

Memorization vs. Critical Thinking. Who wins?

Recently, my son (in fifth grade) needed to discuss the events that lead to the American Revolution. He sat at home and went over all the major points:

- The Stamp Act of 1765
- Taxation without representation.
- The Boston Massacre of 1770.
- etc.

Later, we discussed them and he showed me that he understood.

Yet, when I checked with him before he went to bed, he hadn't memorized the events (those mentioned earlier and others). When I gave him clues, he could explain each one very well.

I began to wonder, "Will he remember to put down all he knows?" It's not like I could sit next to him and give him hints. He's pretty bright but would he be able to show it?

It all comes down to memory in a lot of ways. My son needed to memorize the points he understood so that the next day he could recall them and include them in his essay. Then, he could combine the information with his understanding and come up with a really strong essay. A lethal combination when done right.

So why are there some people that want to relegate memorization to the back of the classroom? A second class study skill.

Wouldn't it be more logical to say that we need to develop both memory skills AND critical thinking skills?

Let's face it. Solid thinking skills depend on a strong memory.

Being able to recall easily helps your child access information in order to make a point.

Let's go back to the example with my son.

He wasn't sure what the essay would be about but he was armed with a lot of information. He felt he knew enough about the events leading up to the American Revolution that he could answer the question with details.

And he did.

And he's only in 5th grade! Yet, this combination of memory and thinking is the cornerstone of learning at any age and helps kids do better in school.

If someone could explain to me how my son would have gotten a good grade on his essay without knowing the facts, I would love to hear it.

Want to know why? Because most of my students would love to stop memorizing tomorrow. They hate it and wish they never had to do it again.

(Could it be that the ones that are so anti-memorization are really "memorizing-haters" from way back?).

I agree with Dr. Mel Levine, author of "All Kinds of Minds", who states, "Understanding + Remembering = Learning."

Talk about hitting the nail on the head!

The real question is, "How do we get our kids to memorize more easily?" I really believe that many hate memorizing because they can't do it very well.

Could you when you were in school? Here's the reason why not. Schools don't teach memory skills. Kids go home and try to memorize on their own.

Some get it but many don't. The ones that don't end up hating the process with a passion.

So, I have an idea. Let's call a truce. Let's teach memory skills along side thinking skills. That way, kids are prepared to retain all the information they'll need later on when it's time to do the thinking.

I'm sure the results will astound us. We'll have kids that call on prior knowledge to make points, illustrate ideas with examples and back up what they say with facts.

Hey, that sounds like a plan!

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About the Author

Jim Sarris is the author of Memorizing Made Easy, a resource that helps kids of all abilities remember more of what they study. This leads to better grades and more confidence. For more information and a free report, visit <http://www.memorizing-made-easy.com>.