

Brain Breaks

Refocus the Brain

Introduction

- ✓ The average attention span of a teenager is 15-20 minutes long¹
- ✓ The average middle-/high-school class period is 45-90 minutes long
- ✓ The challenge is to keep students engaged throughout the entire lesson

What are Brain Breaks?

- ✓ A short mental break, taken at regular intervals during instruction, and used to achieve optimal learning².
- ✓ Brain breaks are best when they are physical
 - ★ Blood and oxygen moves to the brain
- ✓ Brain breaks are limited to five minutes or less
- ✓ Brain breaks allow the brain to refocus on learning

When to Brain Break?

- ✓ Brain break whenever you feel class engagement is lacking
- ✓ Plan for brain breaks between segments of your lesson
- ✓ At least every 20-30 minutes

Successful Brain Breaks

- ✓ One-Minute Dance Party
 - ★ Play a popular or fun song and have student dance any way they'd like. Works best with younger students
- ✓ Simon Says
 - ★ In the target language alternate calling out actions with and without prefacing them with "Simon says"
- ✓ Duck, Duck, Goose
 - ★ Have students form circles in small groups with one student being the fox. The fox walks around the circle tapping each student and saying "duck" in target language. The fox chooses one student and calls them "goose." The goose then chases the fox. If the goose catches the fox, the fox resumes walking around the circle. If the fox gets back to goose's seat before he's caught, the goose becomes the fox.
- ✓ Seasonal Movement
 - ★ Students move around the classroom as seasonal characters. EX: sail the ocean blue like Columbus, fly on a broom like a witch, gobble like a turkey, carry presents down the chimney like Santa, hide the pot of gold like leprechauns, hide Easter eggs like the Easter bunny

Successful Brain Breaks (cont'd)

- ✓ Order
 - ★ Students line up in order by random criteria: alphabetical by first name, alphabetical by last name, by age (day and month), hair length, grade level and alphabetical, height, hobbies, etc.
- ✓ Four Corners (Carol Gaab)
 - ★ Ask questions with 4 possible answers. Depending on answer, students move to one of the four corners of the room. EX: favorite color?, favorite food?, favorite sport?, favorite hobby?, favorite actor?, etc.
- ✓ Quiet Ball
 - ★ Using a beach ball, have students toss the ball quietly around the room. Those who talk, drop the ball, or throw the ball forcibly, are out.
- ✓ Telephone
 - ★ Students line up. Whisper a phrase in the target language to the first student and they whisper it to the next. When it reaches the last student, they say the phrase out loud.
- ✓ Sentence-by-Sentence Story
 - ★ First student starts story with one sentence. Each subsequent student adds to the story with one additional sentence. Story ends with the last student.
- ✓ "Minute to Win It" Games
 - ★ Balance: students walk around the room balancing paper plates on their heads. Add things to the plates to make it more challenging. When the plates/objects fall, student is out.
 - ★ Water-Bottle Toss: Students take turns throwing a half-full water bottle on a table. Object is to get the bottle to land standing up.
 - ★ Noodling Around: using only a single spaghetti noodle held in their mouth, students attempt to pick up six penne noodles. If the spaghetti breaks or the student uses their hands, they are out.
- ✓ Running Dictation (Jason Fritz)
 - ★ Create 5-10 paragraphs in the target language. They should be of equal length. Use fewer sentences for lower levels and more complex sentences for upper levels. Number each paragraph and hang them around the room or just outside of your room. In teams, one person will be the scribe and the other team members will take turns relay-style running to their assigned paragraph, remembering what they can to dictate to the scribe. The team that gets their paragraph transcribed correctly first, wins. The scribe is never allowed to look at the original paragraph.
- ✓ Heads Up, 7 Up
 - ★ Class sits at their desks with their eyes closed, heads down, and thumbs up. 7 students go around the room and touch a thumb. When the thumb is touched, the student puts their thumb down. When each student has touched a thumb, the 7 students stand in the front of the room. The students whose thumbs were touched try to guess who touched them. If they're correct, they replace them. If not, the person survives for another round.
- ✓ Relay Races
 - ★ Students race relay-style outside or safely within your classroom. Have them retrieve objects from around the room. First team to finish wins.

Successful Brain Breaks (cont'd)

- ✓ Rhythm
 - ★ The first student creates a clapping rhythm and the rest of the class repeats it. The next student repeats the original rhythm and adds a few more beats and the class repeats the original plus the addition. This continues until the entire class has had a turn.
- ✓ Color Grab
 - ★ Get some sheets of colored constrictor paper laminated and cut them up into 4 pieces. Have students form a circle in the middle of classroom and toss the colored squares on the floor. Call out a color in the target language and students grab the color called. Those who grab the wrong color or don't have a color are out. Remove some of the squares and repeat until there is only one student left standing.
- ✓ Gotcha!
 - ★ The object is to try to grab another person's finger on one side of you, while at the same time avoid being grabbed by the person on the other side of you. Have students stand up and form a large circle. Each person should hold out their left hand with their palm flat and facing up. Now have students take their right hand index finger and point it directly into the palm of the person to their right. When the teacher counts to three, the students try to grab the person's finger that is in their palm, and at the same time, avoid being grabbed by the person they are pointing to.
- ✓ Musical Chairs
 - ★ Students move around the room while music is playing and find a chair and sit down when the music stops. You can play for just a few minutes or progressively eliminate chairs until there's only one student left seated.
- ✓ Color Touch
 - ★ Teacher calls out colors at random in target language and students move around the room to touch called-color.
- ✓ Limbo
 - ★ Play limbo for about 5 minutes having students hold a stick or a rope lower and lower each time.
- ✓ Human Knot
 - ★ Students form small circles of less than 10 people. Each student puts their left hand into the circle and grab a hand of another student. Then they put their right hands into the circle and grab a hand of another student. Now, without letting go, they are to work together to untie their knot and return to a circle.
- ✓ Dead Fish
 - ★ Students flop around the room like fish out of water until the teacher yells "dead fish" in the target language. Students drop where they are and play dead for a short period of time.
- ✓ Freeze!
 - ★ Students walk around the room being goofy until the teacher yells "freeze" in the target language. Students then stop and hold their position at that very moment.
- ✓ Back Writes
 - ★ Students pair up and one student is given a vocabulary word in secret and they are to write that word on the back of their partner. The partner tries to guess the word.

Successful Brain Breaks (cont'd)

- ✓ Mingle
 - ★ Students mingle around the room asking questions of fellow students in the target language to try to find a match. Example. "What's your favorite color?" If the student's favorite color is blue, they are looking for another student with blue as a favorite color.
- ✓ Charades or Pictionary
 - ★ Using target vocabulary, students either draw or act out the vocabulary as the rest of the class or small teams make guesses.

References

1. http://www.cascaeducation.ca/files/proAstro_payattention.html
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