It's Monday morning. You grab your coffee and head into your classroom, ready for a great week. You have your lesson plans ready to launch onto your third grade class. You look across the room and realize … it’s not going to happen.

Your kids are disengaged. You need some classroom management.

You really don’t want to take the time to wake them up. Why can’t their parents do that? Why can’t they just come in and be ready to learn? You know if you ask them to pull out their spelling books your doomed. So you take a risk. Time for some intervention. It’s an age old problem: how to engage kids in the classroom? One thing we all know: movement helps.

An occupational therapist friend of mine, Miss Sue, used to tell me, “Kids in motion are not commotion. Education is not just from the brain up.”

“Ok everybody stand up! We’re going to play Simon Says!” The entire class looks up at you bewildered. “No. I’m serious. Everyone up.” The kids all look at each other and eventually they all get up, some quicker than others. You begin a three minute game of Simon Says. When the game is over, you can feel a palpable difference in the classroom.

Now you can begin to teach.

Movement is absolutely crucial to providing a productive learning environment. Our brains will only function at their optimal level with a constant flow of oxygen and blood pumping in and out. Movement provides that increased flow. Movement also acts as a filter to an oncoming slaughter of sensory information or what we call "sensory overload." Sitting still, fluorescent lighting, offensive smells, hard chairs and humming noises all barrage our nervous system and movement acts as a filter. Let's take a look at a few “heavy work” or movement activities that can alert the mind, focus attention and filter sensory information without ever leaving the classroom.

1) Mimicking Games

Games like Simon Says are great for engaging the body with the brain and you don’t have to move to far to get a lot out of it. Just following directions with movement is key to encouraging an alert state.
2) Crossing Midline

Left over right and right over left can increase focus and attention like nothing else. You can have kids each keep a small scarf at their desk for these movement breaks. Toss with the right hand and catch with the left. Now toss with the left and catch with the right. You can also use their desk rulers and have them make figure eights in the air.

3) Teacher’s Helper

Stack the chairs, carry books, wipe down the tables. Create a Heavy Work Wheel and have kids rotate through classroom chores. You get a clean room and they get moving to learn!

4) Aerobics

Have your kids run in place or do jumping jacks. It’s old but wise; and it works. Jumping Jacks are great for increasing heart rate and coordination!

5) Chair Push Ups and Sit Ups

You don’t need a gym for these. They can be done right in your classroom. Have your kids push up on their chairs or do half sit ups. Three sets of ten is all it takes to get them ready to learn.

6) Breaaaatheeeeeee!

If you’re a yoga lover, this one’s for you and your kids will appreciate it. Tell your kids to take a deep breath in (“smell the flowers”) and a slow breath out (“blow the bubbles”). Controlled breathing improves oxygen to the brain.

7) Got Art?

Art is not just for the art teacher. Use putty, dough, scissors and tape to give their hands a heavy workout. Add the art into your current curriculum. Your kids will be engaged and the lesson will stick!

8) Hit the Floor

Last but not least: Get your kids on the floor. Circle time, reading corner or just get down to do some push ups. Use the floor as it provides great proprioceptive feedback (feedback to the joints and muscles) to create a calm but alert state.