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Introduction

The self-image that we hold is like a blueprint for our behavior. Images that we hold, consciously or unconsciously, control our behavior . . . We first become aware of the images we hold. Then we create visualizations for the images we want.

— J. Atcherberg, *Imagery in Healing*

To teach a child that he or she can be successful, courageous, and in harmonious relationship with the environment and others is an exciting and challenging task.

We have developed the Mind Fitness program based upon time-tested, documented, and effective learning techniques employed in medicine, peak performance sports, and business. We utilize a whole-brain approach, which integrates the hemispheric brain functions and anchors the learning process in physical behaviors and positive actions that benefit children, their teachers and parents, and the community. This program is an effective way to encourage creativity, promote cognitive skills, and motivate students through the development of positive character traits and self-esteem.

Mind Fitness promotes a shift in thinking that is similar to the difference between coloring in a lined coloring book and creating your own picture on blank paper. Internal imaging is a skill that most people find develops quite readily. The result is a new dimension to thinking, memory, and creative abilities.

Firing the imagination to think in new and creative ways is partly new science and partly ancient art. We have woven the art of storytelling with the science of whole-brain learning into a format that we hope will entertain and delight both you and your children.

Note to Parents. This program is designed to be used not only in classrooms, but also for storytime sharing with your children at home. Reading these special guided stories at night, during nap time, or on rainy days can create a very special bond of positive learning and love between you and your children.

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The Mind Fitness Program for Esteem and Excellence

Overview

Goals

- ✓ To foster and promote self-esteem: Shows students how to utilize their potential to design and live positive and creatively productive lives.
- ✓ To encourage and train for optimal learning: Assists students to infuse the elements of successful learning by tapping the vast reservoir within their own minds.
- ✓ To inspire attitudes of excellence: Provides lessons for students to understand and manage their thoughts and emotions, enabling them to develop creative and caring modes of behavior and performance.
- ✓ To promote positive and productive actions: Helps students effectively coordinate their brain hemispheres, using both imagery and language, thus facilitating integrated learning experiences.

Organization of the Four Units

As many teachers have intuitively suspected and research has overwhelmingly confirmed, self-esteem is one of the most important factors influencing a young person's learning and academic success. To prepare our youth to become lifelong learners, able to stretch their minds and adapt to the unknown needs and demands of tomorrow, we must help them become independent learners, capable of analyzing problems, accepting challenges, and making choices. To do this we must help them believe in their abilities and potential.

The Mind Fitness program organizes lessons into four units:

- Self-worth,
- Self and Relationships,
- Self and Environment, and
- Self-discovery.

Progressing through the program, students move from building self-esteem to examining themselves in relation to other people and the environment. The concluding unit emphasizes discovering strengths and talents and fostering creativity and cognitive skills.

Each of the four units of the program is divided into three levels. Level A begins with short, guided stories in a simple format. The language of the first level is concrete and directive. Levels B and C are more sophisticated in terms of language structure, thinking skills, and the suggested learning activities. The facilitator is the story weaver and is encouraged to change the working of a particular guided story to fit the needs, culture, experience, and language level of the students.

Core Techniques

The Mind Fitness program utilizes three core techniques: relaxation, visualization, and affirmation. Students who learn to relax, focus their attention, and have a positive view of themselves are more creative and effective learners. The Mind Fitness program is designed to help both the facilitator and students of the program to achieve these goals through a series of short exercises and guided stories. Every lesson uses the three core techniques.

Relaxation

Relaxation training provides young people with a means of controlling the excessive stress that is often a serious problem in school. Some degree of stress is, of course, a natural part of life, and everyone experiences it. However, beyond a certain healthy level, and without programmed release, stress produces problems. Giving students the tools to manage and control stress can be crucial to their success as learners.

Relaxation techniques help the individual to achieve an alert but fluid state of mind. Such a mind is open and has the ability to respond appropriately. In addition, when children learn how to relax, they understand that their behavior is influenced by internal states and that they can learn to influence those states (Schultz 1986). The child is empowered by this increased self-control, and self-esteem is boosted.

For these reasons, a short, standardized relaxation induction is used to introduce each lesson in the Mind Fitness program. Relaxation cues and a tone of quiet alertness are also woven throughout the guided stories to help students maintain the relaxed state. A standard close is used at the conclusion of each guided story, providing a smooth transition from the world of the story to the follow-up activities.