

## Transforming Children's Lives with NeuroMovement

by Sandra Yeyati

**H**ow do children learn? How can we help the brain work better? Can children born with disabilities overcome their challenges? And if so, how can we help them? These are some of the questions Anat Baniel, founder of The Anat Baniel Method, has been asking and solving throughout her long and successful career in Neuro-Movement therapy.



Anat Baniel

"It's all about the brain," Baniel says. "The job of the brain is to put order in the disorder and make sense out of the nonsense. When any stimulation—lights, sounds and sensations—come in to the system, into the body, it's just noise until our brain imposes order." With children that have challenges, something interferes with the spontaneous ability of the brain to do its job. Baniel's book, *Kids Beyond Limits*, describes what it takes to make the brain work better and get these kids to be able to do what seemed impossible or very unlikely.

"I don't try to change them or force them to do the behaviors that we would like them to do, because I know that if they could they would. I understand that their brain is missing the answers, the neuro-networks necessary for that brain to figure out what it is that we want from them and how to do it," Baniel explains. Taking advantage of the brain's ability to change and learn from experience, the method's core principles—the Nine Essentials—center upon slow, calm movements with attention that allow the brain to notice variations, make connections and learn new skills. Baniel says, "Stimulation becomes information when the brain perceives a difference. Until we perceive a difference it does not exist. If I cannot see the difference between red and blue, I don't see colors.

If I cannot hear the difference between do, re and mi, I won't be able to sing in tune. This doesn't make me unintelligent. I still have a great brain. I still can be brilliant, but I don't see or I don't hear or I don't feel or I don't notice."

Once the brain begins to perceive differences, it will start a process called differentiation, creating new connections at a very fast pace, which will in

turn lead to the spontaneous integration of many new possibilities. Baniel calls it "turning on the learning switch."

"When I have a child that, due to whatever condition, cannot stand up, I look for ways for that child to feel the difference between the head being more forward or backwards, having the feet touch the floor in different directions, until the child can feel a sufficient amount of differences and refine those differences and it can pull together what we call standing. It has to happen from within the child," she says, adding that she would try the method before medicating a child for behavioral or learning challenges like ADD, ADHD or other conditions.

"My goal is for the child to notice what is going on, not impose on them or tell them what to feel, Baniel says. "I create the conditions so they notice. For instance, if you put your foot too far to the side in a weird place, your knee is going to buckle, you're not going to be able to stand. You will feel that; I don't need to tell you that your foot shouldn't be there. Part of my leadership is looking at the child and knowing and trusting that they have the intelligence within them to figure things out, if I provide them with the conditions that they need."

Baniel is enthusiastic about the incredible improvements she has facili-

tated, saying, "Those kids that I work with are brilliant. Very quickly they start learning, and they calm down. The most common feedback we get from parents is, 'My kid is so much happier.' They feel more comfortable because the world starts making sense to them."

After just one or two sessions, positive changes are observed. Over time, the children will begin to do things that they could not do before, like write letters legibly; stand, crawl or walk; recognize letters and read; make eye contact; or say a word or two. Recalling a little girl with nonspecific developmental disorder that was very timid, Baniel says, "Within a few sessions, she got stronger, felt safer and wanted to go play with other kids and be in the playground. She also spoke clearer and her posture was better. She started blossoming."

Healthy children become smarter under these conditions, too. One of Baniel's goals is to bring these principles and essentials into the classroom.

A new training session program begins in September at the Anat Baniel center. Basic training consists of 90 days, broken down into 10 segments of nine days each, over a 14-month period. The training includes lectures and movement lessons. After completing the basic training, three additional training modules are offered to learn how to help children with special needs, address vitality and aging issues, and benefit high-performing individuals like athletes, musicians and actors.

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