

# Genius in a flash

Every baby is born a genius, provided parents harness the right techniques to develop baby's brain, say advocates of flashcard memory training. True?



“Every child has, at birth, a greater potential intelligence than Leonardo Da Vinci ever used”, says Glenn Doman, author of a series of books including *Teach Your Baby to Read* and founder of the Glenn Doman method which uses flash cards in a large part of its programme.

As with the Shichida method of flashcard training, parents who use such ‘flash memory’ methods are motivated by the purported results that they help their children in recognising and remembering what was shown to them, hence helping them to build a strong bank of knowledge and memory power.

Parents who believe in the efficacy of flashcards do not mind paying hefty sums to enrol into speed memory training classes or to buy the programme or product they deem a “worthy investment” as it provides knowledge and new ideas for their children’s essential learning.

### Why flashcards inspire parents

As a mother to a six-year-old and two-year-old, I got inspired to do flashcard training after watching a VCD called *Your Baby Can Read!*. In it, the father uses words hand written on plain pieces of paper such as “foot” and “painting” to his young charge, a baby who is less than a year old, to which the baby promptly uses hand gestures to depict the object – I found that amazing.

I can also understand why experts say it’s good to start early because you are able to capture the baby’s attention before he starts to be able to walk. I had limited success with my two children because I started the training with them when they were toddlers. They were more interested in touching and pulling apart the flash cards than in sitting

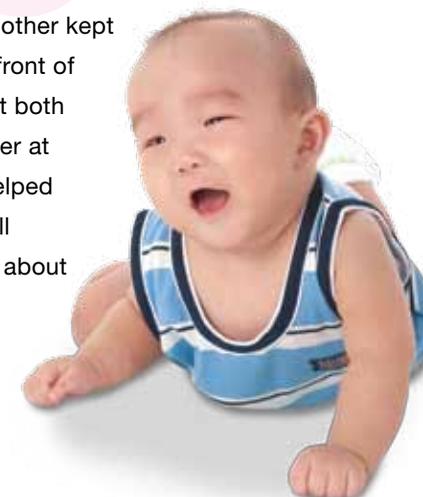
“Reading from a book and showing children flashcards achieve different objectives. When done together, the children definitely benefit more and pick up even more skill sets.”

- Mr Lim Wee Ming, founder of My Little Genius, an enrichment programme provider for babies and preschoolers.

## Little flash of inspiration

We invited three children for our On Cover story shoot – Khng Qifeng, seven months old, Jamielea Quek, 14 months old and Marcus Tay, aged four. Each child has had varying experiences with flashcards, and the shoot required each mother to flash selected cards to their child.

Qifeng’s mother had used flashcards with Qifeng before, but not on a regular basis. Still, he leaned forward attentively in his bouncer as his mother kept flashing fresh cards in front of him. The baby stared at both the cards and his mother at intervals. It probably helped as the little one was still unable to walk or think about grabbing the cards!



TEXT TEO KUAN YEE & TANG MEI LING PHOTOS ALEX HENG KIDS’ MODELS: KHNG QIFENG, 7 MTHS; JAMIELEA QUEK BTE MUSTAFA KAMAL, 14 MTHS; MARCUS TAY, 4 & THEIR MOTHERS ATTIRE: FOX KIDS & PUMPKIN PATCH HAIR & STYLING MABEL LENG

## Little flash of inspiration

Jamielea was an active, curious 14-month-old who moved about all the time. When asked if she had tried using flashcards with her daughter, her mother replied with some amusement: “Never; she’s more into iPad.” Ah, as with many little ones these days, we nodded knowingly. As her mother showed her daughter the Glenn Doman and Baby Einstein cards, Jamielea continuously took them from her mother, to explore. However, when we sat before Jamielea and flashed the cards quickly and continuously, she sat very still for the first time she was with us, enraptured. This seemed to indicate to us that even an active child can focus on such an activity because it matches the sheer speed that a very young child absorbs information.



still to hear me out. I guess this is part of the reason why parents enrol in classes to be taught the right techniques for flashcard training!

Stay-at-home mum Koe Lai Yin is one firm believer in the use of flash cards to stimulate her child’s brain development, especially with the Shichida method. Unlike common flash cards found in bookstores, the Shichida flash cards feature specific topics, such as famous people. Each card features a synopsis of their life story at the back of the cards, says the mother of a primary school boy in an online forum.

### What some methods teach

Flashcards come in physical cards or even CDs, DVDs and languages of all sorts. In Singapore, popular language flashcards include English and Chinese ones.

As for methods, there are several in the market, some established and some created by independent educational companies who may even deliver the package of your choice to your home. The Shichida method was founded by Professor Makoto Shichida, who believes that children are born geniuses. His method helps in stimulating the inborn genius in young children since things learnt a young age are

done effortlessly. Professor Shichida believes that the right brain and the left brain are interconnected and so when parents flash the cards, they show pictures and say the words at the same time. Thus, they connect the right and left brain. The right brain processes the pictures and images and works instantly while the left brain that processes sound and language, works logically and relatively slower, requiring a lot of repetition.

Another long-established flash card training method is the Glenn Doman programme by founder Glenn Doman who received his degree in physical therapy from the University of Pennsylvania in 1940, and began pioneering the field of child brain development. Mr Doman suggests that the baby must start to be trained as early as 10 months. The Doman method stresses the importance of the parents’ attitudes in respect to

the activity to be developed, which must be one that it is a good game and not a job. He explains that the sessions must end prior to the child’s loss of interest. Mr Doman also stresses that the material, despite being simple, must follow specifications, for instance the presentation of words and the way letters are drawn.

### Keeping up with fast little minds

Some baby enrichment classes make use of flashcard training as part of its teaching method. At My Little Genius, its programme is structured in such a way that children are exposed to both story reading and flashcard input. Mr Lim Wee Ming, founder of My Little Genius, explains: “Flashcard training is especially suitable for young children and babies for many reasons. The use of flashcards enables us to increase the speed that we show the children

information compared to reading from a book. This is especially true for younger children below three years old, as this enables us to better capture their attention and retain their interest.”

“Children’s processing speed is very fast. As such, it is necessary for the cards to be flashed at high speed. When flashing cards to young children, each card is shown to a child for half-a-second, for about 200 cards at a time. Ideally, a parent should conduct three sessions of flash cards with the child per day (morning, evening and night), bearing in mind that the same cards should not be repeated on the same day,” he adds.

Flashing cards can be used as a complementary tool to reading, suggests Mr Lim. “Reading to a child enables the child to pick up linguistic skills, intonation and emotions, triggering off their inquisitiveness and creativity. Showing children flashcards

## How to work flashcards

There are varying ways and methods how a parent can use flashcards with her child, but here are some general pointers to note:

1. Sit facing your child, holding the cards at about an arm’s length away from your child.
2. Flash the cards a little higher than your child’s eye level.
3. Hold your flashcard bonding sessions with your little one at least three times a day.
4. Take a card from the pack you are holding from the back and place it in front; flash it at a second or less – reading the word that is displayed at the back of this card – before moving on to the next card the same way.
5. Hold at least three sessions a day and keep each session short. If your child’s attention seems to be waning, let her take a short break and flash the cards later.
6. Make sure she is enjoying the session and do not expect instant results.



captures their attention. This enables the children to increase their attention span, build up a huge vocabulary and information database and increase their visual processing speed. Thus reading from a book and showing children flashcards achieve different objectives. When done together, the children definitely benefit more and pick up even more skill sets."

**So... does it work?**

Dr Tan Wah Pheow, lecturer for the Diploma in Psychology Studies in Temasek Polytechnic acknowledges that "flash cards are probably a good pedagogical tool because they facilitate the repeated remembering of previously learnt material."

He says: "Flashcards are a useful tool for learning and forming representations in long-term memory. Research done in the past has demonstrated that repeated remembering of previously learnt material enhances the representation of information in long-term memory. Because the physical form of flash

cards is such that they are easy to hold and one can just flip a card over to verify the answers to questions posed, they can facilitate the ease of repeatedly testing oneself (or a child) over an extended period of time."

Says Ms Ivy Lim, programme director of My Little Genius: "Some clear indicators of the effectiveness of such training is that children are able to quickly remember and relate it to real life items previously shown to them via the cards. When exposed to such training regularly, many children display very strong memory ability."

However, as with Mr Doman's advice, Ms Lim reminds parents that "be it flashcard learning or speed memory training, it is important that such sessions are conducted in a happy and relaxed manner.

"Children learn best when they are happy and having fun. Ideally, such sessions should stop before the child indicates that he or she wants to stop, so that they are always looking forward to the next session. For young children especially, focus

should be on the input for them in a happy manner, rather than forcing them through it or demanding for output from the children," she adds.

However, despite the purported benefits of flashcard training, Dr Tan questions further claims of flash card training being able to do more, such as "unlocking the potential of the right brain."

"There is no evidence to substantiate this claim or any other claims that using flash cards could lead to the development of any special cognitive abilities and/or talents," he says.

"If one uses any other pedagogical tool or methods that facilitates the repeated remembering of previously learnt materials (for example, information presented on the iPad, or quizzing the child on a regular basis on materials learnt before), they will probably be as effective as using flash cards. It is the repeated remembering of previously learnt material that produces the results, not the use of flash cards."

**Is it acceptable for flashcards to have both pictures and words on them?**

Many flashcards, especially those designed for toddlers and up, have only words printed on them.

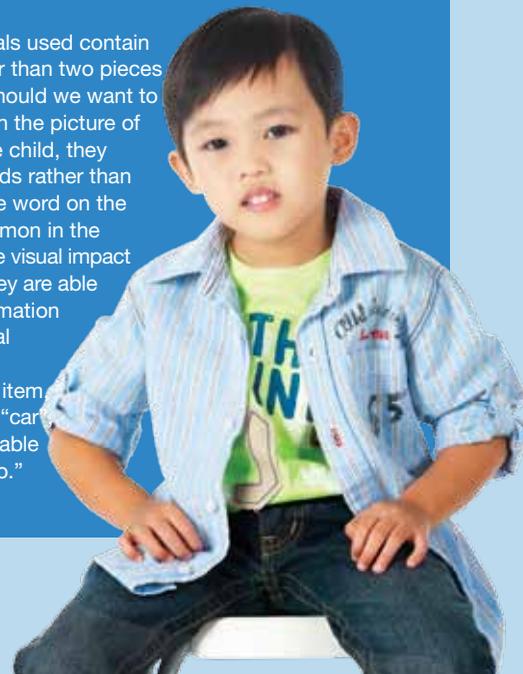
Then there are several flashcard packages that have both picture and word on each card, for example the picture (real or illustrated) of a frog is accompanied by the word "frog" on the same side of the card. The Baby Einstein series of flashcards meant for one-year-olds and up, for example, can work together with the Baby Einstein videos to attain knowledge and vocabulary in six different languages.

And then there are advocates for word-only or picture-only flashcards.

"For added effectiveness of such training, using the right materials is important," says Ms Ivy Lim, programme director of My Little

Genius. "It is good that materials used contain single bits of information rather than two pieces of information. For example, should we want to (convey the knowledge of) both the picture of a car and the word "car" to the child, they should be on two separate cards rather than having both the picture and the word on the same card (which is quite common in the marketplace). In this manner, the visual impact is very clear to children, and they are able to pick up both pieces of information faster and also make the mental connection easily.

"Another dimension to the item, for example, the Chinese word "car" can be added and children are able to pick these up effortlessly too."



**Little flash of inspiration**

Interestingly enough, while Marcus's mother admitted she did not have the time to use flashcards much, his grandmother had apparently been actively engaging her grandson in flashcard activities for sometime. When we showed Marcus flashcards that were meant for six-year-olds and up, the four-year-old could read every single word that was displayed, deeply surprising and delighting his own mother. Of course, we noticed that his mother brought along books for her son to read, a rare sight at our child photo shoots, so probably an overall supportive word-rich environment helped, too.

The fact is, there will always be mixed reactions and feedback from both educators and parents on the topic of speed memory training in babies and preschoolers. You will hear from parents who tell you it doesn't work and you will hear from parents who get a lot out of it.

And there will be some who will acknowledge that it could be more than just one or two factors that lead to brilliant results – or outcomes that are less so.

Ultimately, the decision on whether to use flashcard 'training' – or any other learning cum bonding activity – lies with the child's parents – whether you have the time, the conviction, discipline, patience and the joyful yearning to share timeless, treasured moments of discovery with your child. ☺

