Book Review

*The Impact of Empathy – A New Approach to Working with ADHD Children*

Seven months before his death, American psychiatrist Leon Eisenberg, “scientific father of ADHD” said, “ADHD is a prime example of a fictitious disease.” Steeped in controversy, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder was diagnosed in 6.4 million children in 2011 in the U.S. alone, comprising 11 percent of American children ages 4-17. In many cases, kids are given drugs which have the potential to cause a host of physical and psychological issues, such as increased suicidal thoughts, a higher risk of cardiac problems, liver damage, psychiatric disorders and sudden death, as well as higher rates of delinquency in adulthood, drug use, and growth retardation.

The alarming prevalence and frequency of ADHD diagnoses among children and youth in Western society and the kneejerk psychopharmacological treatment response to such is the impetus for *The Impact of Empathy* by Emilia Costa, formerProfessor of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at the University La Sapienza in Rome and Dean of the Scientific Committee of Pharmacovigilance on the excessive prescription of drugs to children, and Daniela Muggia, a thanatology specialist and founder of Empathic Care at the End of Life (ECEL), with many years of training with Sogyal Rinpoche, author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.

Through the contributions of two authors whose life work covers a breadth of deep experience, *The Impact of Empathy* is an enlightening testamentary resource which offers readers incisive acknowledgement of the shortsighted and suspect impetus, pathology, and untold harm of ADHD overdiagnosis. The book presents case studies and discussion of the alternative and complementary universe of modalities being employed to address attention deficit and anomalous behavior among youth, including ECEL, various forms of meditation, and empathic/compassionate listening.

The first chapter opens with a brief summary of the genesis of “ADHD” and the resulting prevalent psychopharmacological treatment response. It then moves into an expansive discussion of a paradigm shift that is taking place in our world which directly affects how ADHD can be both viewed and addressed. For centuries we have been accustomed to imagining a Descartes-inspired reality in which each object is material and separate from the rest. We have believed that the whole is composed of parts to be analyzed, disassembled, and reassembled. This separative vision, which excludes the interactions between the whole and the part, has infiltrated every field of knowledge, and in particular those regarding the body, where illness—including mental illness—is seen as being “damaged” or “pathological.” Further, therapeutic interpretations of child behavior are colored and obscured by the conditioning and psychological prejudices of the therapists themselves.

With the recent advent of awareness of quantum physics, we are waking up to the reality that every apparent part of the Whole is both part *and* the Whole. As such, we are connected to all and embody all, where the part affects the whole and the whole affects the part.

The authors then put forth a fresh vision for addressing ADHD unaffected by past conditioning. Tibetan thanatology (the study of death and dying), rooted in this awakening quantum paradigm, offers us in the modern world appropriate and life-affirming “empathic care of suffering” as a means to address attention deficit of almost any kind, infused with compassionate/empathic listening. Costa and Muggia continue with a discussion of the power of meditation as another means to address attention deficit and how meditation’s efficacy is also rooted in quantum physics. Drugs have proven only marginally useful in balancing beta and theta waves needed for focused mental states. Research has shown that beta-theta wave imbalance was reduced 3 percent through the use of drugs and 48 percent through meditation techniques.

The second chapter offers specific case study examples of children and youth whose behavioral issues were effectively mediated by intervention adhering to the tenets of empathic care. Chapter two ends with a powerful and resonant declaration: “In short, the problem is not being hyperactive or repetitive, but being out of harmony.”

These three tenets of empathic care are the titles of subsequent chapters: First, Welcome and Listen; Second, Put the Child Back in the Center; and Third, Recognize the Innate Value and Wisdom of the Child. Throughout these chapters are woven further examples of children and new paradigmatic approaches that are being used to address their issues, including Autogenic Training, Shamatha (Tranquility Meditation), Mindfulness Meditation, Vipassana Meditation,

Transcendental Meditation, Sahaja Yoga Meditation, and the Alice Project, which has its foundation in the values of unity, interdependence, caring, and responsibility.

The message of this book is both powerful and urgent: there are complementary, non-invasive, effective techniques that teach ADHD children skills that will enable them to self-manage, deescalate their symptoms, and empower them with tools for long-term self-care. Children are extremely empathic and deeply experience what is around them. Therefore, the peaceful state of the caregiver—parent, teacher, therapist—can be used to directly soothe and teach children to access these states in themselves.

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