

Pupils can draw on power of doodles to aid memory

Nicola Woolcock
Education Correspondent

Doodling while learning is usually frowned on by teachers but it can boost memory and should be used routinely when revising, an experiment suggests.

Academics working with girls at Queen Anne's School in Caversham, Berkshire, found that pupils' power of recall doubled in some cases when they used art to help their memory.

Working with Myra Fernandes, an expert in memory research from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, four sixth-formers at the independent school led the experiments.

One group of girls aged between 12 and 14 memorised a list of items, after seeing each word for 30 seconds, by writing them down as many times as possible. Another group was asked to repeatedly draw pictures of the same

items, such as a truck or pear. When tested several hours later, the girls writing notes remembered an average of six and a half words against nine for those drawing pictures.

In another test, those writing notes recalled half as many, three compared with six on average, as the other group.

The effects were seen across girls of all academic abilities, Dr Fernandes said, as drawing led to the "creation of a more durable, robust memory trace".

Drawing skill did not matter, she said, adding: "The simplicity of this strategy means it can be used by anyone who can hold a pencil and draw a quick sketch."

The school plans to introduce drawing to help memory within teaching from the autumn term. It already has a research unit, Brain Can Do, which works with neuroscience academics to improve teaching and learning. Zoe

Campbell, 18, who is studying art, psychology and English A levels at Queen Anne's, initially found it difficult to incorporate drawing into her revision.

She said: "For years I have been used to using only words when revising therefore it felt slightly unnatural to add drawings.

"Once I became used to adding simplistic drawings into my revision I found it enjoyable and extremely helpful. You have to understand the information before you create a drawing. I instantly noticed that I was able to recall the information better than I would if I had just written it."

Sarah Beales, head of art, initiated the project after seeing a video about Leonardo da Vinci. "I am very excited about this new research," she said. "This shows how science and art work perfectly together."