

A LOOK AT MEMORY AND LEARNING IN CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING

There is a consensus among researchers that memory improves as children get older, starting at birth and reaching 'adult' levels of performance by around 15 yrs. This means that younger children (e.g. 6 and 7 yr olds) generally have worse memory than older children, and kids have generally poorer memory performance than adults. As coaches, we have to take this in to account when we are teaching children. Listed below are some findings from memory research in children and how you might apply this information when teaching/coaching.

- ❖ Kids are not able to keep many “chunks” of info in their head all at once. For instance, a 7 yr-old can only keep about 3 or 4 things in their mind at once. This means that if you try to give children a whole lot of things to keep in mind at the same time (what is sometimes called the *shopping list* style), they will likely forget a lot of it.
 - Tip ... Keep It Simple! Only give them a few things to keep in mind at once.
- ❖ Kids have been shown to process information more slowly the younger they are. This means that information you give them may 'fall out of their head' fairly rapidly.
 - Tip ... Repetition! You may have to remind younger kids more often about what you want them to do because they lose the info quickly.
- ❖ Kids have more trouble 'inhibiting' irrelevant things from popping into their heads. This makes it more difficult for them to focus on the important things, such as instructions being given by you!
 - Tip ... Again, Keep It Simple! Fewer bits of info flying around in their head makes it easier for them to focus on the important things.
 - Tip ... Get Their Attention Before you Teach! With all those other things going on in their heads, unless they are focused on you whatever you say is more likely to get lost in the clutter.
- ❖ People can remember things easily if they can link them to things they already know. Since kids starting swimming will have little to no 'knowledge base', it makes it more difficult for them to tie in what you are teaching with what they already know.
 - Tip ... Patience and Repetition! Swimming skills are complex and it will take new swimmers a bit of time to 'wrap their head' around all the new knowledge that is being thrown at them.
- ❖ People learn things best when they are paying attention. As most of us know, kids usually find it difficult to pay attention to one thing for a long period time (especially if there is a bunch of distracting stuff going on around them ... like on a pool deck!). We also learn better by learning things bit-by-bit over many practice sessions rather than trying to cram everything into one session. The time in between practice sessions gives our new memories a chance to 'consolidate' (i.e. grow stronger). Finally, we tend to remember things that produce a strong emotional reaction better than things that don't.
 - Tip ... Keep It Short And Sweet! Making things interesting will capture and hold the kids' attention, and if a kid has a positive emotional reaction to what you are teaching (e.g. "WOW, that was really FUN!") they will probably remember it well. Keeping things short will also ensure you are not trying to teach too much in a single session and 'overloading' your swimmers.

Reference

Haberlandt, K. (1999). Human memory: Exploration and application. Allyn & Bacon.