

Keys to Concentration

Firstly, my apologies to the school and parent community in that this is the first addition I have made to the newsletter in 2010...much of this is due to the busyness of life as most of us can attest to but things have slowed down a bit so it is my intention to continue providing the school with a monthly snippet from this point forward.

Given the media attention of the last few weeks most of you are well aware that NAPLAN has occupied a great deal of discussion, albeit in a very highly contested and political arena. This article is not a rehash of the debates around this particular testing regime or its precarious place on a website but it is related to an important aspect of student performance. In essence, this article is about what many students may have struggled with during testing or what they struggle with on any given day...*concentrating!*

Last year I provided a small glimpse at aspects of *attention*, but while they are related, attention and concentration are not the same things and as such I am hoping the following might be useful.

From the outset it is important to note that we know that low concentration levels can be a common problem among millions of children. There is even evidence to suggest that the types of technology used by children might be a contributing factor to difficulties in concentrating. The inability to concentrate for extended periods of time can pose many difficulties to children, especially in the classroom. However, there are things that parents and teachers can do to help children develop their capacity to focus, pay attention and concentrate.

One of the first things you can do to help a child's ability to concentrate is to **observe them**. All children are able to concentrate but may do so differently depending on the context. Over a period of time jot down any instances where you see concentration broken and note the circumstances. Quite often children lose concentration due to outside influences and this is particularly prevalent in boys. If you can find some of the causes you may be able to limit their impact or eliminate them all together.

Second, **be reasonable**...a child's ability to concentrate increases as they mature and it isn't until the second decade of life that the human brain is fully developed allowing it to engage in highly complex operations along with maintaining extended concentration levels. The important point here is to be patient and not expect a child to do what an adult can do.

Third, **model and praise** the type of behaviour you want...remember **children see, children do**. Children pick up many cues from the adults around them and if you show an interest in what a child is doing it will help to develop their own talents and interests and by association their capacity to concentrate. Moreover, praise is a great reward and intrinsic motivator for children and acknowledging a child's efforts and focusing on one or more specific tasks can work wonders.

Fourth, it is important to remember that the immediate environment has a direct impact on a child's capacity to concentrate so it is up to the adults around them to **provide the best ambience** possible. As noted earlier distractions can come in many forms and each child is unique so it is important to recognise what might derail individual efforts to concentrate.