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PHOTO BY WENDY TORELLO

Carolyn Nyland from the Kaleidoscope Learning Center leads area parents and educators in a Brain Gym exercise of unrolling their ears Monday morning in St. Mary's School gymnasium. The program shows parents and educators how to use physical activity to help students communicate, focus and organize better.

Brain Gym explains how to help pupils stay on task

By Jill Gosche, jgosche@advertiser-tribune.com

Sticking pencils into erasers, leaning back in classroom chairs, slouching down and not paying attention are all annoyances to elementary teachers.

About 25 parents and educators gathered in the gymnasium of St. Mary's School Monday morning to hear Carolyn Nyland, a consultant and instructor through the Kaleidoscope Learning Center, explain the Brain Gym program.

She helped them prevent those bothersome habits through the practice of Brain Gym physical exercises.

"These movements can be done at any place at any time. They are simple and practical," Nyland said. "It's absolutely for anyone, for any age."

Carolyn Price, a teacher at the school, has arranged for talks by various professionals through the Phys. Ed Connection, which she established in 1992.

"We can use our gymnasium for the benefit of our kids instead of just to play games," Price said.

Like all of the programs, Monday's workshop focused on increasing academic performance by using physical activity. Nyland said the three-dimensional Brain Gym exercises help individuals communicate, focus and organize.

"It integrates the two hemispheres of the brain, which will enhance and accelerate the learning process," she said. "What we want is an integrated brain so you're using both."

The first part is laterality, which improves communication. One of the exercises involves doing "cross crawls," in which people walk using the upper parts of their bodies - swinging the arms, for example - and the lower parts - moving the legs.

The second is the centering dimension, which stimulates organization. The unrolling and rubbing of the ears allow for improved hearing and relaxed muscles in the ears and neck.

The third is the focus dimension, which helps improve the ability to pay attention. One way to exercise this is to perform the calf pump by lengthening the tendon guard muscle in the back of the leg.

The exercises prepare students for reading, writing and other school functions, Nyland said. While some programs are completed step-by-step, the Brain Gym is a choice model; students choose the exercises which will work best.

"In Brain Gym, the basic part of it is children choose the dimension they need," Nyland said.

Margaret Schalk, a recent graduate of Bowling Green State University, said she thought the program would help students engage in physical activity and also boost their self-confidence.

"I heard that it really helps kids with learning disabilities retain and store and recall information," she said. "I think it will help me a lot in the classroom."

Local news

- Front page
- Business
- Classifieds
- Editorials
- Local columns
- Letters to the editor
- Neighborhood news
- News
- Obituaries
- Weddings
- Engagements
- Readers Feedback
- Corrections

News

- Ohio
- National
- International

Sports

- Local/state
- National
- Sports columns

Communities

Around the area

- Colleges
- Schools

Community information

- Fostoria
- Tiffin
- Hospitals
- Industry in Other communities
- Libraries
- Licenses, applications and permits
- Museums