



Improving Sustained Attention to Print

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Goals for today:

- General overview of attention
- What impacts sustaining attention to print
- How to increase sustained attention to print during a RR lesson

References

- Clay, M.M. (1991). *Becoming Literate the Construction of Inner Control*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.
- Clay, M.M. (2001). *Change Over Time in Children's Literacy Development*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.
- Clay, M.M. (2005). *Literacy Lessons Designed For Individuals: Part One & Part Two*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

References

- Lyons, C.A. (2003). *Teaching Struggling Readers How to Use Brain-based Research to Maximize Learning*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.
- Wood, D. (1998). *How Children Think and Learn*. Blackwell Publishers, Malden, MA.

Attention

C. Lyons (2003) page 26

“Attention is a mental act of keeping one’s mind closely on something - mental concentration - which is the foundation of learning.”

C. Lyons (2003) page 26

“...learning occurs when individuals are actively engaged in self-directed problem solving...”

Our brain's attention system:

C. Lyons (2003) pages 26-27

- Constantly surveys the environment to determine what is and is not important
- Decides how much and what kind of sensory information is needed to complete a task

Our brain's attention system:

- Allocates varied amounts of mental energy depending on task demands
- Sustains focus when the task is not interesting
- Determines if and when the task will be completed

Our brain's attention system:

- Persists in tasks long enough to finish them despite distractions
- Disengages from a current task when something more important requires immediate attention, response, or action

Components of the brain's attention system:

C. Lyons (2003) page 29

1. **Arousal** - the ability to suddenly increase alertness

“Arousal is critical to becoming literate. Emergent readers and writers must know what to pay attention to and how to focus their attention.”

“Children who are easily distracted or respond indiscriminately to irrelevant noises or sights have difficulty focusing their attention and sustaining their focus.”

Components of the brain's attention system:

2. Motor Orientation - facilitates and maintains arousal

The cat - on the mat

The cat sat on the mat

Change Over Time in Children's Literacy Development

M. Clay - page 158

“As something interesting or relevant comes into the field of vision the observer makes an orienting movement to bring the image into clear focus. For example, as you bring out a reading book the child turns towards it and initiates some searching, scanning the object. At the earliest stage the teacher may open the book and point to the beginning of the print but soon children can do this for themselves. If we borrow a term from psychologists who experiment with animals, this first and important state at the beginning of a new act of perception is the orientation. When a child is about to learn to recognize a new letter it must be in an obvious and easily seen place and the child must direct his or her attention toward it.”

Components of the brain's attention system:

- 3. Novelty Detection and Reward -**
focuses and sustains attention

Novelty detection and reward

- Found within the limbic system of the brain. “The limbic system provides emotional overtones and motivation for learning...two critical functions for focusing and sustaining individual’s attention.”

Lyons (2003) pg. 30

Novelty detection and reward

- “The limbic system can either facilitate or shut down the processing system if it fails to find some kind of challenge (novelty detection) and personal and emotional connection (reward).”

Lyons (2003) page 30

Novelty detection and reward

- “The novelty detection and reward system is critical to literacy learning. Providing children opportunities to read challenging books that will support their developing problem-solving strategies is very satisfying.”

Lyons (2003) page 30

Novelty detection and reward

- “The child who has learned how to use cues (sources of information) to work out new texts for himself shows considerable enthusiasm when he works out a new word successfully. He finds this activity rewarding and reinforcing.”

- M. Clay (1991) page 249

Components of the brain's attention system:

- 4. Executive Organization** - directs attention and integrates entire attention system

“The executive organization components complete our attention network, which is a cognitive system involved in selective attention, mental resource allocation, problem solving, decision making and voluntary movement control.”

Lyons (2003) page 32

“The executive function plays a major role in the ability to sustain attention by blocking out irrelevant information or stimuli. It allows you to ignore or tune out noise in a classroom or conversations of others while reading a book and to sustain attention even when the material is not terribly interesting.”

Lyons (2003) page 32

“Activities that have been repeatedly performed become extremely efficient, less demanding, and automatic.”

My key understandings

- Attention is learned and can be improved
- Attention is increased when students are motivated and successful
- Active engagement is critical

What M. Clay says about sustained attention during text reading:

What hinders sustained attention?

- Too many teacher interruptions (Part 2 pg. 114)
- Difficulty dividing attention (1991 pgs. 262-263)
- Paying superficial or devoted attention to print (2001 pg.163)
- Have not learned an organized way of looking at print (1991 pg. 145)

How can we enhance sustained attention?

- Prevent wandering eyes (2001 pgs. 146, 155, 167)
- Use masking card (1991 pg. 143)
- Teach directional things by demonstration (Part 2 pg. 7)
- Voice pointing and finger pointing, but not for too long (Part 2 pgs. 11-12)

Small Group Activity

Summary

Fostering sustained attention during a RR
lesson

- Prioritize our teaching
- More demonstration, less teacher talk
- Keeping it easy to learn
- Appropriate choice of texts
- Genuine conversations