



The Woman Who Changed Her Brain: And Other Inspiring Stories of Pioneering Brain Transformation

Barbara Arrowsmith-Young

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Barbara Arrowsmith-Young was born with severe learning disabilities that caused teachers to label her slow, stubborn—or worse. As a child, she read and wrote everything backward, struggled to process concepts in language, continually got lost, and was physically uncoordinated. She could make no sense of an analogue clock. But by relying on her formidable memory and iron will, she made her way to graduate school, where she chanced upon research that inspired her to invent cognitive exercises to “fix” her own brain. *The Woman Who Changed Her Brain* interweaves her personal tale with riveting case histories from her more than thirty years of working with both children and adults.

Recent discoveries in neuroscience have conclusively demonstrated that, by engaging in certain mental tasks or activities, we actually change the structure of our brains—from the cells themselves to the connections between cells. The capability of nerve cells to change is known as *neuroplasticity*, and Arrowsmith-Young has been putting it into practice for decades. With great inventiveness, after combining two lines of research, Barbara developed unusual cognitive calisthenics that radically increased the functioning of her weakened brain areas to normal and, in some areas, even above-normal levels. She drew on her intellectual strengths to determine what types of drills were required to target the specific nature of her learning problems, and she managed to conquer her cognitive deficits. Starting in the late 1970s, she has continued to expand and refine these exercises, which have benefited thousands of individuals. Barbara founded Arrowsmith School in Toronto in 1980 and then the Arrowsmith Program to train teachers and to implement this highly effective methodology in schools all over North America. Her work is revealed as one of the first examples of neuroplasticity’s extensive and practical application. The idea that self-improvement can happen in the brain has now caught fire.

The Woman Who Changed Her Brain powerfully and poignantly illustrates how the lives of children and adults struggling with learning disorders can be dramatically transformed. This remarkable book by a brilliant pathbreaker deepens our understanding of how the brain works and of the brain’s profound impact on how we participate in the world. Our brains shape us, but this book offers clear and hopeful evidence of the corollary: we can shape our brains.

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