

Eastside Journal highlights changes in children from Tomatis Effect - Listening Education Program™

Listening to help study habits

by Nick Perry

Suzette Bernheim believes her children are improving their academic talents by listening to Mozart, Gregorian chants and even distortions of her own voice.

Bernheim's children, David, 11, and Nathaniel, 7, are already in an accelerated program at school. But Bernheim, of Bellevue, thinks they can hone their learning skills even further by taking part in Tomatis learning classes.

The method, developed 40 years ago by French ear, nose and throat surgeon Dr. Alfred Tomatis, involves students listening to a variety of sounds and music. Tomatis believes students can improve concentration by retraining their listening skills.

His method teaches that listening begins in the womb. By filtering a mother's voice and playing it back to students through headphones and "bone conductors," Tomatis aims to recreate what he believes students would have heard before they were born.

The technique is being taught in Bellevue by Liliana Sacarin, who studied under Tomatis in Europe for two years in the mid-1990s. She opened the clinic last year, and operates another in Seattle.

"It is fun," said David Bernheim. "I get to do most things I want to, like play games, draw and build things."

Suzette Bernheim said her children are doing their homework more quickly and seem happier, 15 days into a course that will last three to six months.

"I am elated with the changes," she said.

Unlike the Bernheim children, many of Sacarin's students suffer from severe learning disorders, such as attention deficit disorder and autism. Others come from foreign countries and are having difficulty adapting to a new language and environment.

One such student is Nicholas, of Edmonds, a 10-year-old boy adopted from a Russian orphanage, whose developmental level is two years behind his age.

Nicholas' mother, who fears using her name could expose Nicholas to teasing, said her son's spelling and phonics have improved dramatically since he completed the course, and his social confidence has also risen markedly.

This year, the Tomatis technique was paid for by taxpayers for the first time, when 21 women trying to move from welfare to work completed a Renton course funded by the Department of Social and Health Services.

Sacarin, originally from Germany, hopes the technique will eventually become more accepted by the mainstream in this country.

"It is used all over Europe," she said. "Even (actor) Gerard Depardieu used it for improving his voice."