

## **The Importance of Memory**

**By Lisa Harp**

Today's child rarely plays kick the can until dark, rides horses for hours, rolls down hills, or hangs upside down from trees on a regular basis. Part of this is simply for safety reasons. But the child of yesterday, who spent long afternoons playing cops and robbers has been replaced with a technological savvy child who spends hours each day on the internet, watching television, playing video games, or being strapped in a moving vehicle on his/her way to an organized sport or activity (with a private television screen in the seat ahead to keep from being bored.)

The brain uses physical activities to become "wired" for learning, and this continues after birth. Today's child is missing out on some foundational memory building activities, and the amount of children showing up with learning disabilities only makes this premise stronger.

Visual memory is the ability to remember what was seen. Individuals with poor visual memory find it difficult to recall visual images immediately or after a long period of time. Most of us take visual memory for granted. If we look at something and then look away from it, we can hold it in our memory. Children who have visual memory problems can't do this or can't do it well. This affects academic achievement in numerous ways.

So much of a child's day at school centers around the use of visual memory abilities. The teacher will write a word on the board, discuss the meaning, and erase it. The student is expected to know the word, its meaning, and its spelling. Copying sentences can be a horrible chore for a student weak in visual memory. Even letter formation can be difficult, such as distinguishing the differences between a b, d, p, or q. These children spend the school day and beyond constantly frustrated because reading, writing, math, and spelling (especially spelling) demand a high degree of visual memory.

Auditory memory is another memory ability that affects academic and life achievement. It is the ability to recall information that has been given orally. Auditory memory problems are difficult to identify. If a student appears to be engaged, then the teacher assumes the student is listening and comprehending what is being said. If there is an auditory memory problem, the student may be listening, but there is no "Velcro" to hold in the information. It's as if the information passes right through the student's ears and bypasses the brain. Bits and pieces may be remembered, but that is all.

I am finding more and more students who are weak in auditory memory as well as visual memory. As these areas are exercised and strengthened, amazing things happen. The student acquires that much needed "Velcro" and starts holding both visual and auditory information in his/her mind. This directly affects school work.

There are so many activities that are known to help both visual and auditory memory. Schools would better serve our learning disabled students by using these activities instead of using a pull out program and presenting watered down academics instead of activities that will actually correct memory weaknesses.

As far as learning goes, there is another memory worth mentioning. It is called working memory. Working memory is the ability to hold several facts or thought in memory temporarily while solving a problem or performing a task. Working memory is required to understand spoken language, to comprehend what is read, to write (compose), problem solving, and some math skills. Obviously, if a child's working memory is weak, then learning problems are sure to crop up.

I have found that the kids we work with come to us with weak visual, auditory, and working memory abilities. We always start with brain retraining and visual skills training and then move to auditory training. At every step of the way we work on memory building so the student can exit our program with strong working memory skills.

To remember information presented is crucial for academic success as well as life success. Children can and should be taught how to enhance these crucially important skills, and this leads to life success as well as academic achievement.