

Issue 15 / April 2014

essential reading for those who care

Autism World



Magazine

RDI Changed our lives

How does your garden grow?

Dare to be different

What are you doing this month?

Future Employment:

Part 7: Communication Channels



Malcolm Mayfield
Managing Director
Autism STAR Pty. Ltd

For the past few months, I have been exploring possible causes that could explain the AJ Drexel Autism Institute research findings [individuals with autism spectrum conditions have worse employment and independent living outcomes than people with other disabilities](#).

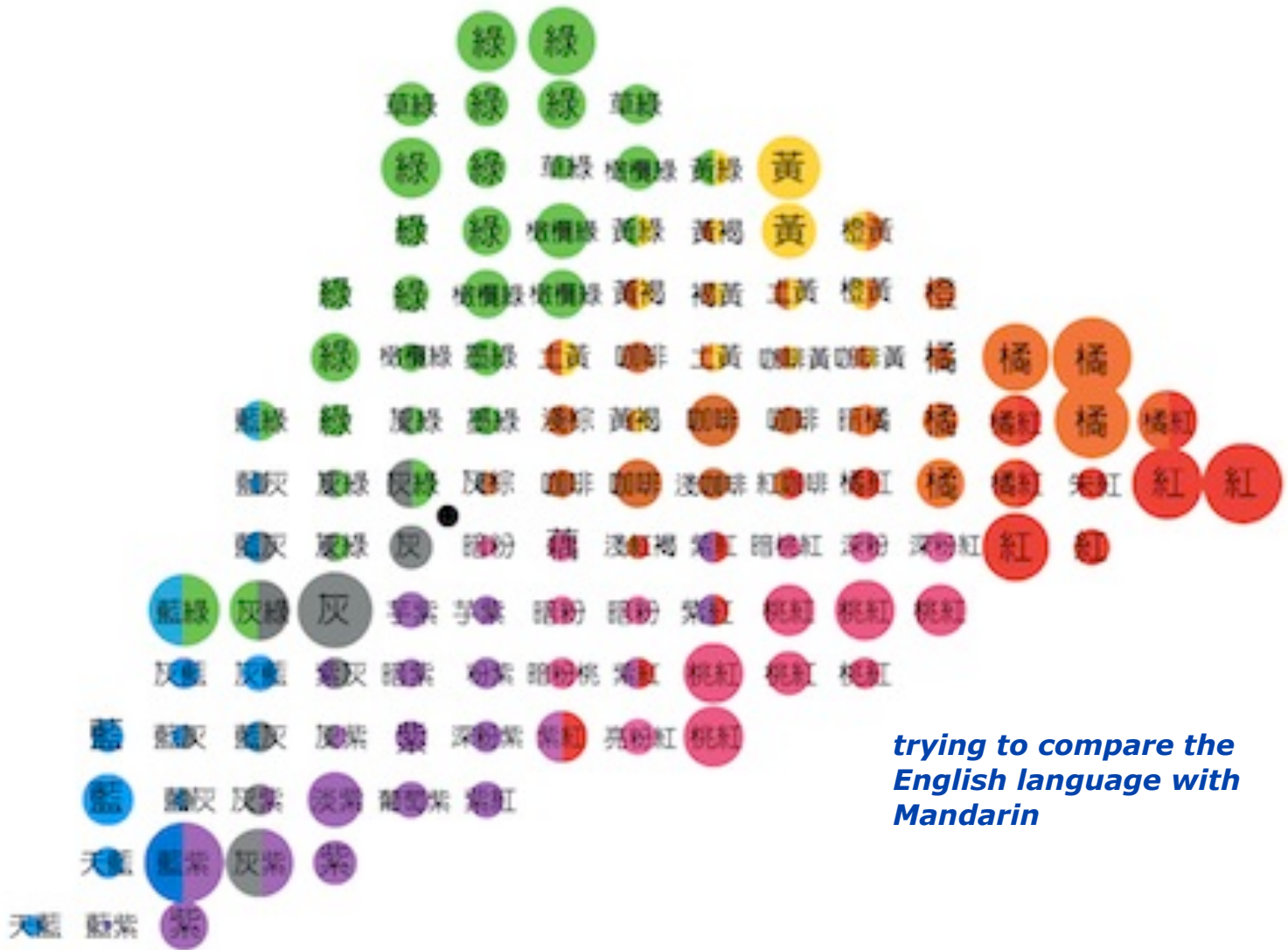
My key observation was that the research was problem focused and failed to present any possible causes. By extrapolation, the research ignored potential solutions to the identified issue.

In my opinion, there were five key factors that contributed to the lower employment and independent living rates of autistic individuals.

They were:

- ✔ Overwhelm;
- ✔ Fear of getting it wrong;
- ✔ Lack of self-belief;
- ✔ Society perceptions of autism; and
- ✔ Lack of training.

The first two factors are very closely linked. The need for perfection leads to overwhelm which in turn occurs to protect the individual from over-stimulation.



trying to compare the English language with Mandarin

If left unreconciled, the interaction of overwhelm and perfectionism can often create a belief in an individual that he cannot achieve his goals.

This lack of self-belief is compounded by a society that is attempting to reconcile the learning strategies of the autistic mind against mainstream education models. The resultant confusion, miscommunication and mismatching results in the individual being labelled as “unteachable” which in turn leads to reduced training, learning and employment opportunities.

To focus on only one of the above five factors is in my opinion a limited and ultimately ineffective approach. We are dealing with a multi-faceted issue that requires a wholistic solution.

Strategies used to deal with overwhelm must be combined with belief change techniques that remove the societal fear of making mistakes. Error-focused punishment must be replaced with solution-based thinking which is also balanced, achievable and realistic.

When a person believes that they can be successful, then she will be open to learning the skills required to achieve that success. Albert Einstein once said that if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

To date, society in general has been attempting to understand the autistic mind by attempting to reconcile it against mainstream thinking. This is like trying to compare the English language against Hindi or Mandarin.

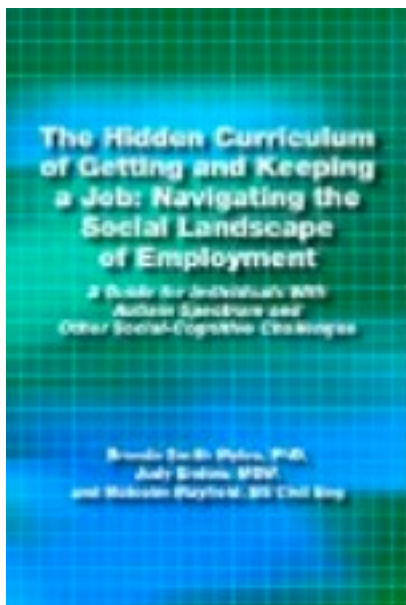
While translation protocols exist to enable communication, the intent of the original message will become distorted or lost entirely.

I stand by my belief that autism is a different language. It is only through the intention of creating clear and open channels of communication that true harmony between the autistic and neurotypical worlds can be achieved.

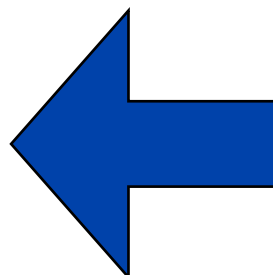
The first step is in achieving understanding.
The next step is in maintaining understanding.

Can you take these steps into a brave new world?

Malcolm Mayfield
Managing Director
Autism STAR Pty. Ltd.
www.autism-star.com
Adelaide, Australia



Malcolm Mayfield is co-author of "The Hidden Curriculum of Getting and Keeping a Job: Navigating the Social Landscape of Employment."



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