

Helping Visual-spatial Learners with School Problems Succeed in Elementary School

Visual-spatial learners are people with a different learning style. They do well in life as engineers, scientists, architects, artists, and mechanics. However, they often have problems in school. They can learn the material, but they do so using a different process:

- They are excellent visualizers and *must* visualize in order to learn. With training, they can visualize and recite a string of 10 to 16 numbers forward and backward.
- They think in pictures, not words, and usually have great trouble expressing themselves in words. They need time to translate their pictures into words. Their handwriting is often hard to read and their spelling is idiosyncratic.
- They are gestalt learners who constantly search for meaning. They thrive on complexity, often fail at simple tasks, and understand details only when they relate to the whole concept. For example, they can learn algebra before the times tables.
- They *do not* learn by rote and repetition; a few examples or problems are enough.
- They tend to be divergent thinkers. Because they focus on the larger picture, they often don't know how they have arrived at a conclusion or solved a problem.
- They have problems following sequential material presented orally. They can overcome this limitation if the material is sufficiently complex and of particular interest.
- They tend to have a poor sense of time.
- They are acutely aware of (often hypersensitive to) everything in their environment.

Ways elementary teachers can help visual-spatial learners:

- ◆ Reading: The lucky ones teach themselves how to read before they go to school. They need meaning, and respond to language experience and whole language approaches. They do not learn by phonics alone, and they cannot divide a word like "bat" into three sounds and then blend the sounds together. They can grasp prefixes, roots, and stems early on. They also can learn basic phonics rules.
- ◆ Spelling: Write each spelling word on a sheet of paper using different colors and big letters. The learner looks at the word, closes eyes and visualizes the word, spells it orally backward and forward, and then writes it forward.
- ◆ Put spelling words and other assignment on handouts. Do not expect them to copy correctly from the chalkboard or take letter-by-letter dictation correctly.
- ◆ Have the learner sit in the front of the room, to minimize distractions, but at least four to six feet from the chalkboard.
- ◆ Give oral and untimed tests.
- ◆ Find ways other than writing by hand for the learner to demonstrate competency. Give two grades on papers—one for content and one for mechanics.
- ◆ Pause during verbal presentations so learner can visualize what was said.
- ◆ Use rhythm and music to enhance learning.
- ◆ Allow learner to tape lectures and discussions.
- ◆ Inform a parent if assignments are not being turned in or classwork is not being done and see if brainstorming together produces a solution.
- ◆ Relish and reward diversity and divergent thinking.