

Using Fidgets Lesson Plan

Created by: Ronda Alley, RSU 24 Adult Education, Sullivan, Maine

Intention:

The purpose of the toolkit project is to help students stay focused and present during classroom time. Classroom manipulatives spread out on classroom tables gives student easy access to the items during times when they feel unfocused or their minds are scrambled.

Population:

Adult Diploma-Juggling Life and Learning class. Suitable for any group.

Materials

- A variety of classroom manipulatives such as pipe cleaners, play dough, clay, stress balls, bendable figures, bubbles, rubber stamps, colored pencils, paper, sticky notes and other fun items.
- Transportable tote to store manipulatives.

Preparation:

Build a stash of various small items to use for this project. It can take time but can be fairly inexpensive. (Word of caution—stay away from items that make noise.) Once you have the supplies, an introduction to the concept of using manipulatives in the classroom is extremely important.

Prepare the classroom by placing the items on tables throughout the classroom.

Ask if anyone gets distracted when they are in a classroom or other setting where they have to sit for longer than a half hour. Next, ask how many people doodle when they are in a meeting or classroom setting. How many click their pens or tap their feet? Ask students why they do these things and what happens when they don't do them. This opens up discussion about, being bored, distracted, antsy, frustrated etc.

Explain that these behaviors are serving a purpose for us—helping us stay focused and attentive, but they sometimes make others annoyed. Explain that there are other ways to stay focused that are less intrusive to a class, and perfectly OK to do. Review the different fidgets and pass them around. How does the clay feel? What about the bendie toys? Are some of them more appealing than others to you? Can you think of other possible fidgets to add to the collection?

Follow Up:

Encourage students to use the items during class throughout the semester or the length of the course. Write down any observations of students or any comments students have as time goes so you can share those insights with staff and students next time around. Check in with students after about three weeks to get their input. Do they use the items? Does it seem to help them stay focused? Are they distracted by others using the items? What are their favorite items? Do they have suggestions about other items that would be useful? Modify your selection as needed.

Another follow up: Provide a short workshop to staff about the value of manipulatives and fidgets. (See snapshot below)

Classroom Snapshot

I have always placed small fun items around any classroom where I teach; I personally find it helpful when I am a student to have something to do with my hands. In the past, students would make comments about the items and I would explain why I use them but I never gave a presentation to the entire class about why they were there. I realized this was the missing piece. Therefore, I started my first class with an introduction about why they were there and asked students to let me know as time went on what they thought about the items.

Throughout the semester many students have commented or said thank you for having the items on hand. It has been fun to watch students pick something up and play with it while we are having class discussions or while they are trying to get ideas for writing prompt.

In adult education we share classrooms. I made the assumption that other teachers would like having fidgets on the tables while they are teaching. I began noticing that each week my fidgets would be tucked away in a pile on a shelf. I assumed they were moved when the room was being cleaned. I gladly kept putting them out each class until one day a student told me that other teachers would not allow students to “play” during class. Upon investigating and talking with the other teacher that used the room, I realized that she did not understand why the manipulatives were there and was getting annoyed at students. This made me think about the importance of offering a workshop to staff about learning styles, stress management, and the way that manipulatives can be used in a classroom setting to promote learning.