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

Educate Your Brain

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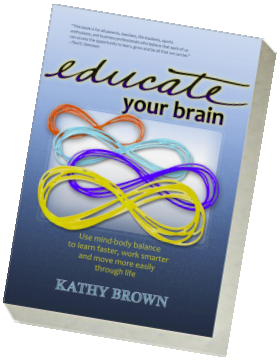

This article was written in 2001 as Kathy was trying to understand and explain in simple terms why reading was difficult for some students and how Brain Gym processes could help. Her most current information is presented in an extensive, 22-page chapter in her book, *Educate Your Brain: use mind-body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

Research: Brain Gym Improves Reading

Study Shows Significant Percentile Increase in One Year

by Kathy Brown, M.Ed.

Cecilia Freeman, M.Ed., a Brain Gym consultant in Ventura, California, has recently announced her findings from a year-long study of Brain Gym and its effects on reading scores. She and her project partner, Joyce B. Sherwood, M.A., worked with teachers and students at Saticoy Elementary School in Ventura, California, over the 1998-1999 school year.

Twelve teachers of grades K, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were given Brain Gym instruction every Monday after school for one hour throughout the school year. In these sessions they learned how to determine which Brain Gym movements and activities were called for in relation to various academic situations and how to guide the students in doing them.

The teachers then taught the children in their classes how to determine for themselves which Brain Gym movements they would benefit from at any time. The children became quite self-sufficient in the use of Brain Gym movements to help them be more productive in any of their academic subjects. Each participating classroom did a minimum of 15 minutes of Brain Gym per day. Cecilia and Joyce also did classroom presentations as well as one-on-one instruction (October through January) with children who were having the most difficulties in school.

The study was based on the children's reading scores on the Stanford 9 test, a standardized achievement test given to all children in grades 2 through 11 in California. It compared the children's reading percentile scores from May 98 (the end of the previous school year), to those of May 99 (the end of the "Brain Gym" school year).

The results were impressive both statistically and academically. The "Brain Gym group" children made almost double the reading improvement of the children in the non-Brain Gym groups.

Cecilia is quick to point out that gaining percentile points on reading scores is only one indicator of the improvement that the children made through their use of Brain Gym (albeit the most easily measured one).

Not so easy to measure, but clearly evident to the participating teachers, children, parents and school administrators, was the shift in self-esteem and attitude toward school that came along with the children's developing abilities. One portion of the soon-to-be-published study is filled with comments from children who were amazed to be learning more easily, teachers who were more energized and effective in the classroom, and parents who were grateful and delighted in the growth they were seeing in their children.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of this project is reflected by an experience that Cecilia had recently when she visited the school, almost a year after her last student contacts there. As she arrived she saw children here and there doing Brain Gym movements as a spontaneous and natural support for their learning process. As children integrate Brain Gym throughout their days, they take on the experience of personal wholeness and self-esteem that will support them thoughout their lives.

***Copies of this study are available** for $23.50, which includes postage. Send a check for this amount to Cecilia Freeman, M.Ed. at P.O. Box 198, Ventura, CA, 93002. Cecilia Freeman can be reached by mail at this address, by phone at 805/641-1851, by fax at 805/648-3536, or by email at cecilia@jetlink.net. Her website is www.iamthechild.com.*

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/Edu-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.

The right eye most naturally tracks left to right

The left eye most naturally tracks right to left

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.[6] 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."

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

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.

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

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

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.

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!

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.

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.