How Gestalt Language Processing Impacts Learning--
and 4 Ways To Help....

(Or why my ADHD/ Autistic kid struggles to study for tests)

Gestalt Language Processors (GLP's) don't think in terms of single words
or single concepts.

They learn things in CHUNKS.

They think HOLISTICALLY.

How do I know?
Because I AM a GLP.

GLP's don't just learn about BLUE.

They learn about LIGHT blue
DARK blue
SKY blue
COBALT blue
STEEL blue
CYAN blue
CORNFLOWER blue
and ROYAL blue.

They want the blue paint they asked for,
in the RIGHT color,
which is the shade they envisioned.
To them....the many shades or blue are NOT interchangeable.

The shades convey MEANING.

Details are important.

Words are important.

How words fit together to create MORE detail is important.

And GLP's think YOU understand,
how important it is,
to get details/words, RIGHT.

Because to them, it is hugely important.

So if you buy them a SET of Marvel Avenger toys, and Iron Man gets LOST....
It is no longer a SET.

It isn't complete so it CAN'T be their AVENGERS.

And they want you to buy an entirely new set,
because if you simply replaced
the missing Iron Man,

it might be a different size
or in a different condition.

It wouldn't FIT the gestalt,
or the PATTERN that
makes up the WHOLE.

And if I show my GLP a skeleton in the Natural History Museum and read him the plaque attached to the display,
he doesn't JUST think of the
skeleton as a
"Dinosaur" or a
"Stegosaurus Skeleton,"

He actually absorbs more than that!

(Whether or not he can verbalize it)

His brain hears that this skeleton is from a
"late Jurassic,
Stegosaurus dinosaur,
that lived in Colorado,
and consumed plants,
with peg shaped teeth. "

And all those details become linked!

They become a part of his understanding of biology,
geography,
form,
and function.

So now,

He may demand to watch Jurassic Park,
next time someone mentions wanting to ski in Aspen...

He may change the topic to dentistry,
next time the preschool teacher passes him a peg board...

He may even insist on playing with dinosaurs,

the next time someone mentions vegetarians.

My GLP is always trying to connect new knowledge,
to his lived experience
and understanding of the world.

So he often info dumps on topics that seem to come out of NOWHERE,
until I can figure out where
they fit in his gestalt.

(This also happens with Autistic kids who repeat phrases from TV....

those echolalic phrases ARE connected to what is happening, at least in their minds/gestalts)

And so for GLP's, studying for tests is REALLY difficult.

After all, how can they read a chapter and figure out WHICH details are important,
when it ALL seems important.

If you tell them to highlight the RELEVANT details, they will highlight ALL of it
(or nearly all of it).

It's like....

How can you ask them to take a test on a whole forest, when the forest is made up of--
trees
animals
insects
plants
soil
rain
sunlight
stones
roots
streams,
fish,
trails
hikers....

And ALL of those things seem worthy of intense focus?

What should they focus on first?

Is it important to know what kinds of trees, grow in the forest?

Or how many of the forest's hiking trails, run adjacent to rivers?

Or if giant ground sloths used to live there, during the ice age?

Or if Nelson Mandela visited the forest, in 1997?

Not knowing WHAT kinds of information others find significant is overwhelming....

And it is 100% the reason I failed a class in college.

Despite getting awesome grades on the papers and projects,
and having a good
understanding of the subject,

I didnt turn up to the final.

I had a panic attack, instead.

The professor said it was cumulative,

and based on an 875 page text that we had never actually discussed in the course.

With no study guide or help to isolate which book info was "relevant," I lost hope.

I had no way to absorb the ENTIRE book and so didn't feel able to even ATTEMPT the exam.

I melted down, instead.

I cried.

So, how can you help your GLP?

1) Be specific.

Instead of "clean your room,"

make a list of what tasks you want them to complete. Add pictures if you can!

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2) Offer context.

Instead of telling them to "learn about dogs," before you adopt one,

Tell them to learn about how much training a dog requires,

how much it's food/care costs,

and what their daily time
commitment would be, to it's
exercise.

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3) Help them eliminate irrelevant information.

If Paul is part of a group, and has perfect behavior,
but MOST kids in the group are
breaking rules,
and the teacher finally
snaps at everyone.

Paul is going to internalize all that criticism and be afraid to return to class.

If you can't run interference, then Paul may become afraid of group social experiences.

You need to tell the teacher that he thinks all critiques apply to him, unless told otherwise.

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4) Try to understand them, so they can understand you.

That means you should echo their phrases and gestalts BACK to them,
instead of pressing them to
sound more like others.

So, if they use scripted speech frequently,
then use those scripts to
communicate to them...
and add things ONTO them to help expand their understanding.

If they info dump on cats all the time,
then find ways to incorporate
cats into other things you are
teaching them...
Help them find relevance through
their favorite topics.

And my next post on GLP is going to address how GLP impacts older kids/adults, socially.

Because even when a GLP moves through (or past) obvious scripted speech.... that learning style continues to impact us.

Written by Neurodivergent Parenting: Think outside the box