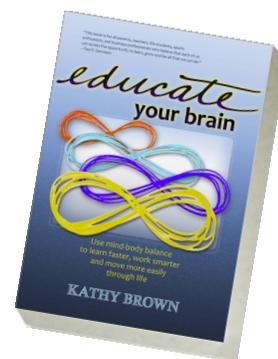


Classic Articles on Brain Gym®
And Reading
By Kathy Brown, M.Ed., author of the 2012 Book
Educate Your Brain

www.EducateYourBrain.com

This article was written in 2001 as Kathy was trying to understand and explain in simple terms why reading was difficult for some students and how Brain Gym processes could help. Her most current information is presented in an extensive, 22-page chapter in her book, *Educate Your Brain: use mind-body balance to learn faster, work smarter and move more easily through life.*



Case Study: Henry and Reading

by Kathy Brown, M.Ed.

Henry has had challenges his whole life. He's had surgery to correct severe cross-eyes, and has worn an eye patch to strengthen his weaker eye since age four. At age seven and a half and about to enter second grade, he was not able to read, despite two years of special education in school and months at reading clinics and reading tutoring. His mother said,

"He just doesn't get it. He doesn't hear the sounds, even when you over-exaggerate. He doesn't hear it... He has been getting help from a vision therapist who has been great. She just helped him so much – but he still can't read. Not a good start for a second grader."

After his mother heard me speaking about the importance of crawling and how Brain Gym® could recreate missing neural pathways (Henry skipped the crawling stage), she brought him for a session to see what Brain Gym could do to support him in his quest to become a reader.

When Henry arrived I wrote out the words "Today is a hot day. It is a hot summer day." in large print on notebook paper. I asked Henry if he knew any of these words and he attempted to read both sentences, but miscalled every word except "a."

Henry's Brain Gym balance called on Dennison Laterality Repatterning, Brain Gym movements, and a variety of other movements to help resolve specific

childhood reflex issues. We did these activities for perhaps 45 minutes.

At the end of this time I asked Henry to read his sentences again. He instantly spotted the repeated words and used his thumb and index finger to point out the word pairs, reading them correctly and without hesitation: "day - day... hot - hot... a - a... is - is..." Then I asked if he could read the sentences. My only support was putting my finger under each word in order, and he read both sentences on his own. I looked over at his mother, and she had tears rolling down both her cheeks. Over the next two weeks I received the following emails, notes and phone calls from Henry's mother:

- "What an experience that [Brain Gym session] was today. Henry just seemed the normal Henry except when it came to reading to me tonight. There was no struggle. He read *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* [a Dr. Seuss book] like an old pro. It was amazing."
- "Henry is still improving! I have him going to the reading clinic just to learn all the consonant and vowel sounds he missed last year. And he's just tearing up the turf."
- "I'm still seeing improvement. Henry tied his shoes yesterday with no problems. He just acted like it was no big deal – never mind that it has been."

- "Henry loves rhyming books now. He used to hate them, as he couldn't hear the rhyme and thought they were just nonsense. Now he can hear the rhyme, and he loves it!"

- "Henry's physical therapist says that his writing is like a different child. He writes like a real second grader now instead of a kindergartener."

- "Henry seems to be hearing all the sounds of his words now. His school speech therapist didn't believe me when I told her about his progress. She said that it just wasn't possible, and insisted on testing him. When she saw the improvement for herself she said, 'What have you been doing with Henry?'"

The answer, of course, is Brain Gym. Vital pieces for this major shift all seemed to come in the package of this one session, although Henry will likely benefit further from more sessions over time. Of course, this doesn't happen every time. Some children need more sessions to see the kind of shift that Henry made in one day. But sometimes, just that one shift is the one they've been waiting for.



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Sample pages from *Educate Your Brain*

Two pages from the section "Ready for Reading" in *Educate Your Brain*, the new book by Kathy Brown.

For more information and to order your copy, go to www.EducateYourBrain.com

In the Brain Gym/Eda-K program, the terms "dominant" and "lead" are often used interchangeably.

additional visual input from its unique perspective, creating depth perception, and more. Think of it as similar to hand dominance: We may unscrew the bottle cap with our dominant hand, but we hold the bottle steady with the other. They're both needed, and they play different roles.

Our right and left eyes have opposite tracking preferences. On its own, the right eye prefers to scan left-to-right, the same direction as written languages of the western world. The left eye, however, most naturally scans right-to-left. This would come in handy if you're learning Hebrew or Arabic; it's less helpful for English.

About seventy percent of people are right-eyed; thirty percent are left-eyed.⁸ However, in my experience, left-eye lead is incredibly common among children in special-education classes. During a day of consulting at one school, I was asked to work with nine children who were being assessed for special help. *Eight of them were left-eyed.* I can only assume that the left eye's tracking preference (combined with lack of integration) is at the root of many "learning disabilities."

The importance of teamwork

Regardless of which eye we lead with, our two eyes are meant to work together. This is called "eye-teaming" and can happen only if both brain hemispheres are easily sharing information.

A left-eye-dominant reader whose eyes are not teaming will almost certainly struggle in school. He may look at the word "dog" and, scanning right-to-left, start by saying the sound "guh." Children who lead with their left eye may end up straining to track the line of print, since their eyes tend to jerk back to the left, again and again, sometimes even jumping to a different line. It's all but impossible to comprehend material read this way. A little reading like this is tiring; a lot is exhausting.

Whole-brain integration is the key

So, is a left-eye-dominant child destined to a life of reading failure? Not at all. If a child's two brain hemispheres are sharing information effectively, his two eyes will be able to communicate as well. For many left-eye-dominant folks, patterning for this kind of communication happens naturally in childhood, through crawling and other cross-lateral movement. Many highly skilled and academically proficient people I know have been surprised to recognize that they are left-eyed; they were fluent readers from the start. "In fact," Paul



The right eye most naturally tracks left to right

The left eye most naturally tracks right to left



This boy's dominant left eye wants to keep jumping "backwards" along the line of print.



When both hemispheres are communicating, both eyes team and track easily.

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Checking another person

Some people (especially young children) cannot easily check themselves, perhaps because they have a challenge closing one eye or the other. In this case, I do the check a bit differently. I have the person assume the very same position (hands overlapped, elbows straight, both eyes open, looking through the space between their hands). But instead of looking across the room at an object, I stand a distance away and have him look *at my nose*. Then I can look through that space, directly at the only eye that's truly aimed at me: his dominant eye. In the case of this girl, you can see only her left eye, which is spotting the camera used to photograph her. The boy, in contrast, is spotting with his right eye.

After following these instructions, some parents or teachers say, "I realize now that my child (or student) leads with her left eye. *How do I fix that?*" There is nothing to "fix" about being left-eyed, any more than we need to "fix" being left-handed. Remember, many fine readers are left-eyed! Balance is the key. If a child (or adult) has sufficient cross-lateral integration, it doesn't matter which eye she leads with, since both eyes are working fluidly together.

These are very simple eye-check techniques, and we humans are complex. For example, some people lead with one eye for near vision and the other for distance. Other people may learn stress-based compensations and appear to be right-eyed when, indeed, they're left-eyed. It can take time and training to learn all the ins and outs of this topic. For now, I invite you simply to notice the vision-related challenges you experience (or those of the children, students, or clients in your care) and see what happens when you introduce movement!

The Stress Connection

Even when we're wired for efficient eye-teaming, we may not have full access to this ability for an entirely different reason: stress. This is true even for right-eye-dominant readers like me.

Survival takes first call on our body's resources, and the main job of our dominant eye is to scan for danger. When I'm under stress, my dominant eye ends up looking *out there somewhere* rather than at the words I need to read or write.¹⁰ Eye-teaming vanishes, and I end up struggling with just my left eye, which tends to "swim upstream" against the flow of the written page. The result? Reversals and choppy reading.



Left-eyed girl

Right-eyed boy

Just noticing which eye you close first may be a clue to eye dominance. Most people are inclined to close (or wink) their non-dominant eye. This would leave their dominant eye more consistently open.



Our dominant eye's first job is to be on the lookout for danger. This right-eyed girl, under stress, will tend to read with her left eye.

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