

# Wyomissing Behavior Analysts, Ltd.

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## TOWARD A “WHOLE BRAIN” APPROACH

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Over the last decade we have witnessed an evolution in the field of Developmental Disabilities from an emphasis on technology to humanism. During the era of technology, the buzzwords were things like behavior modification, reward and punishment, data based, programs, goals and objectives, goal plans, etc. With the current trend toward humanism, the buzzwords changed to things like person centered, positive approach, faith, visions, futures planning, inclusion, etc..

The Technicians among us who were the heroes of the field a decade ago now balk and resist this humanistic movement. No one denies the importance of caring and the importance of the individual, but what about all that technology that served us in the past ? Do we just throw it out ? Sure it was abused, but many people benefited from it too. There is a continued debate between the advocates of Positive Approaches (the Humanists) and the advocates of “The Right to Effective Treatment” (the Technicians).

The Technicians tend to be the Scientists and Professional types with Bachelor of Science Degrees (and then some). They have made a living teaching and doing research. They have done careful experiments and published their results. Success meant the independent variable (the intervention) produced a statistically significant change in the dependent variable (the behavior).

The Humanists never really understood (or wanted to understand) all that technical stuff. After all, they had Bachelor of Arts Degrees and/or just had a lot of personal experience. They were more motivated by ideals than statistical outcomes. They just wanted to help people.

Where do you think you fit in this evolution? Myself, I have a Bachelor of Science Degree. I have a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology. I recently got a Masters in Business Administration. There is no denying it - I am one of those Technicians. I made my bones working on a “Behavior Modification Ward” at a State Hospital. Over the years, my approach has evolved as I learned of new technology and experienced my own successes and failures. If you asked if I cared about the people with whom I worked (my clients), I would have been offended at the suggestion and most definitely answered yes. But to be honest, my focus was on the technology.

If I have to identify a single event that introduced me to the humanist evolution, it was hearing about Gentle Teaching while working at a State MR Center. It was a threat to my technology. I read the book (John McGee, et. al.). It was tough reading for me. It seemed more like poetry than science. There was a lot I agreed with, but it seemed to lack substance and validation.

The humanist movement has evolved a great deal since Gentle Teaching. I was just at a 3-Day Convention entitled "Everyday Lives" in Hershey, PA and no one even mentioned Gentle Teaching. I enjoyed the Conference. The Humanists struck me as more realistic (down to earth) and less visionary (in the clouds) than they used to be. I was disappointed, however, that everyone was still talking about ideals and feelings with very little about the nuts and bolts of getting things done (the technology with which I feel more comfortable).

Is there a way to understand what's going on here and make some sense of all this? I believe there is and it has to do with the fact that we have two hemispheres in our brain - a left and the right. (Just like a Technician to give a biological explanation!).

There is research (mixed with some folklore) to suggest that these hemispheres are not equal, but rather that each has some unique functions. The left hemisphere is responsible for speech, logic, math, reading, analysis, perception of order, etc.. The right hemisphere is responsible for spatial, music, synthesis, emotion, intuition, creativity. Just as we are right handed or left handed, there is evidence to suggest that for each of us one hemisphere is dominant. Those of us who are left brain dominant tend to be more academic, analytic, precise and logical. Those of us who are more right brain dominant tend to be more artistic, creative, intuitive and emotional.

The suggestion here is that the Technicians among us are left brain dominant and the Humanists are right brain dominant. The current evolution toward a more person centered and positive approach is a right brain movement. Right brained people are ecstatic and jump to their feet. Left brained people shudder and squirm in their seats.

There is a Personality Inventory called the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI). It is more popular in the business/organizational world than in human services. It is based on a theory of psychological types described by C. G. Jung. It is based on the theory that seemingly random and disorderly behavior can be explained by differences in the way individuals prefer to use their perceptions and judgments. Preference is distinguished on 4 dimensions: extroversion - introversion (E or I), sensing - intuition (S or N), thinking - feeling (T or F), judgment - perception (J or P). An individual's type is then indicated by 4 letters.

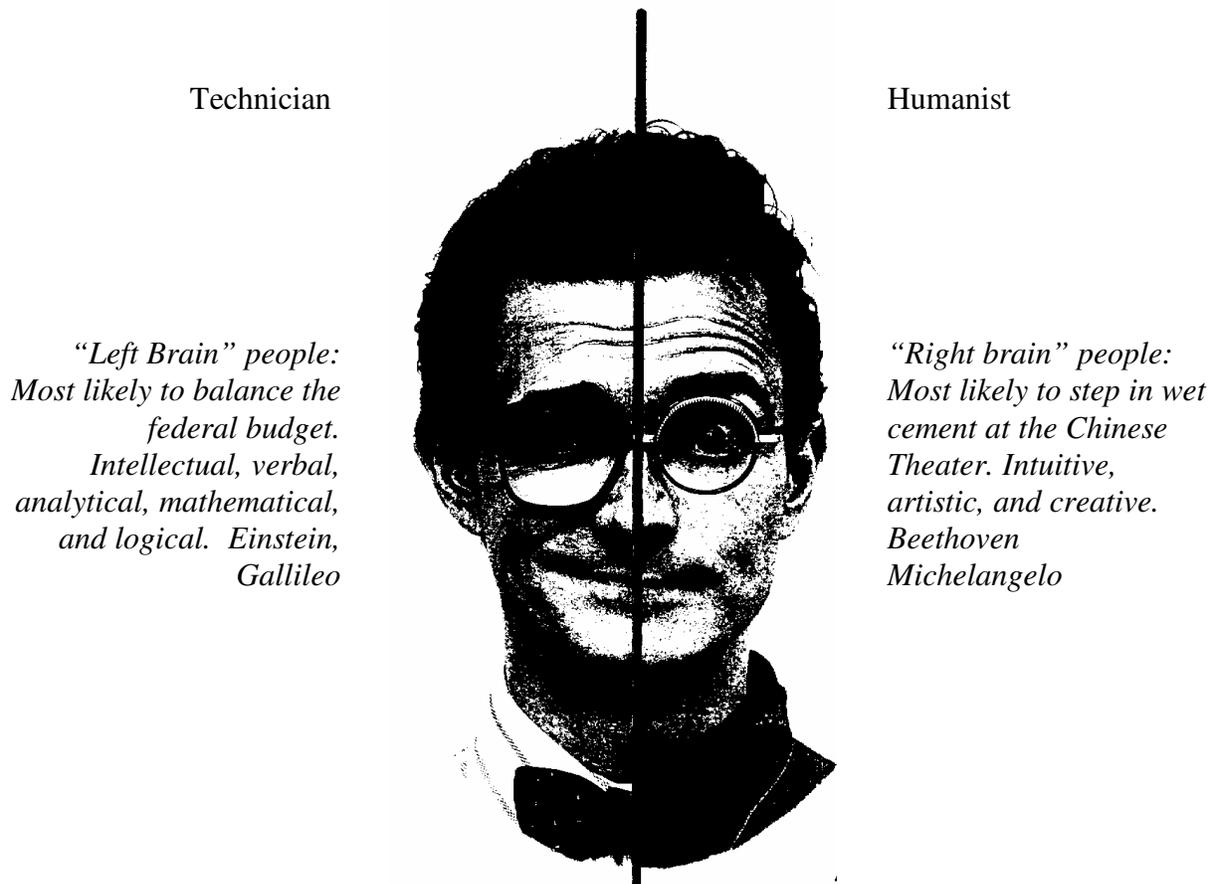
Critical to Jung's Theory and the MBTI is the idea that these are preferences, that there is no right or wrong, that each type has merits and drawbacks. The truly integrated person is able to balance the less preferred with the more preferred (e.g., prefers to be an Introvert, but can be an Extrovert when needs be.)

It turns out that I am an ISTJ (the typical Technician). A colleague of mine is an ENFP - the exact opposite on each dimension (and the typical Humanist). As long as we don't kill each other, we gain a lot from each other's complementary strengths. It has helped each of us become more balanced and integrated in our approach.

I would hypothesize that if this MBTI was given to various people in the Developmental Disabilities Field we would find a correlation between Personality Type, the Technician/Humanist dimension and Brain Dominance. If testing of this hypothesis revealed no statistical difference, I would blame it on the growing number of integrated people in the field - those that can combine the strengths of the Technician with those of the Humanist (or vice versa.)

It explains a lot for me - why the written regulations (left brain) do not seem to fit the advocated approach (right brain), why the funding streams (very left brain), do not seem to fit the vision (right brain), why I squirm when the charismatic speaker suggests we all just have to have faith in the vision.

As an individual, I know my challenge is to find that balance between the right and the left - to become truly integrated in my approach. And so also for the Field, the challenge would seem to be to develop a "Whole Brain" Approach in which the technology is refined to support the vision.



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