

stand the authors' main points. The casual reader might jump to the conclusion that the authors are saying that once we identify children as gifted and treat them as such, their problems will go away. That's not the case. The careful reader will come away from the book with several main points, including:

- Many gifted and talented individuals have been misdiagnosed due, in large part, to "widespread ignorance among health care professionals" about their characteristics and needs.
- Certain gifted children and adults are at greater risk for some diagnoses. The authors cite Asperger's and existential depression as two

examples.

- The characteristics and needs that accompany giftedness should be taken into account in the diagnosis and treatment processes.
- Some individuals have "what appears to be an overlap between giftedness and a particular diagnostic category." The authors refer to this situation as having a *dual diagnosis*, and they explain that it "has implications for [the] education and treatment for these persons."

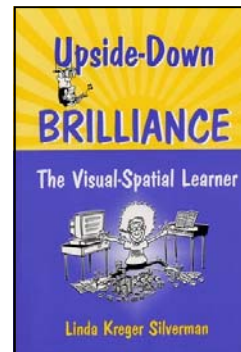
At the end of the book readers will find listings of resources and readings along with an extensive list of references. They'll also find the impressive biographies of each of the book's six authors. ■

Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner

By Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.

DeLeon Publishing (2002)

Reviewed March, 2006



More than 20 years ago a group of children caught the attention of Dr. Linda Silverman. In her work as a psychologist and head of the Gifted Development Center in Denver, she "just happened to discover a fascinating profile of strengths and weaknesses," as she explains in the introduction to *Upside-Down Brilliance*. What she saw was gifted children who failed to achieve. They were not earning top grades, and they were not receiving high scores on IQ tests; but talking with them and observing them revealed children of marked intelligence.

These children shared a number of characteristics. They showed weakness in areas traditionally associated with academic success such as reading, spelling, writing, attention, memory, organization, and following directions. On the other hand, they showed strength in mathematics, art, music, and construc-

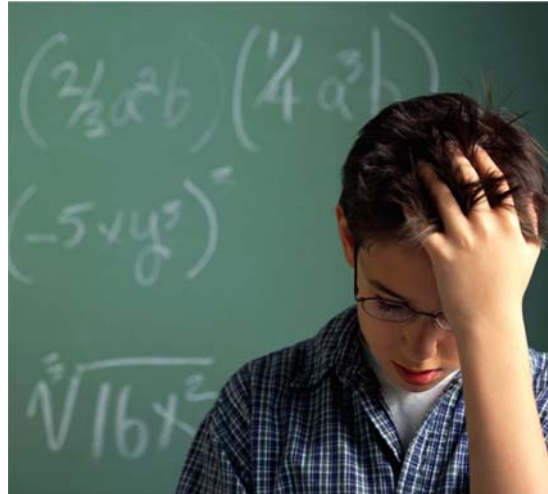
tion. They had the ability to quickly grasp the big picture, and they demonstrated a good sense of humor and a creative approach to problem solving. When their IQ subtest scores were examined, the highest scores were on tasks that required visual-spatial ability.

Dr. Silverman gave a name to children with this profile: visual-spatial learners (VSLs), and she began to write and speak about their characteristics and their needs. According to Silverman, the VSLs' particular combination of strengths and weaknesses is often problematic because the "gifts in the visual-spatial domain ...tend to be overlooked in school. Education often focuses on [these children's] weaknesses rather than their strengths. And how we are treated in school leaves a lifelong imprint on our self-esteem."

In writing *Upside-Down Brilliance*, Linda Silverman has brought together her observations, research, ponderings, and recommendations about this unique group of learners. Her message is that understanding these children is essential since, based on validation studies conducted at the GDC, approximately a third of all school-age children may have this learning style. From her research, Silverman sees that “more and more children are being born with visual-spatial strengths, and some of them have auditory-sequential weaknesses [i.e., difficulty processing spoken information and learning or performing in a step-by-step manner]. Dyslexia (difficulty with reading), and its partner, dysgraphia (difficulty with handwriting), are both on the rise.” Her opinion is that “instead of putting all our energies into correcting these deficiencies, we need to be paying more attention to what dyslexic, dysgraphic children do well. They have abilities critically needed in today’s society.”

With these thoughts in mind, Silverman works to give the readers of her book insights into how these children think, learn, and react to the world around them. She discusses the difficulties they have in traditional classrooms, where most teaching is aimed at students with an auditory-sequential learning style – that is, students who are detail-oriented learners and who take in information best by listening. Silverman offers many recommendations for ways in which parents and teachers can build on the strengths that VSLs possess and accommodate or remediate their weaknesses.

Along the way, Linda Silverman discusses many topics of interest and concern to a broader audience than just those who raise or teach VSLs. For example, the book includes chapters that deal with AD/HD, learning disabilities, and underachievement. These were included because, as Silverman states, “I believe that many dyslexics, many with AD/HD, many who suffer from seizure disorders, ... many who are underachieving...are hidden gifted learners with a visual-spatial learning style.” Parents and teachers will find plenty of useful information and recommendations in these chapters that apply to 2e



students with and without the visual-spatial learning style.

The same is true of the information on giftedness, included because “there are thousands of VSLs out there who were not successful in school, when actually they are among the most brilliant minds on the planet.” However, Silverman does not mean to imply that all VSLs are gifted. Although she believed that to be the case early in her study of this learning style, she came to realize that visual-spatial abilities are not limited to the gifted.

Additional topics of interest to those concerned with VSLs as well as to others are:

- Early ear infections and the role they might play in the development of visual thinking
- Raising and teaching introverts
- Allergies and the role that dietary intervention can play in bringing about behavioral changes.

The chapters devoted to parenting VSLs and teaching them both contain a wealth of practical recommendations that can work well for many children, regardless of their label.

Readers will find this nearly 400-page book to be very readable, written in a conversational style and illustrated with clever cartoons. When sitting down to read the book, make sure you have your highlighter and your sticky notes handy. You’ll find plenty to mark for later reference. ■