

A Message from Harvard to Parents
"Preparing 21st Century Minds"

Irene Dicker

I recently attended a "Learning and the Brain" conference at Harvard University, and was so inspired! The theme was "Preparing 21st Century Minds". Many of the presenters like Dr. Howard Gardner (the pioneer of Multiple Intelligences), Dr. Edward Hallowell, and Dr. David Souza are luminaries in the fields of education and psychology, and are well-known figures through appearances on national TV. The keywords throughout were: Connections, Creativity, Imagination, Critical Thinking, and Innovation.

The conference was a high! I couldn't wait to share the insights with teachers, since we try to implement the most cutting-edge ideas into the Shalom ECC curriculum. As I reviewed my notes, I realized that much of the information was especially relevant for *parents* whose children will be adults from the 2030's through the early 2100's:

Dr. Hallowell, is an advocate for building *very* strong relationships with children: "this is the stuff that makes your life good!" Love drives intellectual growth better than anything else, and emotion is the on/off switch for learning. The best you can give your child is a *connected* childhood. (Not an internet connection- but a person to person connection.) Forge connections within the family, at the dinner table, on outings, and while reading aloud. Have fun, make up games, and make time for your children! Childhood *does* end. Connections to grandparents are *so* important. Many children's names are connections to the past and the values from the person who had the name. If you'd like to read more from Dr. Hallowell, you can find it in his book, "Shine."

Willy Wood, an expert on Reading said that it takes ten years to become a proficient reader, and the "reading gap" is often there the first day of kindergarten. It's a prior knowledge gap starting as an oral language deficit *before* kindergarten, and manifesting itself as a reading deficit that widens over time.

How *do* you make children good readers? Talk to them! Using an enriched vocabulary before the age of seven is the most crucial element in developing good readers from third to sixth grade. Interaction and a connective feedback are essential elements. Don't put kids in front of the TV before the age of two; it can precipitate language delays up to 18 months. Lap reading adds an emotional connection to the cognitive piece. The number of children's books in the home is significant; the average number in a middle class home is 3; the average number in enriched-learning homes is 200.

I was fascinated to learn from Dr. Souza that the frontal lobes (thinking) become active during the ninth month of pregnancy. The brain picks up the low frequency sounds of fathers more than moms. I guess this means that you just have to be careful of what you say during this period.

Dr. Gardner was brilliant. He spoke about Five Minds for the Future, and How to Nurture Them. Learning is no longer relegated to the "school years." To keep current and beyond the curve, we have to think in terms of Lifelong Learning. We have to teach children to be ethical; to be good citizens of our cities, institutions, world, and planet. We and they have to internalize that "it's not how you think, but how you act!"

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