

# SMART MOVES

## WHY LEARNING IS NOT ALL IN YOUR HEAD

BY CARLA HANNAFORD, PH.D.

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## Brain Gym

In 1986 I was asked to become part of a Hawaiian intermediate school as a Comprehensive Student Alienation Program (CSAP) counselor and tutor. The students I would work with had learning or emotional difficulties and therefore were considered alienated from the school program. It was an experiment for me. Here I was, a trained neurobiologist and professor of biology at the University of Hawaii, having taught college biology for over twenty years, with no psychology or counseling background, asked to work with alienated, pubertal, intermediate kids. All this because I had successfully used accelerated learning techniques with my college classes, and I was just gutsy and curious enough to say "YES."

I had never worked with this age group before, so I spent three weeks during the summer of 1986 on the staff of Supercamp, an accelerated learning program for kids ages 13-17, to gain understanding about students of this age and background. Some of these kids had been adjudicated from New York City on scholarships from the New York City Police Department. It was great training for me in being accepting, open, non-judgmental and capable of seeing the potential in every person. My daughter, who had just turned 12, also consented to give me pointers. And so by the beginning of the new school year the stage was set for this strange experiment in my life.

### MY INTRODUCTION TO BRAIN GYM

Having an open and accepting attitude was not, however, the same as having an actual program for helping the troubled children I would face back in Hawaii. At this point, a Nurse Practitioner friend suggested I use Brain Gym with these kids. It had been life-transforming for her son Todd, and I was open to anything that might work.

Todd, though bright and loveable, had been certified learning disabled. As a sophomore in high school he still could not read though the family had spent thousands of dollars on learning programs.

At age 16, Todd was 6 feet, 2 inches tall and the basketball team had recruited him to give them some height. But alas he was clumsy, tripping over the ball as he attempted to dribble down the floor.

In that year his mother attended a Touch For Health conference in California where Dr. Paul Dennison first spoke of his work with learning disabilities and the Brain Gym program. She returned home very excited announcing, "Todd, we're going to Cross Crawl." To get Todd to participate, the whole family Cross Crawled every morning before Todd went to school and every evening before bed. Within six weeks Todd was reading at grade level. He became an important addition to the basketball team soon after.

All the pieces of learning had been there for over ten years but Todd had been unable to integrate them. It took the Brain Gym activities to finally fit the pieces together. A highly successful student, Todd has now completed a college degree in biology.

I figured if something so simple as Brain Gym worked for Todd, it was worth a try. At first I simply followed directions on how to do specific activities that were supposed to activate full mind/body function. I had no preconceived notions as to what would happen with these CSAP kids, but they seemed to enjoy the Brain Gym, and it fit in with my experiment.

Not knowing the protocol, I chose to work with these students without looking at their charts or past histories. What happened next surprised them, and me, and their teachers. They were finally succeeding and in charge of their own lives, emotionally, physically and mentally.

The principal was so impressed he had me make an inservice presentation to teachers, even though my training in the work was minimal. He also signed me up to make a four hour presentation to all the principals on the island. In an attempt to understand the shifts I was seeing in the students I took the Brain Gym In-Depth training a little while later in November, 1986. Thus began my eight year — and continuing — search to understand the molecular, cellular, physical and neurological aspects of this profound work.

### MICRO-INTERVENTIONS LEAD TO MAJOR CHANGES

We are all natural learners, born with a remarkable mind/body system equipped with all the elements necessary for learning. Various stressors, however, can introduce blocks that inhibit the learning process. (We will be discussing stress and its impact on learning in the third part of this book.) Frequent ear infection, for

instance, is a kind of stressor that may impact learning success. The system is not seriously damaged by the infections and is still theoretically taking in all the information necessary to learn, but learning may be stalled. The learner has difficulty assimilating and integrating new information.

Brain Gym appears to contribute the minor adjustments necessary to enable the system to proceed with the learning process. Dr. Dee Coulter, a cognitive specialist and neuroscience educator who has worked extensively with learning difficulties, refers to these minor adjustments as micro-interventions. She explains that these bring about major change because they supply the necessary integration and also reverse the expectation of failure.<sup>1</sup>

I have seen many such micro-interventions take place after using Brain Gym. Once I worked with an eleven year old Down's Syndrome boy whose teacher had worked daily with him for three months in an attempt to have him learn his numbers 1-10. He had a chart that had the numerals in order on the top line, the numbers written out as words on the middle line, and pictures of objects on the bottom line (e.g., one apple, two shirts, three trees, etc.). His job was to take a laminated card and match it with the appropriate numeral, written number or figure on the chart.

As hard as he tried, he could not "get it." He would pick up a 3, say "seven", and place it on the 10. When reminded it was a 3, he would say "three," but then lay it down on a 5. After using every technique she knew, both the teacher and the student had become extremely frustrated with the project.

I asked him if he would be willing to do a Dennison Laterality Repatterning (discussed below), which he was pleased and excited to do. This series of activities took about fifteen minutes, after which he said he was ready to do his numbers again. He sat back down at the chart, picked up a 3, said "three" and placed it on the 3 in the chart. He immediately picked up a 7, said "seven" and put it on the 7, continuing until the whole chart was filled correctly. I felt the back of my chair shudder a bit and turned to see the teacher with big tears running down her cheeks.

The next day he drank water, did two minutes of Cross Crawl, Brain Buttons and Hook-Ups and then sat down and correctly filled in the chart again. He was given another chart he had never seen, which had the numbers mixed up. He easily and correctly placed all the laminated chips on it. Somehow he had been taking in the information, but it took a "micro-intervention," Dennison Laterality

Repatterning, to link the information up and make it useful.

These micro-interventions are seen on a regular basis by people who use this work for themselves and with others. The examples are simple but profound. Here is a graphic example of one first grade boy's immediate, demonstrable improvement in writing after a few minutes of doing some Brain Gym exercises.

one day Before Brain Gym

The image shows a handwritten sample of the words "one day" on a set of three horizontal lines. The word "one" is written on the top line, and "day" is written on the middle line. The handwriting is somewhat messy and lacks consistent letter formation.

a few minutes after Brain Gym.

On Monday we are going  
to have play Day  
I have to wear my  
shorts a tee shirt and  
my running shoes we are  
going to have lots of fun

Grade One Child - Writing Story

The image shows a handwritten sample of a story on a set of three horizontal lines. The text is written in a clear, legible cursive script. The story is about going to play on Monday and wearing specific clothing. The handwriting is significantly more organized and consistent than the sample above.

Figure 7.1: First Grade Boy's Improvement in Writing after Brain Gym

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Before Brain Gym

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