

AN INTERVIEW WITH MELANIE WEST, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

- One of America's leading authority on right brain learning -

Educational Psychologist Melanie West is one of America's leading authority on right brain learning. Founder of The Right Side of Learning, she speaks out about the epidemic that is spreading across American schools. According to West, school age students are not getting the right-brain stimulation they need, a potentially dangerous situation that results in too much left hemisphere processing, ultimately creating dangerous levels of neurological stress and causing attention deficit, low motivation and inconsistent school performance. She has helped thousands of children who were struggling with math, reading, spelling, and written language skills, and each day experiences one of many miracles as a discouraged child begins to feel hope, an angry child finds the joy in learning and a disheartened parent reconnects with their child that was lost along the path of school failure.

Q: Psychologists can focus on many different aspects of peoples' personalities or behavior, but you chose to focus on how the brain learns. What inspired you in this direction?

A: I started my career testing and diagnosing students for learning disabilities. But, as I accumulated experiences, I discovered that we have a very real obstacle in how we approach a child who is experiencing a problem with learning.

The tests we use are designed to show you how the brain responds to different types of stimulation, but they are not designed to show you why the brain is responding in that way.

And, quite simply, if you don't know why something is occurring, you risk completely misinterpreting someone's behavior.

Q: You mention in your book, The Right Side of Learning, that a right-brain thinker learns very differently than a left-brain learner. How so?

A: The left side of the brain is a WORD-thinking machine. It is designed to pay attention to every detail, to keep things lined-up – 1 by 1 – and to keep things sequential and logical.

The right side of the brain is completely different. It is a PICTURE-thinking machine. It sees all pieces of information at one time. Its job is to develop meaning and understanding. The right side of the brain houses creative thinking, it is the part of the brain that can be completely illogical, yet, at the same time, it is the part of the brain that has the ability to have inventive, outside-the-box thinking.

Q: Are we all one or the other, left brained or right brained?

A: The human animal is born right-brain dominant. About 60% of us stay right-brain dominant through our educational years (age 8-18). Yet 90% of all school tasks favor and cater to left-brain thinking skills.

Q: So, right-brain thinkers really are at a disadvantage in our current educational structure. Would you say that our current approach to education is potentially *dangerous* to these types of thinkers?

A: Because a right-brain thinker does not transfer information easily from the left side of the brain over to the right side, a right-brain thinker will experience overload within the left hemisphere much more easily than a left-brain thinker. This overload is causing stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as significantly increasing the number of children experiencing ADD, dyslexia, and other learning disabilities.

Q: Could you give us a quick example of what it might be like to be inside the brain of a right-brain thinker?

A: A right-brain thinker experiences a break down in the linking process between the left and right sides of the brain. The brain can “hear” the words but is not linking the words to the correct pictures. To better explain, I usually do a quick game that allows you to experience what it is like to link the wrong picture to a word. After that, I show you what it's like to try to think when you are missing pictures.

Q: Any quick tips on how to communicate clearly with someone who is a right-brain learner?

A: A right-brain student needs to be prepared to learn. They must have the answers to the big questions (who, what, where, when) before directions are given (1st, 2nd, last). This type of learner needs to build strong visual pictures for key words and concepts before entering traditional lecture or workbook activities.

Q: Is being a right-brain learner really a “weakness” or “challenge” for life – something that a child and parent are simply going to have to deal with – or do right-brain thinkers get “better” over time?

A: 75% of all business owners, entrepreneurs, and CEOs are right-brain thinkers. Really, in many ways, it's the early school years that are hardest, because we simply teach this child in ways that are not authentic to how most children's brains are designed to learn. Schools must design an education that fully engages the right hemisphere during the learning process. Right brain stimulation not only accelerates learning, it engages creative thinking and develops the problem-solving skills our children need for future success – their personal success and the success of our country as a whole.

Q: What is your BIG message? What would you like every parent in America to understand about their child?

A: One, your child is NOT broken. All children learn best when the right hemisphere of the brain has been activated before turning on the left side. Do not let your school tell you what your child's learning potential is. Help your child understand how he or she is designed to learn and you will see a motivated, successful child.

For more information on Melanie West or the Right Side of Learning, visit www.therightsideoflearning.com.