



Newspaper: **Pekin Daily Times**

Date: **Monday, January 25, 1993**

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Photographer:

Edu-Kinesis: Learning Through Motion

Peoria -At the school where J. R. attends, they give a letter grade for behavior. His wasn't good.

J. R., 7, didn't receive an A or a B- not even a C. He's been having some behavioral problems, his mother, D. H. said.

But things are looking up for J. R. since his mother enrolled him in Edu-Kinesthetics, offered through Options in Health and Education. What had been Ds and Fs on his report card from Roosevelt School now are As.

He's also grown in more ways than just his ability to learn, his mother said. "...He is a much happier boy."

Edu-Kinesthetics – learning through movement – uses activities and exercises to reduce physical stress, which enables the mind to work and learn more efficiently, said Helen Cox, director of the Options in Health and Education Learning Center of Peoria.

At Options, the staff is more concerned with a child's learning process than in achievement. As the child learns to learn, achievement follows, Helen said.

Stress affects a person's ability to learn, she said.

When a person recalls things learned under stress, they recall the stressful situation. Stress kills the excitement that children originally have when they enter the school system."

Helen says there are three dimensions to the brain – the right and left hemispheres which deal with communication, top and bottom which are responsible for organization and front and back which are the centers of comprehension.

Through Edu-Kinesthetics, students such as J. R. learn exercises that help access areas of the brain they are not using, alleviate stress, and help the child focus on a particular task and ways to relax.

The exercises are better known as "Brain Gym®" – a series of specifically conceived movements which get the brain and body working together. Helen notes it takes about 1,200 repetitions for a person to learn a new skill, such as a baby learning to walk.

"Water is the only drink children may have during the exercises. It increases the flow of hemoglobin, which increases the flow of oxygen to the brain," Helen said.

The goal at Options is to use exercises to kick-start the learning processes.

"When a person faces something new to learn, they have to slow down to be able to understand it," Helen said.

"When they have had the information before, it is a review and they comprehend it much quicker – this is the high-gear state. But when there is new information to be absorbed, they have to slow down, look at the details and review the material a couple of times.

"...Some people do not automatically go through this process and they become confused and feel stress from the situation," she said.

That's where the exercises come in. They activate the automatic learning process "so a person doesn't have to tell themselves to slow down to absorb the new material."

Helen said Edu-Kinesthetics can be as useful in preschool and adult education as it is with school-aged children.

"One of my goals is to work with adult literacy," Helen said. "These people have often tried very hard in the traditional learning methods and have been unable to succeed. For them, maybe it is time to try a new approach."

"My second goal is to get into the preschool level. I want to correct the problems children are having learning before they enter the traditional school system."

Options' staff works with students one-on-one. The instructors also always try to involve the family.

"I like the family approach to things. It is important for the parents to know who we are, what we are doing and where we hope to go. We furnish a book for the child and the parents that explains the program and the exercises."

"It is also helpful when the parents help the child with the exercises at home and encourage the child to eat right."

Helen is a believer in proper diet because "what we put into our bodies has a lot to do with how we function. Food coloring, sugar and preservatives for instance can cause problems. People need a good diet to function properly."

"Options also has been working with students' with vision perception problems," Helen said.

Vision perception involves how well eyes and hands coordinate, affects depth perception and visual memory distance and provides the brain with information about an object's form, size and shape.

"When people have visual perception problems, their reading is slowed and comprehension impaired because they are concentrating more on reading the individual words rather than on what the sentences mean, Helen said.

Options can help.

"Brain Gym® assists in making visual perception automatic," she said.

The therapy includes eye exercises that train the eye muscles to be coordinated and work effectively with the brain.

J. R. has recently graduated from his thinking skills/movement reeducation program. He is now taking a course in listening skills.

"What did you do at school today?" his Options teacher asked on the last day of his first program.

J. R., smiling, answered. "I got a sticker for being good."