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Kyrene teachers learn 'Brain Breaks' for their students

By [Travis Roemhild](#), Ahwatukee Foothills News | Posted: Friday, June 22, 2012 6:48 am



Two local physical education teachers said they always knew how important exercise can be for children, and how it can positively affect their retention of information and overall education.

Leslie DeRuiter of the Kyrene School District and Leslie Hicks from the Chandler Unified School District funneled that knowledge into a program for other teachers about three years ago.

They draw from a variety of sources, both scientific — in materials dealing with how the brain works — and educational. Together, they have been teaching a program called Brain Breaks to other teachers within their districts to give them a rundown on all the information they have collected over the years.

“As P.E. teachers, we were both very interested in how PE affects learning,” Hicks said. “What we do best is we take research and put it into practical applications that other teachers can implement in their classrooms.”

One source they use is the findings presented by John J. Ratey, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, who says there is a direct correlation between exercise and mental sharpness.

The activities they teach in their “Brain Breaks” seminar focus on “crossing the midline,” or the utilization of both sides of the brain.

“Some Brain Breaks are designed to have the kids step away from the material for a variety of reasons that give the brain time to retain the information they just received,” DeRuiter said. “They can take the time to review the material, or for fun, or for fitness purposes.”

Three times each year DeRuiter and Hicks will host a three-hour class for Kyrene teachers. Hicks, who works as an instruction specialist in Chandler Unified, puts on a five-day seminar that goes more in-depth into the materials.

Brain Breaks are beneficial for kids of all ages, they said. Their program has grown significantly since they started it about three years ago.

“We want it to be that by the end of the three hours, it doesn’t feel like three hours,” Hicks said. “It flies by. They are learning and it makes them feel that their time was valued.”

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