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An Innovative Use of Fidget Toys in a University Classroom

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An Innovative Use of Fidget Toys in a University Classroom
Fall 2008 Through Fall 2010
Dr. Donald Slater, P.E., Georgia Southern University

Abstract
The multiplicity of in-class negative distractions detracts contemporary students from the learning process. The researcher initiated the use of fidget toys in the classroom in order to create a positive distraction to help refocus student attention on in-class topics. The fidget toys used in this research were small, squeezable, spongy, hand-held items. A twelve (12) question Likert Rating Scale survey was used to record data both at the beginning and end of each of the semesters. Research survey results suggest that fidget toys were instrumental in refocusing the attention of those students who had previously succumbed to distractions in the learning process.

Modification
The Fidget Toy Survey was originally designed to accommodate both a course in construction management and a course in computer science. Since the collaboration with the co-researcher ended, the researcher has elected to eliminate questions three (3) and four (4) which were specifically aimed at computer use in the classroom.

Images of Fidget Toys Before Use

Data Collection, Presentation, and Value
Data Collection
Twelve question Likert Rating Scale (LRS) survey with the following:
1 = Terrible, Never
2 = Poor, Low, Seldom
3 = Neutral, Medium, Occasionally
4 = Good, High, Frequently
5 = Excellent, Highest, Always

At the beginning and end of each semester:
Students estimated the value of use of the fidget toys in redirecting their attention to in-class topic material.
Survey was used in the Site Construction course.

Presentation
Utilizes the LRS to display fidget toy survey data.
Survey questions illustrate the alignment of in-class student focus.

Value
Determining how survey data collected from both the beginning-of-course and the end-of-course assist in identifying strengths, improvements, and insights for course management, design, and teaching processes.

Frequency of Use Table
Frequency of Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
<th>Level of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of Use by Number of Students
Frequency of use categorized: Seldom, Occasionally, Frequently, Always.

Frequency of Use by Percent of Students

Examples of Student Comments
Good idea
Think they are good for people who need them
Fidget toys helped me to pay attention and stay off of my cell phone
Was nice to have some days
Helpful
Good for paying attention
Good tool to stay focused in class
I usually stayed focused and had low stress
I found myself more focused while using the fidget toy
Good for an anxious person like me
Very good idea
I didn’t use it but I believe that it is very beneficial to many students
Nice having them available
Very useful on days when I was fidgety

Sample Survey Form Spring 2010

References

Conclusion
The cumulative trend from the selected ten (10) questions of the Fidget Toy Survey suggests an increasing acceptance and use of the fidget toy as the semester progressed. The students’ distraction levels from non-course materials decreased. The use of fidget toys helped refocus the attention of those students who succumbed to distractions to the learning process and to in-class topics.

Acknowledgements
Fidget toys (hats) for the Construction Management course were donated for the research by both New South Construction and Kwissit Southern Company.

Images of Fidget Toys After Use

Presentation, Problem, and Solution
Presentation
Summarizes and analyzes data collected from Fall 2008 through Fall 2010 (i.e., five semesters) from 166 students.
Demonstrates the value of students’ perspectives, values, and opinions in the use of fidget toys in the classroom.

Problem
In-class distractions for contemporary students include, but are not limited to, fidgeting, chewing gum, chewing on pencils, nail biting, hair twisting, nose picking, clicking pens, tapping fingers, sleeping, doodling, consuming food and beverages, communicating on cell phones, text messaging, working cross-word puzzles, reading newspapers, working on assignments from other classes, and doing math puzzles.

Solution
The working hypothesis was that the use of fidget toys would help refocus student attention on in-class topics. The researcher initiated the use of fidget toys in the classroom in order to refocus the attention of those students who succumb to distractions to the learning process. This may be viewed as a modification of behavior from a negative distraction to a positive distraction.

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