ATTENTION

Naomi A. Weiss, M.S.
December 9, 2008
Conference Call Etiquette

Remember to mute your phone by pressing *1.

Press *1 again, when you would like to speak, this will un-mute your phone.

Do not use your phone HOLD or mute button. If you do, your music will be broadcast to all of us on the call.

Press *1 to mute/ un-mute
Naomi A. Weiss, M.S. is a member of the graduate faculty of Bank Street College of Education. She is also a facilitator for the Schools Attuned Program of the All Kinds of Minds Institute. Ms. Weiss also serves as a Hidden Sparks coach in two Jewish Day Schools.

Prior to her work for Hidden Sparks, Ms. Weiss, a learning specialist, worked at All Kinds of Minds Institute conducting neurodevelopmental assessments with teams of pediatricians and psychologists to develop learning profiles and management plans for students in kindergarten through high school.

Ms. Weiss also worked as a Special Educator for children in Early Intervention (0-5) programs and as a classroom special education teacher of children with learning disorders and behavioral/emotional challenges in elementary, junior high, and high school.

Ms. Weiss will share her diverse experience with you this evening in this interactive seminar on “Attention.”

Press *1 to mute/ un-mute
This evening, we will...

- Gain a deeper understanding of our own attention strengths & challenges.

- Describe specific behaviors of children who struggle with attention in the Mental Energy Control System.

- Discuss strategies to help students who have weak Mental Energy.

- Begin to develop an understanding of the Processing Control System of Attention.

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Close your eyes.

Visualize the student whom you are directing to...

PAY ATTENTION!

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hidden sparks
What is your student doing?
“His brain is like an out-of-control orchestra, full of the best, greatest, and most talented players, but there’s no conductor. Different musicians in his mind just go off and play their own melodies without paying any attention to the score. There’s absolutely no harmony, and no melody ever reaches its fanfare. Even though my James is never at a loss for brilliant thoughts, he accomplishes almost nothing, especially when it comes to schoolwork.”

(A Mind at a Time, Levine, 2002)
MENTAL ENERGY: regulates the flow and use of energy ("fuel") for thinking & controlling behavior.
ASSESS YOUR OWN MENTAL ENERGY PROFILE:

Do you...

- feel fatigued during the day? (i.e. yawning, stretching)
- feel fidgety when you need to concentrate?
- have trouble falling/staying asleep?
- have difficulty beginning tasks?... completing tasks?
- work efficiently at some times but not at other times?

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### ASSESSING YOUR OWN MENTAL ENERGY PROFILE:

**If a person ...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feels fatigued during the day:</td>
<td><strong>ALERTNESS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feels fidgety when you need to concentrate:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has trouble falling/staying asleep:</td>
<td><strong>SLEEP AROUSAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has difficulty beginning/completing tasks:</td>
<td><strong>MENTAL EFFORT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>works efficiently at some times but not at other times?</td>
<td><strong>PERFORMANCE CONSISTENCY</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Which strategies do you use to help you maintain your mental energy?
Now...
Think about your students.

Do any specific students come to mind when you consider the mental energy controls we have just discussed?
Children with weak Mental Energy flow are easily misunderstood!

They are often accused of “not trying” or being “lazy” when their reduced alertness is frequently beyond their control.

Children with weak Mental Energy controls do not always struggle with their attention.
MENTAL ENERGY: ALERTNESS

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH WEAK ALERTNESS?

They may yawn, stretch, appear fatigued and seem most exhausted when required to sit still.

They lack stamina.

They may assume various contorted body positions as a way to stay alert.

They tend to “tune out” and miss important direction or signals.

They experience problems with alertness when presented with a particular format during a particular time of day.

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MENTAL ENERGY - MENTAL EFFORT

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH WEAK MENTAL EFFORT?

• They “run out of gas” quickly / work in “spurts.”

• They have difficulty beginning and/or completing tasks.

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KEEP IN MIND:

It is *not* helpful to say:

“We know you can do the work; we’ve seen you do it well.”

“If you’d only put your mind to it, you would succeed.”

*When these students do well just one day...*

it’s held against them the rest of the school year!

**Instead**, say,

“*We need to work together on your inconsistency.*”

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So what can we do?
• Consider preferential seating.
• Use proximity control.
• Allow frequent breaks (for individual students).
• Create purposeful breaks (for entire class).
• Shorten assignments but... periodically increase length.
• Allow student to manipulate objects while sitting at desk. (i.e. “squeeze balls,” clay, velcro, “fidget pens”)
• Encourage “staged approaches” to task completion.
• Provide advance warnings about timing and salient information.

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• Document graphically on a calendar “on time” and “off time” for effort (metacognition)

• Create a private “signal” to regain a student’s attention.

• “Jump-start” students.

• Shift formats.

• Rotate work sites.

• Utilize “white noise.”

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**Processing Control System**

*Processing*: the intake of information

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ASSESS YOUR OWN PROCESSING CONTROL PROFILE:

Do you...

- have difficulty determining what’s important when listening? reading?
- become easily distracted by stimuli (which others might ignore)?
- have difficulty with fine details? prefer the “big picture”?
- free-associate/ daydream too easily?
- often not concentrate long enough OR concentrate too long?
- crave excitement?
ASSESS YOUR OWN PROCESSING CONTROL PROFILE

If a person ...

- has difficulty determining what’s important when listening? reading?
- becomes too easily distracted by stimuli?

- has difficulty with fine details and prefers the “bigger picture”:

- free-associates/daydreams too easily:

- has difficulty concentrating long enough or concentrates for too long:

- craves excitement:

SALIENCY DETERMINATION
DEPTH/DETAIL PROCESSING
COGNITIVE ACTIVATION
FOCAL MAINTENANCE
SATISFACTION LEVEL

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Which strategies help you to process incoming information?
Now...

Think about your students.

Do any specific students come to mind when you consider the processing controls we have just discussed?
**Distractible children are often very creative. They notice things others miss!**

These children need their teachers to help them focus during class.

Don’t call on these children when it’s obvious they haven’t been listening. Avoid humiliation!

Explicitly emphasize: the human mind cannot “take in” everything!

*We all must continuously decide what’s important*

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CONCLUSION

If you had to summarize something you learned this evening that you did not already know, what would it be?

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Educate the youth according to their particular ways...

PROVERBS 22:6
Next week we will...

- Describe specific behaviors of children who struggle with their attention in the Processing and Production Control Systems.

- Discuss strategies to help students with weak Processing and Production controls.

- Deepen our understanding of our own attention strengths & challenges.

- Learn how we can help students become more “metacognitive” about their attention strengths and challenges.

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Hidden Sparks is a non-profit fund whose purpose is to help children with learning differences reach their full potential in school and life. Hidden Sparks develops and supports professional development programs for Jewish day schools to help increase understanding and support for teaching to diverse learners.

Guided by a philosophy that by helping schools meet the needs of children with learning and behavioral differences, ultimately all students will benefit. Hidden Sparks’ programs combine professional development in learning and positive behavioral support, guided classroom observation and one on one coaching. The Hidden Sparks model and program is currently in 21 Jewish Day Schools/Yeshivot in New York and 7 in Boston, through a partnership with Gateways: Access to Jewish Education.