

PSYCHOLOGY

Boys Demonstrate Ability To See Things Hidden by Screen

Power to Retain Mental Pictures Which are More Than Memory Images May Exist to Some Extent in All Children

IF THE ordinary adult were able to see an object before his eyes after he knew it had been taken away, he would probably be quite alarmed. "Seeing things" is considered quite abnormal among grown-ups.

Many children, however, are able to do just this, and several boys from St. Mary's Industrial School in Baltimore, Md., demonstrated this ability before the psychology class of Dr. J. Edward Rauth at Trinity College, Washington.

The boys were allowed to look at a colored picture for a few seconds—a time entirely too short for them to memorize the details—and then after it was withdrawn they would describe what they saw upon a gray screen. They could answer any questions about the picture, even to counting the buttons on the coat of a man illustrated, until after a few minutes the image would fade.

An even more interesting demonstration of the ability made use of a form board containing holes shaped like triangles, stars and other geometric forms with blocks to fit these holes. The child was allowed to look at the board for a few seconds. Then a screen was held over the board so that he could not see it. The child would pick up a block and would look up and down the blank screen, evidently searching his image of the board for the right hole. When he was satisfied, he would reach under the screen and without the slightest hesitation place the block in its place in the hidden board.

Power Fades At 16

Dr. Rauth believes this ability in children to be much more common than psychologists have realized. It is possible that all children have it to some extent. It exists to a measurable extent in fully half the 250 boys that Dr. Rauth has tested. But the power seems to fade at about the age of 16. The few adults who retain it are usually found among artists, sculptors, and musicians, Dr. Rauth told his class.

The children who have the ability, termed eidetic imagery, are also able to

produce from memory pictures which are more than memory images.

The eidetic child is able to distinguish between these images and his memory pictures. He will say of the memory that it is "in my head." But the projected eidetic image is "right there" where he points.

And the images are not necessarily visual. One boy was asked to count with the beats of a metronome and to stop when it stopped. He counted four counts beyond the beating of the metronome, and was not aware that it had stopped.

When one boy was asked to make believe that he was tasting something very sour, the taste was so real to him that he was able to put his finger on the exact spot on his tongue where the sour was. This spot was exactly where the taste buds are most sensitive to sour.

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MEDICINE

Warning Against New Baldness "Cures" Issued

WARNING that a new crop of baldness "cures," though not necessarily any new crops of hair, may be expected shortly is seen in the note received by the American Medical Association from the proponent of the latest method of growing hair on bald heads, Dr. Bengt Norman Bengtson of the University of Illinois School of Medicine.

Dr. Bengtson recently reported striking results in treating baldness with a pituitary gland preparation.

Now it appears the baldness "cure" manufacturers are ready to cash in on the new method without waiting for further scientific confirmation of its value. The situation is not without danger, since pituitary gland extracts are extremely potent substances that cannot be safely used without medical advice.

Charlatans Active

Since his preliminary report, Dr. Bengtson has been besieged with thousands of letters. Commenting on these, he said:

"The experiments, while gratifying in certain types of baldness, do not indicate that a complete solution to this age-old problem has been realized.

"Several non-medical organizations, presumably interested only from a commercial point of view have already attempted to obtain material for promulgation to the public, and several charlatans have stated that they were personally associated with me and therefore absolutely competent to administer the method.

"I have had no associates and no one is authorized to speak for the experimental clinic which is being conducted by the research department of the University of Illinois School of Medicine.

"While interesting, the results have not yet been such as to warrant extreme optimism. Only after extensive and exhaustive research will it be possible to say to what extent the method is specific."

Science News Letter, December 19, 1931



A STRANGE FACULTY

Seeing an image of the puzzle board on the gray screen used to hide the board, the boy, at right, searches his image and places each block in its proper hole. Left, the boy shows how the puzzle board is ordinarily used in mental testing.