
UNIT 6 ATTENTIONAL PROBLEMS

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you met children who cannot sit still in one place, or who constantly look out of the window when a teacher is teaching? Why do they behave like that? What could be the reasons for their inattentiveness? How can we help them as teachers and parents? The present Unit deals with the identification of these kinds of children, factors affecting their inattentiveness, and helping them to develop the required attention.

6.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through the Unit, you will be able to:

- identify the behaviours of children who have Attentional problems;
- find out factors affecting attention, particularly in the learning context; and
- suggest different activities for children in developing attention skills for:
 - Concentration, and
 - Multiple attention.

6.3 HAVE YOU OBSERVED SUCH CHILDREN?

- a) Angela is studying in the 3rd and she is a quiet girl. She was doing very well in the class but of late she looks disturbed. When the teacher asks her any questions, it has to be repeated as she is lost in her class but she prefers to sit near the window gazing out. Her mother is also worried about her and feels that Angela is a dumb child compared to other children.
- b) Ananth a 2nd grade child who usually finishes his work quickly and then moves around in the class. He cannot sit at one place. He gets up suddenly from his seat and starts roaming around in the class. He sometimes scribbles

in somebody else's notebook or snatches away a pencil from somebody's hand. His friend says that he harasses him. Other teachers also find him a very difficult child to handle.

- c) Rehman is studying in the 3rd grade. He sings very well. He likes to go on humming all the time. In the maths period he does not try to attempt doing any sums. If a teacher asks him to do the sums given, he starts crying. His father scolds him for not finishing the home work in maths. He takes a lot of time in doing maths. He just sits over it and the father gets very angry and sometimes spansks him for not understanding.

6.4 POSSIBLE REASONS FOR CHILDREN'S INATTENTIVENESS

You must have seen similar children. Why do they behave in such a way? What is bothering them? Why do they not find classroom environment challenging? Or is it that the fault lies with their home environment? There could be some other reasons which we have to explore. There may not be only one reason for their inattentiveness but a combination of reasons operating upon them.

Would you like to list out the possible reasons of such inattentive behaviours? Write them down in the space given below:

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You might have listed a number of reasons for the inattention of the children in the cases given above. Some of the factors may be related to the children's family atmosphere and some others related to the classroom environment. Let us understand some other cases in order to get a better perspective of the underlying causes of inattention.

Examine the following situation

Neetu, a fourth class student, mumbled 'what a bore' when Mrs. Kapoor entered the classroom. Mrs. Kapoor is a teacher of English. Her usual way of teaching is to stand near the table and read out the lessons to children. She asks children to copy the words. In her talk, she uses 'you know', quite frequently and children make fun of her. Neetu refuses to write each word ten times which is assigned in the class. Sitting on the last bench, Neetu draws the cartoons of Mrs. Kapoor and passes on to the other children and makes fun of her. Neetu is considered slightly dull by her teacher although she is quite popular among her friends. Please write down the possible reasons for Neetu's inattentiveness.

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The reasons for Neetu's inattentiveness in the class could be with the teacher's way of teaching. The teacher's restricted movement and the limited eye contact in the classroom, not attending to all children may result in inattention among children. The frequent use of the word 'you know' distracts attention of children. Children sitting on the last bench do not get attended to by the teacher and that may be the reason perhaps for Neetu's drawing cartoons. Copying the words ten times from the board makes children lose interest. A teacher calling a child dull also gradually results in a low self-esteem in a child thus labeled.

Let us consider the case of Naseem and find reasons for his inattention. Naseem is a six-year-old boy, studying in the 1st grade. Left to himself, Naseem runs away to the street. His mother has to run after him to bring him back. Many a times he takes out all his toys and makes a mess of the room. He takes out a book and tears pages from it. He started speaking quite late when he was 2½ years old, he screams loudly when he wants something. This has caused anxiety to his parents, particularly to his mother. Naseem goes to an English medium school where his teacher finds him slow in grasping. He takes a lot of time to finish his work. His mother does not allow him to play till he finishes his homework.

Refer to your list of causes of inattention you made earlier. Does your list include the possibility of something wrong in a child's early childhood. Sometimes parent's over anxiousness makes children tense and in turn gives rise to anxiety in children. Parent's over expectations regarding academic performance also sometimes creates more frustrating situations and make children restless. Sometimes a noise outside may cause inattentiveness while the child is asked to finish the homework.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Compare your answer with those given at the end of the block

1. Describe the consequent behaviour of the children in the following situations.

Situation 1 : Parminder a 3rd grader is sitting on a back bench in class. His bench mate Vinod is a bully. He often picks his pencil or a ruler, kicks or presses his foot occasionally.

Mrs. Dalvi the teacher is dictating a note on 'Islands' in a soft gentle voice.

Situation 2 : Bina is studying in 5th grade. Bina's elder sister's engagement ceremony is to be celebrated next evening. House is full of guests-relatives and friends. Bina has to complete ten more sums which she has to show to the teacher next day.

2. Which of the following suggestions are likely to help Bina over-come her problems of homework? Tick mark (✓) one or more suggestions which you think are appropriate.

- i) Find out from the neighbour whether they can provide a place for her to do her studies and then ask Bina to go to the neighbour's house to finish it.
- ii) Assure Bina not to worry about the incomplete sums because it is her didi's engagement and give her a note for the class-room teacher explaining the cause for unfinished homework.
- iii) Ask Bina to try to concentrate and do the sums while listening to the conversation in the hall.
- iv) Ask one of the older relatives (brother or sister) to do the homework in Bina's notebook.
- v) Plan activities to develop multiple attention skills for future.

6.5 CAUSES FOR INATTENTIVENESS — CLASSIFICATION

If we consider cases similar to Neetu or Naseem we will get a better idea of the variety of reasons affecting attention of children. Inattentiveness is not caused by any single factor. The variety of possible causes relate to the following areas:

- i) Biological/physiological/health
- ii) Intellectual/cognitive development
- iii) Physical-classroom-home environment
- iv) Teaching/learning process
- v) Social-emotional process

The diagram given below may help us to understand the interlinkages of these areas.

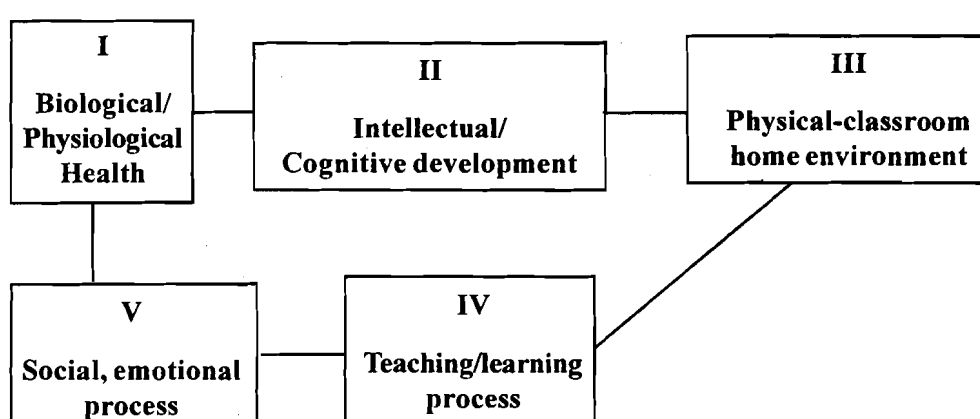


Fig. 6.1: Interlinkages of possible factors causing inattentiveness

Here is a list of some factors related to the various areas.

Category I: Biological and health related factors

- i) Birth injury
- ii) Bio-chemical imbalance
- iii) Genetic
- iv) Disease/illness
- v) Poor health, etc clinical term used to denote children with attention problems-hyperactivity may be mentioned.

Category II: Intellectual/Cognitive development related factors

- i) Inadequate conceptual development
- ii) Lack of cognitive skills, such as below average intellectual level. (as described by Piaget) etc.

The various problems arising out of the areas in the first two categories are discussed in the previous unit. Hence, in this Unit we will concentrate on the remaining three categories.

Category III: Physical-classroom-home environment related factors

i) Classroom

- Sitting arrangement** — distance of the child from the board, posture of the child,
- Temperature** — too hot/cold, availability of fans, etc.
- Lighting** — adequate or not,
- Noisy surroundings** — as nearby cinema theatre, vehicles, colour of the walls and furniture in the classroom, no distractors like giving toys or books to other children.

ii) Home

Small rooms (no specific study place/too many people in the house)

Crowded with furniture.

Disorderly homes.

Lighting, temperature uncomfortable .

Noisy home environment - radio, TV.

Close noisy neighbourhood.

Constant visitors - friends, relatives, etc. You can add many more to this list.

Category IV: Teaching-learning process related factors

Teacher's personality-confident, caring, loving or stern, cold not interested in the children, fatigued-tired using language insulting/punishing children.

Monotonous tone while teaching.

Does not use aids to illustrate concepts,

Position while teaching-constantly at one place.

Little use of pupil participation.

Not providing challenging work for bright children.

No individual attention.

Colour of the teacher's dress.

Eye contact.

You can collect many more instances of teacher behaviour and teaching inadequacies in the classroom environment leading to inattentiveness on the part of children. Just as the teaching-learning situation in the classroom can be boring or punitive, the teaching-learning situation in homes also could be such that children lose interest in learning. For example, a mother who insists on the child's memorizing everything from the book, from the teacher's notes, is also leading to inattentiveness in the child.

Category V: Social-emotional process related factors

This is another important area leading to attention problems. Children like Rehman who are under emotional stress may find it difficult to concentrate on studies. Inadequate and wrong practices of parental handling very often make a child feel

insecure. Emotionally insecure and socially unaccepted children's school performance often gets affected because of lack of concentration.

Let us think of the commonly observed factors that can be listed under this category.

- Undesirable comparisons.
- Humiliating mode of communication by adults.
- Repeated reference to child's inadequacies and over emphasis on achievement at school.
- Getting work done from children under threat.
- Arousal of fears in the mind of the child.
- Uncontrolled anger.
- Constant nagging while the child is doing homework.
- Expressing anxiety regarding the child's progress in school.
- Pressurizing children to do better in academics.

(Irrespective of the child's ability)

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the block.

3. Under which category would you include the following behaviour manifestations as cause of inattentiveness?

CATEGORY OF CAUSES				
Behaviour Manifestations	Teaching Learning Process	Physical Environment	Social Environment	Health
Pushpa feels very humiliated when her mother points to the high score her younger sister gets in tests.				
Mrs. Khanna, 5th grade teacher, was reading from the prepared notes without even looking at children once.				
Ashis is healthwise rather weak and is unable to run fast. He feels left out because he is not included in the class team.				

<p>for the school is coming from the adolescent masses in the school.</p>		
<p>• I have watched from the side taken by groups of adolescents playing cricket in the lane. There is a lot of excitement when one team scores a few runs.</p>		
<p>• I talk too much. I go on and on. I go on as long as I can in a match, only when you will get a break.</p>		
<p>• First, you should not have wasted your time and brought your homework in complete. It is stupid to get so excited about your sister's engagement</p>		

These situations occur both at home and in school.

You can extend this list by adding more factors.

- i) _____
- ii) _____
- iii) _____

6.6 ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE ATTENTIVENESS — ‘CONCENTRATION’

By now we have identified different possible reasons for the children's inattentiveness. Our concern now is to help them to develop their attention. How can we help them? A few activities are listed below which can be tried out in the school and/or at home.

Activity I

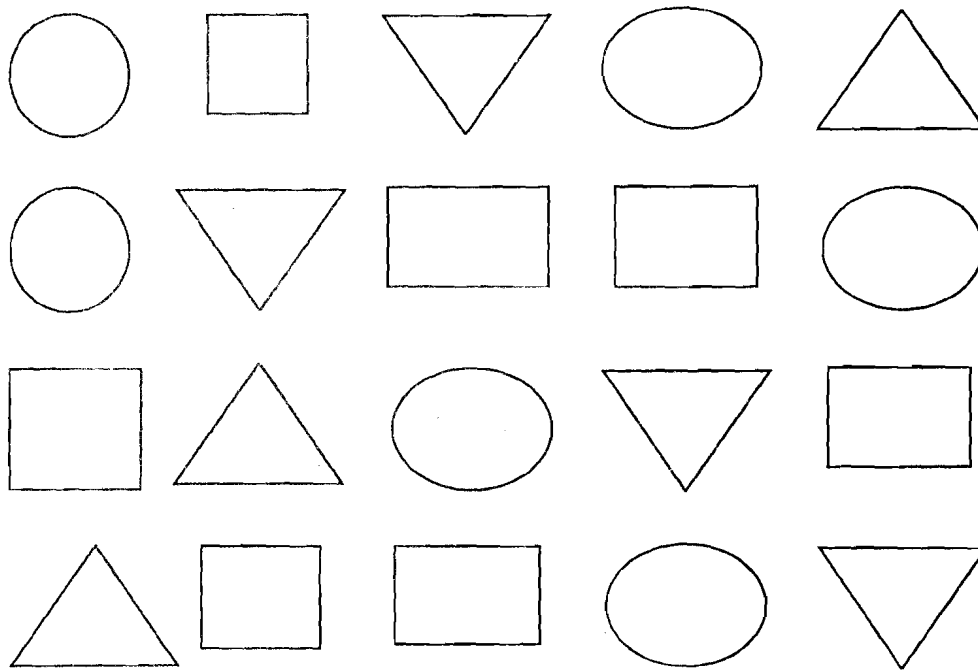
Material required: A paper with figure drawn on it as illustrated below.

Instruction: From the given figure find out and cross

- Step 1. Triangles
Step 2. Circles
Step 3. Squares

Time: 2 minutes for each step. Record your time. Try to increase your speed.

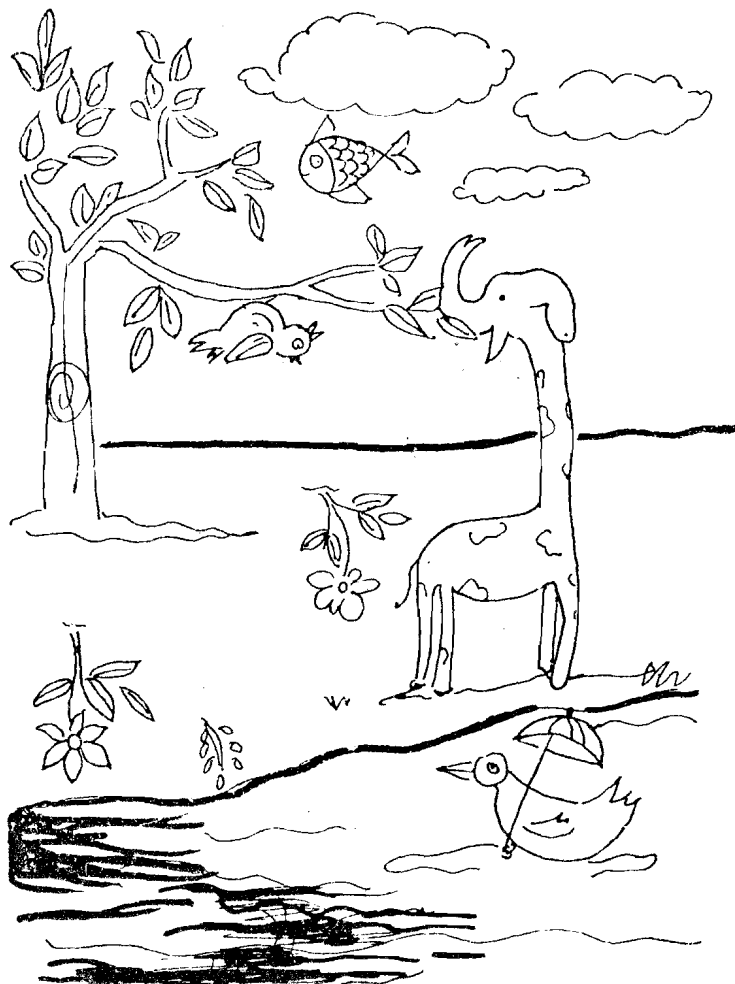
Attentional Problems



If the child (6-7 years old) is capable of doing this exercise the first two categories- biological and intellectual/cognitive can be eliminated as a cause for inattentiveness. We will have to search/investigate the causes related to the remaining categories.

Activity II

Material required: A sheet with figures drawn on as illustrated below.

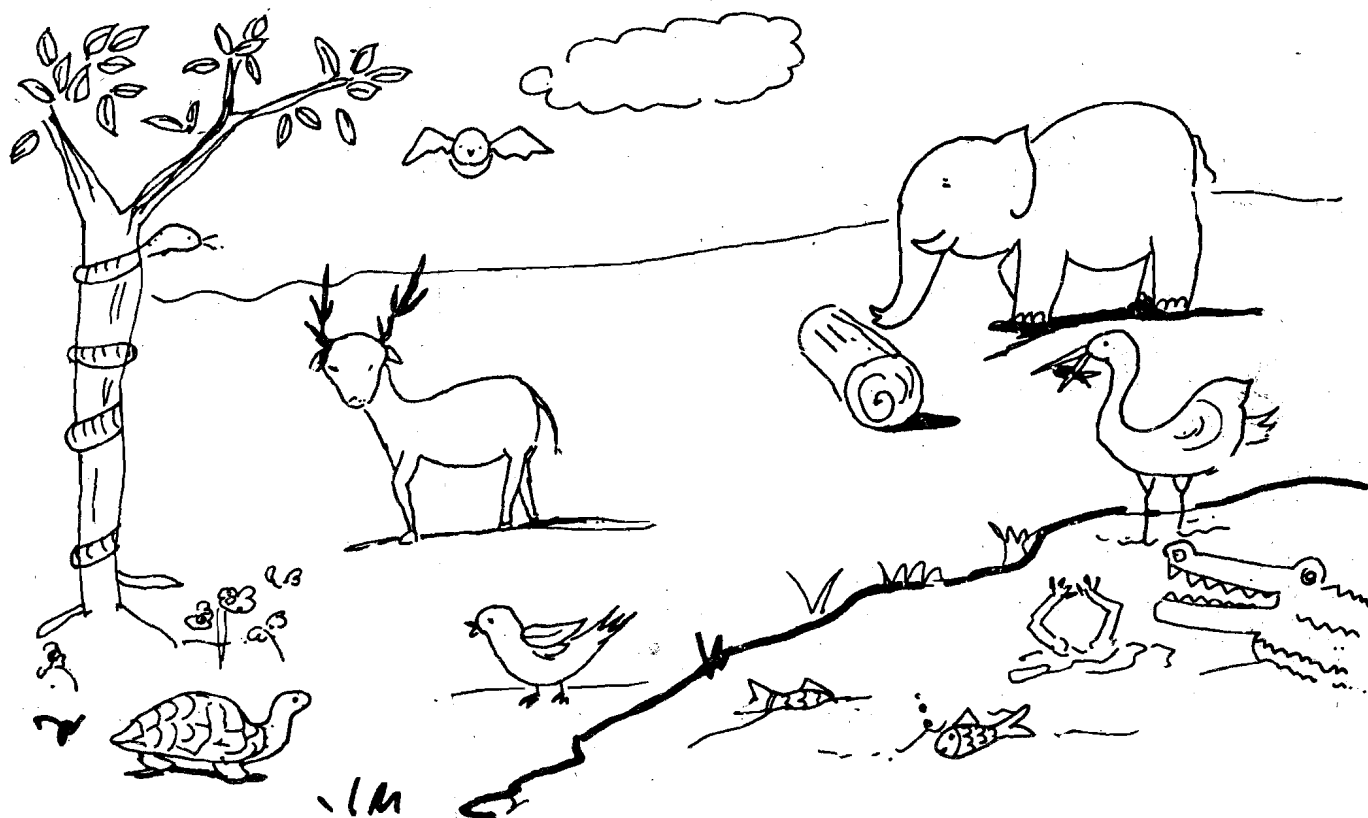


Instruction: They are many things wrong in this picture. Can you spot them? Put an X whenever you spot one.

Time: 2 minutes

Activity III

Material required: A picture of jumbled animals and birds picture attached.



Instruction: List names of all the animals that appear in this picture. Make sure you do not miss out any. For each animal identified you will be given one mark.

Time: 10 minutes

In all these activities you can increase the difficulty level and span of attention by providing more complex tasks. You can ask the child to note the time he/she takes for each activity and also encourage him/her for increasing their attention span.

On similar lines, you can also develop activities which can be done in the school as well as at the home. Give these activities keeping in view a child's age and interest. Sometimes a child may have psychological block with numbers. You may not find him/her attending to activities involving numbers. Such children may love to do colouring or painting

Encourage them to do an activity of their choice and concentrate on it completely.

6.7 MULTIPLE ATTENTION

Do you know the story of Arjun, the hero in Mahabharat about his concentration on aiming at a bird's eye? He was a successful archer. Yes, one should have that kind of concentration. Activities discussed in the earlier section help children to

develop that kind of concentration. Today's urban child however has to cope up with the reality that he/she gets attracted to several objects at the same time. The ability to concentrate on one object is an essential skill which needs to be developed among children. Another but equally important skill is the ability to develop mental alertness to attend to a variety of tasks at the same time. A simple example of crossing the road illustrates this point. The child has to be alert about the vehicles coming from both the sides, traffic signals, and many other things at a time. Likewise, there are many situations in our daily life which demand mental alertness and multiple attention. May be, we have to encourage our children to develop this kind of attention too. In the Sanskrit Literature this has been referred to a 'Ashtavadhani' which means attending to eight different things simultaneously. Arjun also had to become 'Ashtavadhani' to fight with more than one enemy simultaneously.

Case of Riyaz

Let us consider the case of Riyaz and see how he attends to many things at one time. Riyaz is sitting near the dining table and doing mathematics sums. At the same time, he watches the cricket match on the T.V. and also listens to the conversation of his parents. His father scolds him for this. But when the father checks Riyaz's sums, he finds them all correct.

Do you come across children like Riyaz? Write two situations where you have found children doing more than one activity at a time.

Situation 1.

Situation 2.

Riyaz's case presented above and what you have described clearly indicate that we have the capacity to attend to a variety of tasks at a time.

6.8 ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MULTIPLE ATTENTION

How can we develop 'multiple attention' among children? Given below are a few activities which may help children to develop this skill.

Type a activities: these activities are based on attending to more than one parameter. For example, in the follow-up, activities require the child to put his/her mind to shape and colours.

Give children a paper on which triangles, squares and circles are drawn. Some of the triangles are in black and some in white. Similarly some circles are in black and some are white. Same with squares.

Instructions to the child

Step 1 : Put a X in triangles which are white.

Step 2 : Put a X in circles which are black.

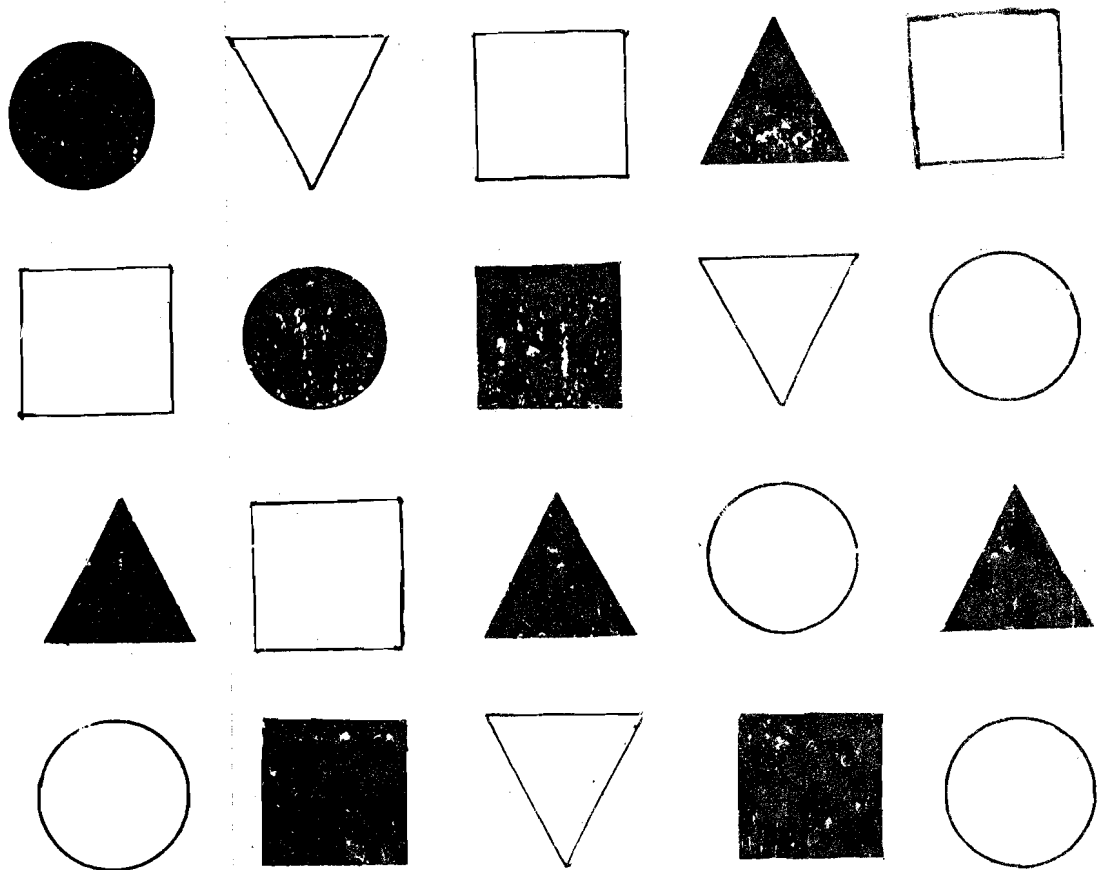
Step 3 : Put a X in squares which are white.

Step 4 : Count all the triangles in this picture.

Step 5 : Count only the circles which are white.

Step 6 : Count the triangles and squares which are in black, etc.

Time: 15 minutes



By making similar combinations you can make this exercise more complex and also increase its difficulty level.

Type B activities: Motor activities that require use of different senses at the same time can be organised as group play activities for children in school. These types of activities make use of different sense organs simultaneously. Consider the case of Sunita who rides a bicycle. When she rides a bicycle she has to concentrate on riding the cycle by making use of different sense organs, for example, eyes to see the direction or to follow a particular path, touch to paddle the wheels, hearing to avoid getting into other vehicles coming from behind, etc.

Activities like climbing a tree in a park or in the school premises offer children an opportunity to use different sense organs simultaneously. He/she has to see how high he/she wants to go, touch-feel the grip by feet, hear-listen to the instructions given by parents or teachers, etc.

Type C activities: Another factor which would help to develop 'multiple attention' is 'practice'. The more the child repeats the act(s) the more competent he/she will be to perform these acts without mistakes. Sunita has done lot of practice in riding a bicycle so she is capable of riding without seeing the movements of her legs or rings bell automatically when somebody is in her way.

Consider also the activity of 'typing'. To begin with, one has to look at the key before pressing it. After lot of practice one can touch the right key without looking at it. This, in turn, facilitates one's reading the notes or the book from which one has to type. In other words, after 'practice' a good typist can use eyes to receive messages from written material while his/her fingers attend to the appropriate keys. This is also what happens to a mother working in the kitchen and simultaneously helping her child to do her home work.

In brief, children can be encouraged to attend to more than one task by providing them the skills to attend to them jointly and simultaneously. Activities suggested in the text as well as those described by you indicate that skills like 'concentration' and 'multiple attention' are complementary to each other.

Caution: Children should be taught to concentrate first on only one activity before training them for multiple attention.

6.9 ASSESSING ONESELF AS A CAUSE FOR ATTENTION PROBLEMS

Different teachers exhibit different behaviours in the classroom. We often do not realize that our personality characteristics, our mannerisms, our ways of teaching affect a child's attention.

Perhaps, we can remedy this situation by modifying our behaviours and mannerism. This is also true of parental behaviour in the home situation.

A simple self-assessment technique will help teachers/parents to 'see' what they are like-how they behave. You can assess your behaviour, your teaching methods', your dealing with children at home situation, by asking yourself questions similar to those given in the following boxes.

Self-Assessment Questions for teachers

- Where do I stand when I teach?
- Am I mobile-reach students especially in back rows?
- Which words do I use when any particular child does not respond properly?
- Is my voice monotonous?
- What do I do to clarify 'concepts'?
- Am I able to adapt or change my teaching method when I find that the children are not learning that way
- Am I able to observe when the children have started losing interest in their work.
- Am I alert to possible symptoms of physical discomfort in children.
- What do I do to minimize physical disturbances in the surrounding area, for example, a procession on the street etc.?
- Do I do anything to comfort a distressed child?

Self-Assessment Questions for Parents

- Do I often scold my child for not concentrating on studies?
- How often do I (mother/father) give physical punishment to my child for committing mistakes?
- Do I reward/praise him/her when he/she succeeds in a given assignment?
- Do I nag the child?

Does the home environment provide a suitable place for the child to study?

Am I careful not to call my friends or others when examinations - unit tests approach?

Do I take care not to put on T.V. programmes like who sings although I like them, while the child is studying?

Do I watch for clues for my own actions, e.g. cold, headaches, etc. in the child?

Am I sensitive to gratify the child's essential needs like hunger, thirst, after the child comes from school and before he/she settles to do his/her homework?

What steps do I take to reduce the child's fears if he/she comes from a noisy neighbourhood?

Some of the examples may not apply in your home situation for example, you may not have a T.V. in your house, you may not also have control on all situations, like arrival of guests, friends without previous intimation. Similarly some schools have overcrowded classes where it is difficult for a teacher to reach back rows. In such situations there is no need to feel guilty. What is necessary is to search for ways and means in the existing situation to reduce the intensity of the difficulties. If children realize that you are trying to assist them in attending to their task/ completing that task, they will be more interested and therefore will provide adequate attention to that task.

6.10 ROLE OF INTEREST

So far we have considered a variety of factors which may cause attentional problems among children and some of the strategies to minimize those cause. We have observed that many factors significantly affect a child's capacity to provide adequate 'attention' to what he/she is learning. The next question we may ask is 'Can we say for sure that removing the uncomfortable elements in the physical environment at home or modifying our behaviour by creating a socially and emotionally conducive environment or improving our teaching methods will necessarily remove 'attentional problems' in children'? Read the following comments.

"I did so much for him but he does not pay attention".

"I switched off the T.V. when he does his homework-nothing works".

Such frustrating comments from adults are commonly observed.

Why do our genuine intentions to improve our own behaviour and help the child do not bare fruit? It is because we have overlooked another important factor, which affects child's attention - his/her interest.

Very often children lack 'interest' in doing a particular activity or studying a particular subject. On the contrary, if he/she has interest in doing that activity or studying that subject, for example, arithmetic, he/she will complete the sums/ exercises even when the house is full of guests. You might have heard of stories of great people, social reformers, scientists who have studied and worked under tremendous hardships and deprivations like studying under street lights.

If you see around, you will come across children and adults studying against various odds. They perform such jobs, complete various activities according to set objectives due to the tremendous interest they have in them.

You will now realize that 'interest' compensate for many of the other deficiencies.

A related factor which affects 'attention' or concentration is the 'time' factor. Interest changes not only during the day but over a period of time. A young child who loves to spend most of the time in playing outside enjoys reading books in late evening. A boy who enjoys colouring or painting in the afternoon, may refuse to do so in the evening. During evenings, he is interested in practicing riding a bicycle. Same way, a girl who scores high on one day will do very poorly on some later day when she loses interest.

Thus, you will realize that 'interest' plays an important role in developing 'concentration/attention'. We will have to think and devise ways and means to develop and also sustain interest among children in studying different school's subjects and/or participating in a variety of activities. Similarly, while giving tasks to children we should consider the time when the child would be interested in performing it.

This has been discussed more thoroughly in the Unit on 'Motivation'.

6.11 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have studied various aspects related to 'attentional problems' of children. Various examples of children having attentional problems been discussed in the unit to enable teachers and parents to identify such children in schools and homes respectively.

A variety of possible factors which affect a child's concentration are presented in order to assist teachers and parents to find out the specific causes of inattentiveness among children. It is emphasized that it may not be one factor but multiple factors that affect the attention of children. Planning activities for developing skills of i) concentration and ii) multiple attention are discussed further. It is emphasized that in addition to develop 'multiple attention' in today's complex society. Role of 'interest' in developing and sustaining attention has been pointed out as another dimension in this area.

6.12 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Identify two children in your class/neighbourhood who have attentional problems. Find out the possible causes for their in-attention in study related activities.
2. Develop two new exercises/activities which would help children to improve their concentration in reading for two different age groups 6 years and 10 years.
3. Identify five real life situations in which children need to have multiple attention (e.g. crossing a busy street).
4. Develop one exercise/game which can be played with paper pencil wherein multiple attention is required to score the marks.