



by BETH SCHOTT

# Access School

## Using the Arrowsmith Program to “rewire” the brain & overcome learning disabilities

There is little more frustrating and upsetting for parents than not being able to help their child who is repeatedly struggling in school due to a learning disability. For the past five years, moms and dads in South Florida have been finding solutions at a Davie-based school which relies on an innovative educational program that does nothing less than change the brain.

“Our focus at the Access School is to rehabilitate the students in an intense clinical program by letting them leave their frustrations behind, correcting the way their brains process information, and reintroducing them into the regular world so they can function,” said Claude LeFrancois, the director of the school, which is located at 4801 South University Drive in Davie.

Based in a comfortable learning environment of 3,500 square feet, the Access School focuses on students with learning disabilities who are average or above average in intelligence; in some cases, high-functioning students with autism have also found success in the program. Every day, an estimated 25 students work with educators who are trained in a unique method known as the **Arrowsmith Program**, which addresses the underlying causes of learning difficulties. The program is based on the principal of *neuroplasticity*, which is the ability of the brain to rewire itself with the help of specific learning exercises.

The Arrowsmith Program was created more than three decades ago by Canadian educator, Barbara Arrowsmith-Young, who after years of her own frustration in the classroom, found a way to correct her learning disabilities. She had near-total auditory and visual memory, but struggled to understand concepts and meaning. Through cognitive exercises that target different areas of

the brain, coupled with years of research and scientific findings, Arrowsmith developed the program, which is now finding worldwide acclaim. She has recently published a widely praised book called, “The Woman Who Changed Her Brain”. Her program, which covers 19 different learning disabilities, is personalized to meet each student’s strengths and weaknesses.

“Students get a specific test when they enter the program, and we figure out all their severities as well as the level of those severities. The program is designed around those severities specifically, so every student has a completely individualized program,” said LeFrancois.



(Top) Access School director, Claude LeFrancois (Above) An Access student, Ariana, works with Miss Roxanne on one of the Arrowsmith Program’s neuroplasticity exercises, which train the brain to better receive and process information

The school is designed for students in 4th-8th grades, a time when LeFrancois says parents generally come to realize that their child has some sort of a block that is keeping them from becoming successful and is not going away with time.

“It gives us three years, often beginning with an intense year of Arrowsmith and no academics, and then we start pushing academics because all of a sudden, the mind has changed and they are open to it,” said LeFrancois.

The students start off their day in the school’s common room, where they focus on customized auditory, computer or paper-based neuroplastic lab exercises. Through repetitive use of the labs, the students master levels that provide a push for the brain to correct itself

over time, improving retention, memory, sequencing and more. The students do up to six labs a day, often alternating with language-based or math classes depending on their needs.

“The brain is so complex that when you wake it up, it starts allowing the information to get from where it comes in to where it should end,” LeFrancois said.

Students also do a P.E. class once a day to stay refreshed and have the option for a two-hour art break every Friday. The goal is to have each student ready to return to mainstream school after two to three years, able to work confidently and independently, without special accommodations.

After five years of working with students in the South Florida area, LeFrancois says his former students have successfully returned to mainstream programs. He also says that the Arrowsmith Program helps to remove what he calls the “steel gate” that prevents so many from learning.

“What we do through the Arrowsmith Program is open that door and remove the many filters and blocks. We lift that gate so that all of sudden, after two years, the memory comes back and retention is there, along with motivation and self confidence,” said LeFrancois.

**The Access School, which accepts McKay Scholarships and also has a flexible program for adults, is planning an Information**

**Session for parents to better understand the program and its life-long effects. Please call 954.680.9494 to RSVP.**

The Access School is located at 4801 South University Drive, Suite 114 in Davie. For more information, phone them at 954.680.9494 or email [info@accessschool.net](mailto:info@accessschool.net). You can also learn more online at [www.accessschool.net](http://www.accessschool.net).