

Movement Breaks for Better Learning

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September 14, 2020



Research conducted over the past 25 years has clearly revealed the value that short, frequent “movement breaks” can have on learning and student health in general. Here’s what some of the research on this topic says:

- The part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that processes learning (Middleton & Strick, 1994).
- People who exercise have far more cortical [brain] mass than those who don’t (Anderson, Eckburg, & Relucio, 2002).
- Standing can raise the heart rate (hence, blood flow) by as much as five to eight percent in just seconds (Krock & Hartung, 1992).
- Exercise improves classroom behavior and academic performance (Dwyer, Sallis, Blizzard, Lazarus, & Dean, 2001).

- Students who are engaged in daily physical education programs consistently show not just superior motor fitness, but better academic performance and a better attitude toward school than students who do not participate in daily P.E. (Donevan & Andrew, 1986).

To put it simply, taking a short break to stretch or walk around or just move helps learning. You can read more about all of the research on the importance of movement and exercise [here](#).

Now's the Time

Admittedly, it may be hard to get 28 students up and moving in your ELA classroom during a regular school year. But right now, with students either learning from home or in smaller groups at school, is the perfect time to help them embrace the benefits of movement and exercise. So, how can you get started?

Movement Breaks

Here are a few resources you can use to get your students (and yourself!) up and moving to increase blood flow to the brain and so much more.

25 Brain Break Videos for the Classroom is perfect for elementary students and may help them to “get their wiggles out.” They can all be done while practicing social distancing and don’t take a lot of space, either at home or at school.

The **BrainPrimers website** allows you to download eight free activities to get your students’ minds and bodies engaged. (Disclaimer: You must give them your email address to download the activities. They also sell additional BrainPrimers.)

Don’t let the title fool you. **Our Favorite Virtual PE Resources to Keep Students Moving at Home** is perfect for both the classroom and home and includes activities for all ages from preschool to high school. And they aren’t just for PE!

Download these free **Movement Breaks for Virtual Learning Slides** and get your students stretching and moving. Change out the graphics and you can use them with older students, too.

Add Movement, Brain Breaks to Learning While Social Distancing or Virtual Learning adds even more ways to get your younger students moving (and they work for in-the-classroom activities, too). My personal favorite from this site is having students stand up and do different arm movements or hop on one foot to show their answers to questions. What fun!

“Jump Around!” The Benefits of Movement in the Online Learning Process has some great activities for teachers to use to ensure that we, too, are getting the movement that we need. It also encourages us to take part in the activities we ask our students to do.

Truscott Elementary School offers these **Brain Energizers** for both elementary and secondary students. I especially liked their **Take a Break Teacher Toolkit**, which features more than 100 one to five-minute breaks for 6th through 12th grade students.

Taking a movement break doesn't have to be hard. You can ask students, whether at home or at school, to grab a stuffed animal, pillow, or small ball (something NOT breakable or hard) and throw it up gently in the air and catch it for a set number of minutes, counting as they go. Clap for the person with the most catches when time is up. To make it harder for older students, ask them to do it one-handed or make the catch behind their back or under their leg.

Sometimes, simply standing can be the break your students need. Put them into pairs in breakout rooms (or in your classroom, but socially distanced) and have them stand to play rock, paper, scissors with a partner. Or put them in groups of up to five and have them count from 1 to 40 with each student adding one number. To make it more difficult, they can't actually say the number they are at. Instead, they have to use words or math problems to represent the number. For example, for the number 12, they could say “6+6” or “one dozen” or “the number of months in the year.”

One More Thing About Movement

The research is also clear that you don't have to have your students run a marathon to see benefits. Many simple, less strenuous play-oriented movements have the capacity to improve cognition, including the following: solitary play (doing puzzles, object manipulation), outdoor learning activities (digging,

observing insects), stand and stretch activities (tai chi, Simon Says), constructive play (building with blocks, model building), exploratory play (hide and seek, scavenger hunts, make-believe), individual competitive games (marbles, track and field, hopscotch), and walking excursions (outdoors, indoors), to name a few. So think about how you can include one of these activities regularly in your classes.

