

Mixed Dominance and Learning Disabilities

By Lisa Harp

Many students with learning disabilities are mixed dominant. This can interfere with learning among other things. The brain likes for one side of the body to be in charge, so to speak, and when mixed dominance pops up, it can create all kinds of havoc.

What does it mean to be mixed dominant? It means that the dominant eye, hand and foot are not all lined up. For instance, a student might be right foot dominant and right handed but left eye dominant. Or, the student might be right eye dominant but left foot dominant and left footed.

Just because a student is mixed dominant does not mean that he/she is learning disabled. But being mixed dominant will usually cause some kind of problem, such as spatial or depth perception issues. And, not all kids with learning disabilities will have mixed dominance. But, whenever I test a student and find out he/she is mixed dominant, I know that it is going to take longer than normal to get the student up to grade level.

I have also found that mixed dominance goes hand in hand with dyslexia. Not to say that if you are mixed dominant that you are dyslexic. But mixed dominance appears more often in kids with dyslexia.

Some people are proponents of changing the eye's dominance so that the student can be lined up properly. I have a different philosophy on this. I feel that the work it takes to change the eye's dominance could be better spent on brain balancing activities and visual strengthening exercises that will give the student better skills in general instead of changing what nature gave the student. Remember back in the 1940's and 50's when teachers forced left handed students to write with their right hands? It didn't work and only caused the students to become more frustrated. Well, eye dominance is the same thing.

Most people don't understand mixed dominance. If there were some clear cut rules about it, then it might be easier to understand. But there really isn't that much to understand. The secret to success is diagnosing mixed dominance and then treating it.

How do you test or diagnose for mixed dominance? It's so easy. Just hand a camera to the student and ask him/her to pretend to take a picture. Notice which eye he/she holds the camera up to, and that is the student's dominant eye. I use a more detailed tool, but this certainly works. To check for foot dominance, you

can just have the student kick a ball and notice which foot he kicks with. Another thing you can check for is ear dominance. You can hand the student a sea shell and ask him/her to listen to the ocean. Take note of whichever ear the student is holding the shell up to, and that is the dominant ear.

Now, how do you treat mixed dominance? Well, there are many things you can do that help the student. The most important and beneficial thing I have found is the brain retraining. The left and right hemisphere activities seem to balance the imbalance that causes all of the problems. The student remains mixed dominant, but is able to cope with academics and learning now because the brain is balanced and able to work.

As a final note, I have found that martial arts, or any activity that crosses the vertical midline of the body, is beneficial to kids and adults who are mixed dominant. I am mixed dominant, which has never interfered with learning, but I never really knew where I fit into space until I learned karate. Too bad I waited until I was in my 40's to try this. Baseball and golf are also helpful. I have found that kids who are mixed dominant are often outstanding athletes, but they usually pick lateral sports, such as motocross, soccer, track, etc. They naturally choose an activity that doesn't cross the vertical midline, because the crossing makes them uncomfortable.

Mixed dominance doesn't have to be a curse. I live with it and so does one of my daughters, and she is an honor student. We are both happy, creative individuals who love to learn and love to read. But, we also have both participated in brain training activities as well as martial arts that helped us overcome the negative aspects of this malady.