Attention Please!

Why is it so hard to focus and what can we do about it?

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PYD NETWORK WEBINAR 3/21/2018
PYD Network: History & Background

New PYD Curriculum 2015

New PYD Online Courses 2016-17

http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/

NYS Partnership: 1998 - 2012
Our Roadmap for Today

Why talk about attention?

How does attention work?

Strategies to strengthen attention

Resources
Housekeeping

Experiencing delays?
Try closing out the other programs running on your computer

Questions?
Use chat function. Post to Everyone.
Why talk about Attention?
Why is this topic important to you?

Please chat in
Attention connects us to the world, shaping and defining our experience. Attention enables us to be aware of

- Self
- Others around us
- World around us

Focused attention is the gateway to all thinking including perception, memory, language, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making.
Functions

Focus on an object

Inhibit distractions
Types of Distractions

- Sensory
- Emotional
Distraction is the New Normal
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6PpRTWxKLo&index=3&list=PL10g2YTln2gmPbtzIWIPXKsNR2-BrWn
Impact

- Internet addictions
- Less social contact and interaction → less social skills
- Loneliness and isolation
- Comprehension, reflecting on meaning
- Problems sustaining attention → performance enhancers (self-medicating)
How does Attention Work?
Cells (neurons) are the building blocks of different structures within the brain (gray matter).

Nerve fibers/tracts form the highways between them.

Major critical regions are built first, then joined together, then specialized.

Stimulation and activity molds how strongly each pathway works.

The Developing Brain: Implications for Youth Program. 2014

http://www.childtrends.org/our-research/the-kristin-anderson-moore-lecture-series/
Nerve Proliferation

Tree growing branches and shoots

Nerve Pruning

Nerves that fire together

Get wired together!!!
Semi-Independent Mental Systems

BOTTOM UP CIRCUITRY

• Faster
• Involuntary & automatic
• Intuitive, operating through network of association
• Impulsive, driven by emotion
• Executor of our habitual routines and guide for our actions
• Manager of our mental models of the world

TOP DOWN CIRCUITRY

• Slower
• Voluntary
• Effortful
• Seat of self-control
• Able to learn new models, make new plans and take charge of our automatic repertoire

Goleman. 2013
General Principle

Brain uses energy/resources economically

Attention given to a new task (top down)
→ Practice will make it a habit, it becomes automatic (bottom up)
Automatic Attention

Gets us through the day

Weakness: It is biased or hijacked by emotions

It can be controlled by top down circuit
Selective Attention

Focusing on a particular object for a certain period of time

Driver for learning

Limited in capacity and duration

Information overload → top down circuit shuts down (mental fatigue)
Cognitive Load

commonly held brain-based learning myths.

http://www.brainfacts.org/For-Educators/Teaching-Techniques/2016/The-Truth-Behind-Brain-Based-Learning-051916
Multitasking – A Myth

Multitasking is really our ability to switching to single-task across a variety of tasks → superficial → uses up energy ↓ concentration, comprehension ↑ stress level
Mind Wandering

**+**
- Default mode of the brain (less effort)
- 50% of our thoughts are day dreams
- Creative thinking/leaps

**-**
- Most common when involved in routine/habitual tasks → more mistakes
- Wandering mostly focused on “me”
- People’s moods skewed to the unpleasant; negative emotional tone

*Side note: Adults with ADD have higher levels of original creative thinking*

*Top down circuit can take control: Promising practice: mindfulness*

*(Focus on the here and now)*
How Our Core Capabilities Work

**Attention**
Attention is the critical gatekeeper that's needed to engage intentional self-regulation.

**Automatic Self-Regulation**
- Rapid, impulse-directed
- "Fight or flight" response
- Important for urgent situations

**Intentional Self-Regulation**
- Conscious, planful, proactive
- Inhibits automatic responses
- Important for achieving goals

Essential capabilities such as planning, focus, and self-control are all orchestrated by the balance of two kinds of self-regulation mechanisms: **automatic** and **intentional**. The proper balance ensures appropriately responsive and productive actions.

REQUIRES **Executive Function**
1. Inhibitory Control
2. Working Memory
3. Mental Flexibility

[Link to PDF]
What are your Takeaways?

Chat them in...
Cultivating Focus
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quS2kK27U_4&list=PL10g2YT_In2gmPbtzIWIPXKsNR2_-BrWn&index=5
General Strategies

- Create an inclusive and safe program environment
- Schedule time to unplug

Programming
- Model and structure programming to do one task at a time
- Build on strengths/passions
- Build in mental exercises
- Build in physical exercise
- Build in relaxation
Integrate Mindfulness Activities

Mind Full, or Mindful?
Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

Jon Kabat-Zinn. 1994

- Heightened awareness of internal and external experiences (thoughts, smells, feelings, body and sights)
- Nonjudgmental observation of these experiences
- Compassion toward self
- Development of openness and curiosity toward internal and external experiences
- Ability to return to the present as thoughts arise
Mindfulness Impacts

- Stress reduction
- Attention
- Emotional control
- Positive self-concept
- Positive Interactions
Mindfulness Tips

Practice mindfulness yourself
- Integrate a mindfulness activity into your own day
- Use it to get ready for a program session

Build it into your youth program
- Make an activity part of the program routine
- Encourage youth to practice on their own (at home, etc)

Watch LeBron https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCR7OfRuQd4
Thank you!

Questions & Comments?
Resources


Edutopia: Daniel Goleman on Cultivating Focus Playlist
https://www.edutopia.org/video/daniel-goleman-importance-cultivating-focus-video-playlist

Harvard Graduate School of Education: Usable Knowledge
https://www.gse.harvard.edu/uk
- Fun and (Brain) Games https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/08/fun-and-brain-games
- Understanding Core Skills https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/12/understanding-core-skills

Brain Facts – www.brainfacts.org
- The truth behind “brain-based” learning http://www.brainfacts.org/For-Educators/Teaching-Techniques/2016/The-Truth-Behind-Brain-Based-Learning-051916
Resources


CASEL: https://casel.org/


Greater Good: Mindfulness https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/mindfulness

AnxietyBC. For youth: Mindfulness exercises http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises

ACT Resources

ACT for Youth: Youth Work Professionals
http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/

ACT for Youth: Social and Emotional Learning Toolkit
http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/sel/
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