

What's the Buzz about Brain Gym[®]?

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Some of you may have yet to experience the Brain Gym[®] program, even though both Touch for Health and Brain Gym branch from the same kinesiology tree, with George Goodheart's Applied Kinesiology at the base. I find it fascinating and wonderful to note the commonalities and close ties of the two modalities.

Brain Gym founders, Paul Dennison, Ph.D. and Gail Dennison, were both trained in Touch for Health. In 1979, Paul took the Touch for Health courses at the TFH Foundation in Pasadena where he met the founder John Thie. While working with students as a reading teacher in his Valley Remedial Group Learning Centers in California, Paul made the intuitive leap to use muscle testing as a teaching and anchoring tool. Following his Touch for Health certification course, Paul wrote a letter to himself stating his goal of writing a book and starting Edu-Kinesthetics, a new method of kinesiology. Edu-Kinesthetics evolved into Educational Kinesiology when established as a non-profit foundation in 1987 and is currently doing business as Brain Gym[®] International.

In 1981, Paul Dennison wrote his ground-breaking book *Switching On*, documenting his success in using muscle testing and other simple movements for people with dyslexia. Paul's own learning challenges were the driving force in his exploration of creating ways to help others. As an educator, he drew from what he had learned in Touch for Health, vision training, Jin Shin Jitsu as well as from his training as a marathon runner when creating an educational branch to the kinesiology tree begun by George Goodheart. Gail's input based on her movement, dance, Touch for Health and vision training background has contributed to the on-going growth of the Brain Gym curriculum.

Brain Gym was the first in its field to explore intentional movements and their relationship to developmental physical skills, cognition, and behavior. Each movement is, in the way that it's used, unique to Brain Gym.

Paul intuitively used the supraspinatus, pectoralis major clavicular and latissimus dorsi muscles from Touch for Health prior to making the connection to the body dimensions—side to side, top and bottom, front and back. He soon discovered that these connections are perfect representatives for the three dimensions, later to be known in Brain Gym as the Laterality, Centering and Focus Dimensions.

The Three Dimensions:

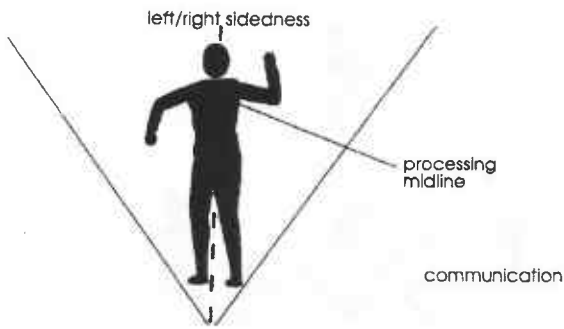
We naturally move in a coordinated fashion within the three dimensions of laterality (side to side), centering (top to bottom) and focus (front to back). There are times when we may be feeling "off", such as when we are spinning our wheels, feeling stuck, overwhelmed or stressed. Looking at the dimensions may provide insight into what could use support allowing one to reclaim balance along with the joy of learning.

We naturally dance between feeling like "we've got it", "we're getting it" and "huh?" (where stressors are evident). When we slow down and notice in which of these states we are currently operating, we can evaluate how the current state is serving us and whether support would be useful in shifting to a more efficient learning/performance state. We can then choose/not choose to do activities (from Brain Gym, TFH or many other modalities), which may move us into feeling more integrated.

We can get a better idea of these learning states by looking the Three Dimensions of the Brain Gym program.

Let's begin with the **Laterality Dimension**.

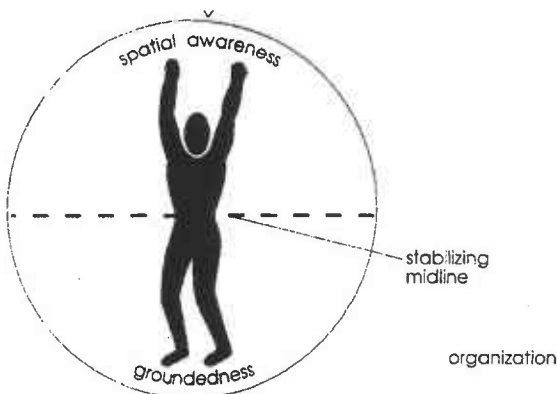
This dimensional midline is right down the center of the body, dividing left and right and has to do with the communication between the right and left hemispheres of the brain as well as the right and left sides of the body – the ability to move and think at the same time.



This is considered the “processing midline” where both eyes, ears, and hands are involved with reading, writing and manipulating objects. There is a flow of information between both hemispheres of the brain, allowing for the creative space of self-expression to develop, the possibility to see the whole picture and the details, and the ability to consider a situation in context.

The supraspinatus muscle represents the Laterality Dimension. In Touch for Health this muscle represents the central meridian associated with the statement, “I am a success”. In Brain Gym-eze we call the range of motion/muscle check “The Robot” and consider “What are my thoughts?”

The **Centering Dimension** has a midline about waist/hip level dividing the top and the bottom of the body.

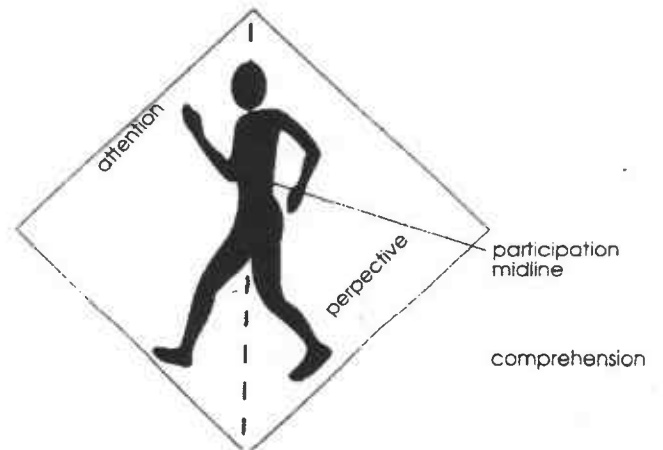


This dimension is about accessing our emotions. The questions of “Am I connected to those around me and the world?” and “Do I belong?” represent the Centering Dimension.

When this dimension is not available the “fight or flight” survival mechanisms may get triggered. Furthermore, the ability to feel grounded and centered in this world may be impeded when this “stabilization” midline is not engaged. This is where we notice our level of connection. Is it safe enough to reach out and gather in new information on a stable base?

In Brain Gym, the pectoralis major clavicular muscles represents the Centering Dimension. The nickname for this range of motion is “The Swimmer”; it has to do the top and bottom of the body noticeable with the up and down motion of the muscle check. In Touch for Health, the pectoralis major clavicular is used when checking the stomach meridian. This meridian has to do with, “I am content and blessed” – or not?

The last of the 3 dimensions is the **Focus Dimension** with its midline going up the side of the body dividing the body’s front and back.



This dimension is thought of as the “participation” midline. The feeling of wanting to move forward and engage in the world or hang back and withdraw describes this dimension, as well as the ability to see new possibilities and take purposeful action. When this dimension is not in balance, the survival mechanism of “freeze” may come into play.

The latissimus dorsi muscle helps demonstrate this dimension; Brain Gym refers to this range of motion/muscle check as “The Penguin”. In Touch for Health, the latissimus dorsi corresponds with the spleen meridian – the “I relax and do my best”

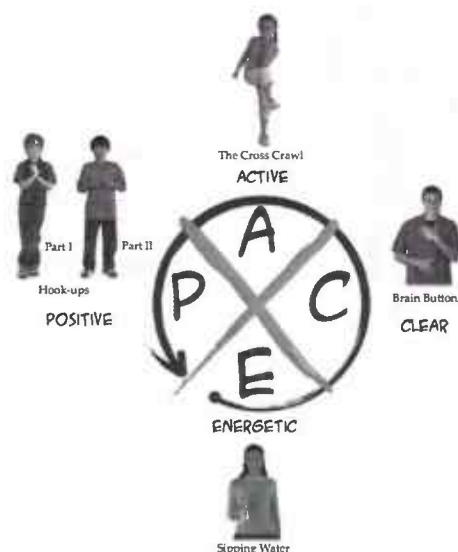
meridian. It has a lot to do with posture. In Brain Gym, we ask the questions: “What am I sensing?”, “Where am I in space?” and “How am I comprehending what is happening?”

Both the Centering and Focus Dimensions deal with the survival system, a vital protective mechanism for the brain/body system. The challenge is noticing when this survival response is truly working to benefit and protect us versus when the perceived danger is a pattern no longer necessary for our survival. When all three of these dimensions are balanced and available we are in the “flow” of life. When we pause and notice that something is out of synch, we can choose to pull from our individualized toolboxes of wondrous modalities to assist us in getting back into balance.

In Touch for Health, one tool available is to “switch on” by doing:

- Up/down switching – rubbing above and below the lips while holding the navel and “switching on” the central and governing meridians
- Left/right switching—rubbing the K27’s while holding the navel to “switch on” the kidney meridian and assist with eye tracking
- Front/back switching—rubbing the tailbone while holding the navel to “switch on” the governing meridian
- Central meridian sweep—sweeping up and down the central meridian (pubic bone to lower lip) and finishing with 3 sweeps going up the body
- Checking for hydration

In Brain Gym, we do PACE, which is an acronym for **P**ositive, **A**ctive, **C**lear and **E**nergetic. Much like the “switching on” activities above, the PACE activities are preparatory – getting us ready for whatever is next.



The acronym begins with:

- “**E**” stands for Energetic--Sipping Water. We are chemical and electrical beings and we know that water is a conductor of electricity. When dehydrated, our electrical system is not able to function at it best. Because our brains and bodies are comprised of a large amount of water, sipping water is supportive.
- “**C**” stands for Clear – Brain Buttons. This element may look familiar as it involves rubbing the K27 points while holding the navel as in the side to side switching mentioned above. The hands placed below the collarbone and on the navel provide a physical reference of our vertical and horizontal planes.
- “**A**” stands for Active—The Cross Crawl. By alternately touching hand to opposite knee, we are using both sides of the body while crossing the Laterality midline. This gross motor movement requires balance and stability while supporting the walking gait.
- “**P**” stands for Positive—The Hook-ups. This movement has been adapted from Wayne Cook and what was known as Cook’s Hook-ups. To do Part One of this activity, cross your ankles and outstretch your arms at shoulder level. Turn your palms out, thumbs down and cross one hand over the other interlacing your fingers. Draw

your arms under and up to rest comfortably on your chest while touching your tongue to the roof of your mouth. In Part Two uncross your feet and arms touching the thumbs and fingers together while resting the tongue on the roof of your mouth.

When we are in a “fight or flight” response our bodies’ energy goes to our extremities to run or stay and fight off our dragons. In Part One of Hook-ups we are bringing our extremities to our center for grounding and balance. According to author and neurophysiologist, Carla Hannaford, “Touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth, stimulates the tongue ligaments which connect to the vestibular system, thus activating the RAS [Reticular Activating System] for focus and balance, and also helps to release a tongue thrust caused by postural imbalance.” Part Two represents the connection of the left and right hemispheres allowing for ease of neural communication and stability.

**Please note that any of these activities can be adapted as needed and can be done standing, sitting or lying down.*

As with Touch for Health, reading about Brain Gym is entirely different from experiencing it. The proof is in the experience. With your skills and muscle testing knowledge, Brain Gym makes intuitive sense. You know about movement and participation. And as Paul Dennison says, “Movement is the door to learning.” Come experience the excitement of the synthesis of these modalities by taking a Brain Gym class or receiving a balance!

Sources:

Dennison, Paul E. and Gail E. *Brain Gym[®] 101: Balance for Daily Life*, Ventura, CA: Edu-Kinesthetics, 2007.

Dennison, Paul E. and Gail E. *Brain Gym[®] Teacher’s Edition, The Companion Guide to Brain Gym[®]: Simple Activities for Whole-Brain Learning*, Ventura, CA: Edu-Kinesthetics, 2010.

Dennison, Paul E. *Switching On: the Whole Brain Answer to Dyslexia*, Ventura, CA: Edu-Kinesthetics, 1981.

Hannaford, Carla. *Smart Moves: Why Learning is Not All in Your Head*, Salt Lake City; Great River Books, 2005.

Resources:

Brain Gym[®] 101 is the 24-hour entry level course is taught in over 87 countries around the world and translated into more than 40 languages. The foundation office resides in Ventura, California and can be found at www.braingym.org. As with Touch for Health, both modalities are simple, profound and international in scope.

Brain Gym[®] International is committed to the principle that moving with intention leads to optimal learning. Through our outstanding instructors and movement-based programs, we empower all ages to reclaim the joy of living.

Moving with intention.

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