

Memory and aging

Debbie Bodinger

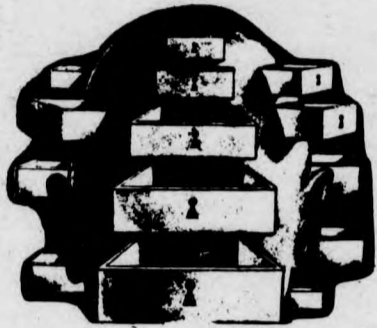
Older people still have it, they just don't use it as much anymore.

This is the conclusion of Dr. Fergus Craik, a research psychologist at the University of Toronto, who recently spoke at York on "Memory and Aging: Downhill all the Way?" the talk, given Jan. 11 as part of the colloquium series for York's psychology program, concentrated on research that Dr. Craik and his colleagues have conducted in their lab at Erindale College. This research suggests that memory deficits associated with aging may be due to differences in the way older people (60 years and older) mentally organize information. It appears that although they still possess the ability to process information in ways that facilitate remembering, they don't do so spontaneously.

The experiments Dr. Craik presented grew out of a model of learning that he himself helped pioneer. While traditional ideas about learning have centered on structures, the "levels of processing" approach (as the name implies) focuses on the mental processing that goes on when a person is exposed to, or asked to, learn new material. Different tasks require different amounts—or levels—of processing. For example, deciding whether the word "elephant" appears in upper or lower case letters requires less mental processing than deciding to which category the word belongs (e.g. animal, vegetable, mineral...). In one case, the person needs to pay attention

only to the size of the letters, while in the other, the person must decide what the letters are, what the word is, what it means, and what other kinds of ideas are associated with it (e.g. big, gray, animal). According to this model, the "deeper" the processing that is done, the more likely the material is to be remembered.

In one experiment described by Dr. Craik, he and his colleagues asked both young and old people to perform several tasks similar to the ones just described. Later, they were presented with a list of words and asked to identify which words had appeared in the experiment. People did indeed remember better those words which they had been required to



process more deeply, but importantly, there were no differences in the performances of older vs. younger people. On the other hand, if the instructions were simply to learn the words (and not make some kind of decision about them), there were marked differences between the two groups. It seems that when older people are specifically asked to do the processing necessary to learn a word (e.g.

decide to which category the word belongs), they learn as well as younger people. Younger people seem to spontaneously use strategies to remember material (e.g. associate the words on the list with something unique to help them recall), but older people do not.

Dr. Craik also spoke briefly about some of the popular ideas about memory and aging. Many people believe, for example, that older people remember past events better than recent ones. According to Dr. Craik, this has not been borne out by research. Usually when someone makes this claim, they are comparing a person's memory for "the time they broke their leg" 35 years ago, with "what they had for breakfast" yesterday. Certainly, the two events don't have the same importance. He cited research done by other investigators who compared memories for recent vs. older television shows (which presumably should have the same importance for an individual). Young or old, people remember the more recent television programs better.

So, is it "downhill all the way?" Well, there's little doubt that older people do suffer some loss of episodic memory (memory for specific events), but, Dr. Craik stressed, the outstanding feature about working with groups of older people is the vast individual differences among them. There is much more variation in the learning abilities of a group of older people than in a group of younger ones of comparable intelligence.

LISTEN, JAKE, AND LISTEN AS YOU WOULD TO YOUR OWN MOTHER! THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS MEETING IN ONE HOUR! THEY WANT TO KNOW THE NEWS AND YOU HAVE TO TELL THEM... TEQUILA SAUZA IS NUMBER ONE ACROSS THE COUNTRY - NUMERO UNO, RIGHT? NOW CLEAN YOUR GLASSES AND GET IN THERE!



TEQUILA SAUZA!



NUMERO UNO IN MEXICO AND IN CANADA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION APPLICATIONS

The Faculty of Education is now receiving applications for the 1980/81 academic session. Students currently registered in undergraduate faculties can obtain applications or information from -

Office of Student Programmes Education

Office of Student Programs
Faculty of Education
Ross Building, N802

Education Office
Glendon College
228 York Hall

INFORMATION MEETINGS

Students wishing to learn more about the Bachelor of Education programmes at York University are invited to attend special information meetings to be held:-

Wednesday, January 30th, 5:00 p.m.
Faculty Lounge (S872 Ross Building)

Thursday, January 31st, 5:00 p.m.
Faculty Lounge (S872 Ross Building)

Tuesday, January 29th, 5:00 p.m.
Fireside Room 3rd Floor York Hall, Glendon College

Some "elevating" ideas from . . . THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL PLANT

Elevator Courtesy - I

The two basic rules of elevator courtesy are the same as those of the TTC or any other public transportation system. They are:

- let everyone leave before you enter; and
- move to the back so others can enter.

However, don't dial IVI-IKII for elevator information!

Seriously though, there are several other ways to be courteous and speed up the service to boot. One of them is to consider how many floors you are travelling and locate yourself in the elevator to suit. For example, if you are travelling from the ground floor to the top floor, you should stand at the back of the elevator. If you are travelling three or four floors, you should be near the doors but not impeding others from entering or leaving. If you are travelling one floor up or two floors down, you should be taking the stairs.

Also, when you enter an elevator in which there are people already standing in front of the pushbutton station, don't reach over to push your floor yourself. Instead, move to an unoccupied spot and ask for your floor to be pushed. The person in front of the station will gladly oblige just as you will when the locations are reversed.

Last, but not least, remember to help the handicapped. Elevators are difficult for the handicapped to operate. A simple gesture like holding the doors while a person enters or leaves, or offering to select the person's floor button will not go unnoticed. Try it - you'll like it!

See you next issue with some more tips on elevator courtesy and conserving energy as well.

Your friendly elevator mechanic,
TED WALDRON