



Newspaper: **Journal Star**
Date: **July 14, 1988**
Author: **Susan Goodale**
Photographer: **Al Harkrader**

No lazy brains in this classroom

An elementary school student sits at a computer, working through a tutorial on fractions. To her right two other students work on multiplication fractions as a teacher looks on, occasionally giving an explanation or a brief word of encouragement.

What distinguishes scene from any traditional school classroom is that there are no desks in rows. Classes consist of 2 to 3 students. And between the academic exercises are exercises in movement, coordination, and balance.

Terms like "Double Doodles," "Lazy 8's," "Cross Crawls," and "Balance Buttons" are as much a part of the educational vocabulary as are numerators and denominators.

According to Helen Cox, director of the Options Center, integrating exercises in physical movement, visual imagery, and hand-eye coordination can enhance one's ability to accept, process and use information ranging from the content areas of math and reading to critical thinking and creative expression through the fine arts.

This program was created by Dr. Al Milliren, EdD at Illinois State University and in private counseling practice in the Bloomington-Normal area. The basis of the program is Brain Gym® developed by Paul Dennison, Ph.D.



Youngsters gathered around music instructor Carol Spayer for a song, upper right, J.G., 8, and from left, Helen Cox, director of Options Center, P.G. 6 ½, N.M., 12, Amy Cox, 13, and Nicole Cox, 10.

According to M. E., special education teacher who works with the Options Center as a teacher and educational consultant, "There are many different styles of learning. What Brain Gym® does is try to provide a way for the child to process information and give back a tangible product."

She adds, "As we integrate exercises in movement, balance, relaxation and coordination, we're actually helping a child to use both the left and right hemispheres of the brains learning can take place."

One of the center's basic textbooks is Brain-Gym® by Paul E. Dennison, Ph.D. and Gail F. Dennison.

M. E., says, "We know it works. We've seen it work to enhance abilities and help students overcome deficiencies."

Helen's two daughters, Amy, 13, and Nicole, 10, are both enthusiastic participants in the program.

Amy says, "I really like it. My math skills seem to be improving. I can do the math drills faster and more accurately."

M. S., the mother of another student in the program, notes, "My son could read, but now is starting to enjoy it. Before, it was a chore for him."

Helen feels that although the center now serves preschool through high school-age students, adults could also benefit from the Brain Gym® approach.

She says, "We all can improve, and this program works not only with people who have experienced some difficulty learning, but it also helps people maximize their potential."

Exercises in muscle-eye coordination are often preceded by visual imagery in which the student visualizes himself successfully doing an activity. Positive feedback from the teacher helps reduce stress and helps build self-esteem in the student.

"We use a total approach to learning," says M. E. "We've known for a long time that not all students learn in the same way. Traditional classrooms are based on left brain learning. The right brain is associated with the body. The Brain Gym® approach integrates both so they can



P.G., 6 1/2 claps her hands to "Hand Jive" record.

work together."

Helen and M. E. also believe that some students experience stress in traditional learning situations. To help students deal with that stress, they teach self-esteem and relaxation as a part of their curriculum.

The center currently has drawn students not only from the Peoria and East Peoria areas, but from Roanoke, Chillicothe, Eureka, Brimfield and other neighboring communities.

Parents are encouraged to assist students with exercises at home and also participate in the Options Center family night movement and activities classes offered at the Fondulac Park District Administration Building. Helen says, " With this approach the whole family can become active in their student's development."