

Gaining Common Ground Among Learning Differences

Take a gander at the following vocabulary. ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder), Dyslexia, Bipolar Disorder, Autism, Asperger's Syndrome. Terminology of sorts and the implications behind them are thrown around loosely by masses of adults today who live under the suspicion that family members, and even the labelers themselves, own one or more of the described conditions, attempting to dictate their lifelong professional, business, academic outlooks. In endless efforts to "solve the problem," parents, teachers, doctors, and even religious leaders leap forward to tackle the internal issues at hand publicly displayed by the victimized citizens in question by finding solutions to end the supposed horror and cure the individuals weighed down by these life-shaping scenarios. However, as the adult parties involved in "healing the sick" quickly learn, getting through to the "patients" at large proves easier said than done. Subsequently, the aged caregivers soon discover that there is no quick fix to cleansing the deepest roots implanted within the souls guiding the perspectives of these intriguing individuals.

For the youth of the world, long-term effects brought on by lifestyles and values originating in the home with parent-and-child immediately get carried over to the classroom via the roles of student-and-teacher, ultimately demanding uniquely-devised methods of individualized attention and academic instruction in an effort to treat the seekers of internal enlightenment and health. As of the year 2011, 1/9 of American children under age 18 receive some form of special education. Depending on the size of the classes in which said students reside during the schoolday (with corresponding

student body populations and daily learning hours, respectively, ranging widely from coast to coast according to geographic location and subsequent State standards for [public] education), resource specialists, classroom teaching assistants and lead teachers themselves devote extra time and energy to ensure that these specialized pupils get the academic-instructional care they need in order to thrive in the scholarly world in which they are placed. As time moves forward, the numbers of students classified as “special needs” continues to grow on an annual basis—further demanding the one-on-one attention and instruction from educators to special students in need of specific direction. For those “chosen students” whose families are unable to afford full-time special education services, topped off by the self-inflicted financial lacking of public schools brought on by local and federal government lackluster funding for educational well being, enduring the arduousness of the rapid pace at which basic academic instruction for “normal students” moves triggers a fire alarm within these students’ mental and physical networks that sets off (or shuts down, as the case may be) their systems entirely, in turn affecting their ability to learn and give effort towards achieving even the [seemingly] simplest of tasks at hand, wreaking havoc for all onlookers (young and old alike) to witness firsthand.

Tragic realities such as these have discouraged members of the academic community from maintaining their own will power to uphold their model leadership and touch the lives of those in their surroundings, unintentionally crushing hopes and dreams for the future of the world in which we live. With college majors and credential programs designed to “properly” train teachers of the present for their career choices that lie ahead, a major flaw existing within these hefty means of professional preparation

involves the thick task of handling students who bring with them a lengthy series and corresponding background of personal conditions and learning styles to the table. Seeing as teaching credentials (graduate school certificates, ranking one level above undergraduate Bachelor of Arts Degrees in the field of college Education majors) aim to train teachers by serving as the academic alternative to medical school (condensed from three years of instruction to two), truckloads of information are fed into the minds of all prospective academic leaders, leading them to believe that the text, technology, and test serve as the sole means of classroom instruction and leadership—diverting natural knowledge and life experience incurred on the parts of the leaders.

Ultimately, this 100% plasticized, standardized approach to academic learning and leadership does a tremendous disservice to those students AND teachers who remain either “gifted” or “challenged” citizens throughout their entire lives. While gifted scholars of sorts are expected to slow their mental movement in order not to get too far ahead of the leveled curriculum, those challenged pupils are faced with the task of picking up speed in order to reach their destination that traces the same path and timeframe as their faster peers. But without mutual understanding of these students’ given outlooks on the parts of their teachers or even family members, only one solution remains to compliment “setbacks” of this kind—**CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION**, with regards to basic, essential learning and comprehension on the parts of the students, and formal instruction on the parts of the teachers. Since children and adults who identify themselves as being non-average citizens fall under the categories of “gifted” and/or “challenged”, taking an alternate approach to intellectual expression is a must.

By allowing your own mind to expand to depths and horizons never before explored, you yourself can increase your ingenuity to indeterminable heights, growing internally every step of the way. From the defining moment of personal inspiration to mentally branching out and exceeding beyond expectation, to the point where an audience becomes captivated by your innovative offerings, life becomes an amazing journey—filled with awe and wonder to the nth degree! The more effort you put into your creative production(s), the greater the public reception, *and* the further any and every follower of yours can gain the same sensationalism you, the innovator, experienced when designing your project at hand—soon reaching down into their own conscience to ignite sparks of their own rapidly-developing creative fire. To be able to know how someone thinks, feels, and reacts at any given moment during the evolution of a revelation allows the highest human power possible to be brought forth, through artistic expression—reflecting, in part, one of the top goals for academic instruction, notably in the elementary grades.

But in order for this common ground to be broken, students and teachers must accept and acknowledge one another first as business associates and professionals, and then human beings at large, establishing mutual respect and understanding of where each party rests on the road of life. And as teachers remain in the driver's seat of the car cruising along that very highway, often containing rowdy passengers, we must remember that we have been down this road before—albeit residing in the passenger's seats as students ourselves for around two decades of our youth. As children at heart (a philosophical requirement for selecting the classroom-based academic arena as your [presumed] lifelong profession), educators can undoubtedly relate to the mentality and

actions exhibited by the newborn minds and bodies at their feet—having gone through the cycle themselves growing up. Undergoing the challenge of acting like an adult while thinking like a child of a certain age proves taxing beyond words! However, if the learned are able to transform our conscience virtually back in time to the mental networking of our “offspring”, we will quickly learn what it feels like to be in their shoes (again), and in turn bring out our own special gifts as people, in an effort to enlighten those who surround us.

Why not get a head start on the task at hand—by gaining an acute perception of life through the perspective of a unique boy, acting as a representative of millions of children wallowing in his situation—bearing an arduous lifestyle via the absence of his five senses, thus being labeled as “deaf, dumb, and blind.” The child’s name: Tommy Walker. His birthday: circa 1945. Birthplace: London, England. Age: 4-10 years.¹ Favorite pastime: Pinball. His life story: read further.

The described character in question takes the form of the protagonist in the landmark Rock Opera entitled, *Tommy*, penned by iconic British Rock & Roll guitarist-singer-songwriter, Pete Townshend, in the year 1969. Taking place in post-World War I and II England, immediately following the bombing of Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945, the multi-angular musical masterpiece traces the story of Tommy Walker—a ten-year-old boy laden with the burden of progressing through life in a world entirely his

¹ His age progression remains anonymous throughout the entire Rock Opera depicting his life story, with the Broadway musical claiming the lad is “four-years-old”, and the original music identifying Tommy as being “ten-years-old.” Regardless, the fourth wall is broken in all surrounding scenarios.

own, facing every challenge humanity bestows upon him at the drop of a hat, beginning with the supposed disappearance of his dear father, Captain Walker, in the midst of atomic chaos at the closure of the War upon the dropping of the bomb. By letting spiritual masters of all kinds, human and mechanical, guide him from one phase of his young life to the next, young Tommy ultimately grows from being a seemingly disabled infant seeking moral support to a masterful leader healing those in search of enlightenment themselves, with the merits of his own life experience that shaped his eternal outlook and brought reward in the unlikeliest of venues.

Decades ahead of its time, the title character in *Tommy* could not pertain more clearly to today's 21st Century-born-and-raised youth shouldering the strain of living in a world engulfed in havoc. From the breakout of a ten-year war attempting to resolve infinite politically religious conflicts amongst the Middle Eastern countries of: Iraq, Iran, Israel, and Afghanistan; to a human society resorting to technological communications and corresponding pleasurable pastimes on a universal scale; to controversial methods of academic instruction and disciplinary actions on the parts of school personnel in learning environments on a national, American level; to a society that demands premature adult mentalities from minors (with food companies and processors having injected animal hormones into their enticingly edible products, causing female members of the human species to blossom too soon), down to questionably humane family homeland dynamics amongst members of the human race itself. For the children of the world having to endure and comprehend such a mind-boggling overall scenario ranks amongst the highest injustices dealt to humankind, with those "underdeveloped" creatures in the preeminent

stages of life's rollercoaster ride of a course having to judge right from wrong early on based on others' errors and success stories right before their own eyes.

Despite the rocking operatic character of Tommy Walker carrying the incomprehensible setback of soldiering through life as a "deaf, dumb, and blind boy", he himself holds a world of wisdom all his own, just waiting to be freed and revealed to all who care to lend an ear, hand, heart, or peace of mind. With Tommy's creator, Mr. Peter Townshend, forever permitting his listeners to perceive the lyrical context of this musical novella-operetta from an angle of their (not necessarily HIS) own, it would only seem appropriate for this author—in conjunction with his own personal life experience, professional backlog as an educator of children floating in a fruit salad of grade levels and learning styles upon confronting a wide variety of academic subjects, with underlying adoration of Townshend and The Who (the band bringing much of the composer's musical creations to life for 50 years) to provide an extensive breakdown of the spiderweb of content in relationship to the backbone of education as we know it from the inside, out—as students, teachers, parents, and administrators with an intended common purpose.

For starters, it should be duly noted that before peace and respect are granted amongst the four major political parties representing their arguments on a regular basis behind schools' closed doors, one typically prepares one's self for hefty battle on the interior floors of the classroom and exterior grounds of the schoolyard—metaphorically resembling the military headquarters and dirty battlefields fought upon by world armies.