

# IBREA REPORT

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## Examining the effects of Brain Education on employee stress management, work performance, relationships, and well-being

The first doctoral dissertation on Brain Education published in the United States  
Interview with Dr. Ericka Crawford

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Volume 13 | February 2020



## **IBREA, International Brain Education Association**

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IBREA understands that the science and technology of today came from the human brain and believes that the key to solving the crisis we face today also lies in the human brain. Based on this understanding, IBREA was established with the purpose of creating a better future for the humankind by sharing the philosophy, and principles of Brain Education.

IBREA is a Non-governmental Organization associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information, and has participated in the UN Global Compact since 2009.



## Examining the effects of Brain Education on employee stress management, work performance, relationships, and well-being

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Interview with Dr. Ericka Crawford

The first doctoral dissertation on Brain Education in the United States was published from Brandman University. The title is “Examining the effects of Brain Education on employee stress management, work performance, relationships, and well-being.” Ericka Crawford, the author of the dissertation, has been leading organizations in the biotech industry for more than 20 years.

In this dissertation, she introduces Brain Education, initially developed in Korea, as "a collection of systemized mind-body training methods to help people learn to fully utilize the capacity of their brain and reach their full potential." And she states that Brain Education blends Eastern and Western elements such as Asian healing arts, mindfulness, meditation, neuroscience, and positive psychology. Global Cyber University and University of Brain Education were established to offer degree programs in Brain Education, approved by the Ministry of Education in South Korea.

She used qualitative phenomenological methodology to examine the effects of Brain Education in the workplace in the areas of employee stress management, work performance, relationships, and well-being.

She is currently vice president of Quality at Maravai LifeSciences and responsible for the strategy, development, and implementation of quality systems that meet industry standards and customer needs. Because of her passion for employee and organizational success, she started her own coaching business several years ago to help people achieve what they want in their life using Brain Education principles.

While she was preparing for the Brain Education Symposium in Los Angeles, where she would present her doctoral dissertation to the public for the first time since it was published, IBREA met her online and interviewed her to help the Korean audience understand her research.

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**Q** | What made you go back to school?

**A** | What is Brain Education? Even experienced practitioners in Brain Education find it difficult to capture the essence in a few sentences. I describe Brain Education as a collection of systemized mind-body training methods to help people learn to fully utilize the capacity of their brain so they can achieve their goals and create what they want in their lives, including health and happiness. And even though there are many research studies showing the effectiveness of Brain Education on improving performance in students and practitioners, there were no studies specifically applied to performance in the workplace, at least not in the U.S. With my research study, I really wanted to know whether Brain Education improved performance in the workplace and if so, what contributed to the improved performance.

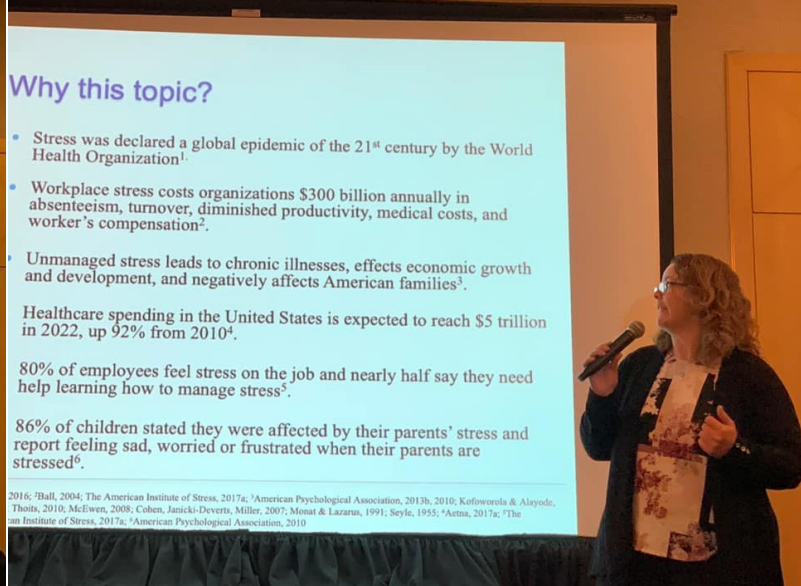
That's one of the reasons I went back to school: to study Brain Education formally. Even though I had my own experience and I was teaching others in my workplace who were also sharing that they were experiencing positive benefits, I couldn't explain why

these trainings were working to my colleagues. This dissertation is kind of my own self-discovery of how to put into words what people experience through Brain Education training and how organizations can benefit from implementing Brain Education programs in their workplace.

**Q** | How are mindfulness, meditation, and Brain Education related to each other?

**A** | I would say that meditation is a tool used in Brain Education to help people become mindful. Meditation means mental training and is a way to help calm the mind and train one's attention to be present, which is mindfulness. Mindfulness is present moment awareness, where one's attention is in the present or in the here and now versus the mind traveling to the past or future. There are many different meditation techniques used in Brain Education such as Brain Wave Vibration or Jigam meditation, which were the two most often described by participants in the study.

Brain Education includes five steps that move from Brain Sensitizing, Brain Versatilizing, Brain Refresh-



▲ Ericka Crawford presenting her research and her own experience at the Brain Education Symposium in Los Angeles, USA, December 2019.

ing, Brain Integrating, and finally to Brain Mastering. The first two steps of Brain Education are focused on increasing people’s sensitivity to feeling energy in their body and making people’s brain more flexible or versatile. These two steps help people become aware of their thought stream without reacting, which helps them keep their attention in the present moment or be more mindful.

Brain Education’s many different tools and techniques have the purpose of helping people fully utilize their brain to reach their full potential. There are meditation tools, mindfulness tools, meridian stretching, games, and many different exercises. Brain Education is sort of an umbrella for all these different tools. Each of the 5 steps of Brain Education have different techniques associated with that step and some techniques have multiple purposes. For example, meridian stretching exercises are used in Brain Sensitizing to help people feel their body and increase their energy sensitivity so they can feel the energy flow in their body. Jigam meditation is also a tool used to increase people’s energy sensitivity. In my study, all participants stated they were able to manage stress much more effectively after Brain Education training because they learned to recognize their energy state and had tools to help them change their energy. Peo-

## Why this topic?

- Stress was declared a global epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup>.
  - Workplace stress costs organizations \$300 billion annually in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, medical costs, and worker’s compensation<sup>2</sup>.
  - Unmanaged stress leads to chronic illnesses, effects economic growth and development, and negatively affects American families<sup>3</sup>.
- Healthcare spending in the United States is expected to reach \$5 trillion in 2022, up 92% from 2010<sup>4</sup>.
- 80% of employees feel stress on the job and nearly half say they need help learning how to manage stress<sup>5</sup>.
- 86% of children stated they were affected by their parents’ stress and report feeling sad, worried or frustrated when their parents are stressed<sup>6</sup>.

2016: <sup>1</sup>Ball, 2004; The American Institute of Stress, 2017a; <sup>2</sup>American Psychological Association, 2013b; 2010; Kofoworola & Alayode, 2010; 2010; McEwen, 2008; Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, Miller, 2007; Mount & Lazarus, 1991; Seyle, 1955; <sup>3</sup>Aetna, 2017a; <sup>4</sup>The Institute of Stress, 2017a; <sup>5</sup>American Psychological Association, 2010

ple described this as life-changing for them.

**Q** | I understand Eastern mind-body practices such as yoga and mindfulness training have been widely accepted in the United States since 1970s. And their effects have been studied by a variety of research institutions and corporations. What are the needs that made meditation popular in workplaces?

**A** | Over the past several years, more information has been published on companies who have implemented meditation and mindfulness programs, including big names such as Google, Aetna, and Yahoo; however, most companies implement programs from a wellness perspective just like implementing exercise programs. Companies know that employees perform better when they are healthy versus sick.

Recently, there has been a shift in the corporate world where companies are interested in implementing programs not just to improve employee wellness but also to improve work performance. But research data analyzing the benefit of meditation or mindfulness programs to help improve performance is rare. The only one I know of was published by Aetna, which imple-



mented an employee mindfulness program that resulted in a \$3,000 increase in productivity per employee.

I hope the findings in my research will help organization leaders understand how Brain Education methods can improve both employee well-being and work performance.

**Q** | You used research studies on Brain Education published since 2004 showing positive effects on four domains of human functioning—cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology—to find out how those effects also influence workplace outcomes. Could you explain the process of your study briefly?

**A** | I used a modified theoretical framework from the Integrative Framework Relating Mindfulness to Workplace Outcomes developed by Darren J. Good and his team in 2016. The framework shows improving the domains of cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology can result in improved workplace outcomes in the areas of performance, relationships, and well-being.

I already had research data from South Korea and the U.S. on adults and students showing improvements in these four domains, so this was the most relevant framework in the literature for my study. In my study, I interviewed employees from various organizations who have been practicing Brain Education for various lengths of time. By examining their lived experience, I was able to identify employee improvements in the four domains and show that Brain Education improves workplace outcomes in the areas of work performance, relationships, and well-being.

**Q** | Could you introduce some of the stories that led you to conclude that the improvements in general

human functioning by Brain Education help improve workplace outcomes?

**A** | There were so many impactful stories, but I'll share three of them here. One interviewee explained to me how Brain Education helped her manage her emotions, which significantly improved her relationships at work. She described how Brain Education helped her become aware of her emotions and how things from her childhood were affecting her in the present time. When her co-workers would raise their voice to her, she would immediately be triggered and get angry and start yelling back. She realized through Brain Education that this was a pattern from something that happened in her childhood, and once she was able to shift this energy, she no longer was triggered by others raising their voice. She stated that now she has much more emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion for others, which leads to improved relationships with her co-workers. She described how learning to manage her emotions reduced her stress and helped her become happier and more productive at work.

Another employee described how Brain Education helped him improve his ability to effectively manage stress. He stated that he didn't really understand stress before Brain Education and had a belief that as a man he shouldn't feel stress. He described how he would ignore signs of stress, which would cause issues, particularly later in the day when he couldn't really concentrate and felt disconnected. He would deal with the stress by drinking more coffee, going for a run, or having a beer. He also said that he would often get angry and lose his temper. With Brain Education, he realized that those were just signs of fatigue and stress and through training learned to replenish his energy by bringing his attention back to his body and various breathing techniques. By employees learning to recognize and man-

age their stress in healthy ways, they increase their overall well-being. Many employees shared how learning how to manage stress helped them reduce or even eliminate medications they were taking, which leads to lower healthcare costs. Being able to effectively manage stress also helps employees focus better at work and see things in new ways, which increases their ability to solve problems.

Another interviewee was a physician assistant. The impact for her with Brain Education was about being able to manage her empathy and emotions when she sees patients. A big topic for healthcare providers who see patients is burn-out, and it's because they spend most of their time with sick patients and can be easily influenced by their patient's energy. She described how Brain Education helped her understand how energy works in her body and how her energy is affected when interacting with her patients. She described how Brain Education helped her become much more effective as a physician assistant because she could feel what her patients were going through, which helped her know better how to help them. She also described how Brain Education helped her increase her empathy and compassion for others, which helped her feel more connected to her patients.

**Q** | What factors or aspects of Brain Education do you find the most effective for improving human functioning and its workplace outcomes?

**A** | One of the most frequent responses from employees that was most impactful is the ability to recognize one's own energy state so they could change it. The word "energy" or "managing one's energy" can be foreign for many people; however, stress is energy and emotions are energy so when you learn how to feel and manage energy well you can effectively manage your stress and emotions

well.

Employees also shared that one of the unique things about Brain Education and why they thought it was so effective is the experiential learning through the body. For example, when you attend a lecture and a speaker tells you information without your experiencing it, then the information remains at the knowledge level. This can be helpful, but if the information is experienced, it helps strengthen the embodiment of that information. It's like reading about how to ride a bike or watching a video on how to ride a bike but never actually riding a bike. Until you experience riding a bike, you really do not know how to ride a bike.

Brain Education helps people increase their energy sensitivity and experience energy through their body, which increases their self-awareness. Self-awareness is the key to everything. Being self-aware helps you manage your emotions and stress and helps you know when you are not focusing well.

**Q** | Could you share your plan or vision to make Brain Education utilized at workplaces more widely?

**A** | I aspire to share Brain Education tools and principles with employees and organizations all over the world to increase both employee well-being and organizational performance. I believe that when you help employees discover and actualize their true potential within themselves, then organizational performance naturally increases. I believe that organizations that embrace Brain Education will become role models for other companies in the 21st century.

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(The article originally from *Brain* Vol. 79)



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