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Brain Breaks: An Innovative Tool to Re-Engage Students

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Research Question

- What happens when I use physical movement breaks during classroom instruction?
- What strategies help students stay engaged and on task?

Methodology

- Participants: 23 first graders
- Subject: English Language Arts
- Reason: When students showed behaviors of disengagement
- When: Afternoon, a time when there were no breaks in instruction.
- Class interviews, observation notes, and brain break activities were content-analyzed.

Literature Review

- Mulrine, Prater, & Jenkins (2008) describe a brain break as a short break that incorporates physical activity with content.
- A brain break is a short activity that is either related or unrelated to the content (Almarode & Almarode, 2008).
- Braniff (2011) reasons that non-content related brain breaks are more effective in the classroom because they allow students' brains to take a complete break from instruction.
- When brain breaks are content related and therefore related to the curriculum, teachers are more likely to use them (McMullen, Kulinna, & Cothran, 2014).
- Brain breaks give students a jolt of energy and allow the brain to receive more blood and oxygen. This allows the brain to filter out unnecessary information (Alamarode & Almarode, 2008).

Results and Data Analysis

- Students needed brain breaks due to an abnormal class schedule causing unproductive noise, work avoidance, and off task actions.
- Post brain break students were engaged in their work, did not require redirection, and got back to work quickly and quietly.
- Non-content based breaks worked the best in the classroom because they provided students a complete break from instruction.
- Brain breaks were most efficient when they were related to something the students knew, involved a high-energy dance, could be sung along to, and were not over used.
- High-energy breaks involving singing and dancing were the most effective strategies that supported re-engagement.
- Brain breaks that related to an upcoming holiday provided for active participants.

Conclusion

- Brain breaks work differently within each classroom based upon the different students and their behaviors.
- It is important to set classroom expectations so students know what behaviors are expected of them during brain break time.
- Future research on brain breaks should be continued in the topic of how brain breaks can be used and the effects of breaks at different grade levels.
- Future research should also look closer at the effects of brain breaks on students who do not show behaviors that need a brain break but participate anyways. It should also look at how long a brain break needs to be in order for the break to be effective on students.