



Education Strategies For Visual-Spatial Learners

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The visual-spatial thinking and learning style is very powerful. Visual-spatial learners are excellent visualisers and must visualise in order to learn. Visual-spatial learners think primarily in pictures not words - either “still” like photographs or “moving” like videos. They need time to translate their pictures into words and should not be hurried to provide answers to questions.

Their thought process is random abstract pattern recognition rather than sequential and they have problems following sequential material presented orally. They need to translate words into pictures in order to think and while they are translating they can miss incoming content material. This means that they may have gaps in their subject knowledge. Because of their need to translate their thoughts/pictures into words, they often do poorly in timed tests.

Gifted visual-spatial learners thrive on complexity yet often fail at simple tasks e.g. they can learn abstract, complex mathematics and yet have difficulty with the times-tables. They can create complex and detailed stories but cannot write them down. They tend to be global and 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.

Writing can be particularly difficult for visual-spatial learners, because it requires considerable effort and well developed visualising skills to translate words into pictures in order to be able to think, translate the pictures back into words and then hold them still in their head while they writes them down. This process requires constant effort which is physically exhausting and mentally draining.

They tend to be disorganised and have difficulty meeting time limits. This is not a behavioural issue but a significant difficulty for which they need assistance to develop appropriate strategies and skills. They need structure and predictability, clear limits and time frames and assistance with project planning. It is important that they are praised for their effort rather than concentration on achievement as it takes considerable time for them to develop organisational strategies and skills.

The following compensatory mechanisms are essential in the classroom to assist Visual Spatial Learners to achieve educationally to the level of their ability:

- identify and develop their strengths rather than concentrating on their weaknesses
- seat them at the front of the classroom to minimise distraction
- present material in a visual manner where ever possible
- directions of more than 2-3 steps be written on the board
- visual teaching strategies be used to build up correct visual images of the spelling of words. This should start with basic words and then move to multi-syllabic words. In this way the skills of visualising words, holding them in visual memory and retrieval are developed
- reading levels to be assessed by silent reading and then testing for comprehension i.e. reading aloud to be avoided
- use of visual teaching and organisational techniques, such as mind mapping and graphic organisers, be used as much as practicable to assist them to develop and use the skills of visualising
- place emphasis on the learning process not solely the end product
- reward best efforts and do not emphasise weakness
- oral teaching instruction be presented visually as well e.g. whiteboard, handouts
- copying from the board to be avoided as it will be difficult: instead, class notes should be provided at the beginning of each lesson
- use of a diary for the classroom teacher/s to record specific instructions and homework
- extra time be given to complete tests, tasks and assignments when necessary
- all school work, including class work, to be done on computer wherever possible i.e. handwriting to be kept to a minimum
- use of computer software such as Inspiration (www.inspiration.com) to assist with planning and organisation of school assignments.

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