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FAMILY TIME: Bruce and Annamaria Currivan meditate with their daughter, Jean Anne, 19.

Tapping into TM

Filmmaker David Lynch wants to share with schools the benefits he says he's reaped from Transcendental Meditation.

By PETER LARSEN
The Orange County Register

Filmmaker David Lynch makes movies that unfold like dreams, surreal and abstract, often beautiful and disturbing at the same time.

The mysterious qualities of work from "Eraserhead" and "Blue Velvet" to "Twin Peaks" and "Mulholland Drive" have at times left viewers wondering if Lynch has found some way to tap into his subconscious and make art of what he finds there.

Which in a way, it turns out, he says he has.

For more than 30 years, Lynch has practiced Transcendental Meditation - TM, for short. He credits it with enhancing his happiness, his health and - most importantly for his art - his creativity.

Because he believes so much in what TM has done for him and others he knows, Lynch has launched an

organization - the ambitiously titled David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace - to provide the program to schools and any student who wants it.

"The proof is in the pudding," Lynch says on a break from work on "Inland Empire," his new movie project. "When you see students who have experienced consciousness-based education, you kind of say, 'Oh, I can't believe what I'm seeing!'"

"These people are self-sufficient. They've got a strength. They have a clarity. They've got an inner happiness.

"They kind of glow with this consciousness."

Transcendental Meditation is the meditation program that has been led by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for the past 50 years. For 20 minutes twice a day, the person meditating sits with eyes closed, seeking to settle the mind into a deeply quiet state referred to in TM circles as "restful alertness."

Baby boomers may remember TM and the Maharishi for such famous followers as the Beatles in the '60s, but other celebrities, from actors Clint Eastwood and Mary Tyler Moore to shock jock Howard Stern, have done it, too.

Yet the movement has always had critics. Some argue that it has religious elements related to Hinduism. A New Jersey court case from the 1970s ruled it was religious in nature and could not be taught in schools.

A spokesman for the national TM organization said that since that case, society's view of TM has changed. Public schools in Detroit, Atlanta and Washington D.C. have used it, and it is now widely considered a mental and physical technique as secular as yoga.

To Lynch, who believes students would benefit as he has, it's a simple equation.

"People out there know the schools are in trouble," Lynch says. "And here is (TM), ready to boogie.

"Bring it out and see what happens."



AT PEACE: Annamaria Currivan's hands reflect her repose while she practices Transcendental Meditation.

Jean Anne Currivan, a 19-year-old from Dove Canyon, has practiced Transcendental Meditation for as long as she can remember, starting out informally as a 5-year-old, then learning the traditional program when she turned 10.

Throughout attending Santa Margarita Catholic High School she meditated twice daily, and she's sure it's helped her studies and her life at large.

"It's given me a lot of clarity," she says, sitting between her parents, Bruce and Annamaria Currivan, both longtime TM practitioners.

"I don't feel tired all the time. And it's allowed me to enjoy my studies for studying them, rather than working to get a good grade."

As a freshman last year at the University of California, Berkeley, where she plans to major in physics and philosophy, her roommate "was always impressed how I didn't stress out before tests," Currivan says.

The Currivan children - sons Joseph, 21, and Peter, 16, also meditate - are poster-perfect for the point TM leaders hope the David Lynch Foundation will help make: calm, clear-thinking and focused.

"I can't imagine people not doing it," says Bruce Currivan, a technical director at Broadcom, who also serves on the board of trustees at Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, Iowa.

"I think it would be great if we had it in school," Annamaria Currivan says. "It gives me tremendous hope for the world.

"It's very natural for (Jean Anne) to meditate and it would be wonderful if other children would have that, too."

At the Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse in Detroit, about 120 students have practiced TM twice daily for six years.

Carmen N'Nambi, founder and principal of the public charter school, says that since the program started - funded in part by a grant from the Daimler/Chrysler Foundation - the 120 students in it cherish the 10 minutes they meditate in the gym twice daily.

"I don't think we realize how much we don't value quiet in this culture," N'Nambi says. "American society is busy.



MEDITATING STUDENTS at a school that are currently using the "consciousness-based education" that Lynch proposes.

“So the future generation needs to know how to rest, to say, ‘That’s enough now, I need to go take care of myself for a little bit.’”

The program at the school is being studied by a University of Michigan Medical School researcher, whose preliminary results found students who meditated there reported feeling happier and less stressed.

“I’d say, ‘Why do you like it?’ “N’Nambi says of her conversations with students in the TM program. “They’d say, ‘I’m not nearly as grumpy,’ or ‘I think I’m doing much better in my schoolwork.’”

Lynch discovered Transcendental Meditation in 1973, after hearing how happy it made his younger sister.

“The first thing that happened was, I had anger, and this anger, within two weeks dissipated,” he says. “I started feeling happier and enjoying the doing of things more.

“It turns the mind within until you reach the greatest field of happiness, pure bliss.

“And that experience is what we need,” he says. “You can say, ‘That is so much baloney, David,’ but it’s us. The ocean of bliss, unity, happiness, love is there for you to experience.”

As a filmmaker, Lynch says TM has helped him tap into his creativity.

“I always say ideas are like fishing,” Lynch says. “You go fishing for ideas, and the bait is desire, I always say. You focus. It’s like bait on the hook, and you catch ideas.

“And the little ones swim on the surface and the bigger ones swim down deeper. And when you meditate, you catch bigger fish.

“I always feel lucky when I catch a good one.”

The foundation, Lynch believes, is a terrific idea.

Beyond providing TM to schools, the foundation also hopes to form groups to meditate for peace, believing that group meditation can help reduce crime and war.

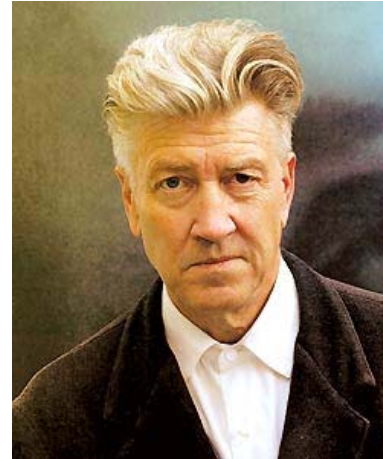
Steven Yellin, a spokesman for the national TM organization, says 40 schools are waiting for funds to provide TM. As the foundation builds an endowment, they will be first to receive the \$2,500 per person training costs.

“The goal is basically to raise money - I would like to raise \$7 billion,” Lynch says. “The interest would sustain teaching TM to any child, any person who wants it.

“I could do that with one-stop shopping with Bill Gates, who’s a guy who’s very interested in education,” he says. “I would just love to talk to him about this.”

But Lynch also wants to raise money from grassroots supporters, such as one of the extras on his current film, who donated the \$50 she’d earned for the day. Or his barber, who recently gave back the money he’d paid for a haircut as a contribution to the cause.

“It’s so possible,” Lynch says. “You have education that brings a student to his full potential, and it’s so possible to set up peacemaking groups to bring peace to Earth. It’s so possible.”



INTO THE CLASSROOM: David Lynch says he would like to raise \$7 billion to provide “consciousness-based education” to any school or student wanting it.

To learn more

To learn more about the foundation, visit www.davidlynchfoundation.com

To learn more about Transcendental Meditation in general, visit www.tm.org