

BRAIN GYM - THE THEORY...

You can find this sort of drivel all over the net. Just Google Brain Gym.

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What is Brain Gym?

Movement is a key part of the process of development and learning. Brain Gym is a programme of simple exercises, developed over a 25 year period by a remedial educational specialist, Dr Paul Dennison. He created the movements drawing on the experience of many others. Originally it was created to help children and adults with reading difficulties (Dr Dennison himself, suffered from dyslexia and difficulties with vision), butand is now used in many areas of education, business, sport, the arts and personal development to improve learning, attention, behavioural skills, body co-ordination and performance .

When can it be used?

Some schools are using it in the classroom as 'brain break' activities to focus the whole class, first thing in the morning, after lunch and during lessons. Children with learning difficulties are sometimes given more in-depth programmes. The movements link in with the development of reading, writing and listening etc. so they can be used before starting a specific task. Brain Gym is not used just in schools, it can be used to help with homework or studying, in the workplace or just with all those brain activities that daily life demands of us.

How does it work?

It works on the theory that specific body movements stimulate particular aspects of brain function, and help different areas of the brain to connect, so that the whole brain is used in learning or other activity. Some of the movements are designed to bring about movement across the midline of the body and so connect the left and right sides of the brain. Stress can be a major inhibitor to learning. Some of the exercises help to connect the part of the brain which governs emotions, with the part which produces logic and reasoning and so induce a more relaxed and balanced approach. It has been reported that, amongst others, Brain Gym exercises have helped with such things as confidence, comprehension, concentration, abstract thinking, organisation, copying, memory, mental fatigue, completing tasks, physical balance and co-ordination.

The neurophysiologist, Carla Hannaford, gives a number of powerful examples of success with brain Gym in her book, Smart Moves. In one she shows a pictures of a child's writing before, and after, a few Brain Gym exercises; in the first example it would seem the child has struggled to write two words, and in the second example he/she has managed three flowing descriptive sentences.

The Importance of Water

Drink a glass of water before Brain Gym activities. As it is a major component of blood, water is vital for transporting oxygen to the brain. You need to replace the water which is constantly being lost. Children need between about half to one and a half litres a day.

Sources and Further reading -

Gym Lesson by Alan Heath -Article for Nasen's magazine, 'Special'.

Brain Gym and Brain Gym - Teacher's Edition - Gail and Paul Dennison

Brain Gym for Business—Dennison, Dennison and Teplitz

Smart Moves - Why Learning is not all in Your Head by Carla Hannaford

Dominance Factor- How knowing your Dominant Eye, Ear, Brain, Hand and Foot can Improve your

Learning - Carla Hannaford

Cheshire Parent Partnership Service/Inclusive Learning Day for Parents 2004/MMcC

SOME BRAIN GYM EXERCISES..

Breathing

The Dennisons say for Brain Gym, and as a rule for every day movements, you should -Exhale when you are extending your body. Inhale when you are drawing your limbs or energy back in. In

all there are twenty six Brain Gym movements. But try the following sample of exercises, in the listed order (ideally twice a day) to get started, drinking water beforehand -

Belly Breathing

Place your hands on your abdomen. Breathe out through your mouth in short little puffs until your lungs feel completely empty. Then breathe in filling yourself like a balloon. Then breathe out slowly and fully. Repeat four times. Oxygenates the blood. Helps relax the central nervous system and increase energy. Can improve reading and speaking abilities.

Brain Buttons

Make a 'C' shape with your thumb and forefinger and place on either side of the breast bone just below the collar bone. Gently rub for 20 or 30 seconds whilst placing your other hand over your navel. Change hands and repeat.

This exercise stimulates the flow of oxygen carrying blood through the carotid arteries to the brain to awaken it and increase concentration and relaxation.

Cross Crawl

While standing, alternately touch your left knee with your right hand (or elbow) and then your right knee with your left hand (or elbow). Do this slowly 10 or 15 times.

Helps co-ordinate right and left areas of the brain. Useful for spelling, writing, listening, reading and comprehension and left/right co-ordination of the body.

Hook-ups

Stand with both feet flat on the floor. Cross one foot over the other. Stretch out your arms and then so the backs of the hands are together. Cross one over the other so that palms are now together.

Interlock the fingers, swing hands down and in and then up onto chest (fingers and thumbs are now uppermost) and hold. Place tongue flat against roof of mouth about a quarter of an inch behind the front teeth and breathe in. Relax the tongue and breathe out. Repeat the breathing part four to eight times. Can also be done whilst sitting with the legs straight out. Connects the part of the brain concerned with emotions to that part concerned with reason and so enables learning and better response to difficulties. Helps diffuse stress and calm the mind, improve self-esteem and positivity. A good exercise to try before a test!

Or try the Seven Minute Tune-up, recommended to prepare anyone for the day ahead -

Drink some water

Belly Breathing - (as above) 4 - 8 breaths

Brain Buttons - (as above) look left and right as you massage the points for 4 - 8 breaths

Hook-ups - Part 1 (as above) Relax for 4 - 8 breaths.

You may want to review areas of stress and consider other possibilities.

Part 2 Place fingertips together and feet flat on the floor for 4 - 8 breaths.

Brain Integration Movement - Extend your arms out as wide apart as is comfortable. Picture bringing

your left and right brain hemispheres together, as you bring your two hands together, interlocking your fingers. Hold this for 4 - 8 breaths.

Positive Points - Lightly place three fingers of each hand on points above the centre of each eyebrow and halfway to the hairline. (you might find a slight bulge) Hold these acupressure points lightly for 4 - 8 breaths. You may want to use this time to plan your day.

Cross Crawl - (as above) 10 - 25 repetitions.

Sources for 'Brain Gym - The Theory' Cheshire Parent Partnership Service/Inclusive Learning Day 2004MMcC