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Our Brains and Innovation

By Jim Stokes (<http://forestviewpps.com/wordpress/>)

On Friday, I had the pleasure of hearing a presentation by Brian Thwait's. Brian is the author of *The Big Learn: Smart Ways to Use Your Brain*. (It was also cool that I won a copy of this book.) In a very humorous way, Brian provided a very enlightening presentation about our brains. He explained how they change over time, not necessarily for the better. He explained that, as we get older, we tend to spend increasingly more time looking for our car keys or wondering what it was that compelled us to go off into another room looking for something or other. This was mostly funny because it is so true.

He also talked about growing our dendrites to improve our brain power and to increase the use of both sides of the brain. To demonstrate how we've become left-brain dominant, he used a compelling test of asking how many people in the room were good at drawing. Only a smattering of hands went up. He then asked how many hands would have been up had this been in a Grade One classroom – the answer being obvious that all hands would have gone up. He spoke of the typical decline in right-brain activity as we age, intuitively obvious when he asked our expectations about the same question being asked in increasingly higher school grades. It seems clear that we tend to be schooled towards logical left-brain dominance and, as a result, many right brains have atrophied.

One of the most interesting parts of his presentation, for me anyway, related to a book he referred to called *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*, (1983) by Howard Gardner. He explained how we all have different aptitudes and strengths in the various abilities identified by Gardner: Spatial, Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic. Each of these tend to be associated with either the left or right sides of the brain. He used a swirling (somewhat impressive – even to Brian) PowerPoint presentation to show how this list of abilities could be re-ordered by priority to demonstrate that every person has a different makeup and to reinforce an earlier point that all of our brains are unique.

Just being exposed to Gardner's list helps my logical (left-side dominant) brain to identify and better understand my own strengths and weaknesses. Some of the most creative and innovative people have been known to be very logical-mathematical, but to also have strong interests in right-brain activities (e.g. Einstein and music). It seems that simultaneously using and developing Gardner's multiple intelligences can have a synergistic effect that will help us to be more creative and innovative.

Given that we are living in an environment where constant change and doing more with less are normal, it seems like the right time to be getting more from our brains. Efforts to fully develop both sides of our brains (grow our dendrites), therefore, are now more important than ever. For a start at improving our brains, check out Brian Thwait's website at www.brainspeaker.com — or buy his book (unless you can find a way to win one!).