

## **October, 1999 - Andrea Bubka, Psychology**

My teaching tip involves something new that I am actively employing this semester. One of my research interests is flashbulb memory, in which a surprising and emotionally-charged event produces a seemingly long-lasting and detailed memory of specifics as well as personal information, such as where you were when you heard the news. For the last two years, I used the Princess Diana incident to study this process. This summer JFK, Jr. died; this event should also produce a flashbulb memory (more like a video memory, according to me). I conducted a pilot study this summer, testing the suitability of the questions that would be presented in a subsequent study (measuring recall/accuracy and assessing the role of emotion). In the questions referring to the "event," such as "How did you find out about the event?" some participants in the study asked, "Which event - when it was announced that he was missing or that he was dead?" My first reaction was that either one should produce the flashbulb; on second thought, I vacillated between the two and finally settled on the former. After discussions with some colleagues, one of them stated that this time period in between when we heard he was missing and then we heard he was dead could be an interesting memory process itself. It could also be a contributing factor to this flashbulb/video memory. I liken it to a cliffhanger in serials in which the reader/viewer has to wait a period of time before the ending of the story unfolds. During this waiting period, the event is mulled over, discussed with others, and predictions are considered for the ending. In one of Hemingway's books, the main character, a writer, states that he never ends a writing session with the completion of a chapter because the next day it is difficult to start the next one. Instead he recommends stopping in the middle of the chapter when there are plenty of active ideas so that the next day he can easily complete his thoughts from the previous day.

The teaching tip is probably something you do - sometimes. Usually a topic/chapter will be discussed for a week or so, and then a new topic is introduced. As the class comes to a close, don't stop at the end of a chapter. The tip is to leave your students with a cliffhanger, something that is provocative, worthy of thought. If the cliffhanger is interesting, they will think about it, consciously and unconsciously, until the class meets again. Thinking about it is a type of rehearsal, but it isn't simply rote memory, it is an active control process - which hopefully should lead to a better video memory of the topic.

A few other teaching tips:

1. Besides introducing subject matter to your students in the classroom, consider the skills that they should acquire in college. Graduates should acquire computer expertise; they should know how to write. I also believe they should know how to communicate through oral presentations. Give them these opportunities in a casual setting.

2. I encourage reading for pleasure - anything. I focus mostly on newspapers and books. I know students have textbooks to read, but pleasure reading should not be something you eliminate until the summer or until after college. Many of our students are required to take the GREs for graduate school, and they don't perform well on the verbal section. They simply aren't encountering the words that are presented on the tests. I have presented a "word-a-day" in my classes trying to encourage vocabulary building. A website, *wordsmith.org*, can be contacted to receive a word-a-day by e-mail.