

WOT – Apr. 2018 - Learning Tips by Andrea Metz



This time I am writing about **stress** and the effect it has on learning. A short introduction before I start: Our **brainstem** is the oldest part of our brain (approx. 500 mio. years old), holds our instincts and is for example responsible for eating, drinking, breathing, heartbeat regulation and intestinal activity. The next part, the **limbic system**, is the mammalian part of our brain (development started approx. 300 mio. years ago) with all the emotions we need to survive, like caring for our offspring, fear and love. Last, but not least: the **cerebrum** with two hemispheres (evolutionary starting point approx. 2 mio. years ago), which differentiates us humans from mammals, as it enables us to think logically and abstractly.

What happens when we are stressed? Physical stress comes from our early years and starts an alarm reaction which prepares us in an optimal way for “attack” or “escape”. The connection to our cerebrum is blocked (we do not need complex thinking processes) and the connection to the cerebellum (motoric skills) is activated. The stress hormone adrenaline is released and this hormone starts a lot of reactions in our body, so we are ready to save our lives.

The issue is now, that the stress our children face does not come from the sabre-toothed tiger in front of them, but from a test lying on their desk, a question from the teacher, a colleague bullying them, pressure they put themselves under (e.g. homework they cannot do) and so on. Just remember: stress blocks the connection to our cerebrum – it is hard or almost impossible for children to think logically and solve exercises when they are stressed!

This means that we can support our children in their learning efforts if we reduce their stress. Whatever the source of the stress is, we should help them to develop strategies to deal with it. If adrenaline is already released, movement is the best way to get rid of it. I use for example the appropriate brain gym exercises. Usually when feeling stressed, the mouth is dry too, therefore drinking water (before swallowing move the water back and forth from one cheek to the other) helps as well.

Please get in touch with me, if you would like more information about handling stress within the context of learning, or if you would like me to work with your child. We can talk about learning content and progress in German or English, and you can book lessons regularly or as needed (e.g. to prepare for an important test).

It would be lovely to hear from you!

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WOT Feb. 2018 - Learning Tips by Andrea Metz



“Learning with movement” or “learning through movement” ... there is a difference and when working with children I use both!

Especially with young children I use a lot of movement. We jump back and forth on numbered mats, I put papers on the floor stating the words “noun”, “adjective” and “verb”, call out different words and let them jump on the right paper or they move from station to station, read a sentence and then get it dictated.

It helps a lot. Sometimes younger children have trouble sitting still for long periods or just have a great desire to move in general. They are more able and motivated to learn when movement modules are integrated into the learning session. And it doesn't even have to do with learning at all. If there is enough room, get up and do a bit of skipping or throwing a ball back and forth. After a short “movement break” they sit down and are able to concentrate again on the required subject.

The other very important subject is “learning through movement”. The American pedagogue Paul E. Dennison has discovered that there is a significant connection between body development, language acquisition and the acquisition of scholastic skills. This isn't new for Swiss people, if they've read some of Pestalozzi's works (the connection between “Herz-Kopf-Hände”). What is however new is that he has developed a program to support the learning process of people (children and adults) with consciously executed movement exercises. He has used those movements for 40 years in more than 15 countries, and in a lot of schools it is part of the daily program.

I use his exercises when working with children and have as well put together a set of movements which can be done at home (5 minutes per day). Some are simple exercises, which they can use at school (e.g. during a test), when they realize they are getting a bit tired. They don't even have to stand up to perform them.

Please get in touch with me, if you would like more information about the movement exercises, or if you would like me to work with your child. We can talk about learning content and progress in German or English, and you can book lessons regularly or as needed (e.g. to prepare for an important test).

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WOT Oct. 2017 - Learning Tips by Andrea Metz



Rhythm – humans are used to rhythms: day and night, summer and winter, concentration and relaxation...

Everyone has their own rhythm. At school new rhythms are created, which work well for some children, however not for all. Teenagers for example have a different day/night rhythm and it would be better for learning success if school would start later in the morning. Often discussed – obviously hard to change. A balance of various learning processes needs to be achieved and without this, an organized school routine would not be possible.

On an interscholastic level, lessons and breaks give a rhythm. Within a lesson, teachers change between various learning forms: a single person, partners or groups working together; learning new material by listening to the teacher or by trying to work it out by yourself; time to practice something; short breaks. All this is done to support various learning types and to enable a child to work according to his or her preferred rhythm. This means that ideally a framework is discussed with the child, and there is enough opportunity for them to follow their own rhythm. To find it is a learning process on its own - but essential to develop the full potential of the child.

What does this mean for us, when we support our child? It is important to find out when it is most efficient to learn with the child. Which times of the day work best? Some children prefer to continue right after school in order to get everything done as quickly as possible, whilst others need time to move, run around and play, before they are ready to do their homework or practice for a test.

Another important factor is how long children are able to fully concentrate before they need a short break or a different learning form. A rough guideline from Klimt is: 15 minutes from age 5 to 7, 20 minutes from age 7 to 10, 25 minutes from age 10 to 12 and 30 minutes from age 12 to 16.

Please get in touch with me, if you would like more ideas to include rhythms into the learning process or if you would like me to work with your child. We can talk about learning content and progress in German or English, and you can book lessons regularly or as needed (e.g. to prepare for an important test).

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WOT Jul. 2017 - Learning Tips by Andrea Metz



The German word for 'understanding' is 'verstehen' or more down to earth it means 'begreifen'. Literally translated 'begreifen' means to touch something, to understand something by touching it. This is what toddlers do: touch and feel an object, put it into their mouth, understand it with all their senses. Each person has a different learning personality. Some learn more easily if they read or hear the information, other people have to visualize the topic, and some simply want as much stimulation as possible for their senses when having to understand and dive into a new topic.

We might not yet know which learning personality a child has, therefore I feel it is important to incorporate various means of communication when trying to explain something and see how the child reacts to it. I use words, drawings, objects, whatever makes the lesson livelier and more interesting, and might help the child to comprehend or memorize the learning material better.

In Year 8 my Maths teacher used a plastic container (10cmx10cmx10cm) to visualize that 1 dm^3 equals a liter of liquid. He showed us 1 liter in a glass bottle and asked us if we felt it would fit into the plastic container. Only one girl said 'yes' (not because she believed it, but because she knew how cheeky our teacher was), the rest of us said 'no' and were contradicted a couple minutes later, when to the last drop the water disappeared in the plastic container. I have no problem to recall this experience even today.

Be creative when looking out for material: a matchbox works as model for a cuboid, a black-roll is a perfect cylinder, and candies are perfect to explain various mathematical challenges.

Please get in touch with me, if you would like more ideas or would like me to work with your child. Maths lessons can be in German or English and we can talk about learning content and progress in either of the two languages. You can book lessons regularly or as needed (e.g. to prepare for an important test).

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WOT May 2017 - Learning Tips by Andrea Metz



When we moved back to Europe from New Zealand, our oldest daughter was 9 (she moved straight into 4th grade) and our youngest daughter was 5 years old and had to go back into kindergarten (she was a 1st grade student in NZ –she was not amused!). Both girls understood German very well, but English had become their first language. On the one side, we wanted them to keep their English language skills and therefore joined the WAC and enrolled them in many classes and activities. On the other side, we knew how important it would be for their school success to have good German skills. We spoke German at home, but realized it wasn't enough. So we tried to expose them to as much German as possible: German movies and series, comics and books, audio books, playdates with German native speakers, holiday camps, sport clubs, ... They were not allowed to join DAZ (German as a second language, offered by the Swiss school system), but I personally thought it would have been good for them.

In the end it's a question of speed and time. The older a child gets, the more subjects are taught in German and the more material he or she has to work with, comprehend and will be tested on. If a child is good at German and likes the language, it's an advantage in this Swiss-German environment. Understanding Swiss-German is important, speaking it is optional. The better a child understands what is taught at school, the faster he or she is able to complete homework. It also helps with the speedy comprehension of exam questions, and improves the child's ability to answer them. All in all it is less energy and time consuming, and instead a more rewarding situation for the child and the whole family!

Please get in touch if you would like more ideas on how to improve your child's German - or if you would like me to work with your child. Progress reviews and discussion of learning content can be carried out with you in English or in German. You can book lessons regularly or as needed – for example, in advance of an important test.

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