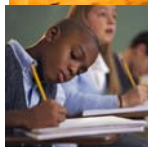




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| o Summer | o 2007

Learning Connections

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING

7 Reasons Intensive Instruction Can Make Significant Gains in Learning

Sarah is a great student. She works on grade level in all of her subjects and produces excellent work without any extra help from mom and dad. But it wasn't always that way for Sarah. You see, Sarah was good in all subjects, *except for math.* In math, she literally panicked. Her mind would go blank and she would blurt out the first answer that came into her head. She grew to hate math, and even wondered if she was smart at all.

It all changed for Sarah when her mother found a center that would work intensively over the summer for 60 hours of one-to-one instruction. Sarah went back to school at grade level in math, and her anxiety was gone!

For Sarah, it was math. Other students have also made this kind of progress in reading, writing, and cognitive processing skills with **intensive summer work.** Schwab Learning expert, Kevin Feldman, Ed.D., says, "It's a combination of excellent instruction and age-appropriate **practice – and lots of it.**"

Here are the reasons why intensive instruction works:

There is no stress from schoolwork, which allows a child's brain to take in and process information more easily. Large gains in knowledge bring feelings of success. Intensives allow time for mastery in weaker

areas. Students can gain a solid foundation in the content. Work can be completed in 1-3 hours per day, so there is still time for fun activities. The effect can be cumulative, with less information lost between sessions. **Students begin the school year with confidence in their abilities.**

Who benefits from intensives?

Intensive instruction benefits students who are below grade level in one or more skills and want to maximize the time they have available before the next school year.

Is it better than help during the school year?

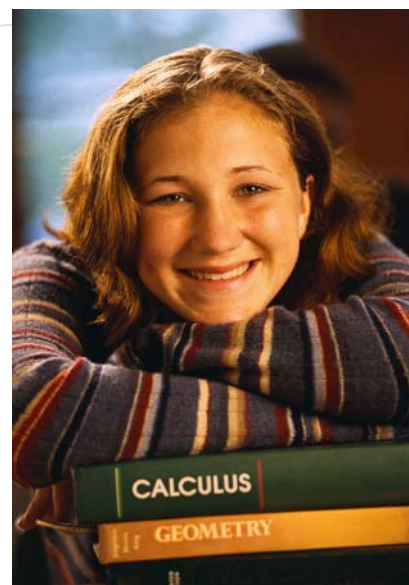
Intensives do offer more rapid advancement for students, beyond the hour to hour comparison. The reason for this is that students have more time to absorb and practice the material in each session and they have less time between sessions to "lose" the new information.

How do intensives help motivation?

Intensives help promote motivation by increasing the learning rate. Students feel better when learning becomes easier, when they can see results, and when they master material that was once difficult. Success is the key to motivation.

How much time does a child need?

Most programs require at least 40 hours to make an impact. The more time you spend on a program the further your child will advance. Sally Shaywitz, M.D. ,



writes in her book *Overcoming Dyslexia*, "...*the instruction must be relentless and amplified in every way possible so that it penetrates and takes hold.*"

How do parents know what is the best plan?

Parents should talk to teachers to find out which skills are weak and which skills are needed for the next year. Intensive summer intervention should include the remediation of weak skills and the development of new skills to make the next grade level successful. *A trained professional can help make next year the best ever!*

Karen Freid, Psychologist, owner of K&M Center, Santa Monica, CA



The Handwriting Connection

Does handwriting really matter these days? Should a child's energy and effort be spent on improving handwriting instead of acquiring keyboarding skills? The answer to both questions is a resounding YES! Handwriting matters. In his book, *All Kinds of Minds*, Mel Levine states, **"If a child is struggling to learn, the poor handwriting process itself interferes with learning."** Not only is instruction of handwriting important, but also practice is essential for the process to become automatic,and it can be fun!

Why should handwriting be practiced?

In her book, *Train the Brain to Pay Attention the Write Way*, Jeanette Farmer, a handwriting remediation specialist, states, "That handwriting is a physical force with an inherent capacity to self-organize the young brain, helping avoid learning problems, is a well-kept secret." As a third, fourth and fifth grade classroom teacher, my intuition told me that this handwriting skill was important to my students' educational success, though I had received no formal training in teaching the process. Farmer's book and program, *WriteBrain*, helped me articulate and substantiate, with certainty, my reasons for insisting on mastery and automaticity. *WriteBrain* is a program that Jeanette Farmer developed after spending 15 years of applying brain research to the handwriting process.

How does it impact the brain?

Handwriting has a powerful impact on the brain and prepares the brain for the reading process. Combining it with therapeutic music provides visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile stimulation, a perfect combination of learning styles. Doing these exercises causes an increase in the activity of neurons, which leads to an increase in metabolism, which leads to an increase in blood flow to the area, which stimulates growth-- and more learning!

Why is practice so important?

Both external factors (instruction book, the pencil grip, and the proper placement of the paper) and internal factors (impulse control, physical state, emotional stability, and spatial perception) affect a student's ability to acquire the handwriting skill. Starting young and regularly stressing the acquisition of proper handwriting habits over time are crucial to developing the skill. Farmer stresses that by age 11 a child's handwriting should be unconscious and automatic, so that it flows easily without anxiety. This enables students to handle the more complex cognitive requirements of upper grades. What often occurs in school is that handwriting is assigned to students, but true instruction and practice of strokes get pushed aside and replaced by other subjects to prepare for testing. **By investing in handwriting practice for 10-15 minutes daily, students' brains could be even better prepared and activated to produce their best possible testing results.** This is true for all ages: from elementary, to middle school, to high school and beyond.

Six Ways the Handwriting Process Benefits Student Learning

Learning - Chronic stress causes a chemical change that shuts down learning and undermines the brain's ability to lock information into memory. In *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, Eric Jensen asserts that excessive stress and threat in the school environment may be the single greatest contributor to impaired academic learning. A multi-sensory handwriting program relaxes the emotional brain to reduce stress levels in students and improve learning.

Language Development - Rhythm helps a child feel the cadence of language, and this facilitates the acquisition of language skills. The regular, repetitive movement used in handwriting helps develop and maintain an internal rhythm that leads to a well-balanced person overall.

Focus and Concentration - Therapeutic music with a rhythm of 60 beats per minute entrains the brain's rhythm and "pulls" it to the music's rhythm. This begins to stabilize how the brain is firing, which calms the emotional brain so it can focus. Handwriting activates neural impulses that are sent to the brain's higher levels to improve attention. **Handwriting and music**..... a powerful combination to gently create a tranquil, effective learning environment in the classroom.



Organization Skills and Work Habits - Farmer states, "As the brain matures, it becomes more specialized with specific functions residing in each hemisphere. The left brain begins to specialize around 5 or 6 years old...The emotionally influenced right brain must be dampened so the left brain can reign supreme." The repetitive manipulation of the thumb and fingers in the hand writing process helps prime and activate the left brain. The left brain manages executive functions such as planning, monitoring, organizing, revising and attending—skills critical to educational achievement and self-management.

Impulse Control - Gaining impulse control causes a fundamental shift from the right brain to the left, and it is necessary for fine motor movement. Repetitive movement, like handwriting, helps counteract the right brain's impulsive behavior. In *The Alphabet and the Goddess, The Conflict between Word and Image*, Dr. Leonard Shalin, M.D., states it this way, "All forms of writing increase left brain dominance over the right. The alphabet, being the most abstract, enhances left brain values most."

Reading - The young brain needs the regulated stimulation of handwriting to prepare or "prime" the brain for learning, so reading can be developed more easily. It lays a foundation of neural pathways and connections that assist sequential processing and integration of thought with action, both necessary for the acquisition of literacy skills. Farmer explains that this is based on a non-cognitive concept meaning that stimulation is provided "in a non-threatening format, so those who are struggling can gain the benefits without enduring more stress and anxiety."

How is this program implemented?

This is a program that has the potential to impact regular classrooms, special education classrooms and conditions that affect learning such as ADHD, Down's Syndrome, autism, developmental delays, brain injury, and learning disabilities. Farmer likens the up and down movement in handwriting to "priming the pump" to start the flow of water from a well. It is a great way to begin learning and training sessions with students. The exercises combined with music **activate and integrate the thinking processes and improve focus and attention**. The students look forward to getting started this way because it is relaxing and fun. The exercises are adaptable to adults and high school students, as well as younger children. It's **never** too late to develop new connections in the brain. These exercises help build good handwriting habits and, at the same time, "**retrain the brain.**"

Brenda Lana, Educational Therapist and Special Educator, founder and director of Pathfinders Learning Center in Mission Viejo, California



Banyan Tree Learning Center opened in San Diego in 1993 to provide assistance to students who struggle in school. Director, Nanci Engle, an Educational Therapist and Learning Disability Specialist, believes ALL children can achieve to their potential. Banyan Tree helps students who have difficulty with reading, dyslexia, attention, memory, executive functioning, language, social skills, and other learning disabilities. Our monthly **Struggling Student Series** is for parents and professionals to learn about current trends and research in learning disabilities. **B TLC's Parent Support Group** also meets monthly for parents to discuss problems and solutions. Call **619-226-6171** or **858-578-6616** for help, or to find out about coming events.

Mommy, My Ear Hurts!

The Facts About Otitis Media



Next to the common cold, otitis media (fluid in the middle ear) occurs more often than any other

illness among preschool-age children. When fluid is not detected, it can cause hearing loss which may affect the child's speech and language development.

Causes: A tiny passageway between the middle ear and the back of the throat called the Eustachian tube lets unwanted fluid drain out of the middle ear. If the Eustachian tube gets inflamed from a cold, allergy, or infection, it will not drain the fluid, and the fluid may become infected.

Ages: Otitis media occurs

most often in children because their Eustachian tubes are small, nearly horizontal, and easily blocked. Two-thirds of all children have at least one **ear infection by age 3**, and one-third have three or more infections.

What to look for: A child may have pain and fever. However, pulling or scratching the ears, irritability, misunderstanding directions, wanting the volume louder than usual, and listlessness may be signs of chronic recurring fluid in the ear.

What to do: If you suspect a middle-ear infection, refer to a physician. If a child has frequently recurring infections or chronic fluid in the middle ear, refer to an audiologist and a speech-language pathologist. The audiologist can assess the severity of any hearing impairment. The

speech-language pathologist can determine if the problems have impacted a child's speech and language development.

Connections are made in the brain for language processing and discrimination of speech sounds between the ages 2 and 4. The speed of the connection is wired in as a "set point"; however, if processing is sluggish due to thickened fluid in the middle ear, language development could lag. Language is the core foundation for learning, reading, and successful comprehension. If a child has had chronic ear infections and is having difficulty learning, *seek help right away*. Maturation will not change how the brain has determined to process information. **Early detection by a specialist can make a real difference!**

Lynda Detweiler-Newcomb, MA, SLP-CCC, is owner of Encinitas Learning Center

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