

Pills are not the answer

Robyn Pearce

With very mixed feelings, this is my last article for *Education Today*. I've written for the magazine since the first issue back in 1999 and now it's time to change track a little. I'm following my own advice about prioritising; creating more time for a long-held ambition – writing historical fiction.

As my last contribution for you I've chosen to touch on a very serious topic. It affects families throughout the country, and therefore every classroom as well.

Everyone is impacted in some way with the results of a serious medical trend happening throughout the Western world: the ever-growing prescription of drugs to both children and adults for depression and variations of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). I join many others in believing that a significant cause of this epidemic is the way many adults view time.

Please be aware that I'm *not* giving medical advice. I'm not a doctor. And I recognise that for some people medication is a life-saver and a huge help. My concern is for the children.

It's over to us to moderate our children's experiences of the frenetic world we live in, but NOT with drugs.

Let's look at Ritalin, just one amphetamine that's commonly prescribed. It was first dished out to American children in 1961. Since that time there has been an epidemic of ADD diagnoses (more commonly referred to now as ADHD, although they're not exactly the same thing). We probably all know children and adults who have been diagnosed with the condition and prescribed Ritalin.

How did this happen? What changed?

American psychologist Richard DeGrandpre, author of *Ritalin Nation*, believes that it's not a sudden biological mis-wiring that has caused a dramatic increase of ADD children, but the vastly increased speed of society. There is evidence that the condition has no definite biological cause. Instead, there is growing concern that rather than the problem originating in the child's biology, rushed and stressed parents are passing on their own dysfunctional attitudes to time; are not taking the time to discipline their children effectively (a slow and lengthy process for which there are no shortcuts); and are using the 'quick fix' of drugs to slow down sensory addictions caused by external influences. A two-decade study of 191 ADD-type children showed that the way they were brought up was the issue, rather than the way their brains were wired.

From my research, it also appears that



much orthodox medical training encourages practitioners to prescribe drugs to fix the symptoms they're presented with, rather than encouraging people to look at the causes. Many mental health practitioners follow the same path. Again, this is a time issue, as I'm sure you can see. Doctors are at least as time-poor as their patients.

And so the problem compounds: medication has become the norm.

Today, many live in a world of sensory overload, of speed, and a sense of time-poverty. Technology moves faster and faster. We feel as if we can never catch up, that there is never enough time.

But it's not true. Time hasn't changed – we have

We adults have choices. However, our children don't. We're the influencers who mould the behaviour of our impressionable children; the results of the wrong choices are serious.

Many busy parents are unaware of the dangers of short-changing quality time with their children from a young age. *'I have to work to pay the bills. I'll hang out with the family when ... [fill in the gaps].'*

Many conscientious parents think they have to give their young children every possible opportunity; what if the kid was a potential superstar in something but not enough time was invested in extending them. So parents and children hustle crazily around town, from one activity to another, with no down-time. Stress and exhaustion are a common outcome.

Digital devices become the babysitter. So easy, so seductive, so addictive, so encouraging of dysfunctional behavior.

'Fast food' is eaten in front of square boxes spewing frenetic noise into the living rooms of the world.

Many families don't schedule in time to talk to each other in a relaxed way. They don't even think it needs to be scheduled in, because *'we live together, don't we?'* But they're not living. They co-exist, passing like ships in the night.

Many fathers (and not just those in big cities) only see their children on the weekends.

Many mothers juggle jobs, kids, housework and community activities, with time for themselves a poor last.

I sincerely believe that almost all parents do the best they can with the resources available at the time. I encourage all of us to be seekers of solutions so that our children don't become victims of the current epidemic of apparent time poverty. We're not time-poor – that is only an illusion. We all have the same amount of time, and all the time we need to do what is really important. But – the only person who can change it for ourselves or our children is us.

And now – Goodbye. Dear reader, I wish you all the best in your vitally important teaching career. If you would like a fresh face and voice at your next conference, that part of my business continues, and I travel often to Australia. Just drop a line to robyn@gettingagrip.com if you'd like to discuss.

Further reading

Richard DeGrandpre. *Ritalin nation*. WW Norton, 1999.

Robert Whitaker. *Anatomy of an epidemic*. Broadway Paperbacks, 2010.

David Fox. *Change your life*. Balboa Press, 2010.

Tony B Rich and Meg Jordan, PhD, RN. *Mother's Little Helper: The history of amphetamine and anti-depressant use in America*. www.wellcorps.com/Mothers-Little-Helper-The-History-of-Amphetamine-and-Anti-Depressant-Use-in-America.html.

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Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. She travels regularly to Australia from her home in New Zealand to work with schools on Professional Development days and also conferences.

To help time-poor parents, check out Robyn's new book *Getting a Grip On Parenting Time: 86 Commonsense Lessons from the Trenches*. You'll see a sample at www.gettingagrip.com/parentingtime/

As well as being a time and productivity specialist

for the last 25 years she's also the mother of six and grandmother of 17, so there have been many 'lesson' opportunities!