

If your child is struggling in school, it may be because he's leaning to the right in a classroom that veers left.

Curve

BY JENNIFER MCCAMAN

Andrew doesn't apply himself at school. He disrupts the flow of the classroom, and he's labeled a troublemaker. But Andrew is extremely bright. At home he loves to draw and has mastered several video games. His parents don't understand why he can't concentrate in class. The answer? Andrew is a right-brained kid in a left-brained world.

THE MISLABELED STUDENT | Our creative God wires each of us to succeed in vastly different ways. Sadly, many school systems fail to empower students who don't learn through conventional teaching methods. Just because a child struggles in school doesn't mean he's lazy or a troublemaker. These struggling kids are often creative and highly intelligent.

Lucy Clay, educational expert and founder of Expressways to Learning, suggests, "Classrooms in the United States teach left-brained dominance — left-brained being structure and organization, right-brained being creative. Classrooms are not designed to further the right-brained child."

Creative children like Andrew are often labeled as learning-disabled. As a result, their self-esteem suffers, and learning becomes a dread. Children with true learning disabilities are often singled out and made to feel inferior. These labels can haunt children throughout their lives, feeding them the lie that there's something wrong with them. In *Right-Brained Children in a Left-Brained World*, authors Jeffrey Freed and Laurie Parsons reveal, "While certainly not all American schools and teachers are left-brained, education seems to draw more than its share of individuals who value compliance, order, and sameness."

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UNIQUE BY DESIGN | Thankfully, God didn't make any mistakes with your child. Years ago Dr. Howard Gardner, a psychologist at Harvard University, identified seven types of intelligence. Which one(s) describes your child?

- 1. Verbal/Linguistic:** Enjoys writing, reading, telling stories, or doing crossword puzzles.
- 2. Logical/Mathematical:** Interested in patterns, categories, and relationships. Loves experiments.
- 3. Bodily/Kinesthetic:** Processes knowledge through bodily sensations. Good at dancing, sports, or crafts.
- 4. Visual/Spatial:** Thinks in images and pictures. Fascinated with mazes or puzzles. Spends free time drawing or has a vivid imagination.
- 5. Musical:** Loves to sing or drum. Keenly aware of sound. Great listener.
- 6. Interpersonal:** Leader among peers, good at communicating, understands others' feelings and motives.
- 7. Intrapersonal:** Usually shy. Keenly aware of own feelings; self-motivated.

There are also a variety of learning styles:

Visual: Learns through seeing charts, graphs, and vivid images. Thinks in pictures rather than words.

Auditory: Learns through listening to discussions and verbal explanations. Easily discerns pitch and tone of voice.

Kinesthetic: Learns through actively exploring. Prefers a hands-on approach to learning.

Brian Mitchell, 24, knows what it's like to learn differently. "From day one in school, I asked four times as many questions as the other students." Brian was diagnosed with ADHD in 4th grade and dyslexia in 6th grade. Traditional learning left him exhausted and often in trouble. "I am a kinesthetic learner. Unless I physically participated in learning, I would start talking and get in trouble. I got sent to the corner a lot." Fortunately Brian had a teacher who recognized his uniqueness and was willing to think out of the box where he was concerned. "Mrs. Williams taught me never to give up on myself. And believe me, I wanted to."

Children who learn by exploring don't want to sit at a desk for hours, completing math worksheets. Students with strong interpersonal skills don't want to sit silently all day. Visual learners find it hard to keep up with a teacher who lectures.

To complicate matters, teachers tend to lead a class according to their particular learning style. A teacher who learns visually might not understand why he needs to read the directions aloud when they're clearly written on the board. As a parent, you probably tend to reinforce your child's learning according to your preferences. Just because you preferred studying with bright lights and no music doesn't mean your child can study that way. Celebrate your child's unique God-wiring. Don't try to rewire him to your circuitry.

Shawnah Shingleton, a homeschool mom, understands how to tailor a lesson to each of her children. She believes God gave her children learning styles that correspond to their spiritual gifts. Jared, 16, is a kinesthetic learner. “When Jared was learning his multiplication tables, we used blocks and he physically did multiplication,” Shawnah explains. Macey, 14, is an auditory learner. For her to really understand, Shawnah looks for rhymes to memorize. There are even songs and rhymes to make math easier. Molly, 12, is a visual learner. “When the paper got stuck in the printer, Molly watched the tutorial video and figured out how to fix it!”

READ BETWEEN THE LINES | Discovering your child’s unique learning style is like putting together a puzzle.

Did your child walk before crawling? Often gifted children begin walking at an early age but miss a piece in the developmental process, which can affect them in school.

Does your child have strong cursive handwriting? There’s a direct correlation between good cursive handwriting and strong reading comprehension. Cursive writing shows the child can “cross the midpoint” of the right and left parts of the brain.

How does your child draw a circle? If your child draws a clockwise circle, it might be an indication of being right-brained. Also children who frequently invert their letters may be right-brained.

Is your child highly sensitive to sound? Many right-brained children can easily detect a quiet whisper from the other side of the room.

Once you discover how God uniquely created your child, it can be tempting to storm the educational system and demand a revolution. But take a deep breath.

“We’re not asking the world to revolve around [our children],” Clay says. “We’re trying to reach children where they are and give them the tools they need to prove what they know in a regular classroom setting and eventually in the workplace.”

You might not be able to change the school system, but you can make learning a joy for your child.

Learn how your child studies best. Does your child want soft music playing the background? Should there be bright or dim lighting? Does your child need to study in short, intense bursts?

Make your home a place of praise. Let your child know you’re proud of who he is. Find something encouraging to say about his schoolwork every day. Remind him continually that God created him in a beautiful and unique way.

Reduce distractions, such as TV and cell phones. Be careful not to mislabel a distraction. Your child might work better standing at a desk rather than sitting perfectly still.

Help your child integrate the right and left sides of his brain. Encourage cross-lateral exercises such as swimming, horseback riding, and jumping on a trampoline.

Meet with your child’s teacher, and discuss (don’t attack) the classroom environment. With the right approach, you can help her understand how to better educate your child.

Use humor in learning. Intelligent children love humor and often understand jokes on a more sophisticated level. Laughing helps them relax and makes learning fun.

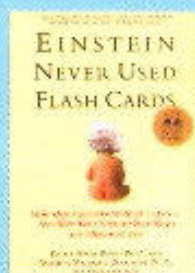
THE POWER TO SUCCEED | Albert Einstein, an accomplished musician, quit school after earning poor grades in language, history, and geography. Thankfully, a report card doesn’t indicate worth or how God will use your child in the future.

Your job as a parent is to listen to your child. You are the number one advocate for his education and self-esteem. Sometimes the answers for how to applaud and encourage your child are right in front of you. Open your eyes, mind, and spirit to your child’s true learning curve, and lean in that direction with him. God empowered your child with certain gifts that no one else has. Cultivate those gifts. Celebrate them! Then stand back and watch God create a class act. ❧

Jennifer McCaman is a freelance journalist with special training in the area of learning styles.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- Expressways to Learning is a multi-sensory, multi-media approach to reading, spelling, and math. Christian-owned, Expressways currently teaches ages 5 through adult. (www.expresswaystolearning.com)



- *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards* by Kathy Hirsch-Pasek, Ph.D., Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D., and Diane Eyer, Ph.D. This educational resource explains why children need to play more and memorize less. This resource is best for parents of infants or small children. (www.amazon.com)



- *Right-Brained Children in a Left-Brained World: Unlocking the Potential of Your ADD Child*, by Jeffrey Freed, M.A.T., and Laurie Parsons. Although this book addresses the needs of children with ADD, it’s a great resource for any parent who has a highly creative, right-brained child. (www.amazon.com)