



## Doberman or Puppy—Which Are You?

“Learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat.”

-Caine, R.N., Caine, G. (October 1990). “Understanding a Brain Based Approach to Learning and Teaching.” *Educational Leadership* 48, 2, 66-70.

You know the experience; you're walking by a fenced yard and suddenly a Doberman (or other large, scary dog) snarls and bears his teeth at you. Does it make your brain freeze and cause you to suck in air? And doesn't your heart still race every time you walk by—even if "Killer" no longer lives there?

Now, think how you felt the last time you played with a puppy. Quite a different response, isn't it?

Such a "Doberman" experience gives us tunnel vision, causes rapid breathing, and sends adrenaline throughout our body. Our brain immediately goes into this "fight-or-flight" response to protect us. Your child often feels this way when he stumbles over words in a reading passage. In such a state, it is impossible for him to think and learn.

On the other hand, when he feels safe—like when he plays with a friendly puppy—his brain doesn't shut down. In this state, his brain *can* learn.

When you work with your child, his brain experiences *you* as either acting more like a "Doberman" or a "Puppy." Let's compare:

<b>A Doberman Coach...</b>	<b>A Puppy Coach...</b>
Talks and "lectures" a lot.	Shows or "models" how to do it.
Expects her child to work at his grade level, even though he reads well below that level.	Knows her child's true reading level is challenging enough and doesn't ask him to read at a higher level.
Thinks her child is lazy.	Knows that her child is offering his best. Every brain wants to look good.
Chooses an amount of work that overwhelms her child's brain.	Follows the "2-Error" Rule. (See <a href="http://wowzabrain.com">wowzabrain.com</a> for more info.)
Thinks to herself, "What's wrong with you? You should know this by now!"	Thinks, "If I do my job and provide daily practice, your brain will get to grade-level reading very soon."
Expects a child to "fix" himself.	Carves out time each day to work with her child so his brain <i>can</i> read better.

The Doberman approach is common—and ineffective. A child quickly develops avoidance behavior to reading and homework: stalling, pouting, or getting off-task.

Undoubtedly, a Doberman Coach tries hard, but practice sessions often end in frustration and tears. Nothing is accomplished, and she frequently wonders, “What's wrong with my kid?” or “Why won't he try harder?”

A Puppy Coach approach is highly effective. Research clearly tells us so. When a child's brain begins to feel safe, he resists less often; he's willing to play for longer periods; and homework begins to get easier.

A Puppy Coach knows that failure and shame shut down a child's brain. So, she is willing to teach and re-teach little chunks of new information as many times as her child needs. She makes sure her child reaches automaticity before adding new material. And, she keeps practice sessions positive by playing each WowzaBrain Game for only 3-5 minutes and ending each game with successful play.

So, if you have been a little "Dobermanish" lately, stop! (We all get this way from time to time, especially when we're tired.) Follow the brain research saying: “A safe brain is a learning brain.” You *and* your child will be glad that you do.



Be a Puppy Coach: give your child what his brain needs—show him (model), and provide daily practice with small chunks of material at his reading level.