

What is happening to our really bright visual youngsters?

by Olive Hickmott of Empowering Learning

The Challenge

Have some of your children been diagnosed with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, Aspergers or Autism? You may realise these youngsters are highly intelligent, even gifted, but they find so much of life a challenge and become frustrated, disruptive or withdrawn.

To help your understanding of "how" we learn, try this little exercise: Can you visualise objects you have seen before, for example your car or your front door. Now, remember a good event in your life, can you recall the pictures, the sounds and the feelings. Which one is strongest?

Having a good visual memory is an exceptional skill, lasting longer than auditory memory and enabling you can do some extraordinary visual gymnastics, in your mind's eye. Some of those I have seen are:

- Changing a 2D map into a 3D model of mountains - exceptionally useful for a mountain guide
- Being able to see different perspectives, often simultaneously - the talent of entrepreneurs, debaters etc
- Being able to fit physical objects together in seconds - the skill of carpenters, garden designers, hairdressers etc
- Being able to imagine the human body and its misalignments - the skill for physiotherapists, masseurs etc
- Being able to manipulate still and moving images at speed - the skill of graphic designers, film makers etc

Meanwhile your auditory skills, feelings and internal dialogue (that self checking voice we have in our head) may be very weak or non-existent, possibly overrun by your exceptional visual skills.

Of course, many of these visual skills may not be recognised until a child is older, so get to know and appreciate your youngster's developing visual skills - you will probably find some great expertise that you may not be able to do yourself!

Now look at the sets or clusters of symptoms that surround their learning difficulties, for example:

- Poor attention and concentration
- Letter and word reversals, poor spelling (including words spelt in spelling test and not for an essay a few days later)
- Poor handwriting
- Poor reading and forgetting "the content" of what you have read
- Difficulties with mental maths and learning tables
- Forgetting and missing punctuation
- Being overwhelmed
- Mixing up words, sentences and whole pages of text
- Inappropriate and bad behaviour
- Lack of feelings for others
- Being in a world of their own
- Poor sequencing

Many of the definitions overlap and children end up being diagnosed with some of this learning difficulty and some of that. To me we need to focus on the individual's symptoms, map back into the causes and determine how children can simply learn to overcome them. This dramatically reduces their confusion, helping them to lose much of their anger and frustration. Many of the strategies they need to develop are things that others have developed automatically and unconsciously, at a very young age. So my objective is to ensure that our very talented youngsters can learn easily without being overwhelmed by their fabulous skills.

The world as seen by visual youngsters

"Nobody told me that all good spellers and readers can 'see' words in their imagination. Maybe it is such a habit for them, they don't even think to tell children."

"When I was very young, I lived in a world of 3D objects, I was excellent at turning things around, like bricks and shapes, to make them fit into the Shap sorter. I built things all from my imagination, without having instructions. I was never told that that letters, words

Visual kids

and numbers are 2D and if you keep moving them you get confused."

"I have exciting videos running in my brain all day, I don't seem to have any control over them and sometimes I have lots of screens with different channels. I can be watching last night's TV, my mum telling my brothers off, my favourite film all at one time. I can't stop them or turn them off and sometimes they move so fast they are just a blur, like the TV when you first switch it on. They are often only a few inches from my face, which can be very distracting and it's too busy for me to pay attention to the Maths lesson. How do other people concentrate when all this is happening?"

"I find myself talking, gazing into space or walking away to try and stop my confusion. When I talk this seems to distract the confusion, gazing into space lets me concentrate on one of the videos and walking away is, I suppose, me trying to run away from everything, even myself."

"I always feel restless and exhausted unless I am on the computer, which is mainly pictures, I can look straight ahead instead of being collapsed in a miserable heap on the desk."

"When the words start moving on the page, I start to feel dizzy and then feel like passing out. I have tried to put this out of my head, but every day when I come to school I hope that this will be the day that school starts to make sense. But I just get confused again and I am so tired when I get home, I am frustrated, angry and sometimes can be really horrible to mum and dad. Nothing in school makes sense to me."

The skills we need to teach are visual for visual youngsters, for example:

- Recalling pictures of familiar objects
- Controlling movies or still pictures
- Recalling still letters and words (for improved literacy)
- Visualising still numbers (for improved mental maths)
- Being able to copy down from your visual memory and the blackboard to paper
- Converting stories into your own picture memories is essential for comprehension
- Converting lists into picture memories improves short term memory
- Converting pictures and thoughts into the written word (story writing)
- Creating imaginary pictures
- Study skills, e.g. mind mapping
- Re-aligning internal memory skills to visualise, recall sound, access feelings and internal dialogue
- Being able to clear your body's energy system from overload

- Motivation to change.

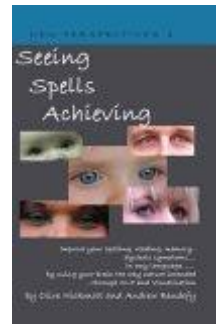
To someone who has a very visual mind, the world seems impossible. They become very frustrated, feel stupid, often ending in poor behaviour to relieve the discomfort. Learning these skills will help.

It is also invaluable to have other family members learn these skills, to get a real sense of joint achievement. All these skills can be taught by every primary school teacher and can teach the whole class in minutes. If you recognise pupils from this article, take a look at www.visualkids.eu

The benefits of a great visual memory will enable our youngsters to be brilliant learners once they learn how to use their amazing skills appropriately. We can teach visual youngsters how to let go of much of their confusions which is a really great start whilst others are arguing about whether "learning difficulties" are curable.

My credentials

I have taught 100s of people to teach others visual spelling and through them we have reached 1000s worldwide. I want to ensure that children learn these and other simple skills at a young age to avoid getting confused. Teaching visual children is a delight; you are suddenly talking their language, in fact, pictures are their specialist subject.



As founder of www.empoweringlearning.co.uk, I first published, *Seeing Spells Achieving*, a simple guide to teaching literacy and numeracy in 2006. Since then I have learnt much about our very talented visual children. I am a health, wellness and energy coach, qualified as a Master in NLP, Energy Enhanced NLP (Energetic NLP), Thought Pattern Management and Professional Coaching. The web-site has many stories of individuals who have had great success, inspiring others to repeat it for themselves.

I run breakthrough workshops with youngsters and their parents around the UK and in Holland. "In just 90 minutes everyone can change their experience."

