

BOOK BREAK

"Genius" can help you tap your mind power



ESTHER LITTMAN

In her book "You're A Genius - And I Can Prove It!" (EmpowerMind, 1995, \$19.95), author Kimberly Kassner asks her readers, "Have you ever had your mom tell you, 'Make sure you go out and take a lot of risks today, honey. Go out and try the impossible, stretch yourself, do something you have never done before?'" Chances are the answer is "Never." Mom's admonitions were more likely to include "Be careful. Watch yourself. Be good."

That's also the problem with our educational system, maintains the former Commerce Township resident and graduate of Wall Lake Central High School. We're taught to abandon our imagination, to play it safe and conform to standardized methods of teaching and learning.

But not everyone learns the same way, says Kassner, who grew up with Attention Deficit Disorder. Plagued with symptoms such as "thought fragmentation, daydreaming and compul-

sive talking," yet confident that she was bright enough to learn and excel, Kassner began developing an individualized learning system to access her mind's potential.

After graduating from Michigan Central University with honors, teaching public speaking at Dale Carnegie and working for Pepsi-Cola, where she became one of the top performers in national sales, Kassner decided to take some risks. She left the corporate world to do what she loves best, which is studying how the brain processes information and creating new, effective teaching and learning techniques. The result of her research and experience is "EmpowerMind," a program that teaches learning fundamentals to the gifted, mentally challenged, and frustrated students in between.

"You're A Genius - And I Can Prove It!" instructs students of all ages in such skills as memorization, note taking and concentration. The author's approach encompasses three basic activities: association, imagination and involvement.

"All learning comes from association," she writes.

To learn a new word or a new idea,

Kassner advises, draw on your "association bubble," the sum total of your knowledge and experience. Then use your imagination. The more zany or outrageous the association, the easier it will be to remember. For instance, to recall that FE is the chemical symbol for iron, make up a silly sentence such as "We'll iron your clothes for a fee."

Association and imagination logically lead to the third activity, and that is involvement. The more involved we are in the learning process, Kassner reminds us, the better the result. Mimic the teacher when he or she lectures (allegedly, of course); to reinforce the words, imagine pictures over the teacher's head.

But Kimberly Kassner knows that students don't learn by the bread of cognitive skills alone. They also need confidence. Chapters devoted to developing self-esteem are full of humor, compassion and encouragement, as well as concrete ideas on how to enhance feelings of self-worth.

An experienced public speaker, Kassner's writing style "talks" to her readers: It is witty, conversational and entertaining. Occasionally, her own voice is interrupted by "Hacker," a fictional

character she created to represent the typical student. He either confirms Kassner's insights and instructions, or chides her, as when she lapses into unnecessary jargon: "Keep it simple, Kimberly, so the readers (that's you adults, too) can understand it."

As students and teachers prepare for the coming academic year, many perform an annual ritual called "shopping for school." It would be nice if their purchases could include a fresh mindset, a brand-new attitude toward teaching and learning. Kimberly Kassner's book may not convert students into budding geniuses — at least not overnight — but it will help them begin tapping the mind power they do have, so that one day they can reach for "the impossible . . . something (they) have never done before."

Kassner's book can be bought at Barnes and Noble in Rochester, where she appeared for a signing, or by writing EmpowerMind, 212 Cascade Drive, Mill Valley, Calif. 94941.

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