

TIPS: BRAIN-BASED ENERGIZERS

Brain-based energizers are short, energizing, physical activities that engage students, bring oxygen to their brains, and heighten their awareness. Here are some tips for maximizing the effectiveness of energizers:

- **Move Students to a New Location** Have students stand up and move away from their desks or tables, take them into the hallway, or go outside. Moving to a new location signals to the brain that new information is coming in; this creates a "state change." A state change allows the brain to "wake up," become aware that new learning is about to occur, and regain focus.
- **Model It** Demonstrate exactly how to do an energizer before having students do it. Modeling helps ensure student success.
- **Vary Your Energizers** Some exercises are simple stretches; others require more vigorous physical movement, such as marching or jumping. Vary the types of energizers you do throughout the day, and make modifications as needed for students who are physically challenged in any way. Just be sure to include some type of physical movement (even if it's only clapping hands), opportunities for deep breathing, and participation within the group.
- **Hint at the Upcoming Topic, when Possible** Connecting an energizer to a topic you are introducing heightens students' interest and cements new learning into muscle memory. For example, to preface a math lesson on patterns, you can have students do the "Beanbag Toss" energizer described below, since it involves a pattern. (For an additional example of how to tie in the Beanbag Toss with new learning, refer to the "Alternate Variation.")
- **Play Lively Instrumental Music** Once you've given directions and modeled it, play lively, instrumental music in the background as students do the energizer. According to research, music with a rhythm of about 60 beats per minute, exemplified by much Baroque and New Age music, reduces brain waves, improving alertness and general mood (Campbell, 1997). Also according to research, listening to music: aids recall (Rose & Nicholl, 1997); causes the brain to become harmonized, energized, and sharpened (Ostrander, Schroeder, & Ostrander, 1994); reduces muscular tension, enhancing relaxation (Bartlett, 1996); positively influences the body's immune system and strengthens stress tolerance (Bartlett).

Below is one of the many energizers you can use with your students.

ENERGIZER: BEANBAG TOSS

Materials:

- 21 beanbags

- Audiotape or CD player
- Lively instrumental music

Notes to Educator:

You will be conducting an exercise in which participants form a circle and toss several beanbags around the circle, forming a pattern. Form groups of no more than eight students each. Depending on the size of your class, you may have several circles, or you may want to have one circle with another circle surrounding it, observing. Then the circles can switch. The activity works either way. Stand in a circle with students so you can model the exercise as you explain it. After you've given directions and modeled it, play lively instrumental music throughout the exercise.

Say the following "Directions" aloud to your students. Any text in parentheses is for you, the educator.

Directions:

(Make eye contact with and then toss the beanbag to the person across the circle from you. Allow everyone in the group to catch and toss the beanbag once. Repeat the exercise so students get the idea of the pattern. After two rounds, add another beanbag. Make eye contact with and toss the second beanbag to the person across the circle from you. Tell him or her to toss it to the person he or she tossed it to before. Go one round with two beanbags, then add another. Keep adding beanbags into the circle and observe the rhythm. It should get faster and faster, but not so fast that students lose the pattern. Once you have modeled the pattern within one circle, have all circles do the activity. Try to introduce as many beanbags as you can into each circle. If you have opted to use one circle with an outside circle observing, switch the circles and begin the process again with the second circle.)

- We're going to toss beanbags around in a pattern.
- I will make eye contact with _____ [name a student across from you in the circle] and then toss the beanbag to [him/her].
- _____ [name of student] will then make eye contact with someone else in the circle and toss the beanbag to that person. That person will make eye contact with yet another person and toss, and so forth.
- The beanbag will go around until everyone has had a chance to catch and toss it to someone else once. The beanbag should end up with me, the one who started the toss.
- We will repeat this exercise with the beanbag using the same pattern. Each time you receive the beanbag, you will be receiving it from the same person who threw it to you in the first round.
- Likewise, you should make eye contact with and toss it to the person you selected on the first round. After we get the hang of it, I will add more beanbags so we will be tossing more than one.

- (Ask) Are there any questions?
- Okay, let's begin.
- Great job! Please return the beanbags to me and take a seat.

Alternate Variation:

If you'd like to tie in the beanbag energizer more directly with learning, divide your class into groups of four or five students each and have each group form a circle. Hand a beanbag to one person in each circle. Have each student who is holding a beanbag share one thing they know about _____ [topic of your choice], whether it is something they just read and memorized or something they already knew. After briefly stating one piece of knowledge to their group, have the student toss the beanbag to another student in their circle. Have students continue sharing their learning and then tossing the beanbag, each time to someone who hasn't had the beanbag yet. Challenge students to see if they can go around their circle and each share twice in the time allotted. Allow two minutes, playing lively instrumental music in the background.

For additional sample energizers, see "Taking It Further."

Source: The above concepts are based on the PLS graduate course *Brain-Based Ways We Think and Learn*[™]. For more information, see "Helpful Resources" below.

References:

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Campbell, D.G. (1997). *The Mozart effect: Tapping the power of music to heal the body, strengthen the mind, and unlock the creative spirit*. New York: Avon Books.

Ostrander, S., Schroeder, L., & Ostrander, N. (1994). *Superlearning 2000*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Rose, C.P., & Nicholl, M.J. (1997). *Accelerated learning for the 21st century*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Slywester, Robert (1995). *A celebration of neurons: An educator's guide to the human brain*. Alexandria, VA.