



Excellence in Education through Learning Development

By

Dr. Christopher Reynolds

Child development is a process of learning. The mind and body develop as a product of learning and by stimulating the sensory systems and integration of sensory information it is possible to increase learning ability. This fundamental principle and unique approach to education is what makes the St Andrews College International unique. Operating in association with the British Institute for Learning Development in the UAE, St Andrews advocates that the basis to education is the ability to learn and that it is possible to increase children's learning capacities and intelligence.

While most children do well in mainstream schooling, there are many children who are hindered in their development by learning difficulties and do not achieve as well as they might without coaching to increase their learning capacities. Indeed, all children will advance in their learning capacities and academics, claims Dr Christopher Reynolds, the Director of St Andrews, when they have a learning development programme that underpins their schooling.

St Andrews College International proposes that the essential element to education is to focus on how children learn and to promote learning development through stimulation neuro-physiological capacities. Indeed, St Andrews offers a learning-based education programme and specialises in helping children overcome learning difficulties. St Andrews College International, in association with the British Institute for Learning Development, operates school and therapy programmes in the United Arab Emirates in Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. They also offer in-school learning development programmes in other schools as well as provide professional development courses for teachers in schools across the Middle East.

In 2002 Dr Christopher Reynolds and Sheena Wilson established a learning development programme in the UAE that was to become the British Institute for Learning Development. Having operated in Dubai since the, in 2009 new centres were opened in both Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. The expansion comes with government endorsement as the Ministry of Social Affairs is pleased to see the learning development services extended across the country.

With alliance in 2004 of the British Institute for Learning Development with St Andrews College International, two paradigms were combined to form a new education paradigm centred on learning. The British Institute with its medical approach of addressing learning difficulties through improving neuro-physiological capacity was coupled with a modified education programme to produce a learning centred school programme to stimulate learning development. St Andrews College International is a registered International Primary Curriculum (IPC) school and provides the education programme in the UAE with the British Institute for Learning Development. The British Institute has a special license in all three Emirates as a "Talented children Development Centre" and thereby seeks develop children's 'talents' by increasing their learning capacity and intelligence. The school asserts that learning is implicitly a neurological function and the capacity to learn can be increased by increasing neurological efficiency. "Children's learning capabilities and performance can improve where children receive personal coaching to first develop the foundational sensory systems of the mind and body", says Dr Reynolds.

St Andrews is unique for its approach to education and is based on the Ranald Philosophy of Learning. The philosophy proposes that the ability to learn is a developmental process and that learning capacities and performance can improve where neuro-processing is stimulated to be

more efficient. The philosophy is founded on four principles: First, that children are in a constant state of learning and their cognitive abilities develop as they learn. Second, that children's capacity to learn is increasing and can be accelerated by stimulating neuro-physiological development. Third, that it is possible to train neuro-processing procedures of the brain and influence a child's thinking processes. And fourth, that learning is interactive and children require a just-right interaction and creative challenge in order to learn.

In an effort to test and prove that the brain can improve in efficiency, St Andrews-British Institute has completed a two year study of the effectiveness of sensory integration to increase neuro-efficiency, and intelligence. With the study of 62 children over some 8 assessments and two years of therapy/coaching, the results show an increase of 4 grade levels of learning capacity on average for these children, while 1 ½ grade levels in ability was to be expected. This results showed an average 16% increase in neurological capability as gauged by the Visual Motor Integration (VMI) assessment, where zero change in capacity year on year is expected.

“Whether a child is labelled as a ‘gifted learner’ or a ‘slow learner’, it is possible to develop the learning process to make connections faster, work well with abstractions, and generally develop intellectual ability”, said Dr Reynolds.

The research is impressive, and has recently won the 2009 Princess Haya (wife of Sheikh Maktoum) Award for Outstanding Research in Special Education. This study is the first of its kind in the Middle East and a hallmark study in child development across the world. (See: www.british-ild.com)

The multidisciplinary team of St Andrews-British Institute is able to offer a range of assessments and therapy in Sensory Integration, Speech Therapy and Auditory Processing, Educational Psychology, Literacy, Play Therapy, Academic Attainment and Intelligence Assessments. With the expansion across the UAE, St Andrews now plans to build a school centred on learning development and progressive inclusion and produce a modified curriculum for children with learning difficulties.