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Fidget Toys in the University Classroom

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An Innovative Use of Fidget Toys in a University Classroom
Fall 2008 Through Fall 2011
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

Presentation, Problem, and Solution

Presentation
- Summarizes and analyzes data collected from Fall 2008 through Fall 2011 (i.e., five semesters) from 246 students.
- Demonstrates the value of using fidget toys to refocus student attention on in-class topic material.

Problem
- In-class distractions for contemporary students include, but are not limited to, fidgeting, chewing gum, chewing on pencils, nail biting, hair twirling, 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 in the learning process. This may be viewed as a modification of behavior from a negative distraction to a positive distraction.

Frequency of Use by Number of Students

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

Frequency of Use Table

Frequency of Use by Percent of Students

References
- Iannelli, V. (2004, November). The importance of fidget toys in the classroom. Paper presented at KSC 2008 - The Innsbruck Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Coastal Carolina University, Myrtle Beach, SC.

Images of Fidget Toys After Use

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

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