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The Energy of Reading Project

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to determine if using two strategies daily from Energy Psychology with the lowest performing readers in grades one in an elementary school setting in Salem Oregon increased their reading scores. The two strategies are *Heart Center/Thymus* and *Collarbone Tapping with Cross Crawl Marching*. The assessment tool was the nationally used, standardized Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literary Skills (DIBELS, 2007). \ On-going research on DIBELS from the 1980's has documented it's reliability and validity, and sensitivity to student change. The curriculum, *Read Well* and DIBELS are the standard curriculum and testing for the elementary school for which we are reporting in this article. Reading specialist, Marlene Boltman MA who consulted with Mary Hammond MA LPC, a Diplomate in Energy Psychology, a Registered Play Therapy-Supervisor and a child development specialist, led the project. No adjustments were made for this project that deviate from the normal special reading curriculum. The materials and the time frames represent an average day in a reading specialist's class. The readers who participated in the reading group that used the energetic strategies had significantly higher scores than the comparison group.

Key words: Energy Psychology, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literary Skills, DIBELS, reading scores, elementary school,

Introduction

Marlene Boltman MA who consulted with Mary Hammond MA LPC, a Diplomate in Energy Psychology, a Registered Play Therapy-Supervisor and a child development specialist

Mary Hammond and Marlene Boltman initiated this project experimentally, hypothesizing that learning also had an energetic component, and that the simple Energy Psychology techniques (tapping and cross-crawl) might improve the readings skills of young readers who had reading deficits. The results were beyond our expectations as the children far exceeded the comparison group in both Phoneme Segmentation and Nonsense Word Fluency.

As a Reading Specialist in Oregon, Marlene recognized the potential of using energy strategies in the classroom after taking Mary Hammond's Energy Psychology classes. She realized that she wanted to use these simple but powerful tools to accelerate her student's progress. Mary Hammond had used

the strategies with great success in her private practice with children with ADHD, PTSD, Dyslexia, Depression, Reactive Attachment Disorder, and Allergies.

Energy Psychology

Humans have been moving their personal biological energy for wellbeing longer than they have been reading. People spontaneously rub below their collarbones when they are stressed and hold their chests when they are shocked or hurting. Energy Psychology uses this concept to move energy within a person's system, as defined by Chinese Medicine, Yoga and many other ancient traditions. There are several steps:

1. Intention
2. Preparing the biological energy field for the task
3. Using bioenergy strategies to facilitate the task

Intention

Our intention in the project was: Each child will become as competent as possible using the Read Well curriculum and have a positive attitude toward reading within the eight month project.

The children set intentions, such as, "I want to be a really good reader."

The principle in energy psychology is that thought, feelings and conditions are energy. If they are energy, they can be changed. Intention creates the "thought field" for change.

Preparing the energy field

The energy field is biological, mental, emotional and spiritual. Energy Field Preparation is essential because it addresses neurological preparation as well as energetic preparation. There are several concepts at play that are established premises regarding both wellness and learning in energy psychology and in previous energy work models. The concepts are: healing trauma, correcting neurological disorganization, and using energy interventions to balance the individual energy field.

Trauma

Researchers discovered over the last twenty-five years that trauma disrupts neurological functioning, resulting in a myriad of health and learning problems. (Perry, 2004) Trauma in the brain seems to normalize with appropriate motor or energy interventions. (Eden, 1998).

In the science of trauma, neurological/biological information meet with psychology and the resulting thinking and behavior is altered. Trauma creates neurological changes following physical, sexual or emotional abuse; neglect; malnourishment/ an auto or other accident; near drownings; fires illness; injury; assault; natural disaster; and witnessing violence or another traumatic event; intrauterine or birth toxins or trauma; and also with lesser dramatic events. Trauma may impact the nervous system whether there is injury or not.

These events disrupt the individual's biological and energetic systems. An immediate flood of physiological responses commonly occur, such as increased heart rate, cortisol production,

adrenaline, perspiration and shallow breathing. This trauma scenario is repeated in the brain whenever a child is reminded of the event by a picture, a sound, a smell, a touch or a memory.

According to the National Center for PTSD in the US 60% of men and 50% of women experience at least one trauma in their lifetime. Trauma interferes with learning by inhibiting intercellular communication, neurological transmission and right brain-left brain communications. It also predisposes the preferential firing of neuropathways associated with and activated by the trauma. Reading is one of the day-to-day activities that is made more difficult by the trauma experience. Learning anything new is disrupted by trauma triggers and the inability to concentrate. The energy strategies described here calm and reorganize the neurological system, as well as the energetic system.

Neurological disorganization and homolateral patterns

A significant portion of energetic neurological disorganization arises from blocks to flows of energy across the midline, from one side of the body to the other. This occurs following emotional and physical traumas.

In children who have been challenged by trauma, a helpful step in the energy of learning, leading toward successful reading, is preparing the energy field with tapping and cross crawl marching (Dennison, 1998). This corrects homolateral neurological disorganization.

When children with reading and learning challenges first begin this exercise they may have a great deal of difficulty, particularly with the marching that involves the cross-over pattern. The greater the difficulty, the more complex is the neurological disorganization/ homolateral issue. By the third tapping and marching sequences there is usually improvement, and daily repetitions reveal even more improvement. These strategies have origins in the chiropractic field (Eden, 1998). The Brain Gym system also supports using movement to improve brain function and reading (Dennison, 1998).

Boltman, after studying energy psychology with Hammond in classes on *Energy Psychology with Children and Families* and *The Energy of Learning™*, decided to use a modified version of the standard neurological disorganization correction, described below. She modified it to keep it simpler for the young children whom she taught.

Standard for correcting neurological disorganization and homolateral patterns

To correct do three sets of:

Two Point Tap: 20 taps under collarbones and on heart center/thymus/sternum (An underarm tap is used in the standard procedure, but Boltman chose to omit this to keep it more simple for the younger children in the study)

Lateral Marching: 12 lateral marches, moving right arm and right leg together, then left arm and left leg together

Cross Crawl marching: 12 marches with the arm crossing over opposite leg

Project Groups

The thirteen first grade students who participated in the project represent poverty and dual language challenges in an elementary school in Salem, Oregon. Of the thirteen children participating, one hundred percent of the children's families live below the US poverty level. This is an important factor because there is little opportunity for outside reading tutoring other than the reading class at school.

The students participated in a daily half hour reading lesson five days per week. Six children worked with Marlene Boltman MA, who is a Reading Specialist with an English as a Second Language endorsement. Five of these children worked with her for eight months, with one child moving away mid-way through the project. Several were English as second language speakers. The children did the correction for neurological disorganization and homolateral and heart center tapping daily for 2-3 minutes at the beginning of each half hour session.

The comparison group of eight children was taught by an equally trained and seasoned reading specialist, and also included children who spoke English as a second language. Five children completed the project in the comparison group over the eight months because one child was referred to another setting and two children moved out of the school district. This group was taught using the same reading curriculum without the energy work.

Implementation of the Energy of Reading Project

The assessment tool was the nationally used, standardized Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literary Skills (DIBELS, 2007). DIBELS standardization is based on the Curriculum-Based Measurement by Deno and colleagues, which was developed at the Institute for Research and Learning Disabilities at the University of Minnesota (Deno 1977, 1985). DIBELS research began in the 1980's at the University of Oregon. On-going research on DIBELS has documented it's reliability and validity, and sensitivity to student change. The curriculum, *Read Well* and DIBELS are the standard curriculum and testing for the elementary school for which we are reporting in this article. Reading specialist, Marlene Boltman MA who consulted with Mary Hammond MA LPC, a Diplomate in Energy Psychology, a Registered Play Therapy-Supervisor and a child development specialist, led the project. No adjustments were made for this project that deviate from the normal special reading curriculum.

The 2007 – 2008 school year began with the DIBELS assessment of all Kindergarten through Third grade students. Students identified as 'Benchmark' by this measure were accurately demonstrating letter-sound knowledge, word decoding skills, and fluent reading at or above grade level. DIBELS 'Strategic' students did not meet the benchmark standard; however, they have some skills in the fore-mentioned areas. Students identified as 'Intensive' were severely lacking in phonemic awareness and in phonics performance, and were able to read only a few words, if any at all.

Classroom teachers provided daily reading instruction for intensive students, plus an extra daily lesson using a direct instruction intervention program, *Read Well*, with Boltman and her colleague. In order to "catch up" with their peers, these students needed accelerated instruction.

Read Well is described by the Florida Center for Reading research as follows:

Read Well is a beginning reading program designed for kindergarten and first grade students and for second and third grade students in need of remediation. The goal of Read Well is to provide students with the foundational skills critical to reading with understanding.

Each new unit usually begins with one new letter sound which serves as the stimulus for all activities that follow. The new letter sound is related to a word which is related to the theme students will read about later in the lesson. Next, skills that have been previously introduced and mastered by the students are put into immediate practice through the reading of connected text. Read Well provides a unique story format that includes two types of stories: duet stories and solo stories.

Read Well was published in 1998 and incorporates research-based practices that have proven

to be effective for diverse learners. A number of pilot evaluations and single subject studies suggest that use of the Read Well program has had positive results (2007).

Data analysis

The first graders were pre and post-tested on the Read Well Assessment in the areas indicated in Figure 1. The five first graders in Boltman's class who completed the project had 60 correct responses out of 100 possible, in the pre-test. The five students in the comparison group who completed the project had 12 correct responses (Figure 2).

At the beginning of grade one, the expectation is for 40 phoneme segments per minute and 30 letter sounds per minute in Nonsense Word Fluency. In Phoneme Segmentation, the assessor says a word, the student's task is to "stretch" or segment the word to accurately identify each of the sounds in the word. The assessor records the number of accurate sounds the student hears in one minute. In Nonsense Word Fluency, the student is shown 100 three-letter (consonant, vowel, consonant) words. The student responds by articulating and blending the sounds to create a "nonsense" word. The evaluator records the number of accurately blended sounds articulated in one minute.

Figure 1. Pre- and Post-test scores on the Read Well assessment, Boltman's group

| Boltman's Group | 9/07 | 9/07 | 5/08 | 5/08 | Growth | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------|-----|
| Student | Phoneme Segmentation | Nonsense Word Fluency | Phoneme Segmentation | Nonsense Word Fluency | PS | NWF |
| #1 | 19 | 4 | 56 | 12 | 37 | 8 |
| #2 | 0 | 1 | 49 | 58 | 49 | 57 |
| #4 | 12 | 0 | 30 | 29 | 18 | 29 |
| | 13 | 0 | 33 | 10 | 20 | 10 |
| #6 | 11 | 0 | 44 | 38 | 33 | 38 |
| | 55 | 5 | 212 | 147 | 157 | 142 |

Figure 2. Pre- and Post-test scores on the Read Well assessment, control group

| Student | Phoneme Segmentation | Nonsense Word Fluency | Phoneme Segmentation | Nonsense Word Fluency | PS | NWF |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| #16 | 3 | 0 | 38 | 33 | 35 | 33 |
| #17 | 0 | 0 | 39 | 12 | 39 | 12 |
| #19 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 4 | 13 | 4 |
| #21 | 6 | 0 | 26 | 5 | 20 | 5 |
| #22 | 0 | 2 | 30 | 31 | 30 | 28 |
| | 10 | 2 | 147 | 85 | 137 | 82 |

Figure 3. Wake Up Your Brain Study Groups – DIBELS Assessment

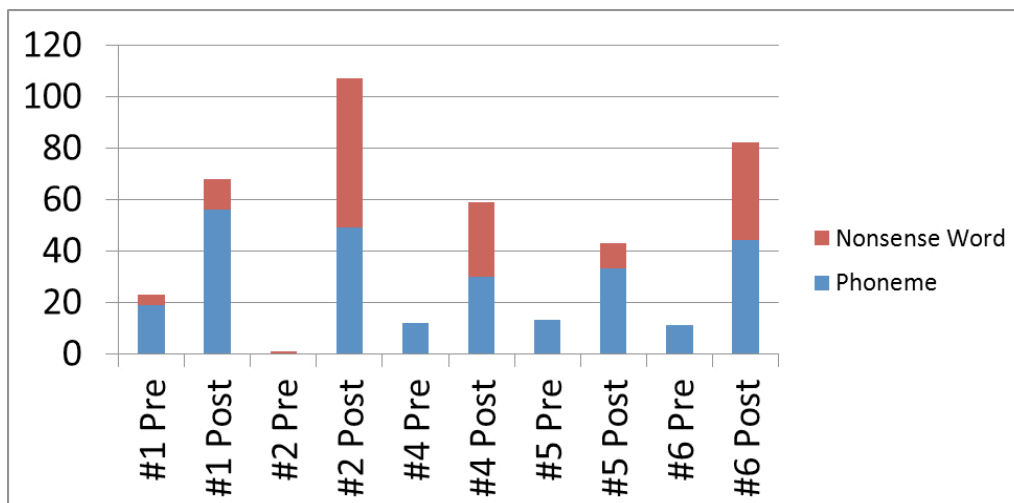
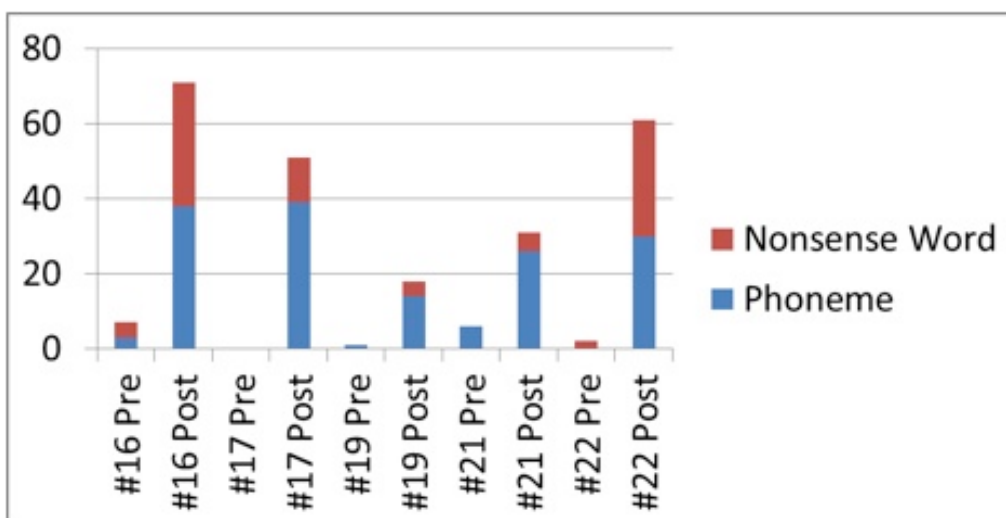


Figure 4. Comparison Group – DIBELS Assessment



Because our student groups had different baseline scores, we measured each student's growth rate by the end of the project. In comparing the final scores of the two groups, the Study Group had a 12.7% higher growth rate than the Control Group in Phoneme Segmentation, and a 42.2% higher growth rate in Nonsense Word Fluency.

Anecdotal notes

Marlene introduced the energy exercises to the children by telling them every day, "We need to wake up our brains". She began doing the simple exercises described in this article with my students at the beginning of each lesson. Initially, their attempts were awkward. She stood beside students who were struggling, especially with the cross crawl marching, to model the movements. Before long, they were not only successful with collarbone and heart center tapping, lateral marching, and cross crawl marching, but were eager participants.

One morning she got a late start with her group and attempted to dispense with the energy exercises. The students protested, “But we need to wake up our brains!” Marlene knew then that they valued the process and knew at some level that it was helping them.

One of the students was referred to another reading group for a while, but returned for the last week and a half of the school year. On his first day back, as he and the other students arrived for their lesson, Marlene was distributing materials. When she looked up, this student had begun the “wake up your brain” exercises. It was obvious that he not only remembered what to do, but had most certainly missed doing this while he was gone. He led the entire group in the exercise that morning.

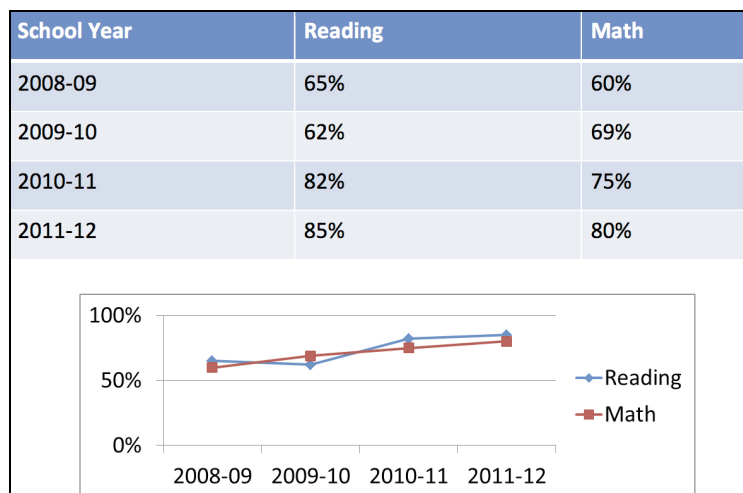
Next Steps

Based upon the success of the Energy of Reading Project, Marla Dow (counselor at the Elementary School and DEH practitioner) and Marlene formed an intention to expand the impact of the Wake Up Your Brain strategy.

In the fall of 2011, Marla and Marlene taught the Wake Up Your Brain Exercise to students, teachers, and supervising staff attending the school’s before school Open Gym. Each morning more than 100 students now begin their day with the tapping and cross crawl exercise.

Each school in the State of Oregon receives an annual rating based upon its students performance on State Reading, Math, Writing, and Science Assessments. The school year’s 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 our State of Oregon School Report Card gave us a rating of “Satisfactory”. By the end of the year 2011-2012, our rating had improved to “Outstanding”! (See Figure 5)

Figure 5. School report card



In summary

Our teachers are dedicated professionals who provide their students with high quality, differentiated instruction. The factor that has changed from 2011 to the present is the introduction of a practice that corrects Neurological Disorganization and clears the way for optimal learning.

The results of this study lead us to believe that all students in all schools would benefit from this energetic intervention. Many factors, which are beyond the control of teachers, interfere with academic performance. Further research is needed to clarify which children benefit most and how the program promotes these benefits. This is a way we can make a difference!

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Resources

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literary Skills (DIBELS 2007) Center on Teaching & Learning 5292 University of Oregon Eugene, OR 97403-5292 E-mail: support@dibels.uoregon.edu Phone: (888) 497-4290 or (541) 346-3108 (M-F 8:00am-5:30pm PST) Fax: (541) 346-4349
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Mary Hammond, MA, LPC, Diplomate Comprehensive Energy Psychology, Registered Play Therapy Supervisor, is a therapist, trainer, consultant and author from Salem, Oregon. Now in private practice, she taught early childhood education for fifteen years and brings her expertise in energy psychology to children's learning challenges. She is published in energy psychology as well as play therapy.



Marlene Boltman, MA is a reading specialist, with an ESOL endorsement, who has taught twenty years in the Salem-Keizer School District. She worked as a Reading Recovery teacher for nine years and has had a private tutoring practice for the last twelve years. Marlene currently works as the Reading Specialist at Mary Eyre Elementary School in Salem. Her focus is early intervention, working with the lowest performing Kindergarten through Second grade students. She has been using Energy Psychology strategies with her groups for seven years.



Marla Dow, MA, LPC, NCC, is a Marriage and Family Therapist and School Counselor. She has more than 13 years of experience in both mental health and school counseling. Marla offers client-centered individual and family counseling to all ages, integrating her training and experience with traditional methods such as cognitive behavioral, play therapy, and family systems theories; and most recently Dynamic Energetic Healing and energy psychology techniques. Her passion is guiding clients to healing and wholeness in all aspects of their being. Marla now works with Marlene with the before school "Wake Up Your Brain" activities, and assisted with developing the statistical chart.



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