

Backgrounder – Cris Rowan and Zone'in Programs Inc.

While working with children in a school setting for over a decade, pediatric occupational therapist and child development expert Cris Rowan observed that learning difficulties weren't necessarily relevant to a child's intelligence, but more relevant to that child's ability to stay focused and alert. Rowan observed that many children's energies were either too charged, or alternatively too "zoned out" to be able to listen or learn. Rowan also noticed that many children were experiencing difficulty printing, which is the foundation for literacy in all subjects. Extensive research review by Rowan indicated that many of children's school performance issues were related to increased use of TV, internet and video games. As child developmental delays, behavior disorders, and learning difficulties continued to escalate, Rowan stepped away from the school setting and developed *Zone'in Programs Inc.* home to *Zone'in Products, Workshops, Training and Consultation.*

Teachers and parents often forget that learning and attention start in the body, not the brain. When a child's body energy is *grounded* and *centered*, then their brain is free to think and create. Children ground their energy through specific types of movement, mainly the type of movement we see when doing *heavy work* activities involving push, pull, lift and carry. Children therefore need to move to learn, and when they don't move, we see energy all over the map, and learning becomes impossible.

Consider the state of human biology 100 years ago. Prior to going to school, children were often up at the crack of dawn milking cows, hauling hay or chopping wood. Children would arrive at the schoolhouse physically "spent", and subsequently cognitively ready to learn. There were no TVs, there were no videogames, and there were no computers. Children played or worked outside all the time: running, jumping, climbing or swinging and participating in creative play such as building forts, riding bikes and playing a variety of outdoor games. These outdoor physical activities were absolutely crucial elements to achieve adequate sensory, motor and attachment system development for learning. Maldevelopment of these neurological systems from excessive TV, internet, and video game use has resulted in a host of developmental impairments, resulting in difficulty attending to tasks, as well as being able to print and read. Studies completed in 2010/15 by the Kaiser Foundation indicates children spend on average 9.0 hours per day watching TV, playing video games, or social networking (texting, chat sites, Facebook etc.), resulting in mental, physical, social and academic disorders that we are only now beginning to detect, much less understand. Obesity, developmental delay, sleep deprivation, attention deficit, addiction, attachment disorders, health disorders, poor school performance, accelerated sexuality, family conflict and violence are but a few of the "red flags" for identifying technology overuse.

Children need to move, touch and be touched, connect to other humans, and explore and engage with nature in order to optimize their development, behavior and ability to pay attention and learn. When children get enough of these four critical factors, they are able to self-regulate their body energy, and stay focused and attentive in a classroom setting. When children use too much technology, or the content is face paced and violent, they are sedentary, overstimulated, isolated, and often neglected with negative impact on overall health and well-being.

In the education sector, recent advances in technology have mistakenly led parents and teachers into thinking that computers will solve all children's problems, taking the place of

printing, math, and even basic learning skills. On the contrary, recent studies show that technology is actually *impeding* children's ability to learn. During her *Foundation Series Workshops*, Rowan states many teachers and parents have remarked that while they all agree that reading is still an essential skill, printing is not. Many elementary teachers actually believe that computers will replace children printing. Subsequently, there has been an erosion in emphasis and amount of time teachers spend teaching this essential skill with negative impact on ability to achieve printing, reading and math literacy. What these well-meaning teachers do not understand is that learning to print is a precursor for reading, spelling, and sentence formation. Therefore if a child cannot print, that child is functionally illiterate. Letter formation is a complex task that requires many sequential components to come online for eventual printing skill development. First a child needs to achieve letter recognition, which develops primarily through a child's observations of his own attempts at letter formation, supported by repetitive practice and observation of the teacher or parent. Printing is therefore a *visual* and a *motor* task and requires practice of both components for skill achievement.

In order to help these children, Rowan has designed *Zone'in*, *Move'in* and *Unplug'in* educational programs, which address problems with paying attention and self-regulation, printing and reading, and technology management. *Zone'in* optimizes attention, learning and listening ability by helping children to understand more about their body energy, and how to get their energy "Zone'in to Learn." *Move'in* is a board game and computer program that provides a fine motor assessment and intervention for sensory and motor impairments, which results in improved printing and reading skill. *Unplug'in* is a developmental tool that builds performance skills in the *Me*, *We*, *Earth* and *Spirit* dimensions, essential for building skill and confidence needed for technology management.

Rowan has also designed a series of seminars and webinars called the *Foundation Series Workshops* to educate teachers, therapists and parents regarding the damaging effects of technology on child development, where she provides strategies and techniques to help children optimize learning and academic performance. Rowan recently release her critically acclaimed *Tech Talks for Families* and *Tech Talks for Therapists* webinar series to improve knowledge and skills in the areas of technology management. Rowan has delivered over 300 workshops and is well recognized internationally as an expert on impact of technology on children. Rowan's *Foundation Series Workshops* have proved so successful, that she is now training other pediatric occupational therapists through her recently established *Zone'in Training Programs*. Rowan publishes the free monthly Child Development Series Newsletter, and writes a feature article monthly for her blog *Moving To Learn*. Rowan has authored her first book "Virtual Child – The terrifying truth about what technology is doing to children", as well as author of the popular Huffington Post article "Ten reasons to ban handheld devices for children under the age of 12 year" which as of July 2015, had 2.3 million 'likes'.

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