



The Book Shelf

By: Rivi Edelman _Tuesday, May 22, 2007

Title: *The Brain That Changes Itself* **Author:** Norman Doidge, M.D.

Publisher: James H. Silberman Books

This is an eloquently written book about the boundless potential of the human brain. It explores the application of neuroplasticity, a scientific buzzword that defines the brain's potential to dramatically change and grow. Powerfully written, it details the author's interviews with pioneers in the field of neuroscience. His greater talent, however, lies in his depiction of the many people whose lives have changed through this new science. From a stroke victim who learned how to walk again despite massive brain lesions, to people whose compulsions and obsessions have been cured without medication, science is reaching new frontiers. The detailed depiction of a woman with acquired balance difficulties is also quite incredible. The application of a special device to train her brain to relearn balance illustrates neuroplasticity's far-reaching effects.

Chapter Two is especially powerful in its presentation of a program that addresses learning disabilities in a unique way. It has the potential to revolutionize the way educational issues are addressed. Instead of teaching compensations, the Arrowsmith Program identifies the weak cognitive areas in learning disabled children or adults and, through a series of innovative and high-tech cognitive exercises, slowly alleviates them. Dr. Doidge explains that, as the exercises change the brain's abilities, these children begin to learn at the natural rate of their peers; they no longer require remedial support, program modification or other forms of compensation.

The founder of the program, Barbara Arrowsmith Young, was herself diagnosed with severe learning issues as a child. She invented exercises to eradicate her disabilities and now licenses her revolutionary program to schools across the United States and Canada. Hundreds of parents testify to the dramatic changes in their children. One graduate relates that when he came to the school at 13, his math and reading skills were at a third grade level. After neuropsychological testing at Tufts University he was told

he would never improve. His mother had enrolled him in 10 different schools for students with learning disabilities but none had helped.

After three years at Arrowsmith Program he was reading and doing math at a 10th grade level. Now he is a college graduate and works in venture capital doing mergers and acquisitions. Another student came to Arrowsmith reading at a first grade level at the age of 16. His parents, both teachers, had tried all the standard compensatory techniques. After 14 months at Arrowsmith he was already reading at a seventh grade level.

In addition to being a fascinating, informative and emotionally powerful read, this book has the potential to enlighten parents about the incredible learning-enhancing opportunities now available to them and their children.