

DYSLEXIC THINKING— *Both a Gift & a Disability*

For years, teachers and parents have wondered how and why students who appear smart in every other way struggle with reading, writing, and spelling. Many famous people known for creativity and imagination struggled with words and letters. The Einsteins, Edisons, Schwabs and Lenos of the world survived their struggles and succeeded because of their way of thinking.

Current research gives some clues: Dr. Linda Kreger-Silverman developed the concept of the visual spatial learner to define students who think in images. She shows that 70% of the population has visual spatial strengths; of this percentage, another 30% are so strong that they have difficulties with symbols and associating sounds with letters. Brain scans show dyslexics read better with alternate strategies since information flows along different pathways in the brain, according to Rumsey and Horwitz of the National Institute of Mental Health. Dr. Jennifer Poole's Grounded Theory found disorientation occurs when the brain cannot process conflicting information.

After helping students and adults in public and private schools and colleges, I learned to look at learning and thinking through the lens of word and picture-thinking. Word thinkers, also known as auditory sequential thinkers, can be described as step-by-step, requiring mastery of one area before progressing to a higher level.

Consequently, these superior analytic skills easily make sense of words and the letters they are made of—thus, reading, writing and spelling come naturally to those learners. Picture thinkers, also known as visual-spatial thinkers, are more self-directed exploratory and look at new concepts from multiple angles, making sudden intuitive leaps. This creativity and imagination natural to picture-



thinking turns on at will. When this talent applies to a letter or word, the word can appear different than how it looks on the page, and writing or spelling may come out differently than expected.

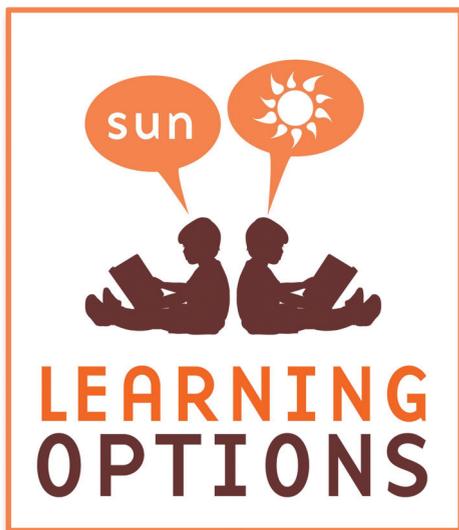
The disorientation that Poole reports happens so naturally that we are unaware that what our brain sees and hears is not what has been written or said. Most of us have disoriented when things do not

make sense to us. Disorientation can be as simple as the feeling that our car is moving when it's not or being so absorbed in a movie that we lose sense of where we are. Since the brain disorients as a result of a person being really good at creative thinking, the creative thinker can turn their disorientation on and off to fit the situation.

By simply turning off the feeling of imagination and creativity, the picture thinker can be certain their brain accurately receives how something looks or sounds when working with letters and words. Once certain of what is seen, the picture-thinker can rely on the order and sequence not naturally

apparent to them and achieve better results with reading, writing and spelling.

Looking through the lens of word and picture-thinking can explain types of smartness and struggles with sequential tasks like reading, writing and spelling. As author Tom West writes in his popular



book on dyslexic learners, *In The Mind's Eye*, our world needs both types of intelligence. Respect and use of both word and picture-thinking gives success with word-based tasks and brings students to the computer-based, visually-oriented careers awaiting them, all part of school success. ■

*Elsie Johnson is the director and owner of Learning Options, which aims to help students with dyslexia and autism in Bozeman and the surrounding areas. For questions, visit TheLearningOptions.com. Contact Elsie at (406) 282-7416 or at elsie@thelearningoptions.com. Attend events at the Country Bookshelf, in Bozeman: *Dyslexic Thinking—Gift AND Disability*, on May 16, and *Autism Explored*, on June 6. (CEU and Teacher Renewal Units available.)*



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