Brain Boosters and Brain Breaks

Science Brain Boosters

ABL
ACTION BASED LEARNING

Creating a Physically Active Classroom through Brain Breaks

What?

Energizing Brain Breaks, also known as energizers, brain boosters, and activity breaks, are quick activities for the classroom that aim to both engage children in physical activity while enhancing their learning experience . They take virtually no preparation and no extra materials to perform. Students and teachers love them because they are fun and make people laugh. They also challenge the brain. Brain Breaks have been found to improve students' time-on-task1,2 and may have the greatest effect on those students with the most difficulty remaining on task.3 Brain breaks can also improve students' concentration and performance on standardized tests,4-7 Consider using Brain Breaks periodically throughout the day with your class. The more students are active throughout the day, the more focused they will be. Movement also helps to anchor the information students are learning.

How?

Children seem to have an endless source of energy that carries them through their day. They run rather than walk, jump rather than step over, and drop down rather than sit. Brain Breaks are designed to help channel that energy into the academic activities of the day. In this guide, we present a variety of easy-to-implement Brain Breaks that include step by step instructions. Variations are provided to easily change an activity to a different academic focus. These activities take into account the busy academic day and are meant to only provide bursts of activity to satisfy even the squirmiest of students as well as provide transition time to refocus to a new topic. Teachers can choose one activity for the day or choose several activities for an extended break. Consider conducting Brain Breaks with your students:

- To begin the day or an activity. (e.g., a test!)
- Whenever students need a break from an extended learning period.
- Whenever students are transitioning from one subject/activity to another.
- Whenever students are waiting in line to go to specials, lunch, library, etc.
- Whenever the teacher sees the need.

Ready, Set, GO!

Getting started is easy. The teacher should set very clear expectation for student behaviors during the activities. Students will stay so busy with the activity that conflicts should be minimal. Stopping an activity can be a bit more challenging. A stop signal is vital and should be included in the clear expectations set at the beginning of the activity. Specific stop signal examples can be found in the **Ideas for Signals** section on the next page. Most of the time students are ready to refocus after an activity. If your students are having trouble calming down you can play soft, calming music or take students through a series of deep breathing exercises.

Helpful Hints:

- Create a positive atmosphere that enhances the self-esteem for all students. Each student should feel respected and valued. All students do not move alike or at the same speed. Have a signal or sign that can refocus students quickly so that they can "freeze" and listen to you when you need to speak or end the activity.
- Make certain each student understands the teacher's expectations prior to the start of the activity.
- Model enthusiasm for physical activity. Be aware that students (at first) may seem apathetic or silly. These are common expressions of being self-conscious about trying something new in front of their peers. With practice, this discomfort can be minimized and students will be more relaxed and willing to participate.
- Give instructions before and after arranging the room to get ready for participation.
- Remind students of the rules for the activity and the "freeze" signals.
- Take time to make sure that objects are out of the way for safe movement.
- Set a time limit for the activity before beginning movement. Be sure to share that time with students.
- Compliment groups or individuals so that all groups or individuals feel as though their participation was valued.

Ideas for Signals:

1."Give me a hand" - Tell the kids, "give me a hand" and students raise one hand in the air. "Give me a clap" and students clap. "Give me a stomp" and students stomp one foot. You can then ask any combination such as "Give me three claps and a stomp" and the attention is focused on you.
2. Have live music you can play and stop when you want students to start/stop and activity.
3. Prompt students to follow the command, "If you can hear my voice, clap once. If you can hear my voice, clap twice." Continue the sequence until you have the full attention of the entire class.

Animal Instincts

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Pick one student to call out an animal and have everyone mimic how that animal moves. Go around the room until every student has an opportunity to call out an animal and the class has mimicked that animal.

Calm Down

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Lead students in stretches to help loosen up tension. Have students each hold for 15-20 seconds each: reach for the sky, touch toes, arm circles, neck circles, knee to chest, etc

Variations:

- Review science concepts while students stretch.
- Reach for the sky—review concepts relating to weather (cloud formations, rain, etc.)
- Touch toes—review concepts relating to the layers of the Earth.
- Arm circles—review concepts relating to waves and wind.
- Neck circles—review concepts relating to the solar system
- Knee to chest—review concepts relating to pulleys/levers.

Rainstorm

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Have a rainstorm in your classroom. Have students follow your lead; begin by having students very lightly rubbing their hands together, then lightly snap, slap their thighs, slap their thighs and stomp their feet (the rainstorm is at its peak!). Then stop stomping their feet, just slap their thighs, return to lightly snapping, rubbing their hands and stop. Do each action for 20 seconds.

Shake It

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Students remain seated and raise their hands in the air. Have them start by shaking their right hand 10 times, left hand 10 times, left foot 10 times and right foot 10 times. Repeat counting down the number of shakes from 9-1. Speed up or slow down the counting to keep it interesting.

Variations: Tailor this to science concepts by reviewing the skeletal/muscular system while students complete the activity.

Take a Seat!

Academic Focus: Science

Activity: Have students stand up and pull their chairs away from their desks. They should stand in front of their chair (seat facing out). Have students quickly sit, then stand, sit then stand 8-10 times. Next, quickly repeat sitting halfway down and standing, repeating 8-10 times. Last, have students barely sit (just touching the chair) and stand quickly repeating 8-10 times.

Variations: Call out a fruit/vegetable/ dairy product. If it's a "GO" food, students should sit, stand, sit then stand 8-10 times. If it's a "SLOW" food, students should sit halfway down and stand, repeating 8-10 times. Finally, if it's a "WOAH" food, students should barely sit and stand quickly repeating 8-10 times. Repeat by calling out different foods.