

Chapter 5 - Understanding and Assessing Memory

Chapter of *Integrating Neuropsychological and Psychological Evaluations: Assessing and Helping the Whole Child* provides an in-depth description of the various types of memory. In addition, a variety of assessment tools for measuring various memory subtypes are discussed.

The following selection provides an elegant example of the relationship between memory formation, memory recall and sensory associations.

Memory

Marcel Proust, in his celebrated exploration of memory, *Remembrance of Things Past* (also translated as *In Search of Lost Time*), described how tasting a madeleine unlocked a flood of memories about his nineteenth century childhood in Combray, France;

“And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray... when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Leonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it; perhaps because I had so often seen such things in the meantime, without tasting them, on the trays in pastry-cooks’ windows, that their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent; perhaps because of those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered... But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest: and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection”. (1981, 50-51)

Here and in subsequent volumes, Proust portrayed many of the subtleties and complexities of his experience of lost time or memory.

There are many subtypes of memory described in Chapter 5. Here is an example of how one subtype, Short Term Memory, may impact a child’s ability to complete a playful activity and impacts her social relationships.

Short Term Memory

Two 11 year old girls sat side by side in front of the computer on a rainy day in March. The inclement weather made outdoor play impossible, so the classroom group was spending some down time indoors. The two girls both enjoyed the same online games, and while they weren’t allowed to play them at school, they used the characters and settings to write fictional stories. They chatted excitedly about the developing plot,

which involved quests and heroes. Elise typed and Julie listened and watched. As Elise sequenced events, she would ask Julie what she thought should happen next. Each time, Julie would ask, "What, who? What are they doing?" and Elise would remind her who the characters were. Despite knowing the characters and setting very well, Julie could not keep track of where they were going, with whom and what they were doing. It was almost as though, she had never heard the story before, even though she was attentively sitting beside her patient friend as they wrote the story. Julie's verbal short term memory was letting her down.

Proust, M. *Remembrance of Things Past, Volume I, Swann's Way*. Translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (1981). Vintage Books, New York.