in which to learn.

In this place of inner quiet and calm, many young autistics can learn to use words and improve communication. It is here also that autistic individuals can respond to their connection to music, nature, principles governing math or science, etc. There have been programs on 20/20 and any number on YouTube videos showing the creative right brain talents of autistic individuals, be it musical or otherwise.

Occasionally, autistics have extraordinary brain calculation or replication abilities, for their minds can function outside the realm of normal left brain limitations (Kim Peek, known as Rain Man) or act like a blank film, capturing and replicating what is seen or heard, etc. Videos on YouTube recently have shown individuals viewing a place, such as flying over Rome for an

hour, and then drawing from memory, within the next several days, every city structure, with complete details such as every window and door.

Since I have just mentioned Rain Man and the amazing skills of autistic individuals, more and more of which are testified to in videos traveling the internet, I would like to tell more of Rain Man's story.

About four months before his death in December 2009, four YouTube videos had gone around about his life. Parts of the video series were described in a New York Times article after his death, an account which also covered parts of his earlier life. I am generally drawing information here from both the article and the video.¹⁸

Kim Peek was raised after he was about thirty, solely by his father. The father dedicated his life to his son, being a total support and advocate, helping his son dress each day, and taking him wherever life called them. Peek needed this help for he lacked the left-brain skills in order to do these on his own.

Prior to the movie made about his life, Kim did not look people in the eye. However, once he had recognition, acceptance and an honored identity as Rain Man, Kim loved meeting people, greeting them on cable cars, in medical office buildings, grocery stores. To each person he engaged with, it was a similar, if not repetitive greeting, such as, "Nice to meet you, and you are such a lovely person."

Kim clearly reveled in offering this greeting to all he met. Following the greeting was his unusual next question, "What was the date of your birth?", and after receiving the answer, Kim would tell what day of the week it had been and added if it had been a holiday such as Easter in that year, all from his 'readable' memory.

Kim's parents had been advised when he was six years old that he should have a lobotomy, but by that time he had already memorized the first eight volumes of the family encyclopedia. Referred to by one of his doctors as a Mount Everest of memory, Kim had memorized so many Shakespearean plays and musical compositions, that he and his father had to stop attending performances, since Kim would stand up and correct the performers.

When invited to speak to a full house at Oxford University, and after answering a broad range of questions, each with Kim's usual precise detail as to when and/or where, a young female student asked, "Kim, are you happy?" His response was, "I'm happy just to look at you!" said with the full charm as was in all of his greetings.

When Kim's father was 80, he decided he needed to take his son to Stanford Medical Center to finally determine, if possible, what was different about him. It was found that Kim did not have a corpus callosum, the nerve tissue that connects the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Kim's father was told that this was why his son could not, and never would, think rationally.

At the end of the video clips, Kim was asked what he thought about his father, this man who had dedicated his life to helping him in every way possible.

Kim responded by saying, “My father and I share the same shadow.”

Here are his father’s closing remarks in the video, paraphrased: “My son may not be able to think rationally, but there is something extraordinary in Kim’s perceptive statement about our relationship.”

To “share the same shadow” is not a rational description. It is profound, such as one finds in the inspired words of poetry, a use of words based in inspiration, not in a left brain analysis.

TEMPLE GRANDIN’S STORY OF BEING AUTISTIC

The account by Temple Grandin of her life as an autistic individual was particularly pivotal for me in my study of autism and learning differences in general. It was from reading her autobiographical book, *Emergence*, that I began to hypothesize that these symptoms, seen as other than normal, are natural occurrences, as these individuals interact with life in a nontraditional manner, due predominantly to a right/heart brain orientation.

Temple was among those first few diagnosed with autism in the 1950’s. She, like most autistic children, longed for contact but could not stand to be touched. Also like autistic kids, she spun around and flapped her arms. Her story tells of her progress through all of her challenges to success and great contribution in the world.

Temple’s book relates how she amazingly and bravely found her way to graduate high school, then college, next to earn a PhD, and later to write of her story in *Emergence*, with other books following. In these writings she describes what it is to be autistic. Temple has also gained acclaim as “...a gifted animal scientist, writer, and presenter, who has designed one third of all the livestock-handling facilities in the U.S.... She is regarded as one of the highest functioning individuals with autism in the world,”¹⁹ as written on the back of this inspiring book of her early life.

Through Temple’s draw to animals and her intuitive connection to their feelings, along with her design abilities, heightened by her natural ‘thinking’ in pictures, these livestock facilities were modernized and humanized by Temple’s redesign. These facilities were changed from old systems that operated purely for convenience, into operations built upon the natural desire of the herd to walk in circles, in single file, with no fearful confrontations along the way to their end, this all showing great respect and care for these animals raised for our needs.

One of Temple’s newer, instructive books for parents, teachers and care-givers is titled, *The Way I See It*,²⁰ an invaluable resource for all involved. From this new book, *Emergence*, and Temple’s others works, there is much to learn. (Updating in 2018, Grandin has written many more very informative books.)

According to Temple, and as I have inferred, autistic kids flap and spin because by so doing, they focus on a self-imposed physical sensation so that they can shut out over-

stimulation from the outside world. Within this spinning and flapping, they find inner quiet, as well as great inspiration and understanding.

Temple, as a child, dreamed obsessively of inventing a device that would help her with her extreme sensitivities and her inability to relate emotionally, or easily in communication with others. **(Children and adults within the span of these learning differences are, to greater or lesser degrees, visionary, and in search of needed solutions and innovations.)** Temple envisioned a ‘squeeze machine,’ a type of which she eventually saw at her aunt’s cattle farm. The farm used a cattle chute to hold and still animals for inoculations and brandings. Temple saw that the cattle chute did not just hold the squirming animals – it calmed them.

With heightened fear and reluctance due to her autism, and her aunt’s own great apprehension about this extreme approach, Temple trusted her aunt to apply pressure to her in the cattle chute. Temple found herself calmed as she had seen with the cattle. Temple then built four increasingly advanced ‘squeeze machines,’ allowing her to be in control and to self-treat with externally applied pressure, subduing her heightened sensitivities to the world. Mothers have known for eons the soothing effects of swaddling newborns, who are sensitive to all the stimuli of the new world they have entered. This swaddling allows their sensory systems to calm as they begin to adjust to their new environment.

Temple used this external pressure to find increasing stillness within. In *Emergence*, she describes that the squeeze machine **“broke through my barrier of tactile defense.”**²¹ It was in this quiet that she was able to learn to relate and communicate with others and to understand her mother’s love, love being felt by us all through the connective orientation of our right/heart brain. Further, it was from her right/heart brain orientation that Temple found an enhanced connection to life at a level where she was highly empathic to the feelings and needs of others, including her passion to work with animals, thus leading to her later expertise and contributions for their treatment.

(Temple Grandin has shared that being on a mild dose of an anti-depressant seemed to help her get through social and life challenges, in addition to the her own self-affirming and passion-following approaches. I know some others, also on the ADD – autism spectrum, use an anti-depressant. Please note my reflections on depression later in this paper.)

WHAT IS PARTICULARLY SPECIAL ABOUT THE RIGHT BRAIN?

The right brain offers an extraordinary dimension to our functioning, if we are available to it. For most of us, our attention is tuned mostly to our left brain skills, trained to go there by the traditions of our societal and educational approaches. The left brain delineates, objectifies, labels and then manipulates objects and concepts, dealing with the world in separate pieces, joining those pieces together as we choose or are accustomed to doing so. Socially, as we act from the left brain, for many it is more common to feel some separation and even, at times, competition with others, feeling a lack of connection to them and often a sense of fear.

In contrast to this, what have we spoken of so far as seen in these children? They have gut-empathy, a sense of connection and understanding of the needs of others, a deep wanting to know and inform others, or to make things better in some way, and creatively from the right brain, wanting to express through music, art, movement, innovation, and more.

As we have discussed, these individuals often appear and feel awkward in their interactions with others, but it is their deep level of empathy that motivates their desires and actions to find ways to make a meaningful contribution.

These connective feelings and the desire to create arise from a right/heart brain intelligence that has its own gifts for our lives. As we understand what the evidence reveals, it is these and other talents that put scholars in the position of not quite understanding how these individuals can seem not to fit our world, but are undeniably somehow ‘gifted,’ in many cases beyond the general population.

What ‘informs’ these individuals from the right/heart brain? It is deep insights, and integration not reliant on linear thinking but on picturing, sensing, feeling, intuitions, what we might briefly experience as ‘Ah-Ha’s, epiphanies, and also our passions. It’s written that Einstein envisioned riding on a light beam to help in his understanding which became $E=MC^2$.

(I have read that after Einstein envisioned the reality of this important understanding, he went to his brother, who was more versed in linear mathematics, who then helped Einstein express this in the famous formula. While researching, one reads information from various sites and people. I had read this about Einstein and his brother, but did not take down the site. However, relooking now in 2018, here is a reference to his troubles in school regarding speaking, writing and arithmetic, which make it not so far flung, that he may have needed continued assistance in this linear area. See in “Notes.”²²⁾

A famous Einstein quote is:

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination (inspired envisioning) embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.²³ (My parenthesis)

(I will add here, updating in 2018, that it is largely our passions, in the case of autistics often their narrow and intense fixations, that arise from the heart and this connective intelligence, that are a very strong guide to our personal gifts and our possible contributions to the world around us. Please see my 2017 paper “The Inside Out of Autism,” at my website: HeartCenteredMinds.com).

And, it is here that I will assert that the best function of the left brain is to work in tandem with the right/heart brain, shaping with form and detail that which is based first in connection and inspiration for the well-being of all. Just as we have two hands, we have

two brain hemispheres and our heart, which are meant to work in harmony together for the betterment and success of humanity, and in turn the planet, also.

Returning a bit more to the right/heart brain, with which we are less familiar...

In a reading textbook used in recent years in elementary schools, there was an expository piece that explained to the children that Edison and many other inventors found their inspirations in dreams, a realm which accesses right brain integration and insight. This text book was being used as No Child Left Behind focused more and more exclusively on left-brain skills.

A book by Daniel Pink titled: *A Whole New Mind, Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, was a NY Times and Business Week bestseller. From the back of this book:

Gone is the age of “left-brain” dominance. The future belongs to a different kind of person with a different kind of mind: thinkers whose abilities mark the fault line between who now gets ahead and who doesn’t.²⁴

And, I would say who needs to get ahead are the people of the world, whose needs we can all meet with inspired connective answers that serve all, for greater than our left-brain-perceived differences, are our shared common needs, known to our hearts and connective knowledge of our right brain.

It is important to understand that there is much in our life that we can learn and understand in ways that do not just focus on left brain skills. The right brain is open, communicating to us with many intelligences that do not start first with thinking.

Not being an artist, I was amazed at a recent gathering where an artist was painting impressions of our workshop day. Her images were dynamic, some strong and forceful, others beautiful and serene. When I asked her how she decided upon these images, she said they came forth quickly and from a place without her will directing it, a place that spoke through her brush as she rapidly painted what emerged. (This is an artistic example, whereas poetry and discovery of scientific principles or elusive solutions can all involve detailed, supportive thought coming after an Ah-Ha’s, a realization, an epiphany, an inspiration or intuition, all arising from the right brain.)

So now, after exploring many things that come from a right brain connection, I can return to Temple Grandin and share with you this dimension of a gifted, perhaps enigmatic intelligence as Temple experienced it. Temple explains that she knew since childhood that she would find “answers in realms unexplored by others.”²⁵ She was referring to the realms of the right brain that had given her, for instance, her childhood vision and compulsion to create a ‘squeeze machine’ for herself.

These realms continued to inspire and guide Temple to her many successes, as she intuited and acted upon answers received in ways that are not directly accessed by the left brain. This is something that we have all tasted in a much smaller way as we have felt a ‘gut hunch,’ and also have felt hidden within our passions, whether or not we have had the confidence to act on them.

This all feels quite enigmatic because it cannot be understood or accessed by the thinking of the left brain.

It is with thanks and appreciation to Temple Grandin that I have shared what I have understood of her experiences. Now, I would briefly like to turn to the story of Jenny McCarthy and her son's challenges with autism.

**LOUDER THAN WORDS, by JENNY McCARTHY
and
THE SPARK, by KRISTINE BARNETT**

This discussion gives me the chance to explain briefly what I think autism is. Like the other 'differences' described earlier, **autism, I believe, is a hard-wired orientation toward the right brain and heart, with an even greater sensitivity and enhanced special abilities and focus.**

However, due to our world of altered foods, chemicals, and a great deal of external stimuli, **many troublesome symptoms can show up**, especially in autistic individuals, who can writhe in response to these harsh intrusions. I believe these symptoms and responses are an add-on situation incited by our world toxins, afflicting autistics' extremely sensitive nervous systems and open orientation. Additionally, this situation, along with linear information overload, can add to an autistic's already prevalent interest focus-inward-turn away from the world.

This is a very large part of the story of Evan McCarthy, Jenny's very creative and intelligent autistic son, who was subjected to great physical trauma as his body responded to our world.

Jenny McCarthy -

Louder Than Words is the book written by Jenny McCarthy that describes the events in her life with her young son as autism took both of their lives by storm. Reflecting later, Jenny realized there were autistic traits inherent in Evan since birth. Kids oriented toward autism at birth, can be seemingly kicked into it more fully by something occurring as they grow and develop. The question is, what can cause this?

One of Evan's early autistic characteristics was not responding with outward signs of warmth and joy to Jenny's loving physical and verbal communications or to those of others. Another was a habit of flapping his hands in apparent excitement. Other symptoms later arose like tiptoe walking and spinning, as well as his fascination with hinges, geometric shapes, turning wheels, and more, as he grew month by month approaching and passing two years old.

But it was on one particular morning that Jenny woke up sensing something wrong registering within her own body. Checking on two and a half year old Evan, sleeping forty-five minutes later than normal, she found him struggling to breathe, soon followed by a seizure and convulsions.

With few answers from medical personnel, and several of those inaccurate, Jenny found herself alone that day and in days to come in a desperate attempt to find out what was happening. The situation intensifying, Evan had seizures along with cardiac arrest six times on one particularly terrible day. Inaccurate diagnoses were accompanied by hugely problematic medications.

Before the seizures, Evan had already learned several words and was able to recite full verses from some songs, an autistic inclination, and when asked to say door, he said “rectangle,” and asked to say stop sign, he said “octagon.” However, one of Evan’s subsequent medications took his speech away entirely. This, along with other effects from tried medicines, plunged Evan into withdrawal and deep isolation from the world.

Jenny states that full-fledged ‘autism’ seemed to have taken hold as the months proceeded after Evan received some of the childhood vaccinations. She believes that Evan and many other children are born with inherently weaker immune systems that cannot take the injection of these live viruses and the mercury when it accompanied them. She and others feel that it might be best to wait until a child is 18 months old to give them these injections, and/or to give them in two sections.

Speaking of one other specific example regarding Evan’s autism, there was a time, after being medicated with numerous antibiotics, when his little body was so full of the yeast overgrowth called candida, that once given an antifungal medication, his body began releasing yeast like it was exploding from his system.

Due to previous diet changes and therapy, Evan’s communication had begun to increase, and then, within two weeks of taking this anti-fungal medication, Jenny heard him giggle at a joke on TV. Even more than a recent and sudden six-word sentence, Jenny realized this giggle meant that Evan understood even the “subtext and emotion, language in a more complex way,”²⁶ there in the joke, which made it appear that his language understanding had been growing all along, despite and beneath his toxin-incited extreme withdrawn response period.

Reading Jenny’s book will give the full description of her frantic, resolute and successful efforts to pull Evan out of ‘autism’ through what some call a ‘window of time’ of possible recovery. She had learned of this window from other moms, from whom she also learned about dairy, wheat and sugar free diets, finding a DAN (Defeat Autism Now) doctor, ABA therapy, B12 shots, and more. In a “What to Do Pamphlet” at the back of Jenny’s book, she lists the many approaches to try in any parent’s attempt to help their child.

I do not know the answer to the question about vaccinations, science saying there is no connection. But it seems a real possibility that, in some cases, vaccines or medicines can initiate or complicate body reactions in many of these sensitive kids, kids whose sensitive nervous systems are connected to a right/heart brain orientation, with its extremely subtle receptive and connective qualities.

Now in 2018, I checked for an update on Evan’s life, and quickly found a 2014 citing of the television program, “The View,”²⁷ which Jenny McCarthy was co-hosting with the other celebrities. She shared that her son, at that time, was being bullied, he not recognizing it as such,

but instead thinking these were friendly interactions. This was due to his lack of left-brain accurate assessment of communication, he being autistic, and this like others on the ADD – autism spectrum who have a similar difficulty with communication, as we have seen, in an equal or less degree.

So, the differences of autism are still with Evan, and I would highly assume he has both the many gifts and challenges of autism. Jenny pulled him out of the terrible physical reactions to foods, chemicals and the like that can further inhibit the communication of autistic individuals. (If you read my paper “The Inside Out of Autism” at my website: HeartCenteredMinds.com, you will see my discussion about SPD, or Sensory Processing Disorder, which is food allergy and chemical aversion that affects some with autism, and also other non-autistic individuals.)

Kristine Barnett-

By citing another parallel, yet different, autistic case as written of by Kristine Barnett in her book, *The Spark*,²⁸ about her autistic son, Jake, we can compare the symptoms and path of these two young boys’ health and learning.

Kristine Barnett wrote about Jake, describing both the amazing and worrisome early months and years when he focused often and intently on light and shadows as a baby and toddler, he also unpeeling cereal boxes to explore the empty space inside, spinning objects and spinning his own body, fascinated with cylinders, and more. She relates that he recited the alphabet forward and backwards, and was sounding out words like ‘cat’ and ‘dog’ when he was one.

However, like many autistic children, starting around 14 months, and intensifying by age two and a half, Barnett shares that Jake had taken a huge inward turn, leaving behind the words he had learned and his connection to those outside of himself, only to focus more and more on his alphabet flash cards, geometric shapes, plaid and straight line patterns, still unpeeling cereal boxes, the distant, non-communicating part of all this a great distress to her and Jake’s father.

With high intelligence but *very* low ‘functional’ scores in those early years, it was later affirmed that Jake has an IQ higher than Einstein’s, has a photographic memory, taught himself calculus in two weeks, and at age 12 was a paid researcher in quantum physics. Jake is exceptional in his intelligence and abilities, but in regard to his autism and the inward direction of many autistics’ attention early on, **Jake reassures, “Children with autism are not missing. Instead they are off making discoveries.”**²⁹

As shocking as this is for families, it can be a ‘natural’ inward turn for many with autism to experience this inner journey, it being a part of their orientation passion focus. However, Jake’s description of a deep inward focus is different than the plummet inward that may have also accompanied a natural autistic inward turn by Evan, which was exacerbated to a plunge by his very sensitive body’s response to food and chemical ‘toxins.’

It is my read that Jenny’s Evan has the abilities and talents of an autistic orientation, but due to his extreme sensitivities, he was life-threatened by the environment coming at him, afflicting him

with strong symptomatic body responses. I would call this the sensitive reactive response of autism to elements potentially toxic to their individual bodies.

Kristine Barnett shares that another child diagnosed with autism about the same time as Jake, seemingly ‘miraculously’ starting speaking again after he and Jake were both started on a casein-free, gluten-free diet. Jake did not start to speak again after being on the diet, it evidently being just autism’s often inward turn that took him within.

I believe that, along with all these other sensitive children I have spoken of, autistics are reacting even more strongly to a world where those of us, far less sensitive than autistics, know that sound and chemical pollution, processed and degraded foods, more and more left-brain linear focus, as well as the stress caused by the increasing pace and demands of life, are taking their toll on us all. Introduce autistics to this scene, and you see individuals in increased reaction and withdrawal, **like ‘canaries in a coal mine.’**

The heightened attunement and sensitivity of these children puts us in the position of needing to find what works for their health, life style, and communication. For some, diet, therapy, and other corrective measures can bring a greater calm and a closer understanding of our world to these individuals. However, it must be an approach that supports the child as who they are, allowing them to feel good with any practices tried, not forcing their brain to do what it does not do naturally, which would cause greater stress and a damaging sense of inherent imperfection in these individuals.

For many, our words, world of stimuli, and linearity are ineffectual and too often totally abrasive, leaving it to us to understand, accept, and discover ways that allow and celebrate new means for autistics, and all on the spectrum, to participate, and contribute what they have to offer this world.

And amazingly, knowing this from my own teaching experiences and those shared by Kristine Barnett in *The Spark*, the way she brought Jake back to speaking, and one of the best of these approaches appears to be encouraging autistics, all on the ADD-autism spectrum, and in fact all children, to follow their Ah-Ha’s, gut feelings, their likes, abilities, inclinations, and their passions, all expressions of our right/heart brain connection, and even GREATLY ENLARGING upon these experiences.

For it is this, with great support, that can cause their brain, as brains amazingly do function, to more spontaneously learn and equip them with what they need, potentially for many skills to develop, often including communication, these being doorways for participation and belonging. Remember those who spoke at the Japanese winery mentioned earlier. (See my 2017 paper: “The Inside Out of Autism”)

NEW MEDIUMS OF COMMUNICATION

Many seeking answers are exploring other means of communication that serve autistics. “Autism, The Musical,” (HBO), shows one creative woman’s wonderful approach to ‘giving voice’ to highly expressive and creative autistic children.

This is a documentary about some twenty-five families that enrolled their autistic child in an interactive therapy and child-affirming program that culminated in a musical. While showing the classes and sessions as they progressed toward the final musical, we also see story segments about the lives of many of these gifted autistic children.

The children were all very bright, and highly sensitive: to sound, light, too much activity, and some even to the requests to participate. Gloriously, they were all respected and loved for being a person who functions differently, but in a way that is to be honored and appreciated. Autism, in the program, was still said to be a brain disability, but it was also recognized essentially as just a ‘different way of functioning.’

Some children who spoke well, showed us their gift of intelligence and insight. Wyatt, around nine years old, while swinging on a swing, was struggling, soul searching with the paradox of why autistic kids withdraw into themselves:

Sometimes I don’t like it when kids go into their own world. You know, I do that a lot, but how are you going to make friends, in your own world, when the most special thing would be to have a friend, a kind friend, **not a bully**.³⁰ (My bold highlighting)

*** Please note here the added reclusiveness implied by the pressure of anyone who disapproves, or emotionally or physically overpowers any on the ADD-autism spectrum.

Adam, about eight, whose behavior can be very erratic, (lucky enough to have a one-on-one aide in his classroom), also clearly showed his gifted brightness. We saw this in his classroom, at home, and in the ‘musical’ as he used his cello as a means of expression. He loves to play Ravel’s Bolero.

Moving to another expressive approach for autistics and others, Joey Travolta, John Travolta’s brother, serves the ‘developmentally disabled’ with his program “Inclusion Films.”³¹ It was originally two-week long Film Camps (ages 9-18) designed to develop self-esteem, confidence, and creativity through acting and digital filmmaking, teaching essential skills for a career in film in a non-competitive environment, this being a place and means to communicate. (Travolta’s outreach checked again is still running full tilt boogie in 2018.)

Travolta’s Practical Film Workshop for Adults (18+) was designed to provide entry and intermediate level skills necessary to work in the film production field. This program helped enable developmentally disabled individuals to fully participate in all aspects of community living and the work force. (This originally written in 2009, programs may have changed, but have surely evolved.)

Many, many helpful programs, such as Brain Gym, and other sound and movement therapies, are serving to decrease the sensitivities of those who are autistic, thereby softening the blows of the world upon them. Now to move on from autism to a sometimes even more volatile world, that of bipolar disorder.

BIPOLAR DISORDER

My research of learning ‘disorders’ affirmed that all of these children are extremely sensitive. They are driven away from the world, either by lack of challenge, or by differently-directed attention, physical or extreme emotional escape, and/or reaction to chemical, food or stimuli invasion. They do not adjust easily or at all to our left-brain governed linear structures and systems.

All these ‘learning-differences’ children, in general, are oriented to the right/heart brain, and feel and think in ways other than the usual, while also sometimes reacting with very anti-social or anti-world behaviors.

The lives of individuals with bipolar disorder, and also the lives of their family members, can be like a nightmare. These children can be extremely reactive to life in so many ways, with huge mood swings, needing love and closeness one minute to yelling and screaming at those who just hugged them, holding it together some days at school and then releasing a rampage when Mom arrives for pick up after school, with so many difficult highs and lows.

I am not a doctor and do not presume to have answers that might be better than what has been already tried, **but I see a connection to what I have discussed before, amazing gifts and great sensitivity to our world.** Along with the inspiration and creativity, which has been noted also in bipolar individuals throughout history, it is almost as if bipolar individuals join other disorders in an increasing reactive response and overwhelm to our world, and in the case of bipolar individuals, it is an extreme reaction.

I know that in the desperate situation with bipolar disorder, families have given their hearts entirely to trying to find answers, as in the case of Jenny McCarthy and so many others. Along with nutritional, environmental and behavioral approaches, and not knowing what else to do to help these kids, doctors have prescribed many new drugs, sometimes more than one at a time, and most untested in humans, in an attempt to see improvement and to offset new side effects.

After watching the Frontline program, “The Medicated Child,” about bipolar disorder, I googled Childhood Bipolar Disorder, and at the very first site found, from the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation:

The family trees of many children who develop early-onset bipolar disorder include individuals who suffered from substance abuse and/or mood disorders, often undiagnosed. Also among their relatives are found highly accomplished, creative, and extremely successful individuals in business, politics, and the arts.³²

The creativity evokes, again, the consideration of right brain connection. Also again, the mood swings could be no left-brain filtering of experience, and heightened sensitivities to stimuli and chemicals, resulting in confusion, disorientation and reactivity.

Substance abuse, with any of these disorders, can be a form of self-medication, which can calm a person down, afford them escape, and sometimes increase focus.

From this same internet writing, there is reference, as with the other ‘disorders,’ to the great creative ability in bipolar people throughout history:

Historical Perspective:

Bipolar disorder has left its mark on history. Many famous and accomplished people had symptoms of the illness, including: Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Goethe, Balzac, Handel, Schumann, Berlioz, Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf, Hemmingway, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton.

The biographies of Beethoven, Newton, and Dickens in particular, reveal severe and debilitating recurrent mood swings beginning in childhood.

The program about bipolar children mentioned above, “The Medicated Child,” followed several children from the onset of the problem and over several years, with behavioral and medication approaches. Many of the children had been on 7 to 10 different new drugs throughout their treatment histories.

At the end of the program, it was shown that Jacob, a boy they started following at age two, was turning to meditation and yoga at about the age of 16 in an attempt by he and his parents to find solutions other than the many medications, sometimes multiple at a time, that had been prescribed for him.

Again, I draw no conclusions but am just noting these similarities in sensitivities and gifted qualities of bipolar individuals that characterize the learning and life differences I have previously discussed for all these individuals.

As mentioned in the discussion about Temple Grandin, depression is an issue for many of these sensitive and receptive individuals. This is much more pronounced in bipolar individuals, experiencing their own deep plummet after a period of intense inspiration.

This would seem to be a chemical plummet, but certain practices, mindful, emotional, attentional, might fill the gap, changing the chemicals released to a dopamine, serotonin, or some similar wellness chemical response, averting the deep depression. In addition, inspired very often to help the world, how can depression not be felt when looking at the state of the world, despite attempts, and also because of the sense of isolation that comes to most of these individuals, due to being so different.

I wonder what might come of this depression, if instead, these lives were honored for who they are and how they function, with our recognition and appreciation of the gifts and contributions they can and do make.

(Adding in 2018: a deep sense of being nurtured, essential, healthy outer life enjoyment immersions, and belonging, all affect the development and equilibrium of the brain, and might help level out the highs and lows of being bipolar. See “The Inside Out of Autism,” at my website, particularly PART III of that paper.)

Having now seen the more severe reactions of autistic and bipolar individuals, we’ll now look at the concurring information regarding nonverbal learning disorder and dyslexia, which, once again, exhibit symptoms at the milder end of the learning differences spectrum. I bring these up now because the description of nonverbal learning disorder generally summarizes again the *broad span* of learning-different characteristics I have described, and the discussion about dyslexia leads us forward to the question of what is to be done.

NONVERBAL LEARNING DISORDER

Children with nonverbal learning disorder evidence the common nonverbal tendencies of which I have spoken in the beginning of this paper, and the paragraph below summarizes the wide spectrum of the milder to near autistic symptoms discussed throughout this work. From the online article, “Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities: A Distinct Group Within Our Population,” by Tom Humphries:

Widespread academic difficulties in the language arts, including problems in reading, spelling, and written composition, are commonly associated with this profile because the individual lacks the verbal strengths to succeed in these areas.... Their inability to integrate and interpret information both socially and academically can result in poor organization and make it difficult for them to remain attentive when trying to do tasks that they do not fully understand. They can be misidentified as a primary behavior problem, or, due to their tendency to cling to the familiar and routine as a way of coping with becoming overloaded with information, they may erroneously be seen as slower in their overall functioning.³³

DYSLEXIA

In an interview, Stephen J. Cannell,²² famous TV screenwriter and author with dyslexia, states:

Despite my obvious weaknesses, I view dyslexia as a gift, not a curse. Most dyslexics are good at right brain, abstract thought and that’s what writing is. You’re starting with nothing and coming up with something all on your own that didn’t exist before. That’s my strong suit.

The real fear that I have for dyslexic people is not that they have to struggle with jumbled input or that they can't spell, but that they will quit on themselves before they get out of school. Parents have to create victories wherever they can, whether it's music, sports or art. You want your dyslexic child to be able to say: "Yeah, reading's hard. But I have these other things that I can do."³⁴

In an interview on the site, Cannell explained that Einstein was so dyslexic that he had his front door painted red so that he could find his home as he drove up and down the streets.

Cannell also related that he himself flunked three different grades early on, but finally graduated with a 2.0 from the University of Oregon. He feels that he made it through school because of his acquired good people skills due to being a high school football champ, boosting his self-esteem, which then inspired his academic effort as well. Cannell's own children were also dyslexic, and he made sure they had tutoring and other assists that got them thru school to their more mature times of choice on how to proceed with talents, schooling, and other opportunities.

Cannell attributes much of his success to the tremendous support of a creative writing teacher in college who saw Cannell's incredible writing talent despite his phonetic spelling. Cannell also found several coping skills, one of which was to sign up for 20 units of study each college semester, ask the teachers how important spelling was in their class, and then to keep only those classes where his phonetic spelling was not a problem.

So now this reference to Cannell's fear that dyslexics will give up on themselves leads us right into the topic "How DO we support all these children?"

HOW DO WE GIVE SUPPORT IN GENERAL

We are seeing a continued huge increase in the number of sensitive individuals with a right/heart brain orientation. Just as it didn't work when society tried to change left-handed kids to right, I do not believe that we are meant to 'flip' these children to a left-brain outlook. They need to be recognized for the gifts inherent in their orientation and supported in the acquisition of any appropriate left-brain 'shaping' skills to bring their talents into this world. Again, the qualities inherent to the right brain that I am seeing are: gut-empathy, connection, and inspiration from a non-linear realm.

We are being invited by nature to solve this mystery of an incredibly sensitive generation of kids, geared away mentally or physically from the world (some reacting to it), and attuned more to the right/heart brain. They find there, and express, deep empathy and connection to people, and understandings not typical of their age. Their sensitivities also lead me to mention again their increasing allergic reactions, as well as their possible genetic pre-dispositions opposed to metals, chemical additives, etc., and the invasive stimuli of our world.

SUPPORTIVE MEASURES WE CAN TAKE

1) Awareness of the non-linear orientation of these children in our **schools can help bring forth experience-based and open-ended type lessons, where discovery and insight are part of the learning environment.** The Waldorf schools and many others have philosophies that honor the development of the whole individual. They encourage open-ended questioning, investigation, inspiration, even movement and outdoor experiences, with the results then shaped and formed by the artful application of left-brain skills. This is a return to balance in our lives, of how we use both our left and right brain abilities, for all of us, and all of our students.

This balance referred to in “Unplugged Schools,” by Lowell Monke:

From the seventeenth century through the first half of the twentieth, schools were places children went to gain entry into the world of symbols. The abstract character of the texts and numbers found in schools complemented the intensely physical character of life outside. Rarely, however, was it allowed to supersede it. Those children who spent an inordinate amount of time in the world of abstractions were typically chastised for being “bookworms” and were pushed outside to get some fresh air.³⁵

I sure remember the phrase, “Get outside and get some fresh air,” from my upbringing in the 1950’s, with overall educational balance enhanced by physical education, home economics, art, music, shop, and auto mechanics at the intermediate and high schools in the 1960’s. These were all right/heart brain activities which reconnect the brain to a renewing energy source that allows for the integration of what has been academically learned, and invites further investigation and the fresh shaping abilities of the left brain.

We need to return this balance to our public and private schools, which, in recent years, have been forced to increase the left-brain focus due to the performance demands of No Child Left Behind (and then, in 2010 and 11, Race to the Top). Left brain skills for forming and shaping knowledge are important, and can be acquired following inspirations and talents in spectrum individuals, AND ALL CHILDREN. When lessons allow children to draw from their inspirations, talents and ability to find answers and create, excitement fuels a momentum and desire to learn left-brain skills that help shape creations into products and services which others can appreciate.

Mr. Brooks, Temple Grandin’s psychology teacher, challenged her spatial and high intelligence by asking, “Can you build a room like this?” It was the Ames Distorted Room Illusion, built so that when two people of the same height stand on each side of the room one person looks twice as tall as the other. Grandin’s brain needed and loved a challenge, which Mr. Brooks, her psychology teacher, understood, this all recounted in Grandin’s autobiography of her early life:

The Distorted Room puzzle became my new fixation. For the next six months I tried to build such a room out of cardboard. At least, my fixation had been channeled into something constructive and aroused my interest in

science. Obsessed by solving the Distorted Room puzzle, I began to study some of the boring subjects just in case I might learn some things that would really interest me.³⁶

2) Until this emergent right-brained orientation is seen more clearly by the educational system, we need to help these kids do their best to succeed or just get through until they can find a freer arena in which to create. As I have seen, and as Stephen Cannell attested in helping his own children succeed, **this may mean lots of tutors, tons of parent/teacher support, any helpful therapies or practices, and a de-emphasis on the ‘all-important’ grades and test scores.** It happens all too often, in fact most of the time, that these children are entirely overlooked as to who they really are, in the attempt to have them fit the norm. And what is the norm?

Considering how this applies to neuro-typical, or those we consider having ‘normal’ intelligence, we have seen the expectations steadily rise for their accelerated academic, noteworthy sports/music/art, and extensive community service load them with late afternoon extended activity and late night home work, just to keep up, building the background for the perfect test scores and application to get into some prestigious school.

One high schooler, among many interviewed about this, responded in a way **that became the title of a powerful and poignant documentary** made about the stressed health and rise of suicides in our nation’s schools in attempts to meet these expectations. This student’s words: “It is the **‘Race to Nowhere.’**”³⁷

Let me say again here, that many right/heart brain oriented individuals can and do adapt or flip and become good or even very good students, often energized by their innate passion that comes from their inspiration. This can happen with an effective teacher, and/or by the support of two or three concerned people in the individual’s life. On the other hand, this can also happen for stronger and more detrimental ‘survival’ reasons, such as driving oneself, or competing with others to get much needed acceptance and attention.

It often happens that many of these individuals, changed to the left-brain orientation, end up continuing our world’s emphasis on a left-brain perspective and modes of interaction and action, alienated from their own right/heart brain talents. Further, although some kids can and do flip, most are unable to make the switch even after great encouragement or prodding, and throughout their lives consider this a great failure and character flaw.

3) **To support right/heart brain oriented kids, AND ALL CHILDREN, we need to allow them to explore their realms of interest, their passions, or in autism, their seeming ‘fixation.’** A student was ‘mainstreamed’ into my class from a Special Education classroom during the afternoons, three days a week. Right off we learned of his love for animals, and he boldly stated he could communicate with them. This young man focused on and knew everything about animals, and was hugely inspired, bringing a contagious enthusiasm for life to every child in the room each day he was with us. We loved his time with us!

Many psychologists say that kids should be diverted from their fixations. Temple Grandin sees that these fixations focus children into the genius of their gifts. She could not be dissuaded from her drive to build a squeeze machine, and thereby discovered her connection to people, and her calling, where her contributions have led to a more compassionate treatment of animals and offers us a greater understanding of gifted individuals.

4) In and outside of school, **these children need the unconditional support and love** of at least one or two significant people in their lives. Of course, the more people the better. In every case of success which I have experienced while teaching, or read about, this was a huge part of a successful outcome.

5) These children's **diets** need to be chosen carefully, selecting wholesome, unadulterated foods as much as possible, along with considering special non-dairy or non-wheat diets if these or other approaches might help with troublesome symptoms.

6) **Serotonin** may play an important role in the picture as well. Temple Grandin wrote that being on a mild dose of an anti-depressant seemed to help her get through. Many individuals I know with these syndromes, ADD, ADHD, Asperger's, are on an anti-depressant. Some anti-depressants act to increase or regulate levels of serotonin. There are additional methods of increasing serotonin, which could be tried in place of, or in addition to, perhaps smaller doses of medication.

Serotonin is a well-being chemical, and right brain activities, such as being in nature, feeling loved and being accepted, having a sense of connection and community, having pets, enjoying art and music, being physically active, and doing meditation and yoga, all promote the production of serotonin. Also, using our senses for the natural world for which they were originally designed: the sights, smells, sounds, touch, and taste of wholesome life, appreciated and savored, increases the flow of serotonin in our bodies.

7) Expose these children to **sufficient amounts of unstructured time**, returning to them the opportunity to discover basic wonders, beauties and principles on their own, with their own eyes, ears, body and mind.

Richard Louv, the author of *Last Child in the Woods*³⁸, states that being connected to nature, much of the time, helped calm and support his daughter with dyslexia. His book is filled with chapters related to the benefits that nature offers: "Why the Young (And the Rest of Us) Need Nature," and "The Genius of Childhood: How Nature Nurtures Creativity." He discusses ADHD, Natural School Reform, and "Re-Enchanting the City."

8) **Limit/modify these kids' exposure to poor television and mind/heart damaging video games or internet activities**, finding instead those programs/activities that are supportive of health, stability, and social and heart-felt learning for these children. (One 22-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome still watched Mr. Roger's because, "The world would be crazier without him; he trusts us and the fact that we are all different.")

9) **Carefully consider medical approaches**, and monitor the effects of these and any medication that may be used in addition to alternative, more natural ways to manage difficult symptoms.

10) Parents should free themselves and their child by **realizing that their child is meant to be different**. Accept behaviors that may be different or out-of-the-box, if they are also health-supportive. This does not mean set no boundaries for the child, because boundaries give shape to their positive identity, ensure physical safety, and create a sense of stability.

11) Be in harmony with, or **'go with the flow'** of your child, as much as possible, for I have a deep conviction that by valuing and accepting these children for who they are, with their sensitivities and great gifts, **we will be transformed ourselves into being less left-brain driven and more heart connected**.

Lexi is a wonderful teenage girl with autism, seen in the HBO program "Autism, the Musical." Lexi would respond in copy style when in an oral conversation, but could compose her own original answers with a word board, and could sing beautifully with no language hesitations.

Lexi's mom, at first stressed, confused and depressed by the huge challenges of Lexi's autism, became a highly accepting and supportive parent, joyous and grateful for Lexi's wonderful nature. Speaking, I'm sure, for so many of the desperate parents who have devoted their lives to helping their special needs child, she says:

Autism is considered a disease...and nothing will happen that is positive, until these humans are valued by others for the beautiful people they are and the gifts they have. I cannot make them respect Lexi and love her, but **Living with Lexi has had a strong effect on who I have become**. (My bolding)

Listening to a panel of three adult males from a San Francisco Bay Area organization called AASCEND (Autism, Asperger's Coalition for Education, Networking and Development), with two of the men having autism, and one Asperger's Syndrome, I was once again struck by an important familiar comment, made at the end by one of these participants.

Greg Yates is a man with autism, perhaps in his 40's, a graduate of MIT, who, despite his high intelligence, struggled through his childhood as a head banger and toe walker, with other autistic characteristics. These things incited bullying by others, and therefore, a self-chosen isolation for Greg. Miseries accompanied Greg into his twenties, when, at times, he wanted to commit suicide.

It was at this time that Greg found and chose ways to cope: always traveling with ear plugs, using Irlen lenses for help with reading and focusing, joining socially structured programs such as Al-Anon, and starting to do Zen meditation. The meditation enabled him to be a 'witness' to his head banging and gave him a choice not to do it. This calming and centering could be used to help him through his normal days, but also before and as a break during highly social engagements, such as parties and meetings. Further, he could enjoy Zen meditation as a group activity, sitting in silence, *with others*.

In addition to these, Greg goes to Zydeco dancing, a ‘special dance for special people,’ and when he found himself feeling extremely socially isolated and unhappy in a job commensurate with his MIT training, he quit and found being a handyman, now, makes him feel most comfortable, by working with his hands and being in peripheral communication with those who need help with various tasks.

When asked at the end of the presentation and discussion, “What was the most help for you, Greg?”, he replied, “Opened-hearted people who dealt and looked at me with an open heart.”

HELPING ADD-AUTISM INDIVIDUALS FIND THEIR PLACE IN THIS WORLD

I would also like to address the important topic of how these knowers/learners can function in our world. Many ‘high functioning’ spectrum learners, accommodating for their more difficult differences through school (or bailing out of school), and moving out and forward in society, can follow an interest or an ability and find a good job in some aspect of our culture. This can be either mainstream, like many successful entrepreneurs and others, or in some off-the-beaten-path *unique fit* to their insights, interests and abilities found elsewhere.

A specific example of a very unique fit: autistics are more and more being employed in jobs needing scrutiny for anomalies or small differentiations. Often thinking in pictures, autistics can see the finer details, spot a pattern in a distracting environment, detect visual structures, and can mentally manipulate complex three-dimensional shapes, as supported in an article by Laurent Morttron.⁴⁰ The Israeli army⁴¹, US army⁴² and many businesses in various fields, particularly in Silicon Valley, are employing autistics to heighten accuracy or help find broader applicability and opportunity aided by their heightened perceptive skills.

And to note, these autistics do not feel overburdened with this work as a ‘neurotypical’ individual would, for their brain is designed to see these things easily, and these autistics do not mind, but rather thrive on repetitious work. This is a little different than what has been said about other autistics such as Temple Grandin needing challenges, but there are differences among differences, and most autistics and spectrum individuals are highly motivated, and thus ‘challenged’ by *any work* that they feel helps others or is for some bigger goal.

Many other individuals with differences, and ‘high functioning’ enough within that general definition in our traditional schools, will make it through our current school system with the help of tutors or special support classes. Many get a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) in order to graduate high school, perhaps going to a junior/community college, maybe then motivated and focused enough to pursue even higher education. At whatever point, they can eventually find their place within a broad ability range of jobs such as computer work, chef, builder, musician or artist, bakery or pet store worker, or wherever their connective intelligence may take them with their ability and interests/passion, large or small.

And then, many of these individuals are here to strongly underscore that which all these learners know at some deep level: that we are to return to connection and kinder, gentler times. A friend of mine mentioned that many individuals with more marked learning differences that he knew were primarily interested in animals, children or older people. This is because the simplicity and depth of connective heart interaction in these experiences matches who they, and all spectrum learners, are inside.

Often helping these last mentioned individuals heighten and build upon these interest-based experiences and interactions can bring greater interactive and performance skills, which feeds further confidence and ability and— continuing development. The brain’s abilities are fueled by interests, passions, nurturing, belonging and success. (See “The Inside Out of Autism” at my website HeartCenteredMinds.com.)

Some of these last knowers/learners may need more support to make their way from home and school to the world outside. And this ‘world-fit’ challenge is about spectrum learners but also others such as those with down syndrome or cerebral palsy. It is very often true with some autistics, when not reacting strongly to our ‘noisy’ sensory and/or toxic world around them, and of those with down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and others, that we see their deep nature: simple, gentle, calm, quiet, kind, and some, deeply knowing.

Lamenting the lack of understanding by others of her autistic son’s differences, mother/author, Laura Shumaker, writing in her book, *A Regular Guy*, protests: “...they can’t accept Matthew as he is. Can’t they appreciate his honesty, his humor, and the pureness of his soul?”⁴³ This is certainly an echo of Lexi’s mom’s comment above about valuing the beautiful people they are and the gifts they have; kindness, calm, and gentleness also being gifts.

It is up to us to make that place for those who need a big transition to our world or to live apart from it. This can be in communities like Camphill Communities⁴⁴ where many join together in a living environment with counselors/teachers as part of the community, supporting the shared life skills of all the residents, many of which include interests such as cooking, landscaping, gardening, farm machinery operations, etc. Here there is acceptance, respect and value seen in differences which creates a place for comfort, meaningful contribution, belonging and joy.

Those with more skills can live in group homes where contact with counselors is by call or text, and residents with ‘differences’ work together using independent living skills, with schedule check-in’s with counselors, and school and/or jobs as part of growing into an adult life.

One very developed and supportive site for those able and wanting to find their way forward successfully in mainstream society is Aspen Network in northern California, created from the vision of co-director Dr. Meg Fields. Part of the website description:

Aspen Network offers four integrated, year-round programs for teens and young adults with social concerns, anxiety disorders and social differences, including spectrum behaviors...the programs, both residential and nonresidential, allow young people to learn and grow in a welcoming environment with peers of their own and a sensitively trained staff that includes neurotypical young adults...

Developing a housing community with people of blended diagnoses means that residents can use their strengths to assist others in their areas of growth.⁴⁵

This type of inspired and comprehensive support for spectrum individuals is so very needed for so very many. The programs I have found at this time are paid for by parents or other support people. In the best situation, this would be paid for in a way similar to Medicare perhaps, for initial and/or ongoing cost for families is very high. Who will pay when parents are no longer here?

The fact that our awareness of all of these different learners has been alerted and heightened now for some twenty years **makes this high time for a paradigm shift**. This will be the change point, acknowledging who they are, allowing them *to be* who they are, support then coming forth big time in all ways, this also opening us to our own heart, inspiring our balanced use of our right and left brain intelligences to find optimal solutions.

DO THESE CHILDREN BRING CHANGE?

Truly honoring these individuals for who they are will indeed bring change. It is no longer working in our schools and our society to try to orient people solely according to our left brain approaches and expectations. Many of these younger people who have had a different orientation are now young adults, not yet having found a place in the workforce yet, or perhaps just beginning to do so.

Families of these sensitive, empathic, gifted individuals are seeing that their children's contributions are going to be made in a different way, and we need to allow our societies to evolve to benefit from the expression of their talents, here to balance our world.

We need to ask ourselves what new accommodations, acceptances and understandings will allow for our embrace of these giftedly-different individuals and what they can bring to our world?

Parents of many autistic, Asperger's and bipolar individuals worry how their child will make it in our society, once grown and in their 20's, 30's, or once the parents are gone. Many of these individuals may not be able to be fully independent in life on their own. However, they can be supported and their talents shared if we create accepting and loving environments for them with coaching that keeps them scheduled and directed, if necessary and appropriate. Environments where there is a sense of belonging and participation, and where an individual is free and welcome to grow and learn in his or her own way.

Group living situations in the case of Asperger's young adults, for instance, can help greatly, for they love the company of similar individuals, and resident coaches can help keep them guided. (Many of these opportunities are now opening in 2010-11, and are continuing to surface in 2018). This also underscores the value of a program like Joey Travolta's, training this very intelligent and sensitive generation with skills that enable them to have an expressive and self-supporting place in the world.

And, we also have to ask ourselves:

Why is this all happening? Our attention and hearts, (ask those involved), are being strongly drawn in a new direction. This message is loud and clear because it is coming to us from the lives of thousands of our children and young adults. They cannot be ignored, mistreated, or continued to be misunderstood, for seeing them from our current perspectives is a form of abuse.

In 2018, as I once again update this first paper I wrote on this huge subject, our attention now desperately, and being forced to ask “WHY” by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, where 17 individuals were shot two weeks ago by a ‘broken’ and lost individual, he having been treated for ADHD and autism it was reported.

This young man was among the many first victims, failed by our whole system, but most fundamentally by the world’s misunderstanding of the gifts and needs of spectrum individuals, as were those of the two shooters at Columbine, mentioned earlier in this paper, the shooters at Virginia Tech, at Sandy Hook, and now in Parkland. These were marginalized and rejected individuals for the outward differences and their inward-oriented direction of their gifted intelligence. Acceptance, valuing, and support brings the right/heart brain gifts of this different intelligence into our world which so needs the inspired answers these individuals can share.

They are here for many reasons, but one very large one...

They are here for us, also. They bring talents of inspiration and giftedness for new solutions, and hearts that are tuned toward the well- being of all. Our outward faced, hectic paced, goal driven and disconnected societies are being forced to turn around and look right beside each of us, to care for extraordinary children who are unable to fit the world in the old ways. And, in the process of caring and providing for the needs of these sensitive individuals, we ourselves will be changed, finding our own heart-centered qualities of connection, sensitivity and service.

How long and how fast has the change been coming?

Evidence of these symptoms of learning differences reaches back into former generations, as well as occurs, not just in the current immediate families, but also in the extended families. Increased change toward sensitive, heart/right-mindedness has been coming for quite a while and is exploding on the world scene right now.

From the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation quoted earlier:

In every generation since World War II, there is a higher incidence and an earlier age of onset of bipolar disorder and depression. On average, children with bipolar disorder experience their first episode of illness 10 years earlier than their parents’ generation did. The reason for this is unknown.

In the PBS interview accompanying the program, “The Medicated Child,” Dr. Castellanos speaks about the role of dopamine in the brain of individuals with ADHD:

And most of the evidence converges and suggests that regions that are rich in dopamine are involved....It used to be said that dopamine was the reward chemical—that if something was rewarding, then you would release dopamine. It turns out to be more complicated than that. It’s not just whether something’s going to feel good, or be rewarded; it’s more if there’s a *possibility* that something would feel good.

If ADHD kids have increased dopamine levels in the areas of the brain where these ‘erratic’ symptoms are evidenced, it is probable that these behaviors are being encouraged with the chance that there might be success acting in these ways.

Teaching a program, designed by Jerome Bruner and others, years ago called: “Man, A Course of Study,” it was described how the juvenile baboons, who were foolhardy enough to tease a sleeping lion, were also the ones who found new places to live, new foods to eat, and whatever else that lent to the survival of the species.³⁹

So, based on my own experiential knowledge about these children, as well as on my research, I believe these individuals are being guided towards their right/heart brain in a left brain focused society. The linearity, structures and hierarchies of our left-brained predominant emphasis over the last 400 or 500 years, while bringing many advances, has also led to division, inequality and a huge sense of unease and imbalance.

It seems clear these children have an inbuilt orientation away from adapting to things as they are. Our present skewed perceptions and mindsets are not working. **It is a lack of the experience of ourselves as whole and balanced that leads to the seeking of exaggerated amounts of information, food, money, and dominance, in search of something that we inherently feel that we are lacking. We ARE lacking—connection to our whole selves and connection to others and this earth.**

Many, many right/heart-brain-oriented individuals, young and old, also feel that *they* are lacking, for they are treated as though they are out of step or disabled in this world. We have known that they are different but have not considered that perhaps their important differences are meant to return balance to what could be cooperative interactions, efforts, goals and visions for our lives and the world.

So, our attention is strongly being called to our children. How better could change call to us? And what might we understand? It is paradoxical to consider that a child’s oversensitivity or resistance to being able to behave in ‘a normal way’ in this world (his/her ‘disorder’) could be the very thing that will allow that sensitivity and orientation to lead us

to a new connection to others. However, seeming paradoxical, I believe this is instead a call for a paradigm shift in our understanding of who these individuals are.

IMPORTANT ADDENDUMS

A BEAUTIFUL MOVIE ABOUT LEARNING DIFFERENCES

A great, beautiful movie dealing with learning differences came out in 2008, and was SO well done. It is an amazingly positive and supportive film, excellently made in India called "Taare Zameen Par," (Like Stars on Earth), found on Netflix as "Taare Zameen Par." It is the compelling story of a misunderstood ADD and dyslexic boy, saved by a teacher who saw his giftedness, the problem, and what was needed to support him. It applies, across the board, to what's needed for every child with a special need or a special learning difference, as well as showing symptoms that are common to so many different learning styles.

The little boy in this movie is totally immersed in the present moment, with the involvements of his mind and body caught perfectly on film. The movie does mistakenly, in my opinion, consider these children as having a disability, of course, but, most importantly, it brings out how to beautifully honor and support them. Once knowing that these children are just other-oriented, one sees in the movie, that by 'reading' and responding with love to these children, it is we also who have so much to learn. What we learn about and from these children, can bring about our own transformation, liberation, and return to joy. Available for purchase and at Netflix.

REFERENCES TO THE CREATIVITY OF THE RIGHT/HEART BRAIN

www.ted.com find "Speakers" and then Sir Ken Robinson speaking on "Education is Killing Creativity", also his book, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*.

Older movies available at Netflix, or elsewhere, about heart-centered, differently oriented individuals, usually still said in these movies to have disorders rather than differences:

Temple Grandin: Different but not Less, autism

Like Stars on Earth, (Taare Zameem Par), ADD and dyslexia, **excellent**, available on Netflix

The Imitation Game, Asperger's

The Big Short, Asperger's

Wonder, a bullied, smart little boy

A Boy named Po, autism

The Whole Wide World (Bipolar individual with characteristic lack of social skills, but extremely talented and empathic. Lived, because totally supported by one individual.)

Praying with Lior, down syndrome

Regarding Henry, Harrison Ford suffers the loss of left brain skills, then becomes heart-centered
Dominick and Eugene
Rain Man, autism
I Am Sam, autism
Jack the Bear
The Other Sister, autism
Her Name is Sabine, autism
The Horse Boy, autism
My name is Khan, Asperger's
Autism, the Musical, (HBO)
The Imitation Game, Asperger's
The Big Short, Asperger's

There are a number of good programs put out by HBO or NBC, such as *The Good Doctor*, but I do not yet have a large list of these.

A COMPRESSED GENERAL LISTING OF ADD-AUTISM 'LEARNING-DIFFERENCES' CHARACTERISTICS...MILD TO MORE SEVERE

A listing follows of general characteristics of learning differences, from mild to moderate, and then moderate to more severe, written as a characteristics continuum flow of shared and intensifying qualities. It is important to recognize that each individual will present with a different set of characteristics. These are quite broadly recognized as typically occurring characteristics, **however my point of view being that individuals on the ADD-autism spectrum do not have a deficit or a disorder, but instead a different orientation**, this listing comes from that paradigm shifting perspective to *explain the reason* for these differences.

I have made this listing as a quick and yet in-depth overview of the characteristics of **those hard-wired with a right/heart brain orientation, those on the ADD – autism spectrum. This spectrum includes Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, and autism.**

Included here are **both their strengths and challenges**, sometimes stated also as their likes and dislikes. This is all to be used to **understand how these right/heart brain individuals function, with their gifts and talents, and how they have difficulties with this predominantly left-brain-governed world since they lack a left-brain filter and left-brain focus, and have very sensitive nervous systems.** (Autism at times, and Asperger's Syndrome can use more left-brain functions.)

Supported to follow their fixations/passions, spectrum individuals can acquire left brain skills in the process, wanting to share their discoveries with the world. **Theirs, and all brains, work optimally to know, learn, and acquire skills when individuals are accepted, nurtured and feel like they belong. All spectrum individuals do better adapting to life when they feel**

supported particularly in these three ways, these engendering success and success feeding back on itself.

Additionally, enlarging upon/magnifying an autistic person's passions can ignite learning of skills they were unable to learn before. (For all this information about spectrum learners see my website: HeartCenteredMinds.com, looking particularly at my paper "The Inside Out of Autism," which refers to all of these learners, while focusing greatly on autism.)

A. Here in section A, is an accounting of the characteristics that are nearly universal to all right-brain oriented individuals, and which are the major qualities of the more mild to moderate individual learning differences for ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, nonverbal learning disorder, and mild Asperger's Syndrome.

Characteristics include:

- 1) **Very bright** individuals, with **heightened to extreme sensitivity**, evidencing as both being **highly gut-empathic** and/or significantly **vulnerable** in regard to people, accompanied by mild to acute **sensory sensitivity** to the world around them, due to very sensitive nervous systems. Therefore, best with a predictable schedule. Also, **working in a run silent/run deep mode** of knowledge retrieval and use, most find it difficult in a 20 minute shift of activity center learning, for example, they needing more time to settle in, work, and move away from that activity.
- 2) Most often have **no differentiating, left brain filter** to physically shut out over-stimulation, or **to take in or give back in linear form**; although very gut-empathic to the inner state of people, lack of this filter makes it **very difficult for them to read body language and social cues**, thereby often making them more reclusive, some preferring computers, they being more predictable than people. Also for most, no filtering left brain system makes **school very difficult** due to the enormous focus on left-brain, linear approaches to learning, causing potentially both overwhelm on the one hand and boredom with mainly two-dimensional, linear feed-in, on the other hand.
- 3) Also, nearly universally: **drawn to** (often passionately) or calmed by right-brain exposures or activities involving: **nature, music, art, literature, principles or workings of math, inherent congruities and details within a certain realm of science, drama, play, cooking, sewing, gardening (hands-on things), etc.**
- 4) Connected to experience coming in as from an open satellite dish, so **information is taken in, in a whole and not a piecemeal fashion**. Understandings then come from, and are fit into, a **large picture of things**. Therefore, exhibit **profound understanding** and embrace of the **deep values in life**, intuiting these themes, beyond the norm, in school studies, movies, and making 'values advocates' of these individuals **on the playground, in careers serving others**, and leading to a strong sense and **drive for social justice**
- 5) **Reading (and writing) may or may not be difficult for these individuals**, again, each developing differently; certainly for **dyslexics** (with phonetic and spelling differences), this presents a large challenge within educational systems, where rigid standards for form can

supersede content, and for those with non-verbal learning disorder, where unfiltered information-overload and a non-linear orientation for experiencing and learning, makes reading and writing very difficult

6) Often **lacking in organizational skills** (bedrooms, school desks, offices) because the orientation is rather for creating, e.g. **may be motivated to do the homework, if it is inspiring, but then forgetting to turn in the work**, the creativity of the job being done, turning it in drops out of the mind like anything routine, interpreted by the brain as boring, non-challenging, so brain goes on ‘**screen-saver**’

7) Nearly all being **passionate ‘creators,’** and, when free to be inspired, are filled with **great drive and excitement**, like, and including, **great entrepreneurs**, whose office managers often deal with necessary, linear details

8) Often **poor large and small motor skills**, because these are left-brain governed, therefore often less physically coordinated, and often poor initial handwriting (or never improved)

9) **Impulsive behavior**, from more mild forms to more dramatic, can be seen some in most of these individuals, as well as **varying degrees of depression**, (due to our societies’ lifestyles producing a shortage of serotonin in the brain, which can be increased with right-brain connective experiences to passions and nature, or, as a friend recently commented, if one is perceptive to all that is around, how could one not be depressed?)

B. Here in section B, we move on to more particular, more moderate to severe qualities, not so universally exhibited, but often accompanying autism and/or Asperger’s Syndrome.

Characteristics include:

1) **A more rigid need for things to stay the same**, in a particular state of understanding or physical placement, **schedules and patterns**, an unbending definition of a certain concept or relationship, the rigid need for **same placement of objects** on some table or in a drawer (this showing the need for stability and some control over what can seem a chaotic world)

2) **Resistance to getting put ‘in the box’ of a defined, limited self**, having to abide by socially prescribed rules, preferring to be free in choice, experience of self, expression, movement, joy, musicality (Asperger’s, bipolar?)

3) **Over-stimulation** of these extremely sensitive individuals can lead to **repetitive physical and verbal behaviors: spinning, arm-flapping, head banging, hitting others**, both the physical and the verbal repeated acts/phrases are self-induced (after change or environment-incited) to shut out over-stimulation and/or to create some stability and peace within and to access deeper knowledge (autism)

4) Some exhibiting **strong technical inclinations, relating more easily to systems or some body of knowledge than to people** (autism, Asperger’s). **Autism individuals** enjoying repetitious and detail discerning activities; **Asperger’s individuals** having abilities to amass

information, numbers, written materials, vocabulary, which they can then wield to some advantage to influence for their purposes and goals.

5) Sometimes **irritability, moodiness, and mild to very strong tantrums usually due to unwelcome change, overstimulation, chemical intrusion, boredom, or outside pressures to perform in certain ways (autism, Asperger's)**

6) **Frequent TV viewing to calm** themselves in their world of familiar programs, to **integrate** some of the 'rules' of relating, **practice reading body language**, and to **be inspired by the personal growth** of individuals in the programs (Asperger's)

—END—

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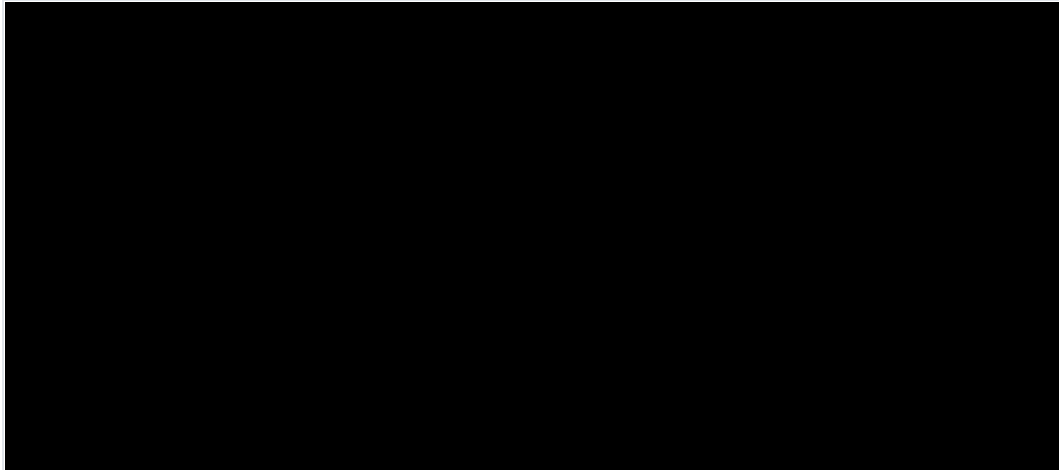
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