

Visit With the Utays

April 2007

School Psychology and Education Specialists



Dr. **Joe Utay**, Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for Total Learning Centers and former professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Department of Counseling, is a graduate of University of Pittsburgh, a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, and father. **Dr. Carol Utay** is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. She is also a graduate of University of Pittsburgh, an expert in learning and special education. "Dr. Carol" has experience as a principal, Orton-Gillingham reading therapist, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. She is a national 2006 Athena Award winner for community service. They live and work in the North Hills with their daughter Andrea.

Another Memory Key: "4 Ways to Combat Memory Interference"

"You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives." When Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel wrote that, he was pointing out the importance of memories that make up who we are. We hear the same sentiment from students of all ages who lament, "When you forget in the middle of a test, you realize just how important memory is to students." The many memory strategies in this series of columns lose their potency when faced with interference. The good news is that the following strategies combat the most typical sources of memory interference:

1. **Counter external distractions.** You want your memories to stick and that won't happen if the glue you use (focus) is diluted. Remind yourself, "It is now time to put all my attention on what I want to memorize."
2. **Counter internal distractions.** Self-talk like, "There's no way I can remember all this for the test" or, "I wonder if they'll have pizza today at lunch" are as bad as external distractions. The solution is the same- "I will now focus on this."
3. **Only use one memory method per task.** When you ask your brain to memorize the same information using different methods, it reduces rather than increases your chance of remembering it. One method, for example, creating an acronym from the first letter of each item on a list, is great unless you ALSO try to remember the same list in a different order putting them to tune of a

common song. Pick just one method per memorization task.

4. **Only memorize what needs memorizing.** In some cases, it is clear what to memorize, such as definitions of vocabulary. Unless bare bones items will be accompanied by essay questions, keep them pure. Keeping it simple is efficiency not laziness..

Most of what teachers ask students to learn is actually easy to remember. The problem is that memories need a nail to hang their hat on to remain remembered. So, the main key to applying all the powerful memory enhancing strategies we have described in this series, is to do so with an eye out for the memory distracters that can pull out the nail as soon as your head is turned. We hope you and your children have benefited already from this series on keys to enhancing memory. As always, if needing more focused information about your own unique situation or needs, Total Learning Centers provide great community resources to help your child prepare today for success tomorrow.

For more information about this or any other topic related to your child's success, including professional assessment of strengths and needs, contact Total Learning Centers at 724-940-1090 (Wexford, Fox Chapel, and Murrysville areas).

Reprinted from Northern Connections April 2007.