

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES
HORICON SCHOOL PILOT PROGRAM: MOVEMENT LESSONS
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The Modality

The Anat Baniel Method for Children, an evolution of the work of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, is based on the premise that the child's brain is almost always available for potent learning, regardless of the developmental issue or injury. This learning process can benefit children with a host of unspecified as well as diagnosed issues.

The Anat Baniel Method considers that many developmental challenges reflect an interruption in the conversation between the child's brain and the world around it. It is often possible to get that conversation started in gentle ways that directly communicate with the nervous system of the child, primarily through movement and non-verbal kinesthetic experiences. Through this process, developmental gaps caused by various conditions and traumas get filled in.

The brain does not learn through repetition alone, and does not respond positively to being forced. Instead, movement practitioners engage the child in a gentle movement process that provides the brain with the conditions and information required to attain the different skills and developmental milestones. In this process the child learns the missing elements upon which the skills are built. The child then spontaneously learns to do what he or she couldn't do before.

The Horicon Pilot Program and Outcomes

The Horicon Pilot Program was designed to assess whether students with developmental and/or learning challenges exhibited different physical, mental, and emotional skills, behaviors, affect, and performance after receiving a series of regular movement lessons. Six students with diverse challenges were selected by the school. The lessons were given by Sylvia Shordike, a certified practitioner of the Anat Baniel and Feldenkrais methods. Five of the six students completed the Pilot Program, each receiving between 13 and 18 individual half-hour lessons over a two-month period ending March 25, 2009. Parents and Teachers were interviewed before and at the end of the Pilot Program.

The individualized lessons included, among other elements, the basic development of orientation, differentiation, flexion and extension, rotation, hand and eye coordination, crawling, rolling, and standing functions, balance, rhythm and timing, and jumping.

In their closing interviews, parents and teachers reported that five out of six students exhibited various positive changes at home and in the classroom during the course of the Pilot Program. Although cause and effect cannot be definitively established in this brief program, these changes are consistent with the practitioner's professional experience outside of the school environment giving movement lessons to children.

The Student-Specific Outcomes

The following pages offer a preliminary summary of the lessons and outcomes for the six participating students. A more detailed video report is being prepared.

STUDENT #1
Third Grade, Age 9

Presenting Issues:

Behind normal academic skill level, particularly in reading and math.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Behind academically in all areas.
- Physically a little clumsy; can't write in a straight line.
- Lacks self-confidence, believes she can't do or know things.
- Immature attention seeking.
- Easily distracted, hard time focusing.

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Difficulty in focusing and completing tasks at home.
- Does not believe in herself.
- Very shy, doesn't take risks.
- Impatient, gives up quickly.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 18 half-hour lessons between February 1 and March 25, 2009.
- Learning body awareness and directionality: distinguishing left and right, up down, etc.
- Hand and eye coordination.
- Balance, timing, and rhythm.
- Learning to feel relationship between her head and pelvis in space and in body.
- Differentiating body parts and their actions; learning weight-bearing skills.
- Making distinctions between shapes, sounds, speed and movements.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Slowed down and learned self observation.
- Learned to feel and distinguish left and right.
- More body awareness and control of movement.
- Improved awareness of lower back extensor muscles in support of body movement.
- Improved communications skills.
- Improved ability to follow verbal instructions and translate them into movement.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Able to focus better.
- Able to follow through on a given task.
- Shows more patience with her little sister.
- Improved communication skills.
- Higher self-esteem and more trust in a herself.
- More motivated to do things.

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- For first time volunteers to read out loud in reading class.
- Able to write more clearly, and in straight line; spelling improved.
- More presence and able to focus more in class; fewer "false starts".
- Emotionally more stable and less attention-seeking.
- More self esteem and improved social skills with classmates.

STUDENT #2
Seventh Grade, Age 12

Presenting Issues:

Behind in physical maturity and balance.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Loses balance in unusual situations, e.g. falls backwards when he pushes, falls off chair in class.
- Physically clumsy, e.g. gets hit in face during ballgames and P.E.
- Emotionally immature; arguments and conflict make him cry; he sticks to his brother.
- Intelligent but lacks motivation.

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- No motivation to be physically active or play outside; rarely runs.
- Acts lazy; lets his brother do things for him.
- Lacks joyfulness.
- Eats too much.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 18 half-hour lessons between February 1 and March 25, 2009.
- Learning better body awareness, differentiating body parts and how to use them.
- Practicing balance, rhythm, timing, coordination.
- Using body weight and gravity to carry himself physically with more ease and grace.
- Learning specific movements involving rolling, coming from sitting to standing.
- Relaxing extreme tension and stiffness in neck muscles.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Began with little concept of own weight or use of body; insecure in own body.
- He leaned backwards, did not use lower back, had extremely tight and shortened neck muscles.
- Quickly learned and integrated movement lessons.
- Improved body awareness, body image, and sense of self.
- More coordinated and purposeful movements.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Now cares about his appearance and hygiene.
- More aware of eating patterns and eats less.
- Has started to run a lot and is more athletic.
- Has "better posture."
- Feels good about himself, is more mature and happier.

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- More outgoing.
- Participates more actively in P.E. class rather than finding excuses not to.
- Seems happier and more active in his school work; does better at school tasks.
- More responsible and more motivated.
- Shows an interest in dancing.

STUDENT #3
Third Grade, Age 8

Presenting Issues:

Behind grade level, in reading and maturity.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Behind in maturity and what he should know.
- Reading at second grade level.
- His "balance seems off".

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Poor ability to communicate and convey his meaning.
- Extremely sensitive; shuts down if approached strongly.
- Self-esteem issues.
- Cries if he thinks he is in trouble.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 13 half-hour lessons between February 1 and March 25, 2009.
- Learning to relax very high muscle tension.
- Working with extreme rigidity in ankles, arms, and hands.
- Working with extreme tension in neck and its effect on head, eyes, breathing, general comfort.
- Working with directionality, distinguishing left and right.
- Differentiating between head, eye, and shoulder movements.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Improved sense of directionality, distinguishing left and right.
- General decrease in muscle tension.
- Improved balance.
- Able to carry himself physically with less effort.
- More comfortable communicating.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Able to complete a full sentence, better vocabulary, makes better sense.
- Overall better communication skills.
- Improved reading skill; can read a full paragraph.
- More confident, better self-esteem; he has figured out "where he is".
- More mature and patient, not as easily frustrated.
- He enjoyed the lessons, coming home and showing the movements.

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Volunteers to read out loud in reading class.
- More self-confidence and better self-esteem; willing to try more.
- More relaxed.
- Clear eye contact.
- More social and "in the thick of things", plays with classmates more during P.E.

STUDENT #4
Fifth Grade, Age 11

Presenting Issues:

Behind his grade level, especially in math, and poor handwriting.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Does not recall facts or retain information from day to day.
- Not much eye contact.
- Doesn't seem happy, or smile much.
- Extremely sensitive; crouches for hours when criticized.
- When running, no articulation through foot and ankle.

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Struggles with homework.
- Handwriting undeveloped.
- Takes a long time to get through any task, and gets frustrated about it.
- When asked to do something shuts down and does not communicate.
- In conflict, shuts down and does not look at you or communicate.
- Most interested in video games.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 18 half-hour lessons between February 1 and March 25, 2009.
- Learning to slow down, feel himself, and develop a positive body image.
- Learning to relax very high muscle tension and stiffness in ankles, neck, extremities.
- Learning to differentiate and control body parts, movement, and thinking.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Began lessons restless, absent, held and defended, with large undifferentiated movements.
- Learned to make clear eye contact.
- Learned to be "present" for the lessons.
- Learned to follow verbal instructions and translate them into movement.
- Exhibited more self-confidence and better body image.
- Less muscle tension.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- "Starting to grow up," more mature.
- Seems happier.
- Communicates with friends by texting.
- Doesn't shut down anymore.
- More motivated to do homework.

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- More aware of his body, feeling himself more.
- More present when shaking hands, and more eye contact.
- Emotionally stronger, more purposeful, wants more of the world (this includes getting out of seat a lot to do different things, which can be disturbing in the class setting).
- During recess still avoids interaction or play at times.
- Wants student to receive more of this work.

STUDENT #5
Second Grade, Age 8

Presenting Issues:

Far below grade level and general functioning.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Loses facts and information from day to day.
- Far behind in academics.
- No abstract thinking.
- Poor sense of direction; takes long, complicated paths to walk from A to B.
- Teacher's Aid supports her throughout the day.

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- One of triplets.
- Has always been slow, behind the others.
- Doesn't walk well, falls down often, insecure going up and down stairs.
- Poor communication with parents.
- Frequent temper tantrums, throws herself on ground.
- Destroys books since very small.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 17 half-hour lessons between February 1 and March 25, 2009.
- Working with movement/drawing/painting to instill sense of directionality: left, right, midline, front, back, up, down.
- Learning to relax extreme muscle tension and protective holding patterns.
- Developing body awareness, sense of skeleton and muscles.
- Creating sense of confidence and success through movement.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Slow but significant changes:
- Improved sense of direction.
- Improved balance.
- Less muscle tension.
- Became more present in lessons, better contact.
- Shift from inability to follow even simple movement instructions to following more and more complex instructions.
- Shift from dull affect to expressions of joy and self-esteem.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Fewer temper tantrums.
- Not destroying things lately.
- Knows her left from right.
- Better communication.
- Walks up and down stairs with more security.

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Fewer extremes in behavior, more "in the middle".
- Would like this student to receive more body awareness work.

STUDENT #6
Second Grade, Age 8
(Withdrew from Pilot Program)

Presenting Issues:

Repeating second grade; diagnosed ADHD.

Teacher's Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Trouble focusing, can't hold still.
- Behind in reading, poor handwriting.

Parents' Pre-Lesson Observations:

- Concerned by poor academics.
- Daily fights about homework and house work tasks.
- Poor communication skills.
- When frustrated hits himself in the face, acts like 2 or 3 year old, e.g. tantrums.

Course and Focus of Movement Lessons:

- Received 9 half-hour lessons before withdrawing from Pilot Program.
- Slowing down nervous system.
- Learning hand and eye coordination.
- Relaxing extreme tension and stiffness in neck muscles, wrists and ankles.

Practitioner's Observations:

- Better communication and cooperation, e.g. came by himself to the lesson.
- He preferred verbal instructions, but these had no effect on his restlessness.
- With hands-on touch and movement his nervous system quieted down.
- Continued to exhibit extreme and unpredictable mood changes.
- After a two-week break in lessons, he "playfully" opposed instructions in apparent attempt to control the lessons. Practitioner at that point asked both student and parents for more cooperation.
- Shortly thereafter, he withdrew from the pilot program.

Parent's Post-Lesson Observations:

- None

Teacher's Post-Lesson Observations:

- Teacher reported that pulling student out of his normal program for the movement lessons created additional challenges of transition for this student, and he was acting out more.
- Teacher would like more movement lessons for this student to improve body awareness, but after the regular class day.