**BRAIN-TARGETED TEACHING**

**LEARNING UNIT**

**Name: Elizabeth Harris Dates: March 2012- May 2012**

**Unit Title: Improving attention skills in the classroom.**

**Grade Level: 4**

**Content Standard(s):** Students will demonstrate the ability to attend in the classroom in order to meet grade level expectations and learning objectives.

**Learning Unit Overview:**

The objective of this learning unit is to teach a small group of 4th grade boys to:

* Identify on/off task behaviors
* Understand the impact paying attention has on learning and emotions
* Identify distractors that draw them off task
* Learn how to apply strategies to stay on task

***Brain Target #1***

**Emotional Connection:**

To develop a positive emotional learning climate rules and routines are established to create a sense of predictability. Learning activities are changed weekly to provide novelty, increase motivation, and hold students’ attention. Relaxation activities are used at the beginning of each group to attempt to settle the boys’ energy and promote a calm mood. To develop a sense of community the group reviews rules and group objectives, and members are encouraged to share experiences from their week related to group objectives.

Group leaders encourage positive group dynamics by providing positive feedback for respectful, productive, and attentive behavior; remaining calm when the energy level escalates; and by responding to inappropriate behavior with firm but sensitive reminders of rules and consequences.

***Brain Target #2***

**Physical Environment:**

Environmental elements are adapted to enhance the learning environment in the following ways:

Placing chairs in a semi-circle to promote discussion and foster group cohesion

 Posters related to learning objectives are hung where the group can see them

 Visual distractions and materials not related to group activities are eliminated

Relaxation music is played and a lavender scent is sprayed for a calming effect

 Group rules are posted within sight of the group to set behavioral expectations

***Brain Target #3***

**Concept Map**

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**Learning Goals:**

The learning goals of this unit are to have a small group of 4th grade boys:

 Identify how attention is demonstrated by on and off task behaviors

 Understand the effects paying attention, or not, has on learning and their emotions

 Identify distractors that draw them off task

 Learn and apply strategies for staying on task

**Introductory Assessment of Prior Knowledge:**

To assess the group’s knowledge about on and off task behavior they were asked to brain storm ideas of “what it looks like to be on task” and “what it looks like to be off task”. Their responses were written on the board in a T-chart**.**

***Brain Target #4***

**Activities for Teaching Mastery of Declarative/Procedural Knowledge**

To identify the effect paying attention has on learning and emotions the students are first asked to create a drawing or comic depicting a situation in which they have stayed on task successfully. On the other side of this paper they are asked to do the same thing for a situation they had difficulty staying on task. Next the students are to write feelings around their picture which they experienced during each situation. One objective is met with this activity when students note the differences in how they feel about themselves in these two different situations. The students are asked to present their work to the group at large for discussion. During the discussion students will share similarities and differences between each other’s experiences; offer ideas about why they think paying attention is important in each situation; share what they learned when they paid attention and the consequences they faced when they did not pay attention.

***Brain Target #5***

**Activities for Extension and Application of Knowledge**

To help students learn to identify distractors in their environment they will role play scenarios in which one student tries to attend to task amidst distraction. To help students learn strategies for staying on task they group will offer suggestions after each group completes their role play. This activity will proceed as follows:

 Students break up into to three small groups

 Each group randomly chooses a situation that depicts an activity requiring one student to pay attention

 Students assign the following roles:

 One person who attempts to stay on task

 One person who tries to teach or direct him

 Two people who act as distractors.

 The group makes up the lines, distractors, and how the student attending reacts

 Each group presents its scenario to the group at large

 Group discussions about each scenario focus on identifying the distractors

 During discussion group members generate strategies for staying on task

***Brain Target #6***

**Evaluating Learning:**

To evaluate students’ learning each student will complete a project to demonstrate their understanding of learning objectives. Students will be given a chose to create a comic or write a story depicting a scenario in which the main character is in a situation requiring their attention. A requirement will be to identify environmental distractors or potential distractors the main character encounters. Students will be asked to identify three strategies the main character applies to stay on task. The storyline will need to include how the character benefited, or what the main character learned by staying on task. A scoring rubric will used to assess each student’s project.

Other assessment options include:

 Observations by group leader and self-report from members during group discussions

 Pre- & Post Self-Assessment and Teacher Assessment

 Written reflection by each student about their experience in the group

 Individual conference with the group leaders about what they gained from participating

**References**

Hardiman, Mariale M. (2003). *Connecting brain research with effective teaching*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Rinne, L., Gregory, E., Yarmolinksaya J., & Hardiman M., (2011) Why arts integration improves long term retention of content. *Mind, Brain and Education*, 5(2), 89-96.

Willingham, Daniel T. (2011) Can Teachers increase Students’ Self-Control. *American Educator*, Summer 2011, 22-27.