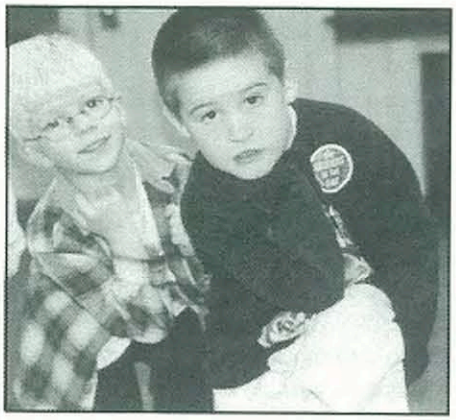
Stepping into PACE in Massachusetts

M. Candis Cosgrove

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, a teacher is someone who provides students with knowledge and insight. As an Adapted Physical Education (APE) teacher, I have had the opportunity to offer both. Teaching allows me to provide for many children—especially those with special needs—the time, space, and freedom to participate in their own physical education.

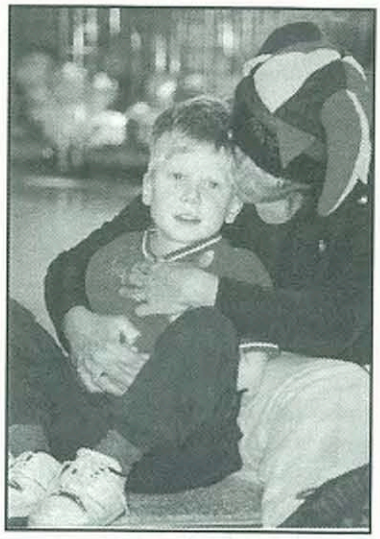
My last sixteen years of teaching have been with the Haverhill Public School System in Haverhill, Massachusetts where I have been entrusted with the job of providing an APE program for the students. My program has grown to the point that, within a six-day rotating schedule, I serve thirteen out of twenty-two different schools—and teach thirty-nine different classes. The design of my program has changed dramatically over the years: while I used to teach separate APE classes, I now provide more services in mainstream settings. My students range in age from three to twenty-two. Their challenges vary from a simple need to develop peer models to the seeming frustration of severe disability—be it cognitive, physical, or emotional. My challenge, always, is to figure out how best to support their learning.



The four PACE activities are Water, Brain Buttons (see photo at right), Cross Crawl, and Hook-ups (see photo below right). Here, Erik and Daniel do the elbow-to-knee version of Cross Crawl during their classroom routine.

I had my introduction to Brain Gym® with Bonnie Hershey at the Kinesiology Connection in Lexington, Massachusetts, in April of 1998. At last I experienced a way to deal with my personal learning blocks—by doing enjoyable, kinesthetic movements! Assessing the many needs of my students, I began adding PACE* to all my classes. After taking two more courses in Educational Kinesiology—and talking about this program with my administrators and colleagues—I was able to convince my district's Health and Physical Education Administrator to provide an introductory Brain Gym course for our department. This inspired my colleagues to add PACE to their own programs as well.

Last March, however, I felt as if I had "passed GO and collected $200" when I experienced Brain Gym for Special Education Providers[1] with Cecilia Freeman and then read her book, *I Am the Child: Using Brain Gym® with Children Who Have Special Needs.*[2] The modifications for the Brain Gym techniques truly clicked for me, and answered numerous questions regarding my students and the practical use of the three Edu-K dimensions* to enhance their learning. With so many different APE classes to teach, I was delighted to gain these insights. Being the eager "sponge" that I am, I absorbed as much of Cecilia's course as possible and saw exactly how I could make Brain Gym work in my own setting.



Andrew enjoys having teaching aide Marianne help him do his Brain Buttons.

Cecilia emphasized that children with special needs can really benefit by getting as much of the developmental intention of the Brain Gym movements as possible. She suggested having the students drink water throughout the day, and also recommended that they switch hands halfway through Brain Buttons and Hook-ups* to help activate both brain hemispheres with as much neurological

[1] Brain Gym for Special Education Providers (Brain Gym 101S) is a thirty-two hour Educational Kinesiology course that introduces Brain Gym with special modifications to aid parents, teachers, and health professionals in their work with children and adults who have special needs.

[2] Freeman, Cecilia K., M.Ed. with Gail E. Dennison. *I Am the Child: Using Brain Gym with Children Who Have Special Needs.* Ventura, CA: Edu-Kinesthetics, Inc., 1998.

The Hook-ups can be done in different variations, as shown by Meghan, Kristin, and Anna.

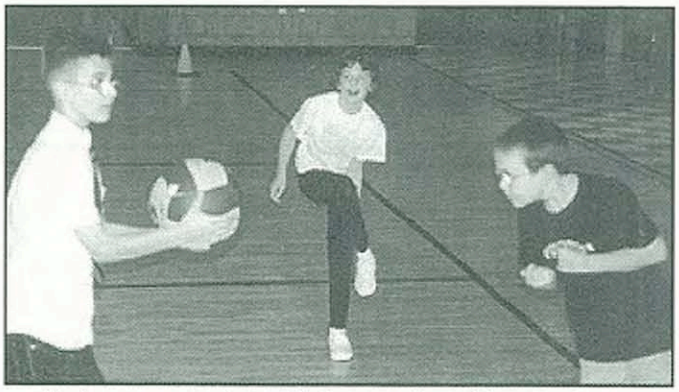
information as possible. For my classes, which are often in mainstream settings, I felt this application would be useful for *all* of the children.

When planning my class activities and aiming to stay in sync with many of the children's diverse routines, I typically use Meyer Johnson's Board Maker picture symbols as part of my program. For example, next to the attendance picture I post a drawing of the Brain Gym activity for the day. That way, everyone knows what to expect next and can visually anticipate the day's agenda.

Cecilia's color coding of the three dimensions* also makes it easy for teachers to determine which Brain Gym activities a child might need. By using blue for the laterality dimension, red for focus, and green for centering, the appropriate movements for enhancing a particular skill can be located with a glance. I usually have one child choose a color and an associated Brain Gym movement as a class activity for everyone to do together. Time is often limited, so students frequently pick Lazy 8s, which they love—doing the 8 with each hand separately and then with both together. Improvements in behavior and academic skill are often immediate, which amazes parents, staff, myself, and (most importantly) the children.

Success Stories

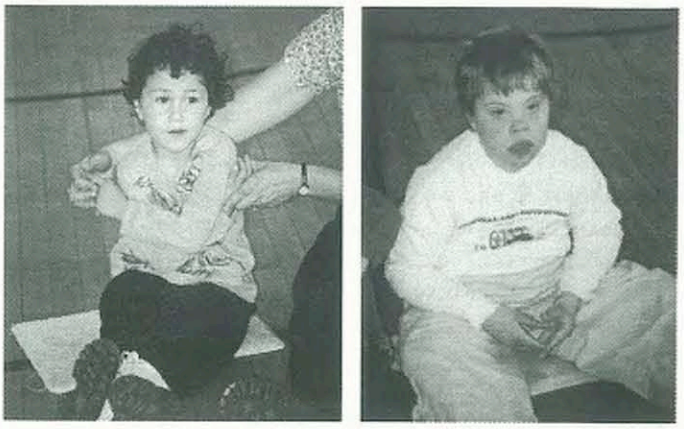
Stories about Brain Gym successes soon began spreading throughout our town. For example, one ten-year-old boy



No longer occupied with the scoreboard buzzer, Jesse (right) enjoys volleyball drills with general-ed peers.

considered to be emotionally challenged chose as his goal to work on his classroom behavior. After several sessions of Dennison Laterality Repatterning (DLR)*, he has reached a point where he has fewer outbursts and higher self-esteem. He is now assertive and social within his general education P.E. classes, and enjoys coming to school.

A boy named Billy, who at age ten was experiencing major learning blocks and consequent low self-esteem, enjoyed similar results. His music teacher noticed an improvement and asked for ways to use Brain Gym to help Billy and his instrument group. Thanks to the use of DLR and eye activation* from the laterality and focus dimensions*, Billy now demonstrates more responsible, independent decision-



Keigan (left), an active preschooler with autism, finds comfort in Hook-ups. Ryan (right), does part two of Hook-ups while listening to the next set of directions.

making. Another ten-year-old, Jesse, is autistic, and was unable to tolerate the scoreboard buzzer and other abrasive sounds. Thanks to DLR, he is now able to enjoy P.E. with his general education peers without having tantrums or putting his fingers in his ears. Also, to the surprise of many, Jesse needed no intervention when a crisis alarm drill unexpectedly occurred.

A kindergartner named Erik, diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), experienced similar changes through the Edu-K work. His mother, a paraprofessional with the preschool autism program, asked me if Brain Gym might help Erik. One vacation day, I played with Erik while focusing on his goal, which was to throw and catch better. After seeing Erik move through 3-D Repatterning*, eye activation, and Lazy 8s, his mother was in tears by the time he did the post-activity. Erik was now throwing and catching with ease! Five weeks later, his mother told me, "His self-esteem has greatly improved, which has made life *so* much happier for all of us!"

The majority of my APE classes use PACE as part of their daily classroom routines. Our outstanding results with Brain Gym have spurred my special education director to further promote the work. Since money is always a consideration, we decided to start with the purchase of the *Brain Gym® Teacher's Edition*[3] for some eighty interested teachers and staff members. These individuals reviewed the book along with an article of Cecilia's entitled "Calming Students with ADHD and Awakening Those with Special Needs."[4] I also presented sessions that I began by showing the video "Introducing Brain Gym"[5] and demonstrating PACE and some modifications of a few Brain Gym movements, along with some Brain Gym activities specific to reading and writing. Since those sessions, the principal of the largest primary school in the city has asked for assistance in teaching these techniques to his entire staff. Beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, PACE will be instated

[3] Dennison, Gail E., and Paul E. Dennison. *Brain Gym Teacher's Edition.* Ventura, CA: Edu-Kinesthetics, Inc., 1989.

[4] See *Brain Gym Journal* Volume XII, No. 2, November 1998.

[5] To order, please call Marilyn Stewart (403 381-7670) or write her at 57 Coachwood Point West, Lethbridge, AB T1K6B1, Canada.

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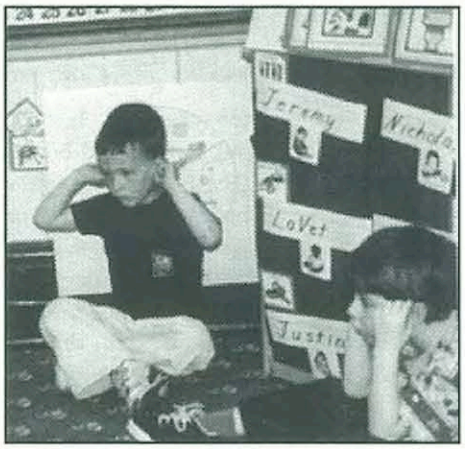
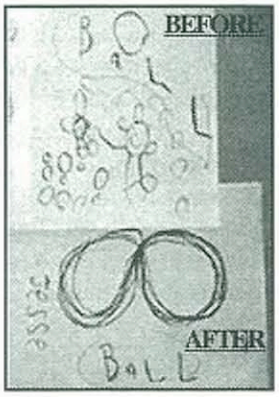
as part of the children's daily routine during morning announcements.

Improved coordination supports sports performance

According to one woman who has taught P.E. for twenty-five years, "The P.E. students demonstrate far better basic skills and fewer peer conflicts" since Brain Gym was introduced at her school. I have also had the pleasure of using Brain Gym outside of the school setting. My neighbor Alyssa, who is twelve years old, was clearly frustrated about her new metal bat, which was longer and heavier than her old one. I introduced her to Lazy 8s and she embraced them immediately. Alyssa has now adopted Lazy 8s as her "lucky charm" for baseball and uses the exercise every time she steps up to the plate. She has been named Most Valuable Player two times so far this season. My ten-year-old nephew, John, has some learning difficulties but absolutely loves to participate in many sports, especially hockey. His goal for a recent balance* was to more easily handle the stick and puck. After 3-D Repatterning* and eye activation, John was clearly faster at handling the puck. During the post-activity, he didn't even notice that the puck flipped up several times—he just *automatically* turned it down without hesitation or frustration. For both children, their newfound sports skills have carried over into the academic arena as well. Their families plan to inform their schools about the benefits of the Brain Gym program.

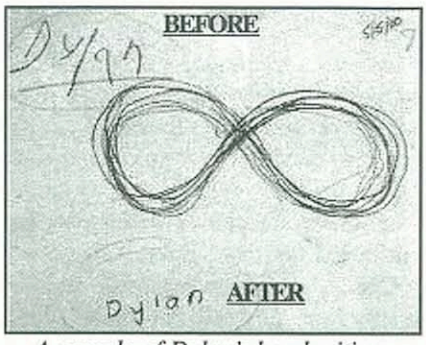


Nicholas and David, age 4, put on their Thinking Caps during circle time.



Jesse, age eight, with developmental delays, "wowed" us all with his writing improvements.

As we continue to use and share the Edu-K work, we understand more and more what Edu-K's co-creators, Paul and Gail Dennison, so clearly meant when they said that the intention behind Brain Gym is to support a shift from "trying" to "doing one's best." Cecilia Freeman takes it one step further when she says, "I can see what you *can't* do. Let's discover what you *can* do." When students make neurological shifts into greater integration of movement patterns, learning can take place in a more whole-brain way, one that naturally honors each student's unique rhythm and timing. I, along with others in my school system, am continually being "wowed" by the results of using Brain Gym with our students. We now recognize the true power and potential of learning through kinesthetics—through movement. Although the implemention of Brain Gym in our school system is still in its infancy, we yearn to learn and experience more developmental steps. Having this bright new "tool box," we plan to invite students to keep "stepping into PACE" as they get ready for each new day of learning.



A sample of Dylan's handwriting before and immediately after doing the Lazy 8.

M. Candis Cosgrove is an Adaptive Physical Education teacher in the Haverhill Public School system in Massachusetts, and has worked in education for close to twenty-five years. Her background is in Therepeutic Recreation and early childhood primary education. Candis is a recipient of the Edu-K Teaching Through Movement Award for 1999-2000.▲

Quality Physical Education: A Key to Academic Success

Three hundred physical educators were introduced to Brain Gym by keynote speaker Dr. Paul E. Dennison at the California Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance's Fall Physical Education Leadership Conference at Sacramento, October 2000.

Dr. Dennison cited research that supports the relationship of movement, learning, and academic achievement. Dennison reminded teachers that their role in the schools, to bring movement back into the classroom, is a responsibility central to the academic program and not an optional or expendable extra. After these educators experienced the power of Brain Gym to make learning concrete, they realized that quality physical education programs and active lifestyles are truly the basis of student success.