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

Educate Your Brain

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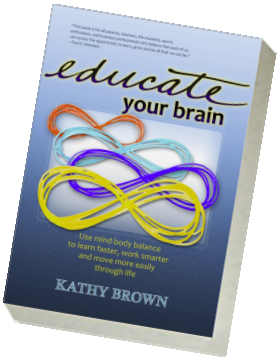

This article was written in 2000 as Kathy was trying to understand and explain in simple terms why reading was difficult for some students and how Brain Gym processes could help. Her most current information is presented in an extensive, 22-page chapter in her book, *Educate Your Brain: use mind-body balance to learn faster, work smarter and move more easily through life.*

Brain Gym® and Reading – Three Success Stories

Study Shows Significant Percentile Increase in One Year

by Kathy Brown, M.Ed.

• **A few months ago** a client brought her ten-year-old son "Greg" for a Brain Gym session to improve his reading. Reading was really a concern for Greg. He'd been slow to learn to read, and had had difficulty with every stage of reading. He was in a special reading class now at his school, and was showing minimal progress, although he is a very intelligent, fun child who is interested in everything around him.

I saw him for two sessions, three weeks apart. At each session we worked on some aspect of reading. We worked on reading fluency and word recognition, and did several repatterning processes, including Dennison Laterality Repatterning, which would allow Greg to have greater use of both brain hemispheres simultaneously during things like reading. It was clear by the end of each session that something had shifted, and I wondered what might be happening at school.

Recently my client had some time off work and went to school with her son for an entire day. She went with him to his special reading class and was so surprised! The teacher had the group reading orally from a somewhat challenging text about wild animals. Greg, the "reluctant reader," was volunteering to read the longest paragraphs with the hardest words--and doing a great job of it!

My client said she was so amazed to see her son read so much better than anyone else in the special class. She said, "He's so delighted with his reading skills! He's really taken off with reading now!"

• **Another client recently brought her daughter** "Laura" for a session to address a different kind of reading problem. Laura is in high school and takes Honors courses; yet she simply could not decode new and unfamiliar words. She would recognize a word once someone pronounced it for her, but she simply could not make out new words on her own at all. Her mother was baffled at how her daughter could excel so in school, and yet not have this basic reading skill.

As a pre-check I asked Laura to read orally from a short story by O. Henry, which has fairly adult vocabulary, and words used in unusual contexts. She read smoothly until she came across a word she'd never seen. She tried sounding it out several different ways and was completely unsuccessful. I was especially surprised, as this word followed fairly conventional phonetic rules.

Balancing for the goal "I easily read new words" led us to use Vision Re-education techniques from the In-Depth material. Interestingly, Laura had a history of "eye tracking" difficulties and had done special eye exercises with a developmental optometrist for some time to correct it. It was clear from the pre-checks we did that eye tracking (both eyes teaming to focus on the same point) was still a challenge for her.

Once the Vision Re-education techniques were complete we re-checked her eye tracking, which showed considerable improvement. Then I had her read again. She began at the next paragraph and read the entire (much longer) passage flawlessly, including several unusual words that I strongly suspected were unfamiliar. The only clue I had that at the moment was the slight, almost imperceptible hesitation she made before pronouncing some of them.

When she was finished, I asked if she'd known all those words. "No," she said, "there were words there I'd never seen before. But somehow I just knew them."

• **A client named "Donna"** said that she had always battled a certain problem with reading. When she looked at a page of print, her eyes wanted to focus only on the center of each line; it took effort to actually look at the beginning and end of each line.

This woman had been a very successful executive with a media company. Her career had been based on her ability to scan wire service printouts for daily news elements to broadcast. I couldn't imagine how much energy it had taken her to do her job!

Donna's session, also, called on Vision Re-education techniques. When we were finished, she looked at a page of print, and the look on her face was amazing. She said, "I can see this entire line of print! I don't have to make myself do it--it just happens."

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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/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.