

BRAINGYM®

JENNIFER STEPHENSON AND KEVIN WHELDALL

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many young students experience difficulties in developing academic skills such as reading, writing, and spelling. Some of these students may also present as clumsy and uncoordinated.

PROPOSED SOLUTION/ INTERVENTION

BrainGym® (also known as educational kinesiology or Edu-K) was originally developed by Dr Paul Dennison and his wife to help students with learning disabilities but it is now claimed to benefit anyone by improving concentration, memory, reading, writing, organizing, listening and motor co-ordination. It is also claimed to reduce stress and anxiety and to improve behaviour and emotional balance. There are 26 movements or exercises (such as standing on one leg with eyes shut while chanting) that are to be learned and practised.

THE THEORETICAL RATIONALE – HOW DOES IT WORK?

BrainGym® is a variant of the perceptual motor programs that have a long and controversial history in special education. Dennison claims that his movement activities work by integrating and improving connections within the brain and through integrating the brain, the senses and the body. The ability to coordinate the two sides of the brain, or laterality, is claimed to be particularly important for the development of reading and writing. It is claimed that the prescribed movements will remediate and develop the basic processes and functions within the brain required for learning.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR ITS EFFICACY?

The lack of evidence for the effect of perceptual motor programs like BrainGym® on academic skills has been well documented since the 1980s. Many BrainGym® websites claim a research base testifying to the efficacy of the activities, but most of the studies cited have been published in BrainGym®'s own non-refereed house journal. There appear to be no experimental studies published in peer-reviewed research journals that support the claims made for the effectiveness of BrainGym® in improving academic performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the lack of credible supporting evidence for the efficacy of BrainGym® activities and other perceptual motor programs in bringing about improvement in academic performance, there is little to recommend this approach.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Teacher time devoted to these activities would be better spent specifically targeting the academic skill deficits of low-progress students with appropriate instruction, using methods of proven efficacy.

THE MUSEC VERDICT: NOT PROVEN.

Key references may be found at:
http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/co_brief.aspx

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