

Other Cognitive-Friendly Strategies

Adapted from Brain Compatible Strategies, Eric Jensen, 2004 and Brain Matters, Patricia Wolfe, 2001

Role Playing Activities

Integrate physical movement to invigorate cognitive activity, kinesthetic, spatial, verbal and linguistic elements of the brain that work into problem-solving skills.

- **Expert interviews:** Pair students up with one student becoming an expert on a topic and another posing as a reporter. Experts take ten minutes to review facts, conduct quick research and “brush up” on their topic, while reporters prepare questions to ask (reporters will also need to research). When finished, one student will ask questions, the other will answer as the expert, and then they’ll switch roles.
- **Retro parties:** Identify an historical era or event in time. Have students stand up and close their eyes for three to five minutes and imagine that they are time travelers in that time period from a specific perspective, or from their own. When finished, have them sit down and freewrite for five to ten minutes about what they imagined.
 - Use this as a priming activity to stimulate prior knowledge about a subject, and curiosity to set learning purposes with.
- **All the world’s a stage:** When reading long text or watching a long lecture, have students pause and reflect for a moment before turning to a peer and discussing the learning as a three-minuet skit. For example, they could perform a dialogue between two characters, world leaders, the sun and planets. They might also dramatize a meeting between two historical figures or critically discuss a piece of literature.

Musical Chairs

Using games to inspire learning improves working memory and inspires cognition by raising the level of “feel good” amines in the brain (dopamine and norepinephrine). Using musical chairs games can achieve this:

- Arrange chairs in a large circle.
- Have students take a chair, stand up and perform an interactive task such as introducing themselves to someone they don’t know very well, making a positive affirmation to someone, or reciting a fact from the lesson taught. They might also find someone with the same birthday or shake everyone’s hand.
- Play cheerful music in the background.
- Stop the music after ten to twenty seconds and everyone find an empty chair to sit in. The last person to find a chair must be the Music Master, starting and stopping the music while initiating an interactive task. Here are some interactive task ideas:
 1. Getting to know you
 2. Lesson or content review
 3. Saying something about oneself that nobody knew before (self-disclosure)

4. Storytelling with each participant adding something to the story
5. Concept mapping, or connecting ideas to an idea started by the Music Master.

Ball Toss

Establish some content-focused learning goals and objectives for students to aspire to as they toss a ball to each other to answer and ask questions (use a soft ball).

Other ball tossing goals can include:

- Presenting a claim or stating a piece of evidence (such as a quote or news item) that supports a claim on a topic.
- Students can invent test questions.
- Students can introduce themselves to each other from a character or historical figure's point-of-view.
- Review content learned

Threat Reduction Strategies

Because our brain is highly influenced by threat and excessive stress, it is ultra-sensitive to it – meaning, cognition can be inspired when challenged, but not threatened. The brain will shut down performance with too much threat, and optimize it with higher-order thinking and creativity with enough challenge. Here are recommendations for minimizing threat, and allowing for challenges that inspire learning:

- Avoid academic surprises – pop quizzes and on-the-spot questioning that some might not be prepared for. Reassure students of success.
- Allow learners to make mistakes, and let them know it is ok to make mistakes and that we learn from them. Post these messages visibly about the room – “We learn from our mistakes!” and, “Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and move on!” In addition, share with them the mistakes you have made and how you’ve learned from them.
- Allow plenty of wait time before asking another question, or before requiring an answer.
- Always discipline students privately and offset it with advice to move forward with.
- Never use additional work or time in class as a punishment or threat to learners; let the punishment fit the crime.
- Establish a social air of no tolerance when it comes to putting others down or bullying in any way.

Synapse Strengtheners

- Choose a concept taught that students have struggled with, or have difficulty understanding and create a graphic organizer for it.
- Give students the major topics and subtopics to be addressed and have them complete the organizer.

- Have students share strategies that have helped them with challenging material, like a reading strategy, a note-taking strategy, a pre-writing or brainstorming strategy.
 - Keep the strategies in a collection for easy retrieval and review when the same or similar challenges arise again.
- Have students write up short presentations of content learned through short constructed pieces, as a podcast, a video presentation, a slideshare or through a PowerPoint presentation.
 - Have students present the learning to the class or to a small group.