



Volume II, No 10

## Kadie's World

### THE SILENT LANGUAGE

*A three-year-old girl climbs the ladder leading to her backyard tree-house. Sheltered among the branches of an oak, she surveys the view of a world which seems all her own. Within calling distance is her home: a sturdy frame house, filled with the intricate art-work of her father—a warm house alive with the giggles of love.*

*In the distance is the thicket where the family goes to identify birds and look for tadpoles. There the silence is broken only by the calls of singing birds and the croaking of frogs.*

*In the nearby field is the place where they once built a snow fort. A curved door provided for passage to and from their frozen fortress and crude windows opened upon a crystalline world.*

As she absorbs this backyard view in all its wholeness, this child feels the richness of her experience—not as fragments, not as words, but as a synthesis of all she is. This is her world, the world of Kadie Jones.

Kadie is fascinated by the world beyond words, a world best described through art or music, dancing or laughter, a world which is weakly expressed through the spoken word and better conveyed in what we might call the silent language.

### TWO MODES OF THINKING

Growing up surrounded by her father's expressive artwork and her mother's fun-loving games, Kadie Jones is fascinated by the nonverbal aspects of life. Labels and classifications are fine, but Kadie wants to understand life's visual elements as much as she does the verbal ones.

Children learn both verbally and visually.\* The verbal world is an outgrowth of the function of the left hemisphere of the brain. The left mode is characterized by using words to label, classify or describe. It is analytic in nature, progressing step-by-step, using symbolism and abstractions to represent whole things. Time-keeping is associated with this rational mode, which draws conclusions based on reason and facts. Sequences, such as in counting or the logic of one idea following another, and the linking of ideas known as linear thinking, all comprise what are known as left-mode characteristics.

The visual world, with its silent language, is associated with the function of the right hemisphere of the brain. Right-mode perceptions connote a nonverbal awareness of things and minimal association with words. This mode of thinking synthesizes

*\* For further reading, see *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, by Betty Edwards.*

fragments to form wholes and has a timelessness or present-moment orientation. The metaphors of life and intuitive insights spring from this mode. There is a willingness to suspend judgment, to look beyond the “facts,” to observe things spatially (in relationship to other things) and to see things in a holistic manner.

Although our current culture favors the left hemisphere orientation, both cognitive styles play an important role in integrated thinking. They are complementary approaches, each being better suited to handling specific types of tasks.

## **THE ART OF SEEING**

When Kadie’s father, Rodney, does one of his insightful drawings, he draws on the right side of the brain. Thousands of dots coalesce in his skillfully rendered illustrations, showing the interplay of lines, shadows, objects and feelings. Rodney studies his subjects with an eye for where each object sits in relationship to the other. Perspective and correct proportions grow out of his ability to disengage the left brain and observe spatial relationships.

In order to draw something, as simple as a child’s building block, he has to illustrate an optical illusion. His left brain knows that the block is a cube, square on all sides, but that isn’t enough to represent a three-dimensional object on paper. This is a visual task. It requires observation of how one edge of the block angles off from another, how each visible side, with its distorted squareness, relates to the others. It’s rather paradoxical, this art of seeing things as they actually appear instead of how we “know” them to be.

Kadie’s awareness of spatial relationships is best seen in her sensitivity to the order in her environment. At about two-and-a-half years of age, Kadie moved into what Italian educator Maria Montessori referred to as the “sensitive period for order.” Kadie noted that each item in the house

had its own special place in relationship to other household objects. When her mother, Betsy, rearranged the knick-knacks, Kadie would put them back in their original places. It was as if she were saying, “No, this object goes at that end of this table and this item belongs here!”

Kadie was demonstrating her recognition of spatial relationships in a way that is completely normal for children of her age. As she grows older, she’ll become more flexible in her approach to order, but this is an important phase for refining her perceptions of how objects fit together within the whole of her environment.

## **INTEGRATED THINKING**

The thing which makes the key difference in whether children can easily shift from one hemisphere of the brain to the other, is the type of experiences which they receive. Some tasks activate the left hemisphere, others, the right. Naming, classifying, reading for or writing facts call upon the left hemisphere. Drawing, writing poetry, dancing or visualizing catalyze a shift to the right hemisphere. Children need experiences which activate both modes.

For Kadie, this can mean running and sliding along a slippery water slide, spinning in circles in her tire swing, or climbing up the chute of a slide at the park. It’s also listening to Suzuki violin tapes as she practices holding her box violin, building with the wood-en blocks her father made especially for her, and watching her parents dramatize stories as they read to her.

She’s learning to identify the songs of North American birds, memorizing the names of each new thing she encounters, and exploring the facts about how something works as she ponders simple experiments. She’s learning about the lives of great people, practicing daily living skills, going on field trips and learning about social skills by playing with other children.

*(continued on page 4)*

Basic

Principles

## THE RELATION BETWEEN PARENTING AND *ADULT* DEVELOPMENT

“To respond to (our children’s) healthy needs we must change ourselves. Only when we are willing to undergo the suffering of such changing can we become the parents our children need us to be. And since children are constantly growing and their needs are changing, we are obliged to change and grow with them . . . parents have more to gain from this process than their children.”

Psychiatrist Scott’ Beck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, states the case boldly. Could he be right? Knowing how thoroughly and profoundly our children’s lives are shaped by the parenting we give them, can we ever believe that we, as parents, have more to learn from the parenting process than our children do?

### **FULFILLMENT AND PARENTING**

A dominant theme of the mid-1900’s has been finding out how adults can get their needs met; sometimes the concept is called “personal growth and fulfillment,” and it fits right in with better parenting.

The tie-in goes something like this:

- The better the parenting children receive, the healthier development those children have.
- The more fulfilled women and men are, the better parenting they can give.
- Therefore, the more fulfilled men and women are, the healthier their children’s development will be.

It holds together, more or less, as a syllogism. The tricky part is in defining terms. What does “fulfillment” mean? And “personal growth”? What “needs” need to be met? and how?

### **SYMPTOMS**

Our culture says that headaches call for aspirin and bad breath means mouthwash; we deal with symptoms. So “fulfillment” and “personal growth” and “getting needs met” mostly turn into feeling good — soon.

For parents, especially mothers in the last two decades, the culture’s antidote for symptoms of parentings’ growing pains has been to leave the child with someone else and get a job. Parenting has been seen as an enemy of adult fulfillment—a context in which that fulfillment doesn’t occur.

We’re a funny lot, we humans—so blind to the natural processes for growth right in front of us, so willing to take on a lot of outer work as long as it will save us from all that inner work we really need to be doing.

### **CAUSES**

Another culture might see headaches as a signal to stop and ask, “Why have I gotten tense? What is my body telling me? How do I get my body back in harmony? How do I catch the tension-causing feelings when they begin?” Such a culture might see bad breath as a message to change diets—or even attitudes. And such a culture might meet “neediness” with self-examination, might see “personal growth” as coming from

personal honesty and inner change, might link “fulfillment” with giving and loving and serving; such a culture might look for causes.

In that kind of culture, there would be no antidote for the growing pains of parenting. There would be recognition of the growing; people would ask what resistances were causing the pains; and they would work through the pains to get to the fulfilling maturity on the other side. Scott Peck already said it: “Only when we are willing to undergo the suffering of such changing can we become the parents our children need us to be.”

Then he goes further. “Parents who are unwilling to risk the suffering of changing and growing and learning from their children are choosing a path of senility ... Learning from their children is the best opportunity most people have to assure themselves of a meaningful old age.”

He’s saying not just that we need to grow to be good parents—although that’s true enough. He’s also saying that we need to be a good parent in order to grow!

### **TO PARENT—WELL—IS TO GROW**

We all know some of the ways parenting helps us grow. Almost any mother will tell you that learning to mother has developed her capacity to nurture—has taught her more about how to love. Many fathers will tell you the same.

In *Between Generations*, Ellen Galinsky cites a study of many married couples who said that becoming parents was for them the beginning of adulthood. When we’re talking about being really grown-up, the process apparently isn’t that old, familiar, “Grow up and get married and live happily ever after.” It’s more like, “Get married, have a child, grow up, and then keep on growing.”

The facilitator of that growth seems to be the children themselves.

Sometimes we project onto children our own unmet dreams, If the children refuse to live our leftover lives, we can blame them and become alienated, or begrudgingly accept their individuality and become resigned, or go beyond that to face our own un-lived dreams and grow.

Other times—many other times—our children mirror us; use the same demanding tone we used with them; use the same easy evasions we’ve used with them (“I’ll be there in a minute,” is one of our favorites); or pointedly lack respect for our opinions, as we so often lacked respect for theirs. Again, always, we can choose—easy anger and blaming; half-hearted resignation/sense of parental failure; or honest searching for how we’ve taught them these patterns, why we’re so upset at seeing this aspect of ourselves mirrored, and what we can learn from the experience.

### **THE GROWING ROUTE**

The growing route is more rigorous and often more painful in the short run; it’s freeing and easier in the long run. Our children are ready mirrors; only we can choose what to do with those glimpses of ourselves we see in them.

Psychiatrist Karl Menninger has said that being a parent is the most difficult task human beings perform. He might add that it’s potentially one of the richest growth processes available to us—if we use it to make sure that as our children grow, so do we.

J.C.

# To Mother — or Father — is to Teach

by Joanna Carnahan

## WORKING WITH OUR CHILDREN'S BRAINS

We all know about positive thinking of course—it gives us energy, attracts friends, solves problems, and helps us grow. Most of the time we work at being more positive ourselves and passing the habit along to our children which was about the extent of it for me until I met Marlyn and Tom.

They tramped into the house, laughing, one snowy, Illinois day. That is, Marlyn was laughing; Tom was disgruntled. As they'd left their house to get into their car, Tom had yelled to Marlyn, "Watch out! That sidewalk is really slick; don't fall!" Marlyn had laughed and gotten to the car safely; Tom had fallen!

"Of course he did," she chuckled. "Whenever someone talks, his own brain is listening and it absorbs every word—or every image, actually. The brain works with images. When you say, "Don't fall," your brain makes the image of falling down in order to understand what you're not supposed to do. And having a clear image of any act makes it easier for you to perform that act. You just visualize yourself right into that fall!"

Apparently Tom thought about it a lot more. Before long there was a new policy for the newsletter he edited. From now on everything in the newsletter would be stated positively. If copy came in written, "They were not running away from life," Tom would edit it to something like, "They, were running toward life." And phrases like, "Don't forget to renew your subscription," became, "Remember to renew..."

The positive effect on the newsletter was noticeable. The same policy used with children makes a significant difference too.

The idea isn't new, of course. It often crops up in casual exchanges between parents: "Oh, just as soon as I tell Jed not to do something, he seems determined to do it!"

That kind of behavior may happen when our children get into a battle of wills with us, but there seems to be a deeper reason for it—a reason rooted in human biology, in how we think. One of the clearest explanations of it that I've come across is contained in two short paragraphs from *Frogs into Princes*, by psychotherapist Richard Bandler and linguist John Grinder. They describe overweight people as saying to themselves, perhaps unconsciously,

" 'Don't eat that cake in the refrigerator.' 'Don't think about all the candy in the living room.' 'Don't feel hungry.' Most people have no idea that commands like that are actually commands to do the behavior. In order to understand the sentence, 'Don't think of blue,' you have to access the meaning of the words and think of blue. If a child is in a dangerous situation and you say 'Don't fall down,' in order for him to understand what you have said, he has to access some representation, of 'falling down.' That internal representation, especially if it is kinesthetic, will usually result in the behavior that the parent is trying to prevent. However, if you give positive instructions like, 'Be careful; pay attention to your balance and move slowly, 'then the child will access representations that will help him cope with the situation."

"Fascinating!" In other words, our children tend to act on the images in their brains. They get a lot of those images from what we say to them—and we get to choose what we say! Telling them explicitly what we don't want them to do is a cruel double-message; "Do not act on the image that I now carefully put into your brain, knowing that you are designed to act on the images in your brain—this is a test!"

What picture (or sound or feeling) pops up for you when you hear, "Don't slam the door!?" ... What image do you get when you hear, "Close the door softly?"

We do well to tell our children what we do want; we can choose to work with their brains. □

(continued from page 2)

## THE ULTIMATE FRONTIER

Through these experiences Kadie is learning about the aspects of life discovered through words, as well as the aspects conveyed through the silent language. These approaches complement each other, combining to reflect the wholeness of the world.

Left hemisphere and right hemisphere are convenient terms for discussing the various functions of the brain, but they are still labels, classifications. They divide into characteristics a mind which is actually whole.

For optimal development, the mind must function as a whole, being able to use the “facts” of life, as well as being able to look beyond them.

As our physical frontiers are fading, a new frontier is emerging. The ultimate adventure lies in exploring the world of the human mind. On that frontier, there

are no limits, except those personally set. Development is self-regulated, and wholeness evolves through recognition and use of our untapped potential.

Describing what Kadie will discover on her ultimate frontier is like trying to describe how one develops maturity. Knowledge comes with experience, sometimes joyously, sometimes painfully, often requiring conscious effort.

Whether we move toward something desired, or away from something dreaded, living itself propels us toward discoveries. When these discoveries are made during conscious pursuit of self-development, the result is a personal renaissance.

Thanks to her parents’ loving assistance, Kadie is already exploring this realm. Wonders need never cease for Kadie—nor for anyone else who pursues this ultimate frontier. □

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