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# Consistency is the key to progress for ALC students

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The woman's strokes are tentative at first, but as she finds her water legs, the arms grow stronger and the legs kick just enough to not displace too much water. Finally, after hours and hours of practice, she's getting the rhythm.

For the swimmer, that's one heck of an achievement.

Lisa Pearson would agree. The swimmer is her 72-year-old mother who recently moved into a housing complex that has an indoor pool. Too bad she couldn't swim.

She couldn't have found a better teacher in Pearson, and her husband, Ross.

"She was timid in the water," Lisa Pearson said. "At first, she was scared to let go. We needed to go with her every day for a couple of weeks to swim with her. That's what it takes for her to be a fearless swimmer."

The Pearsons apply the same approach to the students who enroll in the Accomplished Learning Centre where they have helped hundreds of children overcome the learning handicaps that hinder their lives, not only at school but at home, and which can cripple them in adulthood.

The key is consistency and a commitment to the programs which typically last three months and require one hour of practice a day, six days a week.

The centre, which the Pearsons own and operate from their Langley Mall school, offers intense, three-month courses in programs such as Samonas, PACE, Master The Code, Interactive Metronome and Fast Forward. [See fact box below]. Testing will determine which is the most suitable.

To say that the results are remarkable is an understatement.

"The average gain is more than three years in three months," Lisa Pearson said. "So that means that a 12-year-old in Grade 5 who reads at a Grade 3 level will be reading at or beyond her grade level in six months," she said.

A child who has difficulties that do not include

reading will improve by three years or more in three months.

This child may be a student with a learning disability, suffer an attention deficit disorder and face difficulties in school. He likely fails to finish work in class and so has hours of homework every day, triggering conflict with his parents. From this, inevitably, emerges low self esteem and behaviour problems.

"Every student who leaves our centre after completing the course tailored to him or her is significantly improved. And this improvement is measured with pre- and post-testing," Lisa Pearson said.

"We take this kid who can't learn to read well, despite extra help in class and tutoring, and resolve the problem completely in six months. Guaranteed."

And, Pearson adds, "for most of our autistic clients this is the best therapy they have ever done."

While the school has structured learning there's plenty of play involved. Jenga, a game in which players remove blocks from a tower and pile them on top, teaches reasoning and logic so that the removal of a block will not demolishes the tower. The game strengthens sequencing and fine motor skills.

The Accomplished Learning Centre distributes to parents a list of games such as Uno that encourage one-on-one interaction.

"We don't get enough of that these days," Ross Pearson says.

"There are so many games that help."

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The Pearsons are sitting in the waiting area of their school. Kim Ayling is there, and the trio are watching a relaxed and smiling Mackenzie at play. Kim talks about the incredible changes in her son, and someone remarks that the Pearsons must see little miracles every day at their school.

"Some of these miracles are not so little," Lisa says, nodding towards Mackenzie who has just finished building a giant robot station from Lego blocks.

Ross agrees: "We have the best job in the world."

## How to retrain the brain

Extensive training and research has led Ross and Lisa Pearson to a number of approaches which, in essence, retrain the brain. Here are five used extensively at the Accomplished Learning Centre:

■ **Samonas:** Auditory training using specially recorded and engineered music with high quality headphones. It directly stimulates the middle ear, cochlea, auditory nerve, and cerebral cortex; and indirectly stimulates the entire central nervous system.

**Purpose:** to develop auditory skills for listening, attention, language processing, phonological processing, and emotional well being.

■ **Interactive Metronome:** Using a computer and special equipment, students clap their hands or tap their feet in time to the steady beat of a cowbell heard through headphones. The duration starts at half a minute and builds eventually to 37 minutes. It is fun and takes only 15 one-hour sessions. Golfer Vijay Singh used

this technique prior to winning the Masters, and is its also used by the Miami Dolphins.

**Purpose:** to train auditory and visual attention, concentration, language processing, fine and gross motor skills, balance, and to calm aggressive and impulsive behaviour.

■ **Processing and Cognitive Enhancement (PACE):** This one-on-one program involves more than 100 game-like activities to develop a broad range of cognitive and processing abilities including: auditory and visual memory, auditory and visual processing speed, visual processing, auditory processing, phonemic awareness, logic and reasoning, and attention (selective, divided, sustained),

**Purpose:** to improve learning, thinking, listening and attention skills in struggling learners.

■ **Master the Code:** A "sound to code" reading and spelling program that enables struggling readers to overcome their

reading challenges. This is an aggressive program that develops phonological processing abilities, eliminates incorrectly learned methodology, and teaches reading by re-establishing foundations.

**Purpose:** to completely retrain reading skills in failed literacy learners and dyslexics.

■ **Fast ForWord:** A reading and language computer program that develops and strengthens memory, attention, processing speed, and sequencing.

**Purpose:** to strengthen these skills to improve critical language and reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, decoding, working memory, syntax, grammar, and other skills necessary to learning how to read or to become a better reader.

*The Accomplished Learning Centre is in Langley Mall, 5501 204 St, Langley. Phone: 604 539-1386, or e-mail lisa@accomplished.ca.*

— **Natasha Jones**