



Achieving Academic Excellence

UNCHAINED TO GROW IN WISDOM AND STATURE

GERARD PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Spring Quarter 2012

Yep, it's brain food for breakfast...

It's 8:35 am. The teacher has chalk in hand and is ready to start the day. She has carefully constructed a learning experience of visual input, hands-on activities, reading and experimentation - to help the students learn.

When she looks around the room, does she see bright eyes and positive, expectant expressions, or squirming, sleeping, or distracted students. What happens in a classroom by mid-morning? Mid-afternoon? Are the students stressed, depressed and anxious?

According to experts, the internal environment of the brain is an integral part of learning, just as important as the classroom environment. You may find in some cases students are not able to learn due to poor nutrition or inadequate hydration.

Within a student's brain, a biochemical process of learn-

ing is occurring, that parallels the classroom experience. Making connections, finding meaning, and solving problems are learning tasks that require lightning-fast electrical impulses between areas of the brain. Formation of memory requires physical growth and reshaping of networks of brain cells. So that wonderful experience - when the lights go on and a student says, "I get it!" - is a neurochemical process as well as an academic one. By nourishing the brain with healthy food and water, the internal environment is optimized, enabling students to truly engage in the classroom environment and achieve their potential.

Nutrition Makes a Difference
Nutrition and hydration are part of a foundation for healthy learning. Helping youngsters make healthier choices is an essential part of their education and well-

being. What can parents do to help create an optimal internal environment?

1. Have children bring a water bottle they can keep at their desk or take water breaks throughout the day.
2. Encourage children to bring only healthy treats - such as whole fruit, whole grain crackers; a brain based classroom will stop for snacks!
3. Teach children how to choose the healthiest foods from the menu and serve them at home as often as possible.
4. Be aware of your school's Wellness Policy and contribute or obtain support for change in your classroom/school. Academic excellence takes both inside and outside efforts!
5. Take your children shopping and let them choose favorite items from the produce section of the store. When it's their idea they tend to join in more!

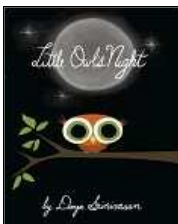
By incorporating healthy food and water in the classroom experience, all students are more attentive, and will engage in enjoyable learning.

ACHIEVING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IS A FREE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO INFORMING PARENTS ABOUT HOW THEY CAN BE AN INFLUENCE IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION .

WE KNOW PARENTS NOT ONLY CARE BUT WANT TO HAVE THEIR CHILDREN GROW AND DEVELOP INTO THEIR BEST SELF, NOT JUST FOR THE TIME FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL, BUT FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

WE BELIEVE THAT EDUCATION AND THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL YEARS LEAVE AN INDELIBLE LIFELONG IMPRESSION, FRAMING THEIR PERSONAL PURPOSE. WE ARE COMMITTED TO PROVIDING TOOLS OF EXCELLENCE FOR OUR NEXT GENERATION.

Raising them up: Buy the Book



A Little Owl's Night is sure to comfort any child with a curiosity about the night.

By Divya Srinivasan
For-3-to-5-Years-Old



Great book for children 8 -12 years
by Sharon Robinson daughter of Jackie Robin-

son. This story tells his life as a father as well as a ball player. A real must read!



Mystery, surprises, and lots of humor and charm
infuse Sheila

Turnage's debut novel for children. For 12-15 yrs.

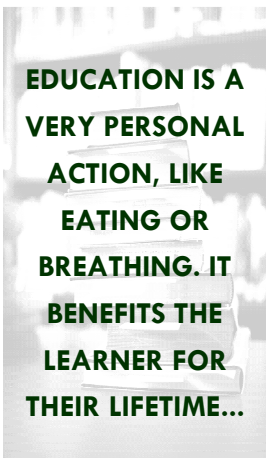
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Achieving Academic Excellence



Education that produces success for the future is what our students need today.



Eyes on Education CHANGE in their lives...

What "defines" education?

Webster sites ed-u-ca-tion noun. 1. The act or process of educating or being educated. 2. The knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a *learning process*.

Notice the definition says education is developed by "a learning process." The real question is; *What is the process to obtain the best education?*"

Experience in education would dictate that rather than being a noun, education is really a verb, an *action*. Moreover, it is a very personal action, like breathing or eating; it should sustain and grow each learner. Education is more than a set of books, a level of knowledge or a stair step to higher things.

One might think education could be compared to constructing a building, adding floors as it advances. However, it is really more like planting seeds which grow up and produce something

more; something self sustaining, a future of successful fruit. Unlike a building or structure, students are pliable, changing and developing and their education must shape and grow with them, challenging them, supporting them and requiring that they reach higher, dig deeper and get involved in the process.

Real education "continues to grow" long after the seeds are planted. Buildings don't grow. You can add on, but they don't grow on their own. If students learn with personal interest and involvement, they will take what they learn and use it in their own lives. Education will become personal, applicable information.

When education is planted into a mind like seeds, the farmer (teacher) *expects* growth, producing even more growth. Furthermore, when students learn in a environment where the ex-

pectation and focus is on their personal growth, *real useable, and applicable education takes place*. Other processes like the "kid under construction" format often instruct and teach according to pre-planned cookie cutter blue prints. The outcome is often like the Three Bears story, too big, too small, and the difficult to find, just right.

For over 3 decades I have repeated, "Education without application is useless information." I believe it more than ever today. In a global market where experience is as valuable as knowledge we can not give our children a cookie cutter education where one size fits all. Our children are not wired that way. Each one of them are distinctly different and their education should fit them, not the other way around.

JGSinclair

Founder~ Branch Approach to Education®

Homework Helps and Headaches

Whose homework is it anyway? Yes, it is theirs. I know you want to help, but help does not mean, do it for them.

Many parents are perplexed by how to help at homework time. Here are some tips to help take the headaches away.

1) Let them have a spot for homework. A place they can always have pencils, erasers, calculator, etc. so they are not asking for all

of it before they can get started. This sense of independence will carry over into getting the work done on their own.

- 2) Make sure they understand the directions. You can always be interested by asking what their homework is about and what they have to do to complete it.
- 3) Your attitude about homework will directly affect theirs. If you dislike homework, chances are,

they will too.

- 4) Ask to see the finished product and praise their efforts or add an edit. Teaching is the teachers job, but parents can be teachers too.
- 5) Set a time limit. Don't make homework an all night event. The stress will eliminate what they may have learned anyway. If they can't finish, let their teachers know.

Myth or Fact: We learn with our brains... Yes, it's a fact...

As scientists learn more about how the human brain develops, many of our ideas about the brain are being challenged. We are learning that some old ideas actually were myths that are being replaced with new facts and understanding. Consider the following examples:

Brain Development - Myth or Fact?

Myth- At birth the brain is fully developed, just like one's heart or stomach.

Fact - Most of the brain's cells are formed before birth, but most of the connections among cells are made during infancy and early childhood.

Myth- The brain's development depends entirely on the genes with which you are born.

Fact - Early experience and interaction with the environment are most critical in a child's brain development.

Myth- A toddler's brain is less active than the brain of a college student.

Fact - A 3-year-old toddler's brain is twice as active as an adult's brain.

Myth- Talking to a baby is not important because he or she can't understand what you are saying.

Fact - Talking to young children establishes foundations for learning language during early critical periods when learning is easiest for a child.

Myth- Children need special

help and specific educational toys to develop their brain-power.

Fact - What children need most is loving care and new experiences, not special attention or costly toys. Talking, singing, playing and reading are some of the key activities that build a child's brain.

Imagine that a child's brain is like a house that has just been built. The walls are up, the doors are hung. Then you go to the store and buy electrical wiring, switches, a fuse box and other electrical supplies. You bring these supplies to the new house and set them on the floor. Will they work? Probably not. You first must string the wiring and hook up all of the connections. This is quite similar to the way our brains are formed. We are born with as many nerve cells as stars in the Milky Way galaxy. But these cells have not yet established a pattern of wiring between them — they haven't made their connections.

What the brain has done is to lay out circuits that are its best guess about what is required for vision, language, etc. Now the sensory experiences must take this rough blueprint and progressively refine it. Circuits are made into patterns that enable newborn infants to perceive their mother's touch, their father's voice and other aspects of their environment.

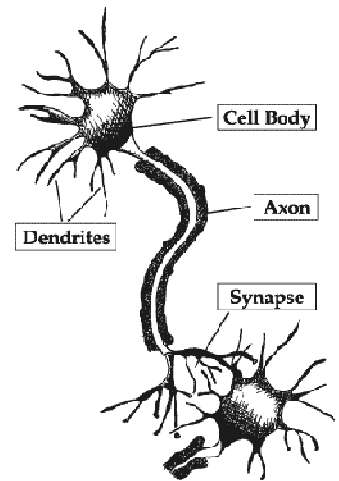
Normal sensory experiences

direct brain cells to their location and reinforce the connections between brain cells. We are born with more than 100 billion brain cells or neurons; we will not grow more. That's about 10 times the number of stars in the entire Milky Way, and about 20 times the number of people on the planet.

Neurons are the functioning core of the brain. Each cell body is about one-hundredth the size of the period at the end of this sentence. A neuron has branches or dendrites emerging from the cell body. These dendrites pick up chemical signals across a synapse and the impulse travels the length of the axon. Each axon branch has a sac containing neurotransmitters at its tip. The electrical impulse causes the release of the neurotransmitters, which, in turn, stimulates or inhibits neighboring dendrites, like an on-off switch.

As the synapses in a child's brain are strengthened through repeated experiences, connections and pathways are formed that structure the way a child learns. If a pathway is not used, it's eliminated based on the "use it or lose it" principle. Things you do a single time, either good or bad, are somewhat less likely to have an effect on brain development.

When a connection is used repeatedly in the early years, it becomes permanent. For example, when adults



repeat words and phrases as they talk to babies, babies learn to understand speech and strengthen the language connections in the brain.

By the time a child is 3 years old, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections — about twice as many as adults have. A baby's brain is superdense and will stay that way throughout the first decade of life. Beginning at about age 11, a child's brain gets rid of extra connections in a process calling "pruning," gradually making order out of a thick tangle of "wires."

The "prime time" for emotional and social development in children is birth to 12 years of age. Differing aspects of emotional and social development, which incorporate higher capacities, such as awareness of others, empathy and trust, are important at different times. For example, the real "prime time" for emotional attach-

Story continued on page 4



Myth or Fact continued from pg 3

Early learning comes from nurture and nature more than toys and television. Love, safety and great nutrition build bigger brains and happier hearts!

ment to be developed is from birth to 18 months, when a young child is forming attachments with critical caregivers. Such development provides the foundations for other aspects of emotional development that occur as children grow.

Emotional intelligence is critical to life success. The part of the brain that regulates emotion, the amygdala, is shaped early on by experience and forms the brain's emotional wiring. Early nurturing is important to learning empathy, happiness, hopefulness and resiliency.

Social development, which involves both self-awareness and a child's ability to interact with others, also occurs in stages. For example, sharing toys is something that a 2-

year old's brain is not fully developed to do well, so this social ability is more common and positive with toddlers who are 3 or older. A parent's efforts to nurture and guide a child will assist in laying healthy foundations for social and emotional development.

Conclusion

The development of a child's brain holds the key to the child's future. Although the "first years last forever" in terms of the rapid development of young children's brains, the actual first years of a child's life go by very quickly. So touch, talk, read, smile, sing, count and play with your children. It does more than make both of you feel good. It helps a child's brain develop and nourishes the child's potential for a lifetime.

Excerpts from: *Your Child's Growing Mind: A Practical Guide to Brain Development and Learning from Birth to Adolescence.* Healy, Jane (1994) New York: Doubleday. This easy-to-read book is full of practical suggestions for teaching and learning. I highly recommend this book to anyone who parents, knows a parent, and above all, to everyone who is called to teach. JGS

Gerard Prep offers Pre-school for youngsters 2½ -3 years. Curriculum and classrooms are brain based supporting all modalities of learning. All Gerard teachers take classes in brain development during their Branch Education® training.



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GERARD Preparatory School has served families in Gwinnett County since 1989. Using the Branch Educational Philosophy, a holistic, brain based, student centered educational format GPS now offers classes for Pre-School through 12th grade. The Branch Approach® integrates Certified Core Curriculum into student involved hands-on classrooms. Education takes place in highly intentional learning environments where "how they learn" is as important as "what they learn." "If learners don't connect with what they are learning, and find a way to personally use it, we are not providing opportunities to increase intelligence; we are simply stuffing the file cabinets in their heads with information. That is not life long, life changing education. It may pass the test, *but will it pass the test of time?*" At GPS their education is a personal journey, one that will lead them to personal and professional success. JGSinclair~ Founder Branch Approach®

GPS is fully accredited with Quality with the Georgia Accreditation Commission.

Visit us at www.GerardPrep.com