



## AT A GLANCE

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## The Gifts of Disabilities

## November 2011 Newsletter

I once met with a Vocational-Rehabilitation counselor and explained how my son's lack of reading skills actually could be an advantage in a self-employment career. She looked at me in shock, perhaps questioning my sanity. I went on to explain that he was considering starting a shredding business and his clients could be assured he wouldn't read their sensitive documents. The VR counselor still didn't "get it."

Some children and adults speak without first *filtering* their thoughts, and may be judged as not having "appropriate" social skills. But isn't there value in honest, transparent conversations? Some possible careers where these attributes would be helpful: product testers, film critics, dare I say politicians?

We may see students who do not speak English as their first language as being "deficient" in communication skills. Native Americans have historically experienced discrimination, and yet their gift of speaking a different language was a great asset in both World Wars. In World War I the Choctaw Code Talkers used codes developed from their native language to transmit secret tactical messages. Navajo speakers were specially recruited during World War II, and Comanche code-talkers made significant contributions to the Allied success on D-Day.

When will we see a person's differences as strengths and as extraordinary gifts to be appreciated?

Does a high school football player who is deaf have advantages on the field of play? Demontrai Lewis, a defensive player has never been penalized for being "offsides" because he watches the football and is not fooled by hearing the count. He is also not distracted by the crowd noises or the trash talk between players. Demontrai's goals are to play college and NFL football.

A recent article in *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science* detailed the advantages of having autism. What a welcome perspective! Many people with autism learn through the visual-processing system rather than the speech-processing system; Dr. Laurent Mottron indicated this is an example of redistribution of brain functioning, and it's a strength, *not* a deficit.

As a researcher on the cognitive neuroscience of autism, Dr. Mottron has hired several assistants who have autism. He recognizes their abilities to interpret patterns from large sets of data and their exceptional ability to remember information as assets for a scientific career. He concludes that people with autism need support and opportunities more than they need *treatment*. I assert that is true for all people with so-called disabilities.

**Identify your vision:    how an assumed disability can be an advantage**

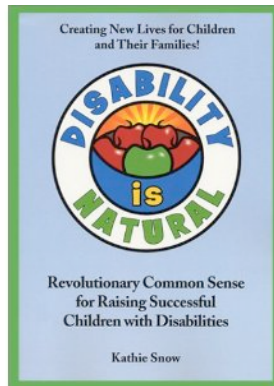
**Use your voice:        to tell others the positive aspects of differences**

**Work together:        teachers and parents, make lists of what the student  
CAN do and share with each other**

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## Resources



Kathie Snow helps us understand that disability is just one characteristic of a person. Families and educators will learn how to support students with disabilities to have rich, full lives, the type of lives they would have if they didn't have a disability.

This is possible when we change our thinking and help others understand students with disabilities are not "broken" and don't need to be "fixed".

You can order this book and other thought provoking products on her [website](#)

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Check out, [What's on my Bookshelf](#) on my website.

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## Websites

### [Changing Perceptions: The Power of Autism](#)

Read Dr. Mottron's complete article about the advantages of autism.

[Click here.](#)

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Cary Griffin and Dave Hammis are the gurus of employment for adults with disabilities. Bookmark their [website](#) and read about job creation, self-employment and civic entrepreneurship.

Employment specialists and families can learn how to successfully create jobs by focusing on the strengths of the individual, working with local businesses, and implementing cutting-edge strategies.

### [Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC](#)

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Would you love to have an easy to read, magazine-like format blog to read? Some of the articles are written by me and others are scooped from a variety of sites. Go to [Beyond Special Education](#), then click on the blue Follow button in the right hand corner.



As a parent and an educator, I bring 30+ years of experience and enthusiasm to create positive change for students, families, and educators! How may I support you? Click the links below to learn more.

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Let us share our **Visions** of possibilities and opportunities.  
Honor the **Voices** of students, families, and educators,  
Choose to work **Together**,

To achieve Educational Success for All!

Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!

Charmaine Thaner

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