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ATTENTION AND LEARNING

A Thesis presented in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Philosophy, in
Education at Massey University.

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1977

ABSTRACT

The basic premise of this study, is that although attention is essential for learning, those most closely concerned with the learning/teaching process, teachers and other educational practitioners, have little or no knowledge of the concept of attention, or how it can be applied to learning. The aims of the study are, therefore, twofold: to increase knowledge of the attentional concept; and to suggest ways in which this knowledge can be applied in the design and implementation of learning/teaching sequences.

In order to achieve these aims, the study is undertaken in two parts. Part One investigates, through the literature, the attentional concept. Initially a brief history of the development of attention as a psychological construct is presented, followed by a consideration of the difficulties surrounding the defining of attention. Secondly a review of the existing literature is undertaken. The framework into which the literature is reviewed and classified is a multidimensional framework consisting of three categories:

(i) activation
(ii) selective attention
(iii) vigilance/maintaining attention,

and was suggested and adapted from the work of Moray (1969a, 1969b). Although the review presented is not exhaustive it is felt to be representative of the major theoretical and research concerns surrounding attention.

Part Two is concerned with how knowledge of attention can be transferred into useful teaching principles, and practices. To this end a model of attention to be applied to learning is proposed and is followed by a guidebook of practical teaching procedures that can be utilised in the design and implementation of learning/teaching sequences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For his help in preparing this manuscript I wish to thank my supervisor, Clive Harper. His suggestions and encouragement have greatly improved the content and form of this piece of work.

My husband, Steve, contributed in more ways than I can identify, and to him I am most grateful.

Thanks also to Eric Archer for his useful comments and discussion.

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