



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Institute for Educational Development


February 2010

Being left-handed in a right-handed world

Melaine D'Cruze

Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck

 Part of the [Other Education Commons](#), [Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

D'Cruze, M. (2010, February). Being left-handed in a right-handed world. *Nurture*, (8), 18–19.

Being left-handed



in a right-handed world

Be it our interests, origins, abilities and beliefs – we all have our differences and similarities. The only thing that is important however is to accept each other as we are, without having prejudices. There is nothing bad or shameful about being left-handed as explains Melaine D’Cruze in her article. Oprah Winfrey, Barrack Obama and Wasim Akram have moved past their challenges and achieved great heights – so can you.



My son was about a year-and-a-half when I noticed his preference for using his left hand over his right. In due time, I was convinced that my child was left-handed. This was the time I became curious on how his being left-handed would affect his lifestyle. It led me to learn everything that I could about left-handedness.

My quest revealed that even in this day and age, children who are left-handed are ‘corrected’ to use their right hand, even though they may be predominantly left-handed. The first people to notice a child’s being left-handed are the parents who generally ‘correct’ their children to use their right hand for day-to-day activities. Delving deeper into the cause for this ‘corrective behaviour’ from the parents, I realized that there was a lack of awareness of what left-handedness is all about, what causes it and what implications it could have on the child’s life in the long run. Many parents feel that it is culturally inappropriate for a child to use his/her left hand for many simple tasks, particularly eating, etc. The second form of ‘correction’ comes from the school, where teachers like the parents due to unawareness force the child to write

with their right hand and mar their writing performance for life. In addition, school desks are mostly designed for right-handed children and left-handed children suffer the hardship of trying to adjust to these school furniture. I was appalled to discover some of the cases where parents and teachers have even resorted to physical punishment to make the child right-handed!

What most people don’t know about left-handedness is that it is hereditary, i.e. it is passed on from generation to generation and it runs in families. Left hand dominance comes when the right side of your brain or the right hemisphere is more dominant than your left hemisphere. Hence, left-handed people are not in any way abnormal, but very normal. My husband was born left-handed, but due to ‘correction’ brought on by his parents and the teachers at school, he was forced to do most of his work with his right hand, however, he often displays ambidexterity. Another colleague of mine who faced the same issue as a child also shared that she was often confused even to this day as to which is the ‘right’ hand to use for various activities. A few studies have also shown

Famous Left Handed Personalities



◀ **Barack Obama** is the 44th and the current President of the United States. He is the first African American to hold the office, as well as the fourth president who is left handed. Obama is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School. Obama is also the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.



▶ **Wasim Akram** is a World Cup winning former Pakistani cricketer. He was a left-arm fast bowler and left handed batsman, who represented the Pakistani cricket team in Tests and One Day Internationals. He is considered to be one of the pioneers of reverse swing bowling. He is also one of the few cricketers who have been inducted in the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame.

▶ **Oprah Winfrey**, a left handed woman was raised up in an abusive and disturbed household. Undeterred by the challenges that she faced, she went on to become one of America's most influential and wealthy women. In 1993 Winfrey won the Horatio Alger award "given to those who overcome adversity to become leaders in their fields," according to Jet magazine.



that interfering with left-handed children and forcing them to use their right hand affects their decision making skills among other things in the long run.

Adding to this, there are several myths and misunderstandings about people who are left handed. Some say they are special and exhibit extraordinary talent than most right handed people and to the other extreme, people think they are clumsy and inefficient. There are no right and wrong answers to these myths. A few research studies have shown that left-handed people view the world differently than their right-handed counterparts. Several accomplished personalities throughout history have been left handed. Authors like Lewis Carroll and H.G. Wells; musicians like Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Jimi Hendrix, artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci; and sports personalities like Alan Border, Wasim Akram and Saeed Anwar (cricket) are a few examples.

There is a very small minority (7 to 10%) of people in the world who are left-handed and this leads to a lot of challenges for the left-handed in many day-to-day activities. For example, many implements and devices like the computer mouse, cameras, drilling machines and musical instruments are designed mostly keeping in mind the right-handed customers. This is the key factor in promoting the misconception about left-handed persons being 'clumsy and accident prone'. However, we can see some awareness in many countries where innovations in designs are including implements made to be used by the left-handed which are welcomed by the left-handed community, e.g. the left-handed scissor and the left-handed guitar.

From an educational point of view, a few simple changes made by the teachers or the schools can make a world of a difference to left-handed children in the class. Firstly, the teacher should be aware of the fact that left-

handedness is normal. With proper instructions teachers can effectively teach the child to write. A very useful resource on teaching left-handed children to write can be found here: <http://www.handedness.org/action/leftwrite.html>. Parents will also find information on this website to be useful not only to help the child adjust but also to prevent any hardship might face, particularly in case of writing. They can also orient the teachers about the techniques and tools to help such children and facilitate learning. This will help greatly in developing the left-handed child as a confident and contributing member of the society in future.

Secondly, the schools should also recognize the fact that there might be a few left-handed children in the classes and may want to design desks more suited for them. The schools can also facilitate support of such children's learning by investing in procuring an appropriate number of learning tools and equipment custom-made for left-handed users, which can reduce the risks of accidents. For example, a simple activity like cutting paper can be done with a left-handed scissor so that children remain a part of the learning experience. It is because of these factors that it is critical to include such facilitation at the early learning stage which will have a lasting impact on the child's learning and life skills.

Every year, an international day is celebrated on August 13 to acknowledge and recognize left-handed people. For more details, please visit: <http://www.lefthandersday.com/>. It would be highly beneficial if the left-handed community in Pakistan would become a part of this network and create more awareness to develop children for the future.

About the Writer:

Ms. Melaine D'Cruze currently works as Assistant Manager, eLearning at the Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED).