**Setting the Table for Thinking and Memory**

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Is having a poor memory causing you or someone in your life difficulty? If so, this article could be helpful in strengthening memory skills for all. For most people, experiencing an event is memorable because the event was enhanced by the use of some of their five senses: smelling, tasting, hearing, seeing, and touching and an added dimension: the stimulus of emotions. That in mind, no pun intended, experiential learning or multimodal teaching techniques were developed in order to enhance a student's capabilities of remembering what was taught in a lesson. But, what about the person in or out of school that simply can't remember conversations, or what they've read? How can we help them increase their memory in every day life events?

Let's think back to when you were in nursery school and in kindergarten. You were allowed to move around in the classroom. You played with toys, clay, colorful blocks, paints and markers. You listened to music, sang songs, you played games with your classmates, you ate snacks. You were able to learn through the stimulation of many of your senses. In first grade, the classroom rules restricted you from moving around. You couldn't talk when you felt like it; you had to be a good listener, stay still and be quiet. By fourth grade, you were limited to using only 2 1/2 of the 5 senses: the sense of seeing- looking at your teacher, the book or the blackboard only, the sense of hearing-listening to your teacher and the sense of touch- holding a pen or pencil as a writing instrument. (2 1/2 senses because it is the hand, not the full body that is experiencing.) The experiential learning of the subject matter becomes very limited. Therefore, a student must be on task at all times in order to hear the directives of the teacher. If a student or any individual is in the middle of a conversation and they "zone out" for a few moments, they literally miss important information that is being spoken to them. For a person who has ADHD this is a very common problem and it really impacts their life in every circumstance. It does not go away! This is an auditory processing problem.

It is critical for a student or anyone to be able to "image" the words that are being spoken to them. It brings to life the expression, "I 'see' what you are saying". The auditory processing of the brain stimulates the right hemisphere of the brain and creates an image for memory. It is just as critical that the print a student or anyone reads makes a picture in their head as it is when hearing.

The full understanding of grammar impacts the capabilities of person to "image" a sentence. The noun-a person, place, thing, an event or idea, has to pop out and become three dimensional in the individual's brain. The verb- an action word or 'part of being', ie.: am, is, are, in the sentence should stimulate some type of motion as in the making of a movie. The adjective-describes the noun's shape, color, how many, style and gives it depth,( 3 dimensional image). The true definition of reading comprehension or math comprehension is that an individual is able to image or make a "movie" from the passage or symbols that are read. Memory is the picture making ability of the brain. Memory should be seen in the mind's eye in the third dimension, as if one could hold the idea being expressed in their hands.

Directional language of left and right are used commonly in conversation. What happens to an individual who is diagnosed with dyslexia or dysgraphia and is given verbal directions to get to a specific location? Will they be able to "see" the directions, map it in their mind's eye? What if they still confuse right and left? This is where comprehension skills, directional skills and strong memory skills are critical for the classroom, work place or just every day conversation. If an individual does not know their right hand from their left hand, they cannot orient themselves to what was spoken to them, and will not "image" what they are reading. By fourth grade these students will be struggling greatly in school and perhaps in some sports. These students need to be taught using all five of their senses to be successful in the classroom. In lieu of having a classroom set up for kinesthetic learning, a student will benefit from sitting close to the teacher and having occasional moments of instruction, ( teacher pointing to a page and making sure an assignment is understood), being available to repeat explanations in a different context and allowing movement during the class period.

In order to concrete the concept of "right-handedness" for a student, an explanation is typically used by saying, "you write with your right". However, this doesn't fair well with the left-handed population. To better assist kinesthetic learning, one could say to the student, "My right hand is my polite hand". Extend your right hand to the student to shake their hand. This truly concretes the imagery and memory of which hand is their right hand. (In order to assist an individual in gaining directional control of their hands and body for scripting and physical self awareness skills, there is a program called BRAIN GYM, you can 'google' this on the web to get more in-depth information.)

Nanci Bell has authored a book entitled, "Visualizing and Verbalizing for Reading Comprehension". She beautifully illustrates how imagery takes place in the brain using a diagram with circles to show the two hemispheres of the brain and using dots to show how imaging takes place in certain hemispheres. The program offered, that is connected to this book, truly changed my life for the better. My memory and comprehension has increased tremendously.

There are many components to attaining and storing memory. I am a tutor for learning disabilities and I needed to come up with a presentation that entails: an explanation of the processing of the brain, a device for increasing memory through auditory and visual stimulation, concrete directions for left and right, linear eye tracking and long term storage of information. I combined Nanci Bell's concept of visual pictures with a diagram of a table place setting.

I remember when my mother taught me how to set the table for supper and how difficult it was for me to remember on which side the utensils should be placed. I learned how to talk my way through the process to remember the pattern of the place setting. This process is called "internal talk". The presentation and explanation of how an individual thinks and attains memory was born: it is called "Setting the Table for Thinking and Memory". This idea and presentation can help anyone of any age understand how the brain accesses, processes and stores that information.



This is how the presentation should be made: I say and repeat, "My right hand is my polite hand", and I shake the students' right hand. I point to the left and right sides of a wipe board and write down the words 'left' and 'right' in the corners. I draw an arrow on the top from left to right and explain that this is the direction your eyes should move when you read any material. (FYI, never assume anything when explaining directional language to anyone!) Then I draw a picture of a fork on the left side of the board along with a napkin, and a knife and a spoon on the right side of the board, leaving a space in the middle, where I will later draw a large circle for the dinner plate. (I take this opportunity to comment that I do not draw very well and that in fact I make many mistakes a day. I state, "I am not perfect". The fear of making mistakes for some people is very deep. Always be aware of the person's feelings and speak gently as you make this presentation).

I write the word 'fork' under the word 'left' and I write the words 'knife' and 'spoon' under the word 'right'. We count the letters together of the words written on the board, and then place a '4' under 'fork' and '5' under 'knife'. Explain that this is a mnemonic device to help remember this diagram. Ask the student to look at each picture and word. Then I ask them to close their eyes and I say, "Try to see the picture of a fork in your mind's eye" and then I say, "'Image' the word 'fork', one letter at a time". Then, I continue encouraging the student to image each and every picture and word. This skill really helps individuals who have been diagnosed with Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities. This, also, helps the student create short term to long term memory using the 'setting the table' diagram.

I continue to say, "The napkin is on the left, so the fork is not alone." Now, draw a large circle, the size of a dinner plate, in the middle of the place setting. While gesturing, touching both sides of your head, ask, "Now what is inside of my head?" The student replies, "Your brain!" "Yes, absolutely your brain is inside of your head and just like this dinner plate drawn on the board, the plate will represent your head and brain. Things will go inside of it, too!" Draw a line down the middle of the plate. I comment that the plate has two sides just like your brain has two sides. The left side of the brain is for the 4 letter words of thinking and processing; write the words, 'word', 'hear', talk' and 'read' in a column on the left side in the circle. (Explain that as an infant, we "hear" words. As we develop, we "TALK" and in school and we are expected to "read" words and understand language. Some students will have difficulty with foreign languages due to comprehension issues.) On the right side of the brain, for the 5 letter words of thinking and imaging; write the words 'click', 'image', 'color, 'shape', 'style', 'count' and 'depth' on the right side of the circle. Draw arrows going back forth from the left side to right side, showing that there is a constant dialogue between the "word" that is heard or read and the image". Use a "word" like 'shoe' and ask the student to say "click" demonstrating that, like a camera, you are making a picture representation of the word in your mind.

The next step is to "image" the "word" by choosing color, shape and style, number or "count" of something and how large or small the thing is, making the image of the 'shoe' 3 dimensional ("depth"). "Does the shoe have red fabric, pink shoe laces, white rubber around the sole?" Now, set this image in your head in motion: make a "movie". Ie.: "What is the 'shoe' doing?" Ask the person to add sound and hear the image at the same time. "Can you hear the shoe making a squeaking sound on the wooden gym floor?" They have made a video! Write the word 'video' below 'movie'. Then say, "This is how you create memory of anything you hear, read or speak." Thus, "Setting the Table for Thinking and Memory" is accomplished.

This setting the table diagram is a very useful tool to explain to anyone of any age how one processes and stores information. I hope this diagram and explanation increases your memory.