



An Afternoon Brain Boost

BY NANCY HUGHES

Senior David Winick (Milton, Massachusetts) and a young mentee work on the applications of their crane.

If you pass by Tom Owen's biology lab any afternoon Monday through Thursday between 4-5:15 p.m., the lights will be on – literally and figuratively – for Brain Boost. Brain Boost is the brain-child of our neighbor Helen Rautenberg, longtime staff member and parent educator at The Children's Center. Eager to offer elementary and middle school children an after-school program that provides students the opportunity to explore the realms of math, science, and engineering in a low-stake, hands-on manner, Rautenberg applied for and received a grant to purchase a wide-range of MindWare products including circuitry and solar power kits. Rautenberg then contacted Brewster's Head of School Craig Gemmell to consider ways for Brewster Academy to collaborate with the program. Gemmell enlisted the support of Science Department Chair Tom Owen and a model of dynamic community learning and partnership began as Brewster students joined the Brain Boost program as instructors and mentors.



Both Rautenberg and Owen are wholly committed to the exploratory nature of the program. They want The Children Center's participants to enter the classroom space and allow their curiosity to direct them. Similarly, Brewster students are encouraged to arrive with an experiment to share with the younger children or to begin exploring on their own with the materials, thus stirring the participants' interest. This approach has proved itself to be enormously valuable to both younger and older students. Along with enriching their curiosity, the younger participants, Rautenberg explains, "benefit so much from having their interests and ideas respected. "They are learning what they want to learn, and we are also learning from them, and that makes these children feel good about themselves. And knowing these older kids are interested in them! Ah! They are just filling up their self-esteem buckets."

Likewise, Owen sees the benefits of Brewster students having to work autonomously – without explicit adult instructions, and has been impressed with how our students are working with the younger children to develop their inductive and deductive thinking skills and to absorb scientific vocabulary – "What do

you think will happen? How can we test your hypothesis?" Owen also enjoys seeing the Brewster kids feed off the younger children's excitement. Everyone is having fun.

What **Ana Gonzalez '18** (Cambridge, Massachusetts) loves most about the program is seeing the kids experience an "ah-ha!" moment. She explains: "Like in math class, when I'm working on a confusing concept, then it all clicks, and suddenly I feel like I under-

That 'ah-ha!' moment is so special; I love seeing them learn so much so quickly."

stand everything about the universe! When the kids are doing science experiments during Brain Boost, and they ask a question and find out the scientific explanation behind something, you can almost see a click in their eyes; you can see how much they realized. That 'ah-ha!' moment is so special; I love seeing them learn so much so quickly."

Gonzalez expresses all students' feelings about Brain Boost. Sharing Rautenberg's belief that people learn most effectively through teaching others, Craig Gemmell is particularly attracted to how the program simultaneously places Brewster students in the roles of teacher and learner. He adds, "Brain Boost demands that Brewster kids take initiative and demonstrate empathy, both skills we want our students to develop." Brewster is grateful to Rautenberg and The Children's Center for involving our faculty and students in this dynamic, project-based program, and so pleased to be able to share classroom space with the program this year. Brain Boost has illuminated a fabulous form of community partnership. We're hopeful its lights will shine brightly into the future.

Q + A

WE ASKED:

What at Brewster has prepared you for navigating the world?

**CIERA BURDEN '17, BROOKLYN**

Being a tour guide. It has taught me to communicate with and also persuade people with whom I'm not familiar. Giving tours has enhanced my communication skills, and also my confidence, which is a vital part of all aspects of my life.

**PAUL RICHIE '18, DALLAS**

Group work with PBLs (project-based learning assignments) have given me an opportunity to work with people I might not normally collaborate with, and most PBLs have a real-world component so I feel like I'm doing something that will have an impact on something or someone.

**TARA FITZPATRICK '17, WOLFBORO**

Forming close relationships with students, teachers, administrators, and beyond has helped prepare my classmates and me for developing meaningful connections and networks in the real world.