

AU psychology professor to probe childhood memories

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Dr. Leslie R. Taylor, assistant professor of Psychology at Alfred University, will spend the summer of 2002 traveling throughout New York state to interview children (ages 3 - 5) in her search to understand their memory development as a part of her ongoing research in the development of childhood memory capacities. This project began in the fall of 2001 as Taylor, assisted by students, interviewed children to develop a line of questions to prompt detailed memories. With the aid of a Summer Research Grant awarded by Alfred University, Taylor will expand her research and interview children as well as college-aged students to gain an understanding of how the process of memory retention develops and changes as people age. Previous studies have shown that while adults can recall memories with greater clarity beginning around the age of three, they have difficulty remembering events that occurred before then. Taylor intends to interview children to see if at the age of three they can remember year-old events. These events will be specific to the child, as the parents will supply information about activities such as moving to a new house, or taking a trip to an amusement park. After analyzing this data Taylor will then collect written data from college students about similar incidents that occurred at a similar time in their lives to see how clearly they remember the events. Taylor will then compare the clarity of memory to determine if it undergoes a significant change. If, as Taylor believes, data showing that the children have no difficulty recalling these events, this will point to a change in how our brains organize cognitive information already entered into the brain. However, if the data show that the children have difficulty remembering the events clearly, this will "indicate the presence of a more comprehensive cognitive shift [around the age three], including developments in memory encoding strategies, the use of language to form cohesive narratives, and the awareness of the importance of events related to the self." Taylor holds a degree in experimental cognitive psychology and will be aided in her research by her colleague Dr. Nancy Furlong, a developmental psychologist. The project has been approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of Alfred University.