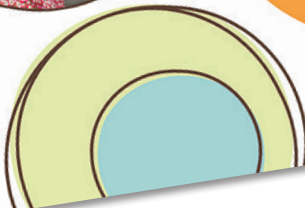


MARCIA L. TATE

# Preparing Children

## for Success in School and Life

20 WAYS TO INCREASE  
YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN POWER



Foreword by  
**Eric Jensen**

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*Preparing Children for Success in School and Life.*

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# Strengthen Your Child's Auditory Mode of Learning

*Tell me, I forget!*

—Old Chinese Proverb

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Have you ever said this to your children: *How many times do I have to tell you...?* The Chinese knew thousands of years ago that to tell someone something is probably the least effective way of getting them to remember it. However, when the brain is engaged during the conversation, memory improves. Why is this the case? When people open their mouths to speak, oxygen is sent to the brain. The brain craves oxygen. In fact, if brains are deprived of oxygen for approximately 3 to 6 minutes, people literally become brain-dead. I have been in some classrooms where students were breathing but you couldn't tell! When the brain is not getting enough oxygen, the mouth opens and a yawn occurs. Notice that you seldom yawn when you are active; you are more likely to yawn when you are sleepy, bored, or tired. In the 2010 Winter

Olympics, speed skater Apolo Anton Ono, the most decorated Winter Olympian of all time, purposefully yawned before each race to send more oxygen to his brain cells.

Oxygen can also improve attention and memory for your children. What we talk about, we stand a better chance of remembering. In fact, there are three brain-compatible strategies on the list of 20 that not only send oxygen to the brain but also increase alertness and attention and improve the likelihood that what your children hear will be remembered. They are storytelling, reciprocal teaching, and discussion.

## Storytelling

Try telling your children the following story to help them learn the continents. It will take less than 1 minute.

There once was a man named **North**. His last name was **America**. He fell in love with a beautiful woman named **South**. They got married and she took his name so she became **South America**. They honeymooned in **Europe**. This couple was blessed to have four daughters whose names all began with the letter A. Their names were **Africa**, **Antarctica**, **Asia** and **Australia**.

The End (Tate, 2010, p. 107)

By the time you have told that story to your children at least three or more times and they have told it to you three or more

The concrete images in stories activate emotions and sense of meaning and provide context and cues for new information (Markowitz & Jensen, 2007).

times, they should be able to recall the continents. Why were they so easy to remember? Because all seven continents were connected together in a story, and the brain remembers more easily when ideas

are connected together. Storytelling also improves a child's ability to listen and reason since it uses the auditory modality with the frontal lobes of the brain to follow the plot (Storm, 1999).

To prove that the brain thinks in connections, try this activity with a family member. Tell the person that you are going to ask him or her a series of questions and you expect quick answers. Then hold up a piece of white paper and ask, *What color is this paper?* (The response will be *white*.) Then quickly ask, *What do cows drink?* (The response should be *milk*, even though cows drink water.) Why? The person's brain connected the word *white*, which is in short-term memory, to the words *cow* and *drink* in the second question.

If you don't believe in the power of story, you soon will. In fact, children's natural fascination with and sense of story never ends. It continues throughout their lives (Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimek, 2005). The next time you are listening to a speaker, watch what happens when the speaker begins to tell a story. Everyone in the adult audience is paying rapt attention. Stories have beginnings, middles, and endings, and the brain can follow a story. If the story tends to be emotional, it can have an even more powerful effect on the brain. When you make up and tell a story to your children or when you allow them to make up their own stories, retention of information occurs.

### Reciprocal Teaching

Another way to help your children remember content is to have them reteach you what you are teaching them. By the time children are 6, they will love to use their inner speech to teach others, especially adults, and guide those adults through a step-by-step process (Sprenger, 2008). Research has shown that in schools, even average and low achievers, with or without learning disabilities, exhibited increased achievement when provided with opportunities to teach the entire class, small groups, or partners (Tileston, 2004). Reciprocal teaching is also the reason college and university students have gotten together for generations to form study groups outside of class, realizing that if they talked about the course content and retaught it to their peers, they would stand a better chance of understanding and recalling it.

Reciprocal teaching worked for a teacher in one of my workshops. She related this story to me. Her husband was interviewing for a prestigious position at a major corporation. As a part of the application process, he had to pass a test that would necessitate remembering a great deal of information. After taking one of my classes in which we discussed the power of reciprocal teaching, the teacher went home and told her husband to teach everything he needed to know for his test to her, realizing that if he could teach it to her, he had a better chance of remembering it on the day of the test. He remembered! She e-mailed me

People remember 95% of what they teach to someone else (Glasser, 1990).

Share what you know and feel memories grow (Sprenger, 2007a).

following the test and told me that he made one of the highest test scores ever on the exam. This experience further convinced her of the power of reciprocal teaching for improving understanding and memory.

## Discussion

The brain remembers 90% to 95% of what it discusses with someone else. Therefore, when your children have a problem or when

Children understand a topic better when they talk about it since their brains process the information not only mentally but also verbally (Allen, 2008).

you need to get information across to them, it is beneficial to take turns brainstorming solutions or sharing ideas. When helping with homework, take the time to engage your children in discussions

regarding the content to be remembered. Begin by asking questions to which the answers are stated directly in the text. Then proceed to more challenging questions in which your children have to *read between the lines* or use details in a story to figure out what the answers might be. In the following section of this chapter, you will find some questions that can be used to guide a discussion of content with your children. When you are helping with homework, engaging them in a discussion will greatly improve their ability to recall later the content discussed.

## HOW CAN I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

- Make up a game that can help your preschool and primary-grade children see the difference between the sounds in words. Call out two words and ask them to tell you which words rhyme and which do not rhyme. For example, *dog-log*, *cat-fat*, *face-make*, *man-can*, *sit-pig*. You might want to see if they can recognize whether words have the same beginning sounds, such as *big-bat*, *top-map*, *fish-face*, *hat-him*. Once they are successful with beginning sounds, try ending sounds, or even vowel sounds. Continue the game using words around the home to see if your children can discriminate the different sounds that they hear. This skill is very important for a beginning reader.

- When giving directions, remember that the adult brain can only hold between five and nine things at one time, or an average

of seven. It is helpful that so much in the real world comes in series of seven—days in the week, colors in the rainbow, notes on the scale, phone numbers, continents, dwarfs, and so forth. Children appear to be able to hold a lot less than seven. Up to age 3, expect them to hold one direction, such as *Go get your coat*. Four- and 5-year-olds can hold two, such as *Put on your shoes and go get your coat*. Six- and 7-year-olds can hold three. Eight- and 9-year-olds can hold four, and so forth. Remember not to expect the brains of your children to hold too many different directions at one time.

- Remember that the brain needs to hear information at least three times before it begins to stick. If you don't believe that is true, consider what happens when you are not at home and someone leaves a message on your answering machine. Do you often have to play the message back more than once to get the whole message, especially if there is a phone number to be remembered? It is even more important with children that content be repeated. Therefore, when working with them, review what they need to know more than once.

- When helping your children remember content, take the content and connect it together in a story. Tell the story to your children several times and have them tell it back to you several times. Watch their memories improve. When your children are taking a test at school, they will remember your story and remember the content!

- When reading aloud to your children, stop periodically and have them retell you a part of the story just read. Not only does the talking get more oxygen to your children's brains, but it also engages them and assists them in recalling the story.

- Students often remember stories better when those stories are original creations (Allen, 2008). Have your older children create their own stories connecting concepts that they want to remember. When they remember the story, they remember the concepts.

- The next time you take your child to the library or a bookstore, look for storybooks that teach concepts your child may be learning in school. Take the books home and read them aloud to your children or allow them to read the books themselves. The fact that the concept is presented in a story makes the concept more meaningful. A list of children's book titles, their authors, and the concepts that can be used to teach are as follows:

## Sample Children's Books

Title	Author	Concepts
<i>The Important Book</i>	Margaret Wise Brown	Main Idea and Details
<i>The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash</i>	Trinka Hayes Noble	Cause and Effect
<i>Thomas' Snowsuit</i>	Robert Munsch	Sequence of Events
<i>The Pain and the Great One</i>	Judy Blume	Point of View
<i>Encounter</i>	Jane Yolen	Point of View
<i>My Brother's Flying Machine</i>	Jane Yolen	Point of View
<i>The King Who Rained</i>	Fred Gwynne	Figurative Language
<i>Amelia Bedelia Series</i>	Judy Blume	Figurative Language
<i>The Parts of Speech Series</i>	Brian Cleary	Parts of Speech
<i>The Parts of Speech Series</i>	Ruth Heller	Parts of Speech
<i>The Doorbell Rang</i>	Pat Hutchins	Concept of Division
<i>Counting on Frank</i>	Rod Clement	Real-World Math
<i>Math Curse</i>	John Scieska	Real-World Math
<i>Science Alphabet Books Series</i>	Jerry Pallotta	Science Concepts

○ Since the brain learns what it is able to teach to others, stop periodically when helping with homework and have your children teach to you what they are trying to understand or remember. If they can teach the concept correctly, they understand it. According to David Sousa (2006), author of *How the Brain Learns*, the teacher should become the learner and the learner should be the teacher at some point in every lesson.

○ Take turns reading a story aloud to your children. Stop periodically and have your children explain to you what was just read. You may want to ask some of the questions listed next to guide their explanation.

## Possible Guiding Questions

- What happened in the story?
- What does this word mean?
- Who are the main characters?
- What is the story mostly about?
- Predict what would happen if...
- What happened first, next, last?
- Tell how, when, where, or why.
- Which is a fact? Which is opinion?
- What is the relationship between...?
- What conclusion can we reach?
- How can we solve the problem?
- What else might have happened?
- What might be another ending?

Use the question stems listed above to engage your children in a discussion related to academic work or even personal situations. Remember that there is more than one answer to most questions and allow your children to discuss a variety of ideas. Using questions is a great way to help children understand the ideas and skills they are learning while remembering a great deal of information at the same time (Caine et al. 2009).



## ACTION PLAN

What will I commit to do to strengthen my child(ren)'s auditory mode of learning?

### **What am I already doing that I should continue to do?**

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### **What new habits will I commit to developing?**

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