Reading Readiness for Visual-Spatial Learners*

Linda Silverman and Betty Maxwell

Visual-spatial children master reading in a different manner from auditory sequential children. Some VSLs have a difficult time learning to read, while others seem to magically absorb the entire process before they enter school. Perhaps the key here is"before they enter school." Methods used for teaching reading in school may not work for VSLs. Because relationship is so important to their learning, perhaps part of theirreading instruction should be done in the safe atmosphere of home—maybe with the help of grandparents. Here are some suggestions that can set the stage for your child to become a better reader. These ideas will help all young children to fall in love with books.

Read to your children as often as possible. Read anything and everything, not just children's books. Continue reading aloud as a family even when your children are reading independently. (Myhusband and I read the Harry Potter series aloud to each other even now. Great fun!)

Put your finger under the word you are reading, so that they see theconnection between the written word and the word you are saying. Then, when they are ready, have them do the same.

Encourage your child to memorize stories or books, especially those with repetitious phrases (e.g., Green Eggs and Ham and other Dr. Seuss books).

Promote awareness of printed words. Point out words in theneighborhood, such as stop signs, road signs, street names, names of stores, names on boxes and cans in the grocery store. Read the names of favorite cereals at home, and point to words in television ads.

Have a time for reading in your home, when the television is off, and everyone reads silently.

Tell stories to your children. Have round robin stories, where you start the story and each of your children or their friends continue it at an interesting part and then pass it on to the next person. My mother used to ask us for three things:
(1) something that grows in the ground;
(2) something manmade; and
(3) a person or animal.
Then she wouldweave together a story
about the three things we named. (She said that I should be sure to tell you the idea wasn't original, but she can't remember where it came from.)

Create books with photographs of their favorite people and pets, with the name written under each picture.

Cut pictures of objects out of magazines and write the names of the objects under the pictures. These can be made into posters for your child's room or into little picture books.

Have your child draw a picture, then dictate to you a caption, sentence, or story about the picture. Write his or her ideas in large letters by hand or on the computer. Decorate the house with these picture stories. Start with just a few words, as fewer words are easier to read.

Borrow books without words from the children's section of your local library (there are tons of them), and have your child tell the story from the pictures. Record your child's stories on the tape recorder, then transcribe them on the computer in large print.

Read children's books that have repeated passages, such as Chicken Soup with Rice, by Maurice Sendak, and have your child fill in the repeated word, then the repeated phrase.

Buy rhythmic, rhyming books with tapes, and have your child followalong in the book, while listening to the tape.

Jumpstart Reading and Interactive Reading Journey are good computer programs for early readers.

Borrow or buy extra large books with very large print. These were developed for classroom use with large groups, but they are fun for beginning readers as well.

There are tiny refrigerator magnets of words that can be made into silly sentences. Find or make large-sized words and take turns seeing who can make a sentence with the longest number of words.

Get books on tape and listen to them in the car.

The crucial factor in being your child's teacher is having fun. If you aren't having fun or your child's not having fun, stop. Make a game out of every learning activity, anddon't be attached to the outcome. It's the process that counts, and the enjoyment of being together. Don't compromise that enjoyment by setting achievement goals.

*Excerpted from Silverman, L. K. (2002).
Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner. Denver: DeLeon Publishing.

Why All Students Need Visual-Spatial Methods

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.

The first child I observed with unusual visual-spatial abilities was profoundly gifted (above 175 IQ).
So I assumed that visual-spatial learners were profoundly gifted.
Then, I discovered that children who fit the characteristics of giftedness, but did not test in the gifted range due to hidden learning disabilities, were usually visual-spatial learners.
So I thought that visual-spatial learners were either profoundly gifted or twice exceptional (gifted with learning disabilities).

In 1991, I was asked to create a video on visual-spatial learners for the state of Missouri; the Director of Curriculum was convinced that the information would be applicable in all subject areas and at all grade levels, from Kindergarten through 12th grade. I was uncertain at the time, but he turned out to be right.

When we developed the Visual-Spatial Identifier, a process that began in 1992 and took the better part of a decade, we still thought that a small percentage of the population would be visual-spatial learners.
The results of the second validation study of our Identifier, in 2001, astounded us. Approximately one-third of the 750 students we had assessed in two schools were strongly visual-spatial and another 30% were moderately visual-spatial. That represented the majority of the school population!

As I was completing Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner, published at the end of 2002, I realized more clearly what Dr. Jerre Levy had said:

"Unless the right hemisphere is activated and engaged, attention is low and learning is poor."

She was talking about every student in the classroom.

Throughout the book I hinted that the visual-spatial learner might soon have the edge in gaining employment.
Tom West (1991), author of In the Mind's Eye, suggests that in the 21st century employees will require strong visual skills: "ready recognition of larger patterns, intuition, a sense of proportion, imaginative vision, the original and unexpected approach, and the apt connection between apparently unrelated things" (p. 88).

Daniel H. Pink (2005), author of A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, proposes that, now that information is readily available on the Internet, success in today's world is dependent on empathy, intuition, spirituality and right hemispheric-directed abilities.

"In the United States, the number of graphic designers has increased tenfold in a decade; graphic designers outnumber chemical engineers by four to one. Since 1970, the United States has 30% more people earning a living as writers and 50% more earning a living by composing or performing music. ... More Americans today work in arts, entertainment and design than work as lawyers, accountants and auditors." (p. 55)

I began thinking about how schools are preparing students for success in their careers.
It is very likely that until the modern age the skills emphasized in school were necessary for achievement in adult life. However, the world is changing very quickly and our educational systems are not keeping pace. Success in school still depends upon:

- ☐☐ Following directions
- ☐☐ Turning in assigned work on time
- ☐☐ Memorization of facts
- ☐☐ Fast recall
- ☐☐ Showing steps of work
- ☐☐ Neat, legible handwriting
- ☐☐ Accurate spelling
- ☐☐ Punctuality
- ☐☐ Good organization; tidiness

What positions require the skills so heavily prized in school?
These auditory-sequential skills are actually limiting the potential of all students to gain employment in today's world.
Citizens of the 21st century are rewarded beyond school for:

- ☐☐ Ability to predict trends
- ☐☐ Grasping the big picture
- ☐☐ Thinking outside the box
- ☐☐ Risk-taking
- ☐☐ Problem-finding and problem-solving skills
- ☐☐ Combining one's strengths with others' to build a strong team
- ☐☐ Computer literacy
- ☐☐ Dealing with complexity
- ☐☐ Ability to read people well

Isn't it time we recognize the importance of right-hemispheric abilities and provide all students the opportunity to develop their visual-spatial skills?
These skills are essential to their success in adult life.
To continue to prepare students for jobs in the 1950s is limiting their potential instead of enhancing it.
One of the central functions of school has always been to prepare the citizenry for gainful employment.

Are we missing the mark?

Prepared for the Visual-Spatial Resource website: www.visualspatial.org

A Visual-Spatial Approach to Spelling

by Linda Kreger Silverman Phd.

1. Write the spelling word in large print in bright coloureded ink on a card

2. Hold the card at arms Length.

3. Study word, then close your eyes and pitcture the word in your mind

4. Do something wild to the word in your imagination

5. Place word somewhere in space (in front of you or above your head)

6. Spell word backwards with your eyes closed

7. Spell word forwards with your eyes closed

8. Open your eyes and write the word once