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Strategies for Using Movement

Incorporating movement activities into lessons is interesting and fun for the teacher and the students. Although moving around in class is common in the primary grades, it drops dramatically at the secondary level. Middle and high school teachers are understandably concerned about having adequate time to cover the enormous amount of material in the curriculum. Some are also uneasy that students moving around the classroom may get too many of them off task. Because trading a few minutes of teacher talk for a movement activity can actually increase the amount of learning retained, it could be a very worthwhile investment of time.



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Remember that not many students participate in the physical education program. Yet physical activity is essential to promoting the normal growth of mental function, to generating positive emotions, and in learning and remembering cognitive material. Some suggestions are as follows:

- **Energizers.** Use movement activities to energize students who are at low points in their energy levels (e.g., during early-morning periods for high school students or during that down-time just past the middle of the day). For example,

“Measure the room’s length in hand spans.”

“Touch seven objects in the room that are the same color.”

“Go to four different sources of information in this room.”

“In your group, make a poster-sized mind map of this unit.”

“Use ball toss games for review, storytelling, and vocabulary building.”

- **Acting Out Key Concepts.** This strategy uses the body in a physical way to learn and remember a difficult concept. If the lesson objective is to learn the continents, try this: Stand in front of a world map. Say the continent and point to the assigned body part (Chapman & King, 2000).

North America = left hand	Europe = forehead
Asia = right hand	Africa = waist
South America = left knee	Australia = right knee
Antarctica = a point on the floor between the feet	



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Allow time for practice, then remove the map and repeat the activity.

Is there a difficult concept that you teach that could be acted out?

- **Role-Playing.** Do role-plays on a regular basis. For example, students can organize extemporaneous pantomime or play charades to dramatize major points in a unit. Have them develop and act out short commercials advertising upcoming units or to review previously learned material.
- **Vocabulary Building: Act Out the Word.** Look for vocabulary words that lend themselves to a physical movement. Then do the following:
 - a. Say the word.
 - b. Read the meaning.
 - c. Do the movement (the movement acts out the meaning of the word).

For example,

- a. oppugn
- b. “to oppose or attack”
- c. Make body gestures that indicate “opposing” or “attacking.”

Do the three parts (a, b, and c) three times. This places the information in working memory. Now continue rehearsing the word, and use it in context so that it transfers to long-term memory (Chapman, 1993).

- **Verbal to Physical Tug-of-War.** In this activity, students choose a partner and a topic from the unit they have been learning. Each student forms an opinion about the topic and has 30 seconds to convince a partner why his or her own topic is more important (the verbal tug-of-war). After this debate, the partners separate to opposite sides for a physical tug-of-war with a rope.