The Reading Connection
By Janice Blanton

"Educators--the Stimuli for Increased Brain Power?"

The results of a fascinating and enlightening study concerning the increase in brain cells in laboratory mice as a result of heightened physical and mental activities was recently published in the Los Angeles Times (February 23, 1999). The study, conducted separately by scientists at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla and at Princeton University, is revolutionary in its potential implications for humans. It is revolutionary in that previously "most experts were convinced the human brain had done almost all its growing by the time a child was born." (A27) As a result of this study with mice, the potential for humans to have the capability to generate new brain cells after birth is being seriously considered. It is feasible that we, as educators and reading instructors in particular, will be in the unique position of not only facilitating learning but, through our instructional strategies, to actually influence an increase in the intellectual capacities of our students.

According to the Times' article, the scientists found that "some kinds of physical and mental exercise promoted the growth of neurons, while also measurably prolonging the survival of existing brain cells." (A27) In addition, they cited that the "changes" occurred in an area of the brain called the hippocampus, "which is crucial to the formation of new memories." (A27) Princeton psychologist Elizabeth Gould, who conducted the research, said that "it is a classic case of use it or lose it." In the experiment, the adult mice exercised on a running wheel for as long as they wanted and "regularly developed twice as many new brain cells in the hippocampus as mice housed in standard cages." More importantly,

"mental challenges that required the animals to master information involving spatial relationships and timing, which placed special demands on the hippocampus, had the greatest effect. The lab mice, for example, had to learn how to locate platforms in a water maze, which tested their ability to put together spatial relationships. Learning tasks that did not place demands on the hippocampus had no effect."

According to Gould, the study was not designed to directly focus on humans, however, they feel that the animal experiments highlight "the importance of an active life of the mind." There was reference to the concerns of the absence of mental stimulation in one's life in that neurons could "atrophy and die." Gould said "A lack of learning opportunities may have a negative structural impact on the brain." (A27)

Certainly, there is incredibly more research to be done in this area in linking the study's findings to humans, but intellectually, it seems to make sense that regular mental and physical activity would challenge and stimulate the capabilities of humans. This is our area of expertise: we assist our students in accessing new knowledge and in igniting critical thinking which certainly would include information concerning the value of maintaining a healthy exercise regimen. It seems to me that educators are the scientists' most important resource in this field of study? Why don't they call us?

However, it does not really matter to what lengths and conclusions this animal research leads in terms of humans. Educators will still be facilitating the stimulation and enhancement of their students' minds. If science ultimately proves that "our work" is at the heart of increased intellectual prowess in more ways than we could have even fathomed, then that would be wonderful and validating but certainly no surprise! No surprise at all!!!!
Faculty Footnotes
By Kathi Bartle Angus

Faculty and students enjoyed Norma Inabinette's presentation of "A Reader's Bill of Rights" at the REG dinner in February. It's no wonder Norma is in such demand as a speaker. Some of us who teach at the college level were so inspired we considered a return to the elementary classroom.

All education faculty are currently gearing up for accreditation reviews in 2000. These periodic reviews by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are what help keep our programs among the best in the state. As graduates of the CSUF Reading Program you should be pleased to note that Fullerton is one of the few nationally accredited schools in the state and the only one in Orange County. Some of you may be asked to comment on your preparation as part of the review process.

Peggy Hammer Receives 1999 Distinguished Alumnus Award

Peggy Hammer, a founding member of REG, was named 1999 Distinguished Alumnus. This award is the highest institutional award given by CSUF.

President Gordon presented Peggy with the award at the Vision and Visionaries Dinner at Tinsel town on April 10. This honor is particularly significant since it is the first time the award has been bestowed upon a teacher.

Peggy's contributions to CSUF and the field of education are indeed substantial. Peggy has served on the University Advisory Board, the Executive Committee of the President's Associates and the President's Scholars selection committee. She is also on the university planning committee and the committee for the 40th anniversary. As an educator, Peggy was a reading supervisor for 22 schools. She was instrumental in establishing the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program in California. Additionally she has served as a coordinator of the Right to Read program. Peggy is the author of several books for children and parents. She has been recognized in the past by the Reading Program, Reading Educator's Guild and the Orange County Reading Association.

REG is delighted that one of our own has been so honored. Congratulations Peggy!

Diane Lindwell Memorial

Diane Lindwell, daughter of Peggy and Joe Hammer passed away suddenly this winter. Peggy Hammer has begun a fund for books for the reading Clinic in her memory. A special section will be designated for the books in this collection. If you would like to honor the memory of Diane Lindwell contributions can be sent to the Reading Clinic care of Norma Inabinette.

Hancock Fund

The Hancock Fund was established to honor Dr. Deborah Osen Hancock for her contributions to the field of reading and specifically to the Reading Department. The fund is solely for use by the CSUF Reading Clinic. Over the years, the fund has supplied books and technology for use by clinicians and students.
REG would like to thank the following members for their generous contributions to the Hancock Fund:

Joan Beck  Shelia F. Means
Cheryl Dumler  Greta Nagel
Kathie Engstrom  Diane Urias
Ellen Herich

Recommended Reading
By Carla Thomson

Make Time for Reading - Aloud

What a great evening we had at the REG Winter Dinner. As one colleague put it, "Just like old times, listening, enthralled, to Norma." As she presented us with the Readers’ Bill of Rights, Norma pointed out that not least of these was the right to experience the joy of reading, to understand what a lifetime love of reading is all about. To drive home her point - as she and Ash have done so many times before - she read to us, and, as always, we loved it.

How often do we offer the same experience to our students? What are our favorite read aloud books? How can we be sure that reading aloud is appropriate for our students regardless of their age? Is there an age at which students are "too old" for listening to good literature or just a good story?

Speaking as one who loves being read to, whether it’s Norma or "Books on Tape," I’d unhesitatingly answer, "No!" to the last question, but I'd like to hear from you. Send your answers to any or all of the above questions to me, and let’s begin a forum in favor of the readers' rights to all the joys of reading.

I’ll begin by offering one of my favorite read-aloud authors - Louis Sachar. Here are two of many rave reviews published on the web at www.amazon.com:

"Louis Sachar is the king of children comedy books. I really mean it!!!!!! If you like Wayside school you should read The Boy in the Girls bathroom! It is so funny our teacher read it to us and ... it is so funny. Really!!!! Read the other books of Louis Sacher and you will love them."

"Wayside School Is Falling Down' was given to me by my Aunt to encourage me to read. So I read it and loved it! It was like I was reliving grade school only in a very far out and off the wall way!" I like to kick off an information technology lesson, discussion, or unit by reading, "A Package for Mrs. Jewls" from _Wayside School is Falling Down_ in which Mrs. Jewls illustrates exactly how "The computer will help us learn. It's a lot quicker than pencil and paper." Find the book and read the chapter (or drop by, and I'll read it to you). Those of you who know my penchant for espousing the benefits of technology may be in for a surprise!

Don’t forget to drop me a line and share some of your favorites with me and the readers of the REG newsletter at: cthomson@fullerton.edu or snail mail to REG Newsletter

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If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, by being a regular column writer or just an occasional article donator, please contact JoAnne Greenbaum at jgreenbaum@fullerton.edu. We need all of you to help make REG great!