Today’s piece was prepared by Greg Fahl, MD based on an NPR piece [A Lost Secret: How to Get Kids to Pay Attention](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/06/21/621752789/a-lost-secret-how-to-get-kids-to-pay-attention).

This article begins by talking about research that showed children in Guatemala outperformed upper middle class white children in the United States in a test of attention1. The article obliquely references the growing concern of ADHD in the United States. Rather than pursuing that as the topic of discussion, the author asks the question, what else contributes to attention? She answers this with commentary from researchers who demonstrated motivation as a driver of attention and performance on attention-based exams2. The story bookends nicely with a comparison of the culture in which children are raised in Guatemala compared with the United States focusing specifically on the differences in autonomy between the cultures. It claims that the greater autonomy provided in the Guatemalan culture in comparison to the US public school system, particularly with agenda and schedule setting, leads to an increased interest in their own activities. This hones the ability to pay attention. The article references self-determination theory in education to support this claim3.

This short article was both entertaining and provocative. It is presented in a format that easily digestible. It obliquely and directly references multiple peer-reviewed articles as well as a growing body popular literature on ADHD. The flaw with the piece is that it carelessly links multiple small sample size, single study findings like, “Guatemalan children perform better on an attention-based exam” to “college subjects perform better on attention tests when motivated” to make the claim that Guatemalan children are better motivated by their culture and school system. This is hard to support with any rigor. The article would be more accurate if it mentioned that single study findings are usually worth repeating to authenticate veracity, or if it discussed the subjective nature of the scoring of Guatemalan vs. US children attention span.

**RESOURCES ON LEARNING & ATTENTION:**

[Understood](http://www.understood.org) *Assists families of children through late adolescents to better understand variations in learning and attention*

1. Correa-Chávez, M. & Rogoff, B. Children’s attention to interactions directed to others: Guatemalan mayan and european american patterns. *Dev. Psychol.* **45,** 630–641 (2009).

2. Esterman, M., Poole, V., Liu, G. & DeGutis, J. Modulating Reward Induces Differential Neurocognitive Approaches to Sustained Attention. *Cereb. Cortex N. Y. N 1991* **27,** 4022–4032 (2017).

3. Niemiec, C. P. & Ryan, R. M. Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness in the Classroom: Applying Self-Determination Theory to Educational Practice. *Theory Res. Educ.* **7,** 133–144 (2009).

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!