

Increasing Students' Retention of Material

Summary: It is always frustrating for teachers when students learn something one day and then don't remember it the next. In an article for *Education Week: Teacher* magazine, a veteran teacher and member of the Teacher Leaders Network discusses what science has to say about increasing retention of material.

Practical Applications

The article explains several best practices teachers can employ, including:

- *Return to information consistently over time* – this means considering using less “on-the-fly” questions and more pre-planned questions that harken back to previous lessons.
- *Slow down.* Even though “wait time” is a common strategy, use more than you think you need to – student’s brains need the time to process
- *Time it right.* The peak learning times for students, brain-wise, are in the beginning and end of lessons. Moreover, students need to catalog and process information every 20 minutes or so. Thus, the author suggests:
 - Make the first 10 minutes of a lesson extremely “pointed, explicitly linked to the new lesson.”
 - After 20 minutes, take time to consolidate the information through turn-and-talks, having students summarize their learning, etc.
 - Spent the last 5 to 10 minutes of the lesson concluding and summarizing again
- *Build strong relationships with students.* Emotional states and stress levels have a direct effect on memory, so knowing your students and being able to connect with them when they are distressed will actually increase their academic achievement.
- *Establish relevance.* This means ensuring the content is relatable to students so that they are able to connect the new knowledge with old knowledge. In particular, don't dismiss incorrect or “seemingly random” comments out of hand; instead, give the students an opportunity to explain so you can gain insight into what prior knowledge their brains are trying to connect and adjust accordingly.

Conclusion and Citation

Many teachers already use many of these strategies as part of their everyday practice, but being thoughtful and deliberate about how we are helping students have the best chance to retain content is a key aspect of effective teaching.

Pillars, W. “What Neuroscience Tells Us About Deepening Learning.” *Education Week: Teacher* (Mar. 2012), <http://bit.ly/H1idzO> (free).