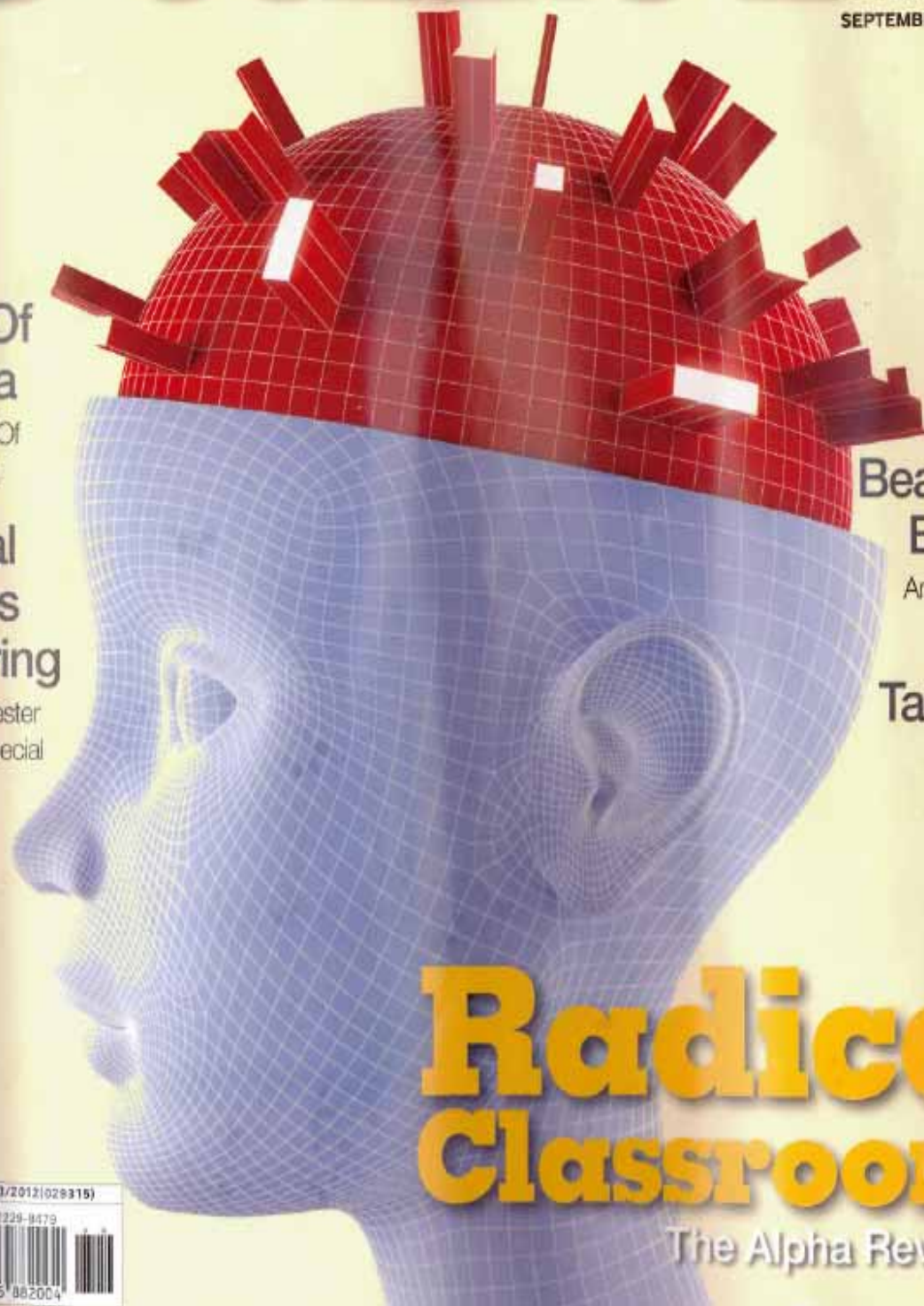


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The Alpha Revolution

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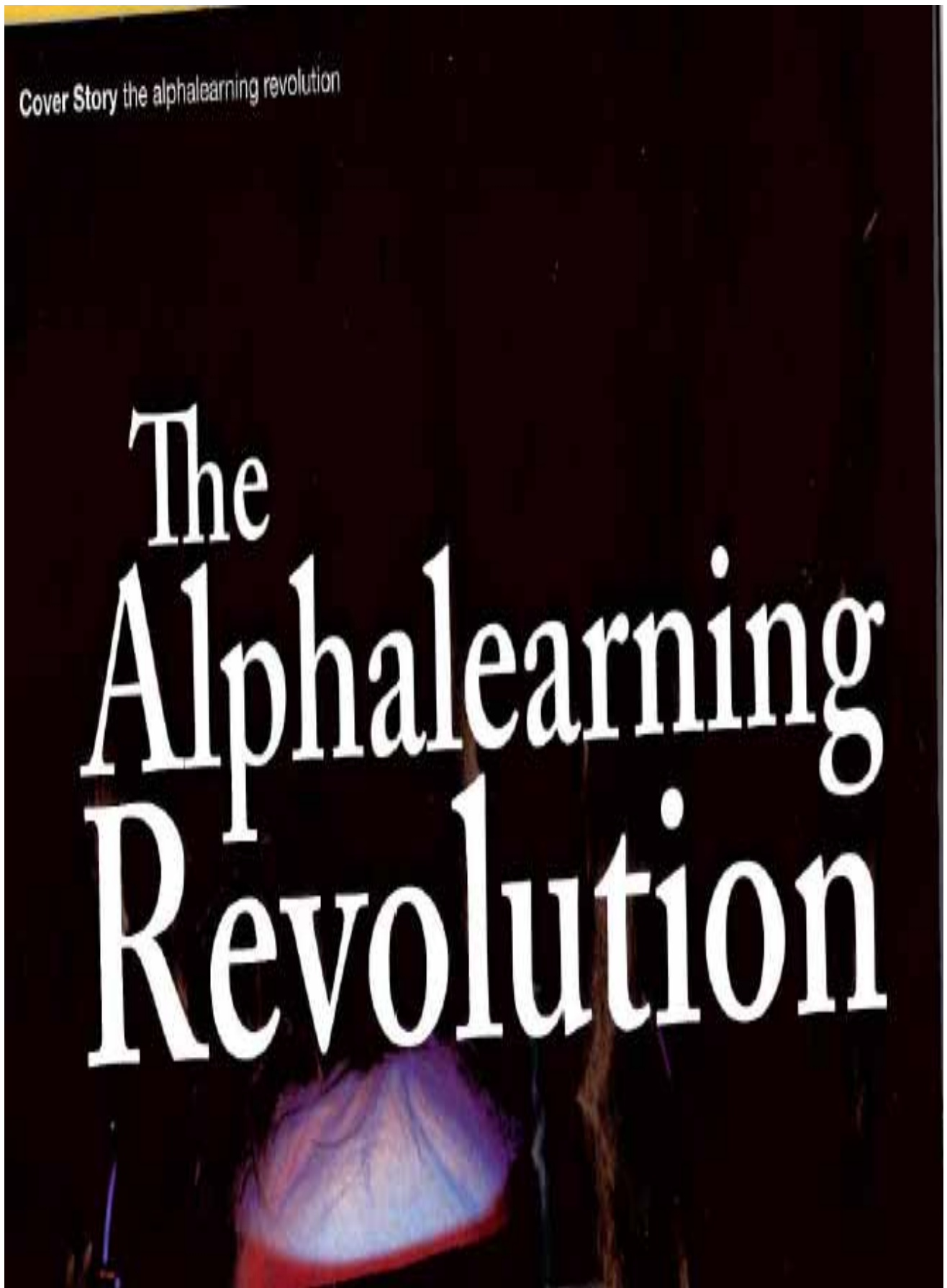
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Cover Story the alphalearning revolution

# The Alphalearning Revolution



*Fancy  
doubling or even  
tripling your reading speed  
with no loss of information  
retention? And adding up to 20  
points to your IQ? The Alphalearning  
Institute in Switzerland makes it  
happen via an eclectic science-meets-  
philosophy technique to help balance  
the mind. And it even reportedly  
heals hard if not impossible to  
treat ailments and disabilities. But  
being an unorthodox technique  
it has generated its fair share of  
controversy as its tenets raise  
profound questions about  
what we believe in and the  
extent to which we can  
control our minds, JULES  
MARSHALL  
reports.*

I'm in the charming, affluent lakeside Swiss town of Lugano, on a USD1,000-a-day, five-day executive course entitled, with misleading simplicity "Learning to Learn." I say misleading because essentially I and the other participants will be learning to perform neurosurgery on ourselves, as in 'creating immediate and irreversible change to our brains'. For another USD5,000 we'll get to take home the tool with which to do it. Are we crazy, or the forerunners of an educational and medical revolution?

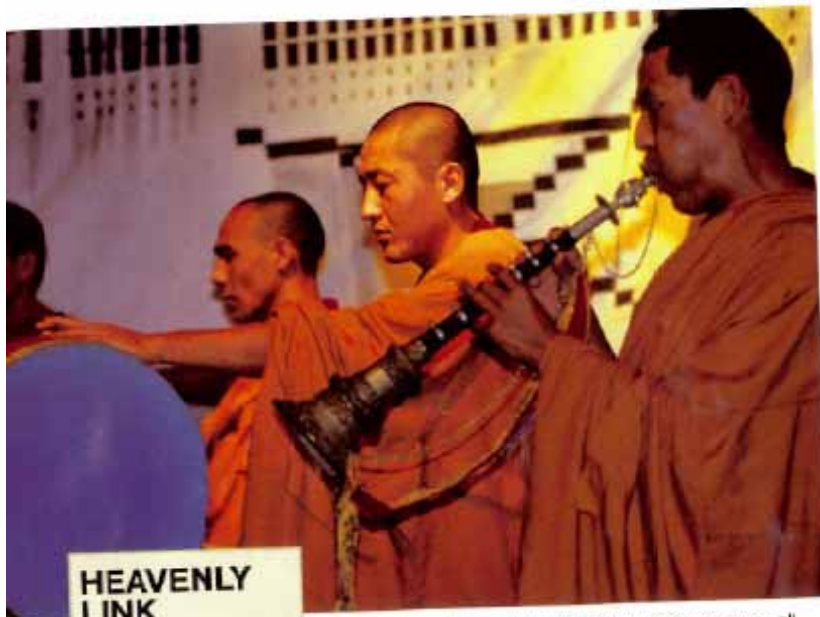
Learning to Learn is the course conducted by the Alphalearning Institute as a pre-requisite for buying its Brainwave 1, a sophisticated electroencephalograph

(EEG) and 'brain training' (strictly speaking, entrainment) program. When combined with a simple PC, headphones and 32 tiny golden LED lights that fit on the frame of a pair of spectacles, they create a tool of such remarkable potential, it excites and scares its inventor - Sean Adam, also director of the Institute - in equal measure.

#### THE GENESIS

The goal of most religious, martial arts and healers for at least the past 5,000 years has been to balance the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The belief was that the brain, body, mind and emotions were all





### HEAVENLY LINK

Buddhist monks have combined chanting, meditation, prayer wheels and music for thousands of years in their pursuit of low brainwave states and hemispheric balancing.

interconnected and that by balancing any one, all the others would also become balanced. Not only is this something we instinctively feel, science is increasingly supporting the linkage.

Various techniques (some say over 100) have been developed and taught over the years to further this course. Tai Chi is a classic example of concentrating on balancing the body to achieve physical and mental harmony. Aikido is another. Other techniques involve mantras: the repetition of a sound - or a colour blend - such as in a mandala.

### LIGHT & SOUND EFFECTS

Adam studied Aikido, worked closely with the Maharishi in India and lived in a Tibetan monastery. He also read some 680 books on the mind and brain (the average PhD only reads 40 books in his chosen field.) He realised that both his direct experience with ancient brain balancing techniques during the 70s and 80s and the theoretic scientific

information on the same topic, both worked to guide the brain/body connection towards balance and stability - but very slowly.

A faster way was needed. Corporate executives don't want to sit on a rock and chant for 15 to 20 years, they want a high-speed solution. So how does one get to the bottom of this theory and expedite the process?

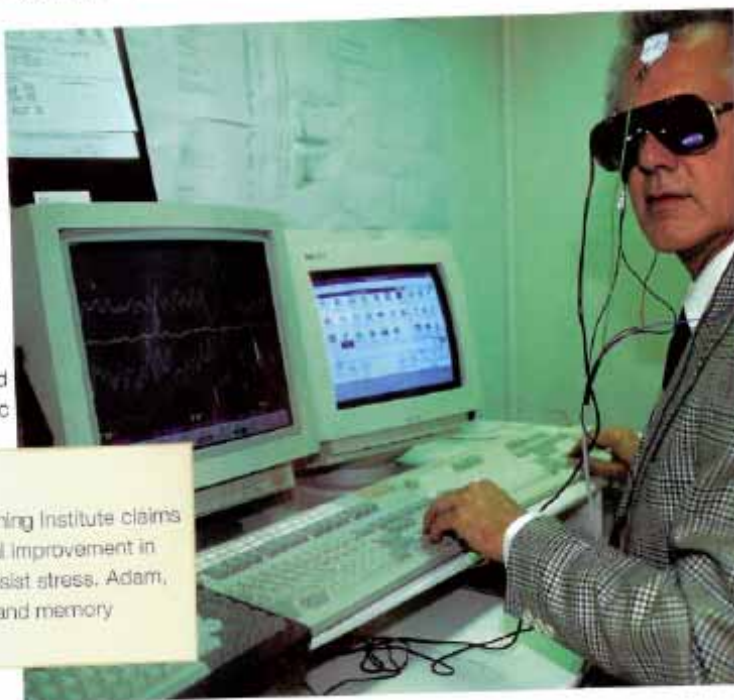
Light and sound have been used for thousands of years to influence man's state of mind and emotions. In its earliest form, some 65,000 years ago, people danced around fires to create the first "strobe" effects, while drummers added beats. Similar effects are brought on by the constant, rhythmic-drone of Tibetan Buddhist chanting, which transports monks and other listeners into realms of blissful meditation. It was clear even then that low frequencies of flashing light and drums caused people to sit more calmly and learn better. Moreover, the effect was fast (if ephemeral).

### PERMANENT EFFECTS

During the 1970s the first electronic programmable light and sound machines were developed in California to enhance music appreciation and meditative experiences. The problem with these machines was that 40 to 60 minutes a day was required to achieve a measurable effect on the brain - and it had to be continued forever. Most people will not or cannot invest that time. Another problem was that while the equipment could easily change brain

### SMART ALEC

It wins no prizes for style or design, but the Alpha-Learning Institute claims 15 minutes a week on its machine can lead to continual improvement in all manner of measurements, from IQ to the ability to resist stress. Adam, a former world record holder in several speed-reading and memory categories, is an eloquent proponent of his system.





frequencies and therefore control the body's thought and physical processes, it had no lasting effect. Lights off: effect off.

The Alphalearning Institute set out to find a way to keep the change once the lights went off. It took three years of testing, changing the parameters – frequency of sound and light, input and output factors, combinations of other non-technological techniques – before they delivered a system that worked. And it has changed little in the last 18 years (although millions of Euros have been spent on fine-tuning). It can be used to train users in self brain-balancing in 30 to 35 hours, along with teaching the ability to enter an alpha state at will.

### UNORTHODOX PROBLEMS

A mix of hard, soft and "para" science, and also eastern philosophy, its "differentness" has been a problem for Alphalearning. Peter Selkirk, a senior executive at Raychem UK (which took up the co-sponsorship reins of the initial study from Raychem Belgium, alongside co-sponsors Heinkel and ICL) says: "As the seniority of managers taking the course rose, there were increasing concerns about its acceptance. How mainstream was it? Just how fringe did Raychem choose to go? It's an example of the fear you encounter of going beyond boundaries of science, and the fact is it is very hard to distinguish between the charlatan and the innovator."



### ALL SHOOK UP

Jos Van Es took a course with his family in 1994 in an attempt for them all to come to terms with his brain damage, incurred in a car accident. Having lost his sense of taste and smell, frustration at the inability of therapists to tell him what was wrong or to do anything about his symptoms had left him also prone to anger and confusion, with upsetting consequences for home and work life. Here, he's wired for his first EEG.



### TIGER STYLE

Sean Adam demonstrates one of the sporting applications of the Alpha-Learning system – improving one's golf swing. Many course attendees who play, report improved handicaps as a result of a better ability to 'quieten' the mind during the swing and when putting.

He followed a course way back in early 1994. "I understand how they feel. However, I was keen and thrilled with it." Though popular, it never became mainstream. "This is one of Sean's frustrations, and it's understandable," says Selkirk. "Glasses and earphones make your brain better? It does take some swatowing."

### COURSE DYNAMICS

On the course with me are two therapists who hope to integrate the system into their alternative health practice in Toronto, and a Swiss woman writing a report for the local canton of Ticino on future education policy (which will later recommend the rapid integration of Alphalearning technology into the teaching process). A Dutch executive who is setting up a 'superlearning' consultancy and has been told by people in the field that Alphalearning is a must-have tool, joins us midweek for his second course.

During the week we'll be using the EEG and light and sound machine in combination with well-





## MAKING THE GRADE

The list of people attracted to the Alpha-learning system spans the gamut of A-listers: hundreds of executives from global corporations (including Olivetti, Raychem, KLM, Ford and Fisons), wealthy individuals (from Swiss bankers to Saudi princes and household names like Richard Branson), Formula One drivers (David Coulthard), bankers, military officers and Olympic athletes. But they keep quiet about it.

established ancient and modern techniques of non-chemical mind alteration, from hypnosis and visualisation, to biofeedback, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), eye exercises and Mind Mapping. Together, they comprise a system that stretches and relaxes the brain before easing it into balance and keeping it in balance to retrieve more information, faster.

In addition to our professional interests, we've been promised personal benefits including doubling or even tripling reading speed with no loss of information retention, up to 20 points added to one's IQ, and a degree of control of our brain state that once took many years to master. All in five days.

### READY, SET, GO...

The morning of Day 1 starts unremarkably enough. Attendees learn about the brain – its structure and function, how it pays attention, stores and retrieves memories, and so on. It's interesting and dynamic, with science and anecdotes woven neatly together by Adam, a charismatic and observant teacher.

Some of the information was unorthodox when Adam first espoused his theory in the early 1990s including vignettes like: 'most people have some degree of brain damage, but it can be fixed,' or 'brainwaves are contagious' (the brain broadcasts as well as receives). But these assertions, rooted in

Tibetan and other Eastern conceptions of the brain as observed over thousands of years, are not just backed by the results of the Institute's research but have since been slowly acknowledged by science too.

Suitably briefed, in the afternoon we all get our first session on the EEG/brain machine. Following a brief standard test for brain damage, and video documentation of visible things like facial symmetry and gait (that are liable to change once the brain rapidly balances) we prepare to take turns.

An EEG is recorded by attaching four wires from a blue box to the trainee's head with sticky tabs, enabling us to view the brain's activity on screen. This recording is then evaluated to determine 'weak' and 'strong' areas of the brain as shown by wave amplitude and the balance of left-right, front-back activity.

### SCIENTIFIC APPLICATION

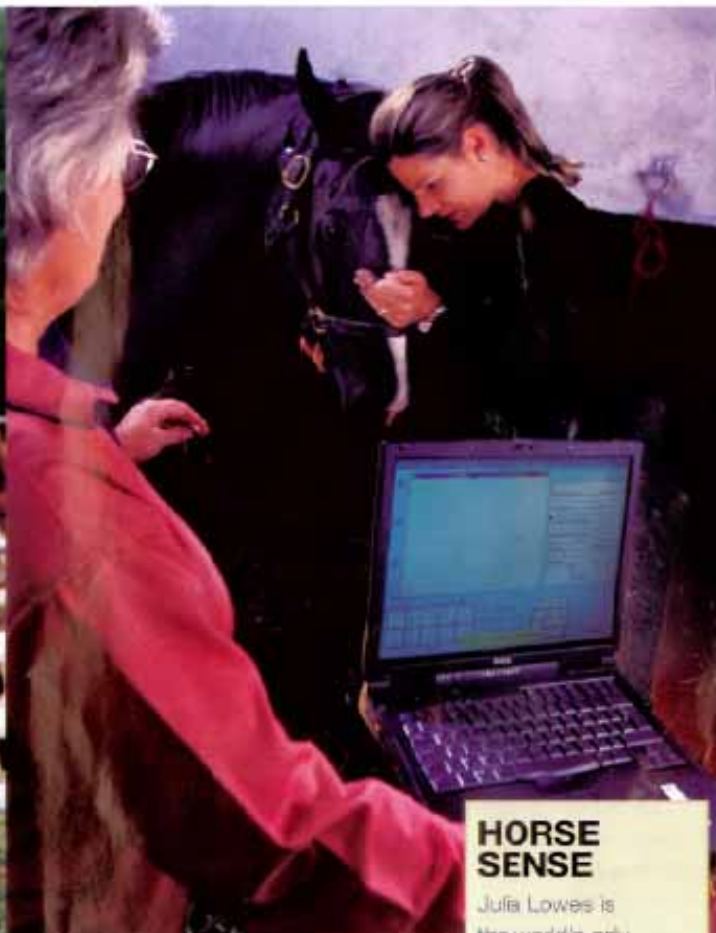
Lights and earphones are used to input certain frequencies to synchronize the 4 main sections of the brain (front, back, left and right). The program used is based on the results of the first EEG. Biofeedback exercises are performed allowing the user to hear and see their own brainwave frequencies and their left-right hemisphere balance. Thanks to the phenomenon of entrainment (brain-training), the brain is attracted to the sounds and images of perfect balance and, therefore, balances and tunes itself.

A second EEG is recorded for comparison to the first, to measure the effect and results of the training session. This is used to determine the next session setting for the light and sound training frequencies. This takes about 30 minutes. And indeed, our EEGs show that our brains are more balanced and the change is permanent.

Over the next few days, we repeat the session several times, in conjunction with the other techniques mentioned earlier. After several playings of a hypnotic visualisation tape to familiarise the brain with being in a relaxed alpha state – the best for absorbing new information – Adam uses Lotus software to 'put' us in that state, then NLP to 'anchor' it instantly and draw on it at will thereafter.

### UNINTENDED BENEFITS

Alphalearning was developed as an executive tool, a way to help execs read faster and retain more. By 2002, over 3,500 participants had been on the course. Apart from the promised results, there are the small, almost imperceptible changes that occur with regular Brainwave training, from quickened



## HORSE SENSE

Julia Lowes is the world's only "electronic horse whisperer." Julia had been on the brink of a pace in the Great Britain show jumping team when she was just 17. She's close to the world of international show jumping again, but this time as a horse therapist.

reflexes and increased mental clarity and alertness, to greater intuition and enhanced smell.

But the most dramatic results of this course were discovered inadvertently. It started with a number of beneficial "anomalies" that occurred during the initial executive testing – strange little tics and life-long problems disappeared – and by word of mouth, parents began to bring disabled children along. In February 1994, Harry Selkirk was just two – so any fears of a placebo effect were removed. He was brought to a session in the UK and a clubfoot he had since birth straightened out there and then, in just one 12-minute session, and it has stayed straight.

In the following months, these health anomalies continued. Not just improvements in concentration, confidence, rashes, depression and better pain control, but treating addictions, Attention Deficit Disorder, and various types of dyslexia. Several epilepsy patients were allowed to come off the drugs they used to control their problem.

### GOING DEEPER

It became clearer – to Adam at least – that what had

started out as simply a way of teaching executives to read faster and remember more was threatening to become a full-blown medical revolution, the Institute had to decide what it was in business for.

"We at the Alphalearning Institute no longer believed that there was any basic difference between dyslexia or autism or any of 50-100 other "brain disorders." We now believe the common denominator is electrical damage in the brain. It's just that damage in different parts of the brain causes different external symptoms, both physiological and psychological," says Adam. "And we can fix them."

### READING MATTERS

For the time being, Adam is concentrating the thrust of his claims on dyslexia, a range of conditions he believes are all brain damage related and all treatable. The US National Adult Literacy Survey found almost a quarter of the 200 million American adults were at Level 1: the lowest level that creates "difficulty using certain reading, writing, and computational skills considered necessary for functioning in everyday life."





### BATTLE TESTED TOO

Another practitioner of the Alpha course is Professor Rainer Dieterich, psychologist and dean of the education faculty at the German army's Bundeswehr University in Hamburg. Dieterich uses the system for speed-teaching military officers to speak French (increased from 12 words per hour to 36). Other uses of Alphalearning include training helicopter pilots to memorise the 40 steps required to evacuate a crashing helicopter and for parachutists to memorise the 14 steps involved in landing.

Almost a fifth of UK primary school children are registered as having serious learning difficulties, representing a doubling in the past decade. No reading, no access to the rest of the curriculum; in a knowledge-driven economy this amounts to an appalling handicap, and the impact of constant failure on a child's self-esteem is debilitating – it should be no surprise that 66 percent of US prison inmates are functionally illiterate.

### STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Ask Julia Lowes about dyslexia. Her educational psychologist, a dyslexia specialist, pronounced Julia "severely dyslexic - one of only six genuine dyslexics she'd encountered in 16 years." She eventually and reluctantly did the Alphalearning course in 1994, after being badgered to do so by her brother, who discovered it when trying to get back into university following brain damage sustained in a car crash.

"Three hours into the course, straight after my first go on the Brainwave, I phoned my mum and asked her to buy me a book," says Julia. "Immediately and for the first time in my life, I could relax my brain enough to see the words. It's a problem to describe, let alone teach: how do you 'relax' your brain?" There's been gradual improvement ever since, her reading speed is up from three words/minute to 190.

When Julia and her mother went back to her educational psychologist, she "blustered about how all kinds of changes can happen in adolescence, etc. She skipped two to three parts of the 11-part Wechsler IQ test to avoid having to discuss

or confront the real changes that had occurred, changes that could only have come from the course," says her mother Fippa. "She completely shut the door on us."

### ELECTRIC HORSE WHISPERER

Julia was a racehorse groom, and when she bought a Brainwave I she set it up in the stables where she worked. Soon, several riders and trainers remarked how calm two of the horses were. They were the two horses nearest to her PC, which reminded her of Adam's claims that "brainwaves are contagious – maybe even to horses."

She got her chance to test the theory in Dubai where Adam was conducting a private course for two sheiks. One had an eight-year-old horse, a grey that no one could get near without causing it extreme distress. Its vet was finding it increasingly hard to approach even with a head harness, and it could only be ridden after a long, tiring battle. She put the headphones on its neck and held the lights over its eyes – the institute has a video of the event – and sure enough, the system seemed to work on animals too. "The focus on the grooms!" laughs Julia. "Their chins hit the ground, to see it following me round like a meek puppy after 20 minutes."

She now spends 75 percent of her time working as an "electronic horse whisperer" in the UK. "It's a conservative world, the horse world, yet it is increasingly looking to alternative remedies and therapies," she says. "People have been very sceptical. I remember one old hand calling it 'mumbo jumbo', but being gobsmacked after I'd done a session. He couldn't believe it was the same horse."

But her real passion is in helping kids like herself. "I've had so many dyslexia industry doors closed on me. Institutes don't want to know. They fear they'll all lose their jobs, but I believe there will be more work for them with this equipment."

### SELLING THE REMEDY

"Proof" is a difficult concept - as is "cure" for that matter. On one hand, there has been a retreat from seeing science as the only arbiter of truth. But how else do you convince people of incredible claims? How do you mobilise government and health organisations to back and provide access to a heretical technology like this?

The only real proof of the pudding is in the eating. You have to do the course, and go on the machine, to believe. Those that have, believe. And they in turn tell their friends and family.

I have been in sporadic contact with the



Institute for 15 years since we first wrote about and photographed several families on its courses, and followed its progress as it moved from Brussels to Holland and finally to Lugano. I have spoken to many course attendees and the tales they tell of the sometimes extraordinary effects of the course. We caught up with some families again many years later. They included Karin, mother of severely disabled Kris and Jos, who had brain damage from a car accident and his family. They were unanimous in saying the system had helped them, both in understanding what was wrong and in helping them control, and to some extent reverse, their problems.

#### MOVING FORWARD

Science is forever getting a better grasp on the functioning of that most enigmatic of organs: the brain. But what can we actually do with this knowledge? "Most systems in neurology are only good for diagnosing," points out Dr Paulo De Faria. "We can identify the problem, but what can we do? Maybe find a certain stimulation or exercise - listening to a sound, playing with a ball. But nothing localised, and it's always very slow."

Everyone I spoke to, without exception, has experienced the aggressive dismissal of their mainstream doctors, psychologists, teachers and brain specialists. Yes, it's scary, this change. Fix a liver and you've made someone well; fix a brain and you're changing who someone is.

But if even half the claims are true, it could herald a new era in human understanding of the relationship between mind, brain and body - in



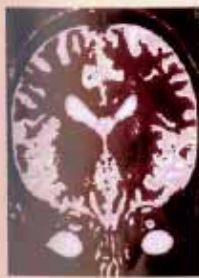
#### INFORMATION OVERLOAD

As the amount of information executives were expected to process and assimilate, exploded in the 1980s, concern over their ability to cope fostered research into learning and relaxation. Brain machines were championed as a solution.

education, healthcare, prison rehabilitation, sporting endeavours and more. Look at our failing schools, the epidemic of brain degeneration in our elderly, prisons full of uneducated, frustrated time bombs.

The question is: what are we - society, governments, business - going to do about it? In the last 15 years, lacking support or recognition, Sean Adam says he has often felt like throwing his research away. "It scared me, what I was opening up," he said. The critics can say it shouldn't work - and I have no idea nor opinion on why it should or even whether or not it should. But they simply can't argue that it doesn't work; I have over 3,500 cases and their 40,000 EEGs on record to show it does." ■

### A REVOLUTION IS BORN...



As corporate executives became more and more overloaded with information in the late 1980's, it became widely appreciated that new and more efficient

techniques of learning had to be mastered. According to a survey conducted at the time by the European Commission in Brussels, the average senior executive spent three of his 10 hours at work each day reading. An increase in reading efficiency would save

two hours per day. According to the same survey the average cost to a company for a senior executive was over USD200/hour, so each supercharged executive could save USD4,000 a month for his or her company. And that estimate was made 20 years ago.

In co-operation with senior executives from 100 international corporations, the Alphalearning Institute was established in 1989 to conduct research to determine whether brainwave frequency training could increase learning efficiency. Its director Sean Adam tested and studied the brains of high performing individuals to identify the brainwave frequencies required to perform specific mental and physical

activities; it was the first brainwave study done on "super high performing" subjects - and all of them had the same frequency when performing an outstanding task.

The same tests were done on amateur and professional sportsmen and women and drew the same results: better brain balance corresponded to better performance and a better ability to quiet the "internal scream" produced better results under pressure. To determine how these brain states might be replicable in less-than-super performing individuals, the Institute began a trawl through the tried and tested ancient techniques of achieving brain balance. And the rest, as they say, is history.