

Welcome to Holland



BY EMILY PERL KINGSLEY

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability – to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It is like this.

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip – to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change of flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guidebooks. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around . . . and you begin to notice

Holland has windmills . . . and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy . . . and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's

where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away . . . because the loss of that dream is a very very significant loss.

But . . . if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things . . . about Holland.

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I'M NOT NAUGHTY



Newsletter of the
Society for the Promotion of
ADHD Research and Knowledge

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The Good News



The good news arrived in April on an Istana letterhead and read: “Dear Mrs Chin, I am pleased to inform you that the Society for the Promotion of ADHD Research and Knowledge (SPARK) has been selected to be one of the beneficiaries of the funds raised from President’s Challenge 2004 (PC 2004). The National Council of Social Service will inform you the expected amount to be allocated and other details on the use of the funds allocated. Funds are expected to be disbursed during the first quarter of 2005.”

It went on to say that “in the course of PC 2004, you may be approached by one or more organisations tasked to organise specific events under PC 2004, to involve your organization in a meaningful way as part of their PC event.”

The President’s Challenge is an annual series of events started by President S R Nathan to create greater awareness of the needs of the social service voluntary sector, and to mobilise the community to help the disadvantaged and less fortunate in our midst. It also aims to raise funds for selected voluntary welfare organisations.

Another piece of good news is the suggestion we substitute our monthly meeting in December with a year-end party on a regular basis. I think it’s a lovely idea and would like to hear from members on what it should be (picnic?), where we can go (park?) and how many can come. If we keep to our schedule, it will be the first Saturday of December, the 4th. Of course, we will need members to volunteer their time to plan, to supervise the activities, to donate food and help out with other expenses. Let’s all join in and make this a truly joyous gathering for our children — and ourselves. Contact Christine (email address below) if you can help.

Bella Chin, President

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Parents Support Group Meeting: July to November 2004

Teaching Your Child in the Way He Should Go 3 July. Speaker: Dr Francis Ngoi Ngie Huat

Since 2002, Dr Ngoi has been the director-cum-family therapist of Oasis Family Life Education Centre. A pastor of the Methodist church from 1976 until 2001, he has a Master’s degree in pastoral care from Trinity Theological College in Singapore and a doctorate from Boston University.

He has three grown-up children. The eldest, suspected to be an ADD child, is now 27, married and a chemical engineer. His two daughters are in university.

Movement and Development, a Kinesiology Approach 7 August. Speaker: Moira Dempsey

Kinesiology refers to the study of movement. In American higher education, the term is used to describe a multifaceted field of study in which movement or physical activity is the intellectual focus. Physical activity includes exercise for improvement of health and physical fitness, activities of daily living, work, sport, dance, and play, and involves special population groups such as, children and the elderly; persons with disability, injury or disease; and athletes.

Moira has over 1000 hours of kinesiology training, with emphasis on education components and 20 years teaching experience. She first became interested in Brain Gym in 1991 in Australia and completed her first class then. Moira completed her training in 1997 in the USA, and since then has continued training classes in Singapore, Malaysia, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Germany. In July 2000, she received an “Outstanding Achievement and Contribution” award from the Educational Kinesiology Foundation, USA for her work with Brain Gym in Asia. She is currently co-authoring a book with Dr. Svetlana Masgutova, called MOVE TO LIVE, LIVE TO MOVE, about infant reflexes and their effects on learning and behaviour.

Intervention Programmes for Children with ADHD

4 September. Speaker: Representative from Care Corner Educational Therapy Service.

Care Corner Educational Therapy Service is a voluntary welfare organization offering intervention services for children with learning and attention difficulties. Its fees are based on a sliding scale to ensure affordability. Someone from Care Corner will speak on the services in general and describe the intervention programmes for ADHD children in particular.

Behaviour Management with Neuro-Linguistic Re-programming for Parents and ADHD Children

6 November. Speaker: Cheng Kah Kee

Kah Kee started the series of talks to schools on how to manage ADHD pupils in the classroom. Among Spark members, Kah Kee’s self education and success with her ADHD daughter is the envy of us all. But it was not achieved without great sacrifice. An adjunct professor in accountancy with Nanyang Technological University, she gave it all up to educate herself, understand her daughter and explore the many alternative treatments available. She was the founding treasurer of the society.

Helping Inflexible and Easily Frustrated Children

2 October. Speaker: Dr Alefiya Nomanbhoy

Children with learning challenges are often easily frustrated by the demands made on them by school and family. They may be inflexible and have temper outbursts with verbal and physical aggression when they are unable to cope with such demands; and this has a negative impact on interactions and relationships between child and family. This talk will help parents understand such behaviours better and learn some strategies to improve these children’s capacity for flexibility, frustration tolerance and self-regulation.

Dr Nomanbhoy is a specialist in dyslexia, ADHD and other learning disabilities. She has a Ph.D. from Northwestern University in Illinois in the field of Learning Disabilities. She also holds a post-graduate Diploma of Teaching in Higher Education from the National Institute of Education. Before her return to Singapore, she was an educational therapist at the Institute for Attention-Deficit Disorders, Northbrook, Illinois, where she evaluated and treated children, adolescents and adults for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders and specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia).

She is a past president of the Society for Reading and Literacy (Singapore) and currently leads their Special Interest Group on Learning Differently.

All meetings are held from 2-5PM at the Child Guidance Clinic, Health Promotion Board, 3 Second Hospital Ave #03-01. They start with an introduction and sharing session. The talks begin at 3PM and are followed by Q&A.

Cope first with your own problems

LEE SWEE HUAT summarises the May talk by **Anthony Yeo**, adding his own views in the box on the next page.

Children with ADHD are not the only ones with problems to resolve. Often, their problems are aggravated by the parents' inability to cope with the problems of having a child with ADHD, so said

Anthony Yeo, the guest speaker at our monthly meeting on May 8, 2004.

Many SPARK members at the meeting also shared in this observation.

Kah Kee's experience with ADHD children who were more successful in dealing with their

problems in school and other social environment found they often had parents who were better able to cope too. Not just with the learning difficulties but were able to adjust their expectations and grow along with the child in coping strategies.

Often the parent's self-esteem had to be high to withstand criticism from relatives and friends and to cope with the difficulties in raising these, before they can better influence and teach their children.

Anthony said he did not see ADHD children as having learning disabilities; rather they have Selective Learning Ability (SLA). In some areas, they learn as well as, if not faster than, other children. It is important for parents to allow their children to experience some success in the areas that they like, regardless of whether these will be useful for them to earn a living in the future (e.g., arts, roller-blading, etc.). This was because after experiencing success in some areas of their life, children with ADHD will be more willing to venture out and learn other areas that they may have difficulties in.

Anthony does not think it best to work with the ADHD child alone. As clinical director of the Counselling and Care Centre, a family therapy outfit, he prefers to work with the family in resolving the problems that an ADHD child may have. There is frequently a vicious circle within the family that prevents a child with ADHD to fully develop his potential.

The problems of an ADHD child will be easier (not necessarily easy) to resolve if the parents of the child learn how to cope and deal with their own difficulties.

Parents of a child with learning difficulties should first work in resolving their own problems and difficulties before they can help resolve problems faced by an ADHD child, said Anthony. It is also hard for many parents to teach their own ADHD children.

It is not unlike husbands trying to teach their wives driving. Very few wives find it easy to learn driving from their husbands. The same applies for children with ADHD when trying to learn schoolwork from their parents.

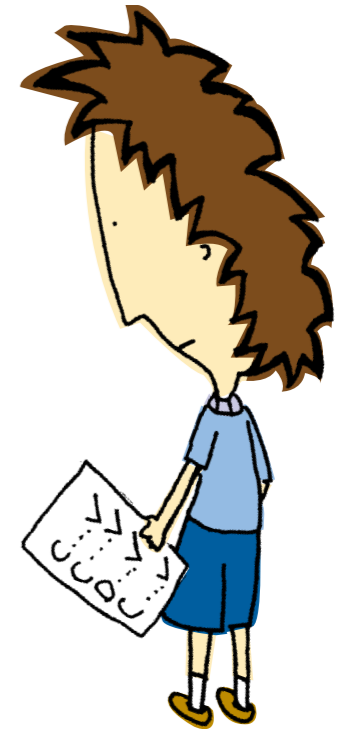
Anthony suggested parents examine where they send their ADHD child to school. A top-ranked school will further stress the child. A number of SPARK members agreed, adding that their children coped better when they were transferred to a neighbourhood or less well-known school where the academic standards were lower or there was less homework.

Anthony added that being rich did not equal happiness. The emphasis in Singapore on the pursuit of material wealth or financial success ought to be questioned (and abandoned?) especially if it made parents less realistic about their ADHD children's apparent "lack of success" in school.

Anthony's children were "slow learners" — his elder son is getting his university degree later this year at the age of 28.

Anthony has resisted the Singapore academic system so his son can continue to have an interest in learning. He cited the case when he allowed his son to continue sleeping instead of waking for his Chinese language exam so he would have the energy to handle another exam the next day. He also preserved his son's self-esteem by not letting his son fail his Chinese exam. This way, the son can say he did not fail his Chinese, he merely did not sit for the exam, he said half jokingly.

Anthony reminded SPARK members that many parents with ADHD children tended to focus on tasks, control and discipline when it comes to teaching their children. "What will



your children remember you as when they grow up or when you are not around, if you only focus on these activities?" Children learn best during play and fun-time; play is the best language for teaching children, concluded Anthony.

Anthony Yeo has been practicing as a psychotherapist, marriage and family therapist since 1972. He also lectures and trains counsellors in Singapore and Asia. He has authored several books on counselling, stress and issues related to mental health. He can be contact at Tel: 6536-6366.



SMALL SUCCESSES ARE CRITICAL FOR GENERATING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Children with ADHD (and their parents) need to experience some success before they can be motivated to put in more effort to cope with their difficulties.

It is often easy to give up trying after many unsuccessful efforts. It happens to many children with ADHD (and their parents). "Why put in more effort when I'm going to fail anyway?"

The importance of small successes cannot be over stressed. The key to experiencing small successes is to set small achiev-

able and realistic targets

There are plenty of articles telling us that high self-esteem comes from self-acceptance and self-confidence. In order to have self-acceptance and self-confidence, it is important to experience some form of success.

When the parents of ADHD children experience little success in teaching or raising their children, the parents end up with low self-esteem themselves.

Parents with low self-esteem will then find it difficult to cope

with their children's learning difficulties.

It is thus very important for parents who have children with ADHD to also take care of themselves, have the right expectations and also give themselves at least some opportunity to experience some form of success in some areas.

When these are achieved, parents will be able regain some level of confidence in helping their children.

— LEE SWEE HUAT

YOU TOO CAN ACHIEVE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS



JONATHAN MOONEY, a graduate, recounts the 5 principles that showed him the way – with a little help from mom.

In my school life, I've been every kind of student. As a little kid, I was in love with learning. I would spend hours building things with my hands or talking about ideas or stories that got me excited. Come elementary school, I became the kind of student who was considered “bad” and “stupid.” I grew up in the hallway hanging out with the janitors after being kicked out of class or sitting in a little blue desk in the principal's office chatting with Shirley the receptionist. I grew up in the “blue bird” reading group reading “See Spot run.” I spent elementary school hiding in the bathroom in tears, terrified of reading out loud and praying that when I returned I would be passed by in the reading circle – only to discover that the class had waited for me.

I learned at an early age there is a stark difference between education and schooling. Although many schools give lip service to the ideas of truly valuing knowledge, passion, and the individual learner, what our education system truly values is schooling: sitting still, getting in line, blind achievement, competition, and following the rules. Come high school, I was sick of schooling.

“My mom saved my life by telling me that my struggles with school were not because my mind was broken, and we would learn how to play the school game and navigate this system together.”

I was the kind of student who did not care one iota about school. I was an athlete and that was all. Or at least that was all I showed to the outside world. Like most students who have learned academic helplessness, under that facade was a kid who loved to learn his own way. But it was a long time before I found that kid again, the one who loved to learn. I slipped through high school considered apathetic, lazy, and average; I was even told that I would be “flipping burgers for a living.”

So what kind of student am I today? Am I flipping burgers? Not quite. Even though I still spell at a third-grade level and have the attention span of a gnat, I graduated from Brown University with a 4.0 in English literature. I was a finalist for a Rhodes scholarship and was awarded the Truman Scholarship for Public

Service for Graduate Studies in the field of creative writing and education. In addition, as an undergraduate, I co-authored a book, *Learning Outside the Lines* (same as Learning Outside the Box). I am far from flipping burgers.

But Brown, my marks, and these accolades are not the essence of my success. School success is far from educational success. The essence of my success is that I stopped pursuing schooling and pursued my education. How did I do this? My approach to learning – my study skills – played a pivotal role in that transition. During my time at Brown, I abandoned the notion of trying to learn the normal way. I stopped worrying about schooling, and developed an approach to learning and studying that was truly individualized.

This approach is what you will find here. These principles about study skills will get you started.

PRINCIPLE 1: LEARNER CENTRED TOOLS FOR EMPOWERMENT

These study skills are about empowerment. They are tools that can empower your kids to craft an individualized education that is right for

them in an environment where students have little control and little room for individuality. These study skills are centred around your child's individual learning style, personal goals, and educational passions. You will have help to identify how your child learns, and then find concrete tools to empower you to individualize your child's approach to school. They are not one-size fits all and they do not oppose some idealized standard of what a good student should be like.

“These study skills are about killing the myth that there is such a thing as a “normal” student. The reality is that what we consider to be normal is actually average – normal students are those that are well schooled, not well educated. Your goal is to have an educated child.”

PRINCIPLE 2: PLAY THE SCHOOL GAME

My mom saved my life by telling me that my struggles with school were not because my mind was broken, and we would learn how to play the school game and navigate this system together. That is the foundation of any successful study skills development. Your child's success or struggles with school are not an indication of her intelligence or her worth. The reality is that school is a game, with rules and ways to learn how to play the game better. There is freedom and concrete success in addressing this fact with your child and helping her understand that study skills are a way to play the school game in a manner that is right for her mind.

PRINCIPLE 3: DEVELOP META-COGNITIVE SKILLS

One of the most important elements of these study skills is that they begin the process of developing meta-cognitive skills in your child. The meta-cognitive process is just a fancy way to say helping your child to think about thinking – in other words helping your child understand how she learns and how she thinks. Many studies have shown that meta-cognitive skills are a better prediction of life success than grades or test scores. This is no surprise. When an adult knows how his mind works he can master any

situation in his life. As you work with your child to develop individualized study skills, ask her to think about how her mind works.

PRINCIPLE 4: RECURSIVE PROCESS

It is important to realize that the act of developing individualized study skills is a recursive process that keeps building on itself over time. It is unreasonable to expect that your child will develop perfect study skills in one day. In reality, developing study skills is a process of trial and error that occurs over the course of a child's school life. It is imperative that you create an environment where it is OK for your child to try a skill, fail at that skill, evaluate why that skill did not work, and create another one. Moreover, study skills change with different academic tasks and as your child gets older. These study skills are something you will come back to over and over again. Through this recursive process

of trial and error, you will empower your child to have ownership of her own study habits and be able to adapt and modify these skills herself.

PRINCIPLE 5: STUDY SKILLS AS THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

In the end, there is an element of these study skills that transacts the concrete goal of your child getting better grades. These study skills are about killing the myth that there is such a thing as a “normal” student. The reality is that what we consider to be normal is actually average – normal students are those that are well schooled, not well educated. Your goal is to have an educated child. These study skills provide a platform for you to begin the process of un-schooling your child. Ultimately, these study skills are an educational end in and of themselves. The process of empowering your child to develop dynamic study skills and take control of her education is an exercise in the practice of educational freedom.

So much creativity, talent, passion, and so many lives are lost because we value “schooling,” fitting in, and being normal above true learning. It is educational freedom, not school success, not schooling, not gold stars, or GPA's, that will change your child's life.

