

Mnemonics

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Statement of the Problem

Students who have difficulty learning often have to struggle to retrieve information. Memory deficits can impact a student's learning across the curriculum and make it difficult for them to achieve academic success. Students may have difficulty recalling facts, general vocabulary, or procedures.

Proposed Solution/ Intervention

The use of mnemonics as a strategy to help students remember vocabulary and factual information can take a number of forms. Strategies include the use of keywords, which are familiar words which can be linked to visual and acoustic imagery; pegwords, which are rhyming words which may be linked to images, often used for numbered or ordered information; and letter strategies, including acronyms (each letter represents a word) and acrostics (the first letter in each word of a sentence help to recall a list). There are many internet sites that provide examples of mnemonics (e.g. http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=instruction/cognitive_strategies/teacher_tools/mnemonic_strategies)

The theoretical rationale – how does it work?

Mnemonic strategies work on the basis of linking new information to previously acquired knowledge. When students use visual or verbal cues to help retain and retrieve information they are able to access newly acquired information with greater success than through more traditional rehearsal methods of memorisation.

What does the research say? What is the evidence for its efficacy?

There is a large body of empirical evidence that indicates that the use of mnemonics is a very successful intervention when used to assist students recall academic content, including those with mild disabilities at both primary and secondary school level, in memory-based tasks. Meta-analyses of the research studies have found large effect sizes across grades, content areas, type of disability, and settings. Research has been conducted in both laboratory and classroom settings with rigorous standards of control. Results in both settings show that students who are taught mnemonic strategies to assist their learning consistently outperform those who are taught using more traditional instruction. Research evidence indicates that mnemonics can assist students with comprehension of new materials. The efficacy of mnemonics has been demonstrated in a variety of content areas including maths, science, history, geography, languages, and English, indicating that the strategies are useful beyond simply memorizing vocabulary.

Conclusions

Mnemonics are simple, effective strategies that provide students with a means of helping to improve their recall of information, thus enhancing opportunities for academic success across the curriculum.

The MUSEC verdict

Recommended

Key references may be found at:

http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/community_outreach

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