

The Bowen Technique

The Sound Learning Centre



In the last issue of Choice, I wrote about 5 ½-year-old Archie who didn't talk until about age 4 ½ and had problems with attention and concentration.

He also complained a lot of 'headaches' which his mother believed was really his way of expressing that he was in a situation out of his routine or comfort or that he was not understanding what was being asked of him. He had had lots of speech therapy and attended a pre-school for children with learning difficulties and was now at a mainstream school under special educational needs. After six Bowen treatments, his mother reported such a change in Archie that she felt he didn't need any further treatment – certainly not for the immediate future. No more 'headaches', his developmental progress was moving along well and his confidence was being established and growing.

Over the years, I have often seen Bowen treatment prompt progress and improvements in areas such as speech, balance and coordination. But this past May, I had the opportunity to attend a superb 5-day workshop that presented a profound and important new way to understand what could be behind problems such as Archie's as well as diagnoses such as Asperger's, autism, dyslexia or dyspraxia. And, most importantly, there is a way to treat the underlying causes of such things.

The course was given by Pauline Allen, a Neurodevelopmentalist with a background as a dyslexia teacher, who is the Principal of The Sound Learning Centre in London. It was entitled: "SenseAbility – a Sensory Development Programme." The focus of the workshop was to understand the impact of underperforming sensory systems on a person's development.

Pauline's work at The Sound Learning Centre is to look beyond the diagnosis in order to find the cause of the problem and to give effective treatment for it. It is easy to 'blame' many of the difficulties experienced with learning, sensory, developmental or emotional difficulties on the official diagnosis, or label, given by educational or health professionals. Many people will take it for granted that people with dyslexia will have problems with reading or spelling and leave it at that – it's the dyslexia that 'makes' them like that.

Similarly, autism 'makes' people behave in unexpected, or even unwanted, ways and it's the autistic spectrum disorder that 'does that' to them. OK, but WHY?

This is the question that The Sound Learning Centre addresses in the very thorough, in-depth assessment that each person is given in order to determine what is going on.

Let's look at hearing, for instance. Since I attended Pauline's course, I have seen several young children in my Bowen clinic who are there because of speech delays and/or behavioural difficulties. Following on from what I learned with Pauline, I have asked their mothers if the kids seem to have a hearing sensitivity – are there some sounds they can't stand? Each of the mothers has looked at me with wide eyes and said, "How did you know?"

So, what difference might this make to a person? Hearing is the key sense for acquiring receptive and expressive language and **deficiencies or imbalances in hearing** often express themselves in difficulties with speech and language, but **may also influence many other areas, such as concentration, behaviour and emotional state.**

Standard hearing tests often report that the hearing is 'within normal limits'. The 'normal limits', however, mostly **exclude any hypersensitivity**, allow for a very **wide range on the hearing-loss side and ignore any distortions.** The reason why most standard hearing tests are so limited is that they are designed to assess if there is sufficient hearing loss to warrant a hearing aid. The influence of hypersensitivity or a distorted hearing profile on speech acquisition is rarely acknowledged.

So, at The Sound Learning Centre, they look at how the underlying systems operate and find ways, where required and possible, to **make changes to the way the brain processes information.**

The Sound of a Miracle, by Annabel Stehli, is an excellent book that details the impact of distorted, hypersensitive, improperly processed sensory information and how that affected functioning in her daughter, Georgie's, life. In a very quick summary: at age 12, Georgie went from being a diagnosed autistic child with a prospect of spending her life in special schools to being enrolled in normal school. She went on to take university degrees, speak many languages, marry and have a child. The key to her

remarkable turn-around was a course of Auditory Integration Training (AIT) given by the French doctor, Dr Guy Bérard, who pioneered this treatment based on his understanding that the brain's processing functions needed to be 're-trained', so that sensory information was not imbalanced and distorted, but could play its important part in a person's full development.

Georgie had hypersensitive hearing and visual perceptual problems. This meant that some sounds were excruciating and terrifying for her – for instance, the waves rolling in at the beach on family holidays sounded like a tsunami to her and she would run, terrified, from the beach. It also affected how she saw the world, with strands of hair looking to her like the size of strands of spaghetti. This, of course, was incomprehensible behaviour to her family, so the diagnosis of autism – with all its strange, incomprehensible behaviours – seemed to fit the situation. But, as Georgie herself said later, after her hearing had been balanced and brought into the normal range: "I wasn't crazy, I was crazed".

Parents can often get a reasonable evaluation of how the hearing is performing through simple observations. These can play a key role in uncovering what may lie behind learning, sensory, developmental or emotional difficulties. Some typical behaviours that often are the result of the hearing system not working properly can include:

- ☉ Stressed when in a noisy environment
- ☉ Startles at unexpected sounds
- ☉ Covers ears at certain sounds
- ☉ Regularly 'switches off' or 'tunes out'
- ☉ Requires repetition before understanding
- ☉ Often misinterprets verbal instructions
- ☉ Has difficulty with following sequential verbal instructions
- ☉ Needs time to process verbal instructions
- ☉ Speaks incomprehensibly
- ☉ Makes constant sounds or noises
- ☉ Grinds teeth
- ☉ Began to speak but regressed
- ☉ Does not speak or is late starting to speak
- ☉ Has a very limited vocabulary
- ☉ Cannot sing in tune
- ☉ Speaks with a lisp or speech impediment
- ☉ Stutters or stammers

- ④ Confuses syllable sequences
- ④ Has difficulty reading silently
- ④ Has difficulty reading aloud
- ④ Has difficulty comprehending written materials
- ④ Has difficulty with spelling
- ④ Listens mainly with left ear

This article has barely scratched the surface of all the information available from The Sound Learning Centre, which also covers the other direct senses of vision, touch, smell and taste as well as the indirect senses of balance and proprioception. Their website (below) also has detailed information about the treatments they offer to correct the underperforming sensory systems. The Sound Learning Centre has regular

Open House days so people can meet Pauline and the staff, hear a presentation of the work and ask questions. For in-depth information about the problems and their treatment, there is also a new edition just out of Dr. Bérard's book, *Hearing Equals Behavior: Updated and Expanded* by Guy Bérard, M.D., and Sally Brockett, M.S. (ISBN 978-0615474526).

It is interesting that Bowen treatment has seemed to be able to initiate some progress and improvement in conditions that may well originate in the sensory systems. But the work of The Sound Learning Centre can offer so very much to remove these obstacles and see people – from children to adults – able to use their abilities to the full. **CHW**

© Janie Godfrey is a Bowen Technique practitioner in Frome, www.bowenclinicfrome.com

The Sound Learning Centre
12 The Rise, London N13 5LE
0208 882 1060
pauline@thesoundlearningcentre.co.uk
www.thesoundlearningcentre.co.uk

For further information about the Bowen Technique, a full course prospectus or a list of accredited practitioners contact:
Tel/Fax: 01373 832 340
Email: info@thebowentechnique.com
Web: www.thebowentechnique.com