

Left or Right Brained?

Continuing with my discussion on exploring labels in regard to learning, I will give a brief explanation of the left brained/right brained theory of neurological development. This concept was first popular in the 1970s when it was accepted that the left hemisphere of the brain controlled analysis and accuracy, while the right side was responsible for aesthetics and feeling. Of course, we use both hemispheres of our brains all the time. They interact with each other in complex ways and cooperate with other parts of the brain as well. The theory suggests though, that we all have a preference for one or the other hemisphere's apparent functions.

LEFT	RIGHT
logical	creative
orderly	intuitive, imaginative
busy	sub-conscious
conscious	spontaneous inspiration
systematic	rapid scanning and processing
sequential	deals with many things at once
slow, detailed processing	sees in whole pictures
deals with one thing at a time	controls recognition, aesthetics, memory
sees small details	receptive
controls language, numbers, symbols	synthesises
expressive	artistic
analyses	musical
mechanical	spatial
speaking	random

writing

holistic

rational

subjective

objective

relaxed

There are exceptions to these basic classifications. One example is that while musical ability may be located on the right side of the brain for most people, many trained musicians tend to process melody on the left side of the brain as their ability to read music increases.

Like with any attempt to classify individuals, this theory becomes relevant when considering which strategies are used in a learning environment. Most classrooms focus on left-brained material, which can cause feelings of inadequacy and poor test results in predominantly right-brained individuals. Unfortunately, many schools and homeschooling curriculums are geared to left-brained learners who do well with auditory teaching. Success with academics can vary with different teaching methods and therefore home based learning has an advantage over traditional education in that the student's learning style can be considered in planning or choosing a curriculum. I am finding that as our second child moves into doing more academics in her home based learning journey, I need to reassess the activities and materials we chose to use with our first born in order to cater for her unique learning style.

It is estimated that 65% of children today are right-brained, whereas in the 1940s - 1950s that percentage were actually left-brained. The use of televisions, computers and other technology are changing our children's brains. It is debated whether the education system is keeping up with this shift, and whether most classrooms can possibly be an optimum environment for learning when over half of the students have different requirements than those which the system still caters for. This theory possibly explains why so many of the children in schools are carrying labels such as ADD, ADHD, LD, Gifted and so on. It has been suggested that many of the students may just be mismatched to the methods and materials commonly used in mainstream education today. It is also assumed that gender and culture (two vital factors in designing an appropriate education) play a role in whether a person is more right or left-brained.

Which side of your brain do you use most? Take this fun quiz and find out:

Are you always or mostly on time?

A. Yes B. No C. Sometimes

Are you better in math or art:

A. Math B. Art C. Equally talented in both

Would you rather have directions written out or drawn?

A. Written B. Drawn C. Either

Do you usually wear a watch?

A. Yes B. No C. Sometimes

Would you rather read a book or draw a picture?

A. Read B. Draw C. Either

Do you try not to put things off?

A. Yes B. No C. Sometimes yes, sometimes no

Do you like throwing things out?

A. Yes B. No C. Sometimes yes, sometimes no

Do you make decisions based on careful thought or because you have a hunch?

A. Careful thought B. A hunch C. A bit of both

Do you squeeze the toothpaste from the top or bottom?

A. Bottom B. Top C. I don't know!

Mostly A's – Left Brained

Mostly B's – Right-Brained

Mostly C's – Both Brained

Resources

In Their Own Way by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D. (1987)

Endangered Minds by Jane M. Healy, Ph.D. (1990)

Right-Brained Children in a Left-Brained World by Jeffrey Freed and Laurie Parsons (1998)