

I am a child

By Marita Villafuerte



Marita Villafuerte-Pierce is a licensed therapist for children with learning disabilities and has a Master's Degree in Elementary Education from Loyola College, Maryland. She trained in Montessori Primary and Elementary methods from Association Montessori Internationale, USA. She wrote the TRUTH Curriculum and founded PREPPI School, Inc.

Brain training (that makes SENSE)

Second of three parts

Are you ready for your next brain training exercise? This series will focus on *sense-ible* techniques that will appeal to your child's senses.

Professor Lyelle Palmer of Special Education at Winona State University in Minnesota made a study that indicates the vast learning potential available in our universe for everyone to take advantage of, and yet we tend to neglect it. The human brain is the most receptive organ. It literally customizes itself to the person's specific lifestyle since the first day of birth. It undergoes selective receptiveness as it prunes away unneeded cells and billions of unused connections. The most important consideration is, *"What do you want your child's brain to customize?"* To put it even more simply, the question can be translated into this, *"What abilities, talents, and experiences is your child being exposed to and what is being missed out?"*

The Motor Brain. A child needs to move to learn. "Move Baby!"—should be your motto. Children who have the right amount and manner of movement develop motor intelligence. Crawl time is a basic and valuable learning foundation for every baby born in any period of life. Even babies in these modern times need to move. Unfortunately, children today do not get the early motor stimulation they need for their basic development and optimal school success. Today's tot is more often than not "baby-sat" by

television, carried by a nanny presumably to avoid germ contact, locked in a crib, seated in a walker-type contraption, or strapped in a car seat. The infant of today is deprived of precious motor development hours. Based on U.S. statistics, the average 2-year-old in the 1960s spent an estimated 200 hours in a car. The 2-year-old in present times spends an estimated 500 hours in a car seat! The li'l one is moving all right but not with his/her own body which needs to develop. The mileage acquired is credited to the vehicle and not to the infant. Significantly, a vehicle that is constantly used depreciates through time while a young toddler who moves frequently develops strength and intelligence in time.

Children who are deprived of crawl time and movement in infancy tend to be clumsy and lack motor coordination, strength and balance. More significantly, early motor stimulation has a positive impact on reading, writing, and attention skills. Children who do not have enough motor stimulation may develop reading problems. It is only in recent studies that this finding has been confirmed. Movement contributes positively in developing reading skills, stress response, writing, attention, memory, and sensory development.

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The inner ear's vestibular area plays a vital role in school readiness. Rocking is a vestibular stimulation that causes a faster weight gain, and early vision and hearing devel-

opment. So, go ahead and rock your baby. There are studies that link dyslexia and other learning problems with lack of vestibular stimulation. Timing is very important. Move your babe very early in life. A Harvard study reveals that a child's brain by age 4 is not going to change much when it comes to movement. A kind of irreversibility sets in. While much learning occurs even after age 4, much of the brain's infrastructure is in place by this time.

Gymnastics is the most basic of all sports. All professional athletes need and actually do gymnastics to learn basic movements, balance, equilibrium, and control of body. In my school is a professional gymnastics program for our toddlers to prep students. It is a professional training because the one who teaches is a practicing professional gymnast who has national and international experience.

The Visual Brain. The infant at 2 to 4 months undergoes a major spurt in visual development. Much of our vision develops in our first year, specifically in the first 4 to 6 months. There are more than 30 distinct visual areas in the brain (color, movement, hue, and depth, for example) that the infant needs stimulating inputs. The learning tot needs lots of practice time to handle objects to learn their shapes, weight, and movement. Unfortunately, over-protective parents tend to keep away all things from the tiny and curious Einstein. Neuroscientist

Martha Pierson prescribes offering a feast of information to the learning child. A vast variety of objects, games and responses from parents direct and mold the child's visual development.

The visual stimulation needed has to have the following ingredients: allows time for reflection, human interaction and three-dimensional exposure. It is wise for parents to talk to their babies. Speak in short and clear sentences, point out and identify objects that are here and now or three-dimensional. Due to the above elements, television is not good for children from zero to 60 months. The boob tube is only two-dimensional which does not fully satisfy the developing brain's need for depth. The fast movements on the screen do not give the child's eyes time to relax, which can cause stress and consequently intensify learning difficulties. Television also deals with abstract conversations that are often non-existent in the child's environment. The exposure to violent shows, speedy speech and abstract vocabulary affect the child negatively. I have had young preschoolers who speak like a cartoon character. They speak so fast that it is unintelligible. It takes years of therapy, training and money to transform these "televisionized tots" into normalized children. It is ironic then that children are entrusted to the TV baby-sitter or care-givers who leave the children to a television's magnetic clutches because parents have to work to make a living. They end up spend-

ing more money and time to correct their child later on.

Television can never replace the vital role of sensory-motor development and key relationship time with real human beings. Doctors, scientists and researchers actually prescribe banning television for all children before age 8. These TV-free years significantly give the brain time to better develop its language, social and motor skills.

The Thinking Brain. By 9 months, the brain is ready for tactile learning that contributes to development of thinking skills. Dr. Montessori was famous for her realization of the hands being the instrument of the intellect. This is real Hands-On Learning at work. The infant's cauliflower-shaped organ called the cerebellum found at the lower back of the brain works overtime. Recent studies show that infants have the capacity to grasp basic counting and even simple physics before age 1. Neural circuits for math and logic are ready to receive inputs at this age. Some researches reveal that infants can learn simple math even before they are ready for abstractions. The brain is wired to learn and receive information very early in life. Take advantage of it.

Parents who explore the above possibilities establish the long-term success of the child not only in academic school but in the school of life. 🧠

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