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Improving Visual Memory: A Terrific Teaching Tip

Renee Rice Moran

East Tennessee State University, ricemoran@etsu.edu

Huili Hong

East Tennessee State University, hongh1@etsu.edu

LaShay Jennings

East Tennessee State University, jenningsjl@etsu.edu

Kayla Knupp

Edward J. Dwyer

East Tennessee State University, dwyer@etsu.edu

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Improving Visual Memory: A Terrific Teaching Tip

by

Renee Rice Moran, Huili Hong, LaShay Jennings, Kayla Knupp, and Edward J. Dwyer

Visual memory involves the ability to remember what we see. Remembering the structure of words is essential for developing reading competence. Many beginning readers readily remember the letters that make up words in a relatively easy manner. However, some developing readers have great difficulty in remembering words. The pioneering work of Fernald (1948) challenged the notion that visual memory is a fixed capacity. Engaging in multisensory literacy study has been in vogue ever since. In this light, Vacca et al. (2015) suggested using a "multisensory approach" (p. 130) with all beginning readers who are learning letter names.

Fernald (1943) demonstrated that visual memory could be improved greatly through using a multisensory approach to learning. Instead of just looking at words, developing readers employ a variety of sensory-based strategies to encourage visual memory. Fernald used sand on trays to trace words as part of an overall multisensory approach. However, using sand is rather cumbersome. Over the years, using shaving foam has become a popular strategy but tends to be difficult to use effectively, although, admittedly, it is an enjoyable strategy for young

learners. We will allow that the shaving foam method is wonderful toward the end of the school year when desk and table surfaces need to be cleaned!

The strategy presented herein involves constructing an easy-to-use learning instrument that can reinforce memory through providing tactile involvement. The first step is to take an ordinary clear page protector and place it on a piece of corrugated cardboard from a box with the three ring opening to your left. Put a piece of paper into the page protector. Punch holes at about .25" apart over the entire surface using a push pin (Photograph 1). The cardboard will prevent damage to the desk/table surface. The paper in the page protector makes it easy to see where the holes have been punched. Pull the plastic sides of the page protector apart once you have finished punching holes, and you will have a rough surface on one side. Add a new sheet of paper to replace the one with the holes. The new sheet of paper provides a backdrop. Words or letters to be learned can be placed in the page protector (Photograph 2). The perforated page protector is ready for practice. If desirable, the perforated page can be conveniently stored in a three-ring binder.

Photograph 1. Punch holes in the page protector with a push pin.



Photograph 2. Perforated page protector for reinforcement of visual memory



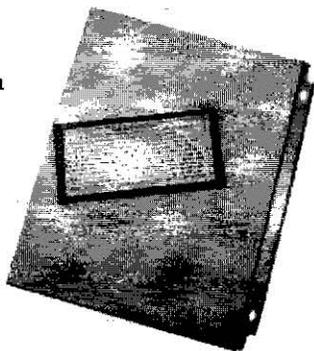
Visual Auditory Kinesthetic and Tactile (VAKT) Learning Strategies

The goal is to foster growth in visual memory using a variety of sensory inputs. An eight-step approach to using VAKT strategies follows:

1. Discuss the meaning of the word—for example, tree.
2. Look at the word and say it aloud.
3. Say the letters in the word and spell them aloud.
4. Take a word card with the target word written on it and place it under the perforated page protector. Use a reader friendly font such as Arial.
5. Say the word aloud, trace the word while saying the letters aloud, say the whole word aloud, and repeat several times.
6. Close your eyes and write the word in the air with your index finger while saying the letters aloud; repeat several times.
7. Say the word aloud, and say the letters aloud without looking at the word while clapping on each letter. Then, say the word again, and repeat it several times.
8. Add the word card to your word bank.

Even the most capable of students will occasionally have difficulty with spelling or with content-specific vocabulary and will find that the multisensory approach can be helpful for encouraging memory. We have demonstrated the strategies presented herein with hundreds of teachers and also in clinical settings while working with struggling readers. Photograph 3

Photograph 3. VAKT strategies on a card in a page protector



shows a Learning Strategies card with the eight VAKT steps presented herein with the perforated page protector to serve as a reminder of suggested procedures. While multisensory approaches have been around for a long while, we propose that adding the page protector tactile reinforcement strategy will provide an easy to use and effective addition to strategies already underway with developing readers.

References

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About the Authors

Rence Rice Moran (RICEMORAN@mail.etsu.edu) and Huili Hong (HONGHI@etsu.edu) are assistant professors in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (CUAI) at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) in Johnson City where they teach classes in literacy instruction.

Lashay Jennings (JENNINGSJL@etsu.edu) is a clinical instructor in the CUAI department who teaches literacy classes and guides students in field placements.

Kayla Knupp (knupp@etsu.edu) is an undergraduate student in the CUAI department who is an academic performance scholar.

Edward J. Dwyer is a professor in the CUAI department where he teaches classes in literacy development (Dwyer@etsu.edu).

Rence, Huili, LaShay, Kayla, and Ed strongly support constructivist/hands-on strategies for enhancing reading competencies and encouraging reading for enjoyment among developing readers.

Department of Curriculum and Instruction (CUAI)
East Tennessee State University
Box 70684
Johnson City, TN 37614
(423) 439-7595

Contact author: Edward J. Dwyer (dwyer@mail.etsu.edu)