

A Brain Gym® “Residency” Day

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I had a wonderful opportunity recently to do quite a bit of Brain Gym® consulting at a school dedicated to implementing a comprehensive Brain Gym program. Melanie Powers, the owner and director of ACCLAIM Charter School in west Phoenix, recently took Dr. Dennison’s Whole Brain Reading course and followed that with the Brain Gym 101 course. She was so impressed with the Brain Gym program that she’s decided to have her entire staff trained in Brain Gym, and to have me come for several “Residency Days” to work directly with students who are having specific challenges.

I developed the concept of Brain Gym “Residency Days” to offer schools a full day of direct student services, presentations, and/or demonstrating use of Brain Gym in classroom settings. All of my Residency Days at ACCLAIM have focused on offering direct student services in one-on-one sessions, seeing an average of eight students daily. So far this year I have done seven Residency days at this school, in which I have have completed 54 sessions with 43 different students.

Each Residency day begins with a quick discussion with Ms. Powers about the students on my list for the day, after which I set up my Brain Gym materials in the room provided and have the secretary call my first student. Each session begins with a quick get-to-know-you conversation with the student, leading into a discussion of what he or she finding challenging in school. I explain a bit about the Brain Gym balance process, and together we choose one specific area they’d like to address in a balance. Together we go through the PACE warm-up process (which they all know because their teachers are all using it with them).

I notice that many of these students have significant challenges with The Cross Crawl portion of PACE. They’re much more inclined to bring their elbow down to their “same side” knee, rather than the opposite knee. This indicates lack of coordination between the two hemispheres of the brain. No wonder they’re having academic problems! It takes fluid coordination between both brain hemispheres in order to be what I call “academically agile.” Therefore, it’s also no wonder that balances with these students often call for Dennison Laterality Repatterning (DLR), a specific Brain Gym process that creates powerful connections between the two hemispheres of the brain. Occasionally other Brain Gym modalities are called for,

supporting other aspects of brain connectivity and function. Whatever the process, we move quickly but effectively through the balance session. My goal is to focus fully on each student and his/her balance, while holding the awareness that there are many students to see that day. I’ve found that it’s possible to see wonderful results with students, even though their sessions are relatively quick.

The following are brief descriptions of typical Residency Day sessions at ACCLAIM Charter School. (Names and details have been changed.)

Mariella is a sixth grader who has been having significant difficulties with reversals in writing, and was reading two years below her grade level. When I asked her to write her name she used small, cramped printing. When I asked Mariella for a reading sample she chose a simple story book, and mechanically read one word at a time, hardly pausing at punctuation. When doing the Cross Crawl during PACE she had great difficulty consistently getting her elbow to the opposite knee--she kept bringing it down to the “same side” knee. I took Mariella through the DLR process after which I had her read again, and this time her reading was quite fluent. She was so pleased with herself! Now she effortlessly and automatically connected her elbow with her opposite knee when doing the Cross Crawl, and when I asked her to write her name again, she chose to write much larger and in cursive, which is a much more whole-brain activity than printing. When asked if she had any questions, Mariella asked, “Are you coming back tomorrow?”

Ernesto is in eighth grade and I was surprised to learn that he was reading on only a 2.8 grade level. His oral reading from a very simple Dr. Seuss book confirmed this. He stumbled and stumbled on this very simple book, miscalling several very basic words and ignoring the punctuation. After DLR Ernesto’s reading improved significantly. He read much more fluently, and when he made mistakes he self-corrected. He often backed up to re-read sentences with feeling once he figured out the context, and commented on the rhyme of the lines: “That’s funny!” The humor had completely eluded him in his first reading, when he was just calling one word at a time. He was very pleased and said he’d like to come again. His reading teacher tells me that Ernesto now loves reading quiz questions out loud to his classmates--something very new for him.



Curtis is a first grader who was not yet reading, despite much loving and careful attention from his teacher. The morning of his Brain Gym session he had been able to read only two of his eleven “practice words” for the week. We talked a bit about reading, and then went directly to the DLR process, after which he left. I learned later that when Curtis returned to his classroom he proudly and excitedly read nine of his eleven words!

Sanford is a fourth grader who’s having challenges with many aspects of school curriculum. He said he’d like most to improve in math. A precheck showed that he knew few of his multiplication facts. As we did PACE it was obvious that Sanford had significant Laterality issues, because even with repeated guidance he kept going back to a pattern of bringing his elbow to his “same-side” knee, rather than reaching for the opposite one. We did the steps of DLR, after which he was still extremely awkward in doing Cross Crawl, consistently reaching for his same-side knee. He was happier about doing multiplication facts, and did a bit better, but I can see that Sanford will require more Brain Gym balances in order to improve significantly.

Warner is a seventh grader with many emotional issues that have caused a lot of disruption in his life. He told me he was very good at reading but had a hard remembering what he’d read. He chose to read from the hardest book I had with me, a collection of Sherlock Holmes stories. He read fluently, but remembered few details from the paragraphs he’d read. We went through the steps of the DLR process, after which he read again. This time he was even more fluent, said he’d understood much better than the first time, and recalled every detail of those paragraphs. He said he was looking forward to his next comprehension test.

Clara is struggling through first grade. She read to me from a very simple book for beginning readers and she did very poorly, guessing at most of the words, consistently using picture clues to arrive at the right “word.” I led her through the steps of DLR after which she read again. This time she looked only at the words as she read, sounding out many of words correctly, a few with a bit of help. Her teacher came to the room and Clara read for her. The teacher said that she had never heard Clara really sound out words before, that she’d always guessed using clues from the pictures. By the time Clara finished reading for her teacher, she was easily reading or sounding out every word, reading with voice inflection and meaning.

Martin is a third-grader who really wanted to improve

his reading. He read aloud from a simple second-grade level book and basically read fine, but not well. He didn’t stumble, but read slowly and carefully, without much expression. We began with a DLR balance followed by two of the many advanced Brain Gym processes: one that activates the core muscles of the torso, and “Vision Re-Education,” a process that supports coordination and smooth tracking of eyes. When we completed this he read again -- fluently, and with great ease and inflection. What a lovely, resonant voice! I suggested that he go right back to class and read for his teacher. At the end of the day I checked in with the teacher, who said the class had been working in such a focused way on math that she didn’t take time to hear Martin read. But she did notice that when she gave him a division paper that normally would have taken him an hour (with much resistance) that he was finished in ten minutes, with all correct but one. When she pointed out his one error, he nodded and said he saw exactly what he’d done wrong. Martin happily read to himself during the rest of math time.

When I complete a balance with a student I typically ask, “Was it worth the time?” and students answer “YES!” My Residency Days at schools are very rewarding. It’s great to see students make such quick progress in academics and attitude! While you can see that not every Brain Gym balance does everything we’re looking for, the results often affect much more than the “target” issue, especially considering how much a student’s attitude improves when his or her academic abilities improve.

My vision for our education system is to have a fully-trained Brain Gym consultant on every school campus so he or she can do ongoing work just like this with students every day. Interested? The first step is taking Brain Gym 101, where you learn to facilitate many kinds of Brain Gym balance processes, including Dennison Laterality Repatterning.

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