

beings and reassuring them that their difficulties with sitting still and concentrating for countless hours are not altogether unusual. I am sure for others such exercises are a cringe-making embarrassment and they'd rather do anything than draw a 'lazy eight' in front of their friends. In that case they can opt out and no damage is done. So long as the teacher is confident in who they are and what they believe, and so long as the teacher is 'safe' then I see that no harm can come from these simple exercises.

Dalwyn R Attwell

'The student should work within his own limitations and be encouraged'

Dear Editor

I am concerned about the effect that the 'Brain Gym: a Christian response' article (*ACT Now*, Summer 2008) may have had on young and inexperienced teachers. They will surely worry that they are unwittingly engaging in 'spiritual abuse' of the children they teach. Furthermore, I am concerned that if – like the author of the article – *ACT Now* readers decide to boycott school activities or resign their post and move elsewhere, they will simply be denying vulnerable groups of young people the care of a committed Christian educator.

Personally, I would have been much more comfortable with Chris Dobson's article if it had challenged Brain Gym on the basis of fact and critical thinking as well as religious belief.

I spent an hour or so looking for material about Brain Gym on the Web. My research did not reveal any references to Hinduism. It did, though, yield plenty of references to the weak scientific basis of Brain Gym. According to Bad Science (www.badscience.net), Brain Gym is based on a scientific fallacy. Apparently, in order to stimulate the carotid artery in the prescribed way, pupils would need to dissect their own chests! In fact, much of what is peddled in education as Brain Based Learning is operating from a weak scientific base.

The sad fact is that in the pressurised world of education, teachers are drawn to the quick, easy, low cost fix. At this point truth is sacrificed for expediency. That is something a Christian must never do even when the truth is uncomfortable.

But, does Brain Gym improve learning? Probably. Take away the title, call it 'exercise, drink water and focus on the task', convince teachers they are

doing something special and it will work. Science has a name for this: the Hawthorne Effect – 'any observed system always changes in the direction of the required change.' When I trained as a teacher we called it a self-fulfilling prophecy. Getting pupils to eat apples before a maths lesson would, in the same circumstances, raise standards.

Those of us who have been in teaching for some time and feel secure enough to mount a challenge to things we believe to be wrong have to remember how difficult it is for those starting out. I think there is another lesson from Daniel that can be applied: DO SOMETHING BETTER. When Daniel was required to eat food that offended God he was able to show that the diet he adopted because of his beliefs produced a healthier body. Believe me, nothing focuses a headteacher's mind more than brilliant results! If you are challenging a school policy you must make sure your pupils are exceeding their targets. Your head will then have to look at what you are doing and may even wish to spread it across the school. How about starting each lesson with prayer?!

I cannot see any wisdom in a good teacher, who believes their pupils are in spiritual danger, leaving a school. How about ...

- Being such a good colleague that you are voted onto the governing body as a school governor.
- Encouraging local Christians to stand for the governing body.
- Setting up a prayer support group for the school between local churches.
- Taking on extra-curricular activities and building even better links with parents and pupils so that they see the difference in you and ask questions.
- Tracking down Christians in the Advisory and Inspection Service – they may wish to support your position.
- Talk to more experienced members of the profession: there will be few battles they have not fought.

Sadly, the article seems to be written from a position of fear and inexperience. Plenty of Christian teachers will be starting lessons each day with Brain Gym without compromising their faith. Using Brain Gym doesn't make you Hindu and it may not even change your brain, but it will wake you up and it is fun! This is the wrong battle badly fought. Christians in every profession must recognise that the way to change the organisation they serve is simply by being the best.

Mark Deacon