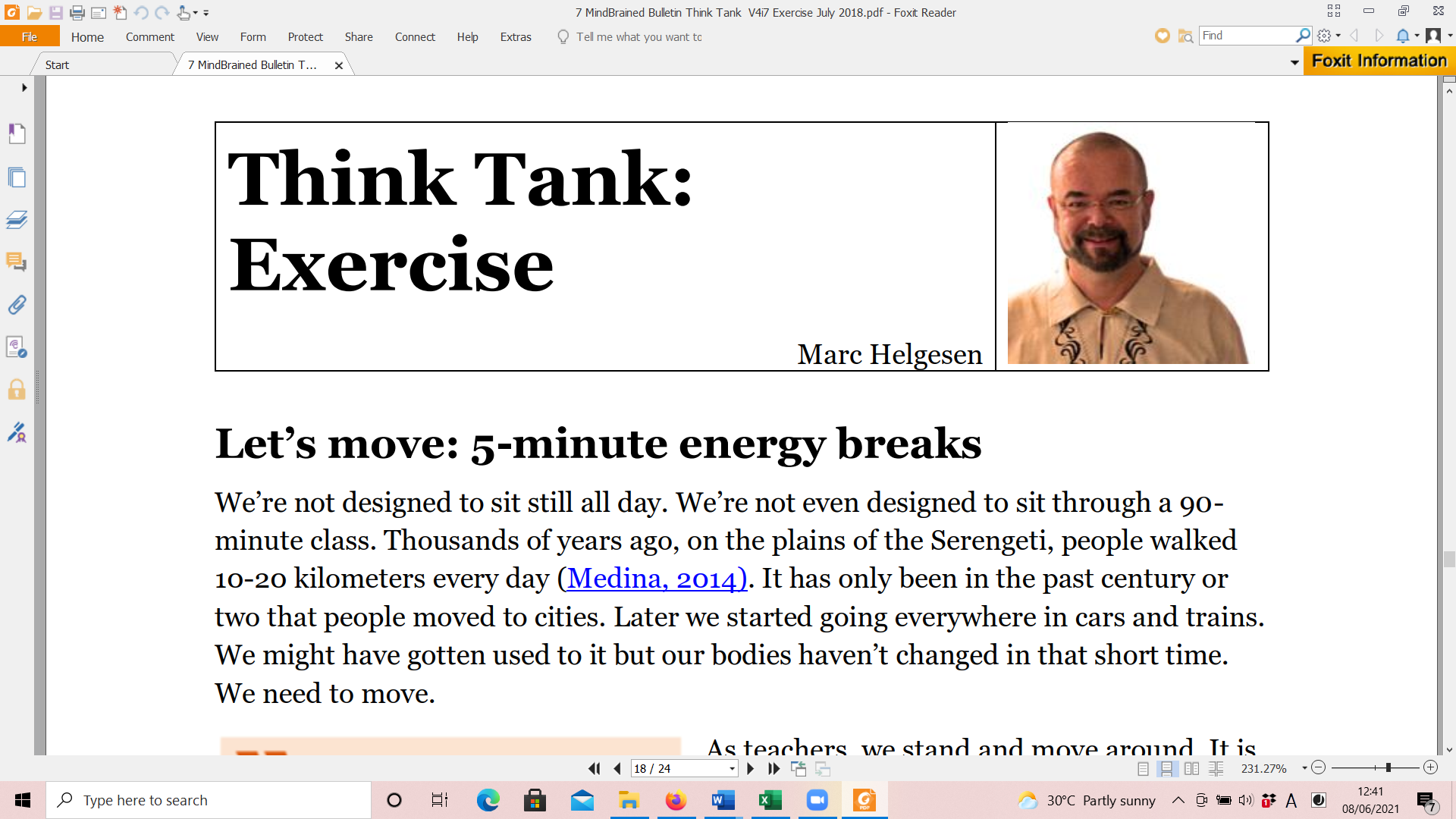
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**Let’s move: 5-minute energy breaks**

Marc Helgesen

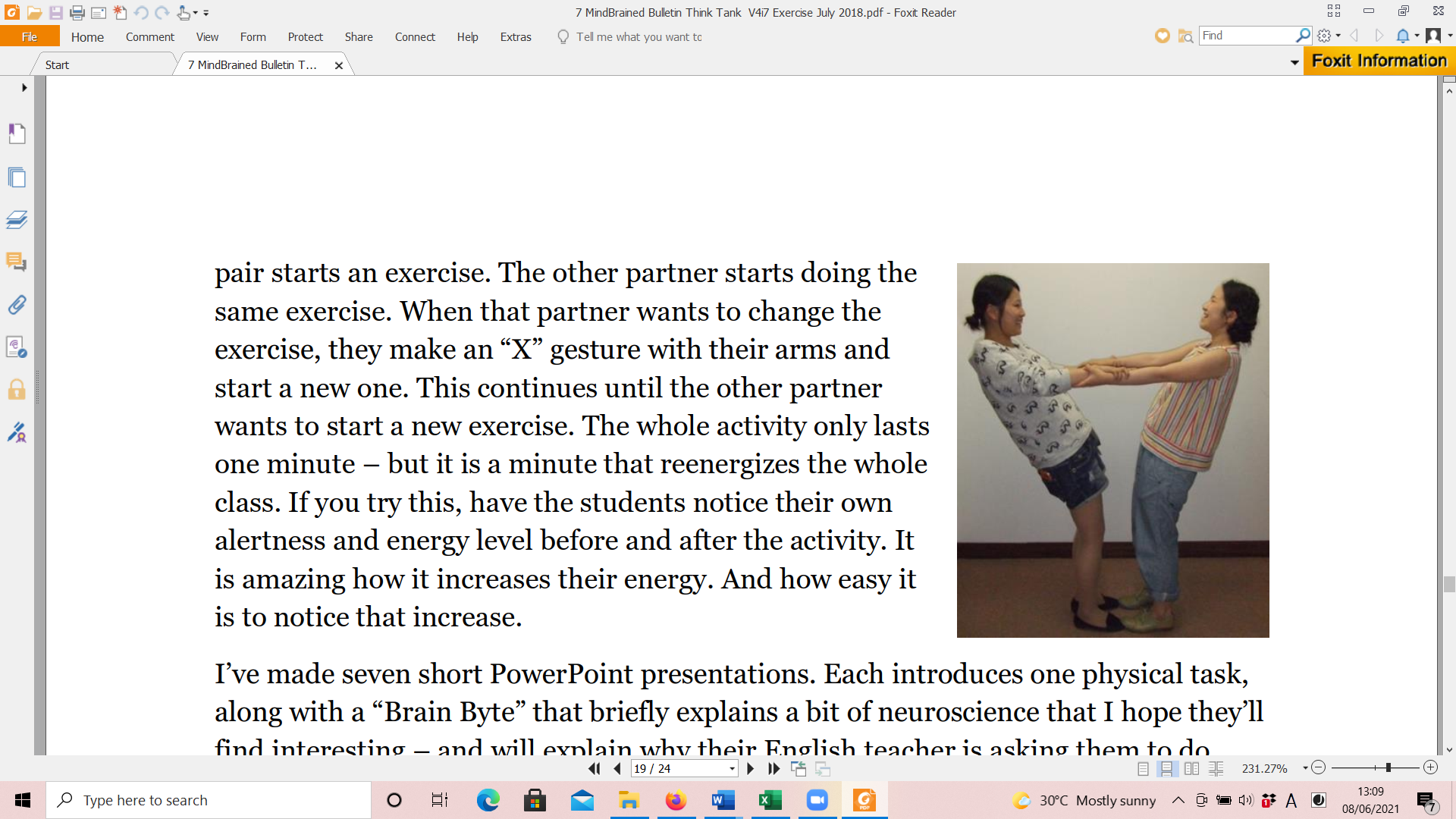
We’re not designed to sit still all day. We’re not even designed to sit through a 90-minute class. Thousands of years ago, on the plains of the Serengeti, people walked 10-20 kilometers every day (Medina, 2014). It has only been in the past century or two that people moved to cities. Later we started going everywhere in cars and trains. We might have gotten used to it but our bodies haven’t changed in that short time. We need to move.

As teachers, we stand and move around. It is easy to forget how hard it is to say alert when you are just sitting. (If you go to faculty meetings, you might have an idea.\*) How long do your students sit during class? For most teachers – unless they teach kids – the answer is “the whole class.” But when people sit for 20 minutes, blood flows south. There is a build-up of blood in the feet, lower legs and buttocks However, when we stand up and move for just one minute, there is a 15% increase of blood and, therefore, oxygen, to the brain (Sousa, 2011).

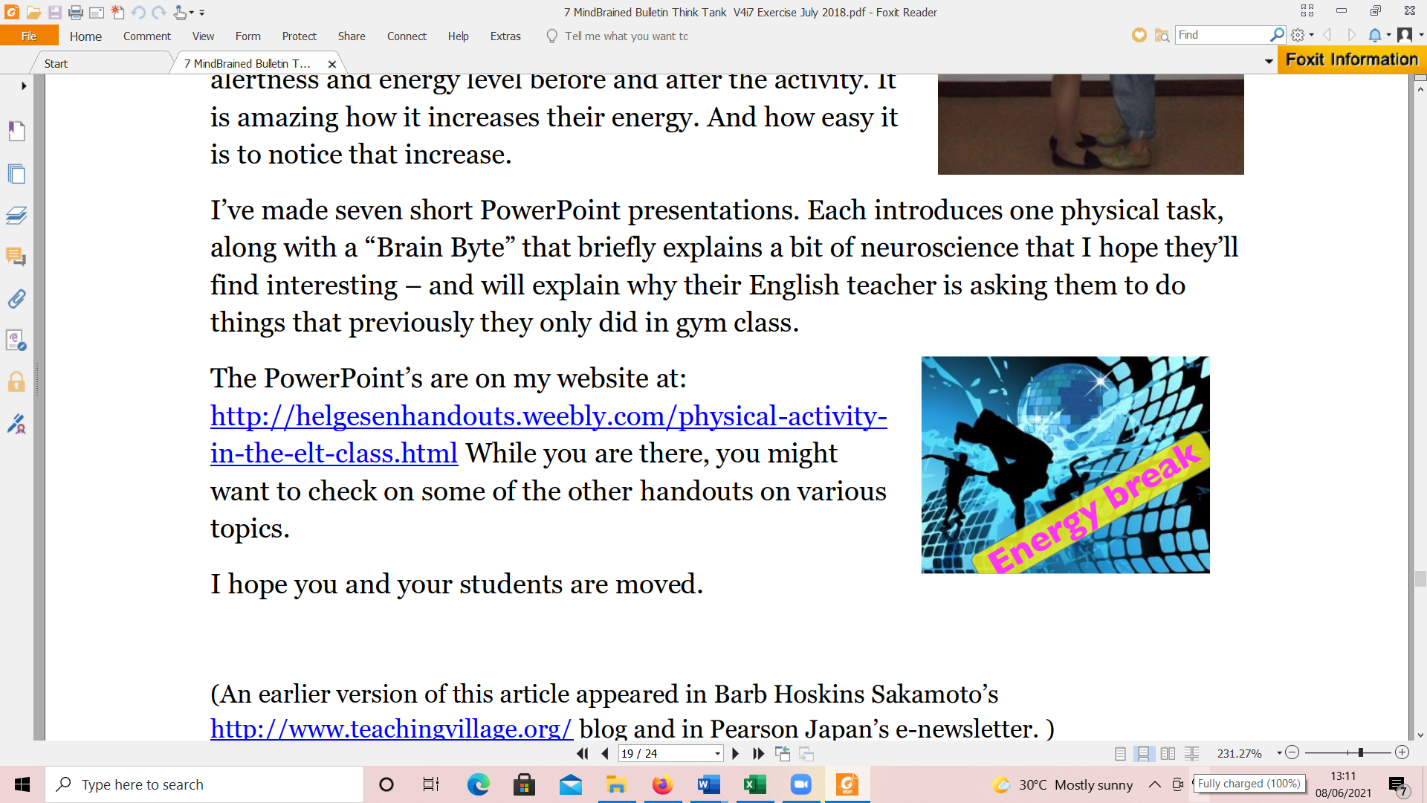
And it pays off in the classroom.

Here is something people might find surprising: brain science shows that exercise correlates with increased scores on seeming unrelated subjects like math and science (Ratey and Hagerman, 2010). The same writers cite research that shows increased rates of vocabulary learning among physically active learners.

For several years, I’ve been using “energy breaks” – short bits of physical activity in my classes. They really are short – usually less than five minutes. But it is a great use of time. The students really get energized. They are more ready for the rest of the class.

One simple example is “5 right here, right now.” Students identify at least five physical exercises they can do in the space around their desks. Obviously things like running are not practical but there are many things they can do: jumping, stretching, balancing on one leg, squats, etc. Then students work in pairs. One student in each pair starts an exercise. The other partner starts doing the same exercise. When that partner wants to change the exercise, they make an “X” gesture with their arms and start a new one. This continues until the other partner wants to start a new exercise. The whole activity only lasts one minute – but it is a minute that reenergizes the whole class. If you try this, have the students notice their own alertness and energy level before and after the activity. It is amazing how it increases their energy. And how easy it is to notice that increase.

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I’ve made seven short PowerPoint presentations. Each introduces one physical task, along with a “Brain Byte” that briefly explains a bit of neuroscience that I hope they’ll find interesting – and will explain why their English teacher is asking them to do things that previously they only did in gym class.

The PowerPoint’s are on my website at: https://helgesenhandouts.weebly.com/energy-breaks1.html While you are there, you might want to check on some of the other handouts on various topics.

I hope you and your students are moved.

\* Re: sitting during faculty meetings. Does your school provide soft, padded chairs for faculty meetings? Mine does. I think we should have to sit in those plain wooden chairs the students use. Teachers would realize what a pain in the… oh, well….you know.

Medina, J. (2014). *Brain rules: 12 Principles for surviving and thriving at work, home and school* (2nd ed.). Seattle, WA: Pear Press,

Ratey, J. J., & Hagerman, E. (2010). *Spark! How exercise will improve the performance of your brain.* London: Quercus.

Sousa, D. A. (2011). *How the brain learns* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

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