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'Inner Peace' Offers Options for Problems: Woman Tries to Cure Everything from Fat to Bad Grades

It is difficult for the average person to understand what's happening in the little white house in the 200 block of East Washington in East Peoria.

The sign in the yard reads "Options" in large, bold letters, followed by slightly less bold, "in Health & Education Learning Center."

"I chose 'Options,' " says founder Helen Cox, "because I used to think that if you had a problem, you had to find the one right answer."

"Now, I feel like, you've got to figure out all the alternatives, then choose the one that's best for you."

The alternatives offered there range from personalized, individual counseling sessions on nutrition, health and spiritual matters to a class called "College Entrance Testing Preparation," which offers stress-reduction methods designed to help students "function at full potential" during the test.

In between, one can get a herbal body wrap in the kitchen, buy natural herbs and dietary supplements, or attend a variety of workshops and lectures scheduled periodically.

For instance, the next session of the 'Inner Peace Movement' begins the first Tuesday of this month. The weekly support group is designed to help people get in touch with "the healer within."

"Creative Self-Awareness" sessions, for anyone 6 or older, started late last month. The classes use the arts to help students deal with self-esteem, handling conflicts and to stimulate motivation.

Although the programs revolve around the idea of holistic health - which is fast gaining acceptance in the traditional medical and educational communities - some of the choices dance on the extreme edges of that philosophy.

An upcoming six-hour lecture is on iridology, the practice of assessing health by studying the iris. That lecture is one of a four -part series which also includes lectures on herbs, muscle testing and starting your own business.

Depending on the client, Helen may also use techniques in the private counseling session that range from transformational fantasy, which, in short, is using the imagination to resolve conflicts, or rebirthing, resolving conflicts by going back to the moment of birth.

Helen, a registered nurse with degrees from Methodist Medical Center's School of Nursing and Bradley University, recognizes that what goes on there is not for everyone.

"I am only a guide," she emphasizes. "I am not there to write down the rules, or to say 'Here's what you should do.' That's not where I am."

"I lose people because of that," she says. "Not everybody is ready to do that."

And she is careful not to say anything that might give the impression she might tell someone what to do, one reason she is reluctant to discuss iridology.

"No way can I say, 'This is your problem and this is what you need to do.' That could be interpreted as diagnosing and prescribing, or practicing medicine without a license."

Instead, she may say, "If I were you, this is what I'd do," or "Historically, this has been useful."

Helen estimates between 10 and 20 people attend the center a day, either for her counseling sessions, the body wraps, or the learning center programs, which are geared to children. She deals mainly the private counseling and "Inner Peace" sessions, while part-time instructors, including some teachers, conduct other workshops, lectures, and the learning center programs.

As different as one program seems from the other, they are tied together by a theory called Edu-Kinesthetics.

"The body and the brain have to be in balance to have good health," she says. "What we do in all of these programs is use Edu-Kinesthetics to get the body and brain working together."

Edu-Kinesthetics, short for educational kinesiology and sometimes called [Brain Gym®](#), which is a system of exercises designed to "switch on" the whole brain, and thus, improve learning ability.

Developed by Dr. Paul Dennison of the University of California in 1981, the theory was adapted to the learning center's programs by Al Milliren, a former Illinois State University instructor who now runs a clinic in Normal.



The Options in Health and Education Learning Center is located in a small white house at 240 E. Washington, East Peoria.

According to the theory, changes in learning and behavior can be affected by a series of exercises designed to integrate the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

Milliren describes Edu-Kinesthetics as a "novel extension" of the Doman/Delacato learning theory. That theory, popular in the 1960s, was based on the idea that a series of creeping and crawling exercises helped reverse brain damage and improved children's reading ability.

"They got into a lot of heat because people couldn't duplicate their results," Milliren says.

And Edu-Kinesthetics itself is on the "cutting edge," he says.

Elda Buchanan and Claire Etaugh, professors at Bradley University who specialize in learning disabilities and child development respectively, were skeptical of the Doman/Delacato theory, though both said they were not familiar with Edu-Kinesthetics.

"To my knowledge, there is no scientific evidence to support the basic theory of cause and effect between motor activity and neurological organization in language and reading," Buchanan says. "We know there is a relationship, but not necessarily that it's a cause-and-effect relationship."

Adds Etaugh: "Over the years, various claims have been made, but there's no good systematic evidence to support or refute those claims. It's easy to make claims, much harder to prove them."

Milliren admits that most of the evidence he has is anecdotal rather than clinical.

"But we need to be real careful in getting hung up on everything having a research basis. Look at how long it took to acknowledge that people had individual learning styles. This just goes a step further in acknowledging that there's a real strong connection between body and mind."

None of those questions seem to bother Helen.

"People who come, come to get well," she says. "The same is true of the learning center, she says. Parents send their children because they've heard that the program works."

Helen began studying these out-of-the-mainstream techniques in 1979 after she went to a chiropractor for her own health problems. She became a student of holistic health, in a sense, attending workshops and conferences and exchanging information with friends.

She began seeing people in her home, "as a hobby," in the 1980s.

Eventually, she says, her husband told her she should start charging for her services. The center opened in East Peoria in 1987 and moved to the current location last year.

Helen's counseling sessions are \$20 an hour. Other prices range from \$3 a session for the Inner Peace Movement support group to \$125 for the six-hour iridology lecture.



Amy Cox, 13, going through testing exercises designed to improve reading.