

Principal's Message - week ending 13 03 20

Dear Families

In last week's message, I suggested that

- We all learn in remarkably similar ways
- Practice is key to learning, particularly retrieval practice – going back over things we have 'learned'
- 'Multi-tasking' hampers learning
- We may have a 'preferred' learning style but mostly we learn best through both words and images and by thinking hard and practising
- There is nothing 'natural' about talent; talent is about being really good at something and that comes from practice

This week: **How do we learn best? Part 2.**

Here are some specific things we can all do to learn well. By learn well, I mean creating the best possible chance of making learning stick. With many of these, as you will see, parents can help their children.

1. **Quizzing and testing.** Asking and answering questions, self-quizzing, doing practice exam questions and so on, are amongst the most effective ways of learning. The great thing about using quizzes and tests is that questions are hard to avoid – you either know the answer or you don't; and where you don't, it's essential that you fill in that gap. Questions uncover what we don't know; it's crucial that we fill the gap that the question has created. Parents can quiz their children and they can encourage the children to self-quiz – to ask themselves key questions, try to answer them, and then try to fill any gaps.
2. **Making flash cards.** Say you are learning about 'Digestion' in Science, you read the information and you answer a few questions about it. Now, get an index card (those small rectangular cards you can buy in many places) and write the question on one side, 'What is digestion?' and a model answer on the other, using bullet points. Read the model answer a few times. Set the card aside. Later, go back to the index card and just look at the question and have a go at answering it. Think hard before turning the card over. Then, turn the card over and fill in any gaps in what you remembered. And repeat. Maybe the next day, a week later, a month later. It will stick.
3. **Making notes that summarise things we have learned in our own words.** We read a passage on the causes of the Second World War; we note the key points using bullet points. This is very effectively combined with using flash-cards because we can then create a new flash-card with the key question on one side – What were the main causes of the second World War? – and the bullet-point answers on the other side.
4. **Teaching others things we think we know.** Ask your child to teach you about Digestion. If you have the notes or the book they have used to try to learn, you can compare what they tell you with the notes/book. Don't forget to help them fill in the gaps!
5. **Retrieval practice:** this is a thread that runs through all learning techniques. Go back over it again and again and again, but at intervals. Do it today. Do it again tomorrow. And then again next week. The more we do it, the more key knowledge will stick. Retrieval practice is the KEY learning strategy in the world, in my view.

Kind regards

Mark Patterson
Principal