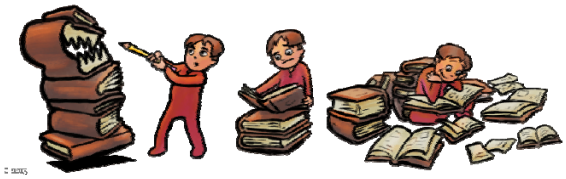

Cynthia Z. Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P
Educational Therapist/Professional
Gifted & Talented Education Specialist

Unmasking Challenges to Reveal Possibilities
Interventions & Strengths Development * Academic Enrichment ∗ Family Support

Creating Meaning out of the Spinner-Fidget Craze[1]

Cynthia Z Hansen, M.Ed.,ET/P[2]

Early Spring, 2017—While working with a gifted child on motivation, executive functions, and social inclusiveness, I offered several options to replace his habitual hand gestures that were inappropriate for the classroom. Among the items were a jointed bendy-bracelet, several moving pencil toppers, and a spinner that was gathering dust in the resource room. He chose the pencil first. A week later, trying an alternative, he chose the spinner, which was stolen after the first day. Fortunately, the Velcro we tried next did the trick and the habit, now realized as a need to move when bored, dissipated.

But little did I know that the start of the spinner craze, had begun. Within 3 weeks spinners were everywhere. The craze evolved quickly and completely: they were at checkout stands in (Michael's) crafts stores! And they were just as quickly banned.

Unfortunately for students like mine, and colleagues who understand, the ban created a dilemma. We know that the use of these tools can channel inappropriate motor activity into productivity. The truth is we all use different tools to support our learning, including fidgets of all types, as long as they do not sidetrack other students (or the teacher!).

All students benefit when they understand their strengths, their motivations, and their distractions. Wouldn't it be wonderful if each could create their own reminders to redirect themselves when they struggle? With this thought in mind, I developed a lesson for NAGC Creativity Night in 2015, to transform a toy into a tool with a similar repetitious movement as the spinners. *Fidget-Widget Puzzles* have many names: they are the wonderful 8-block contraptions that fold and bend from square to rectangle in cyclical fashion revealing different surfaces (similar to a Jacob's Ladder toy).As an educational therapist specializing in the needs of high potential, underachieving students, I found that this contraption was a wonderful focus for those with psychomotor needs.

Unlike spinners, when these "Fidget Widgets" stop, a message created by the child is revealed. They are quite addictive for those with active hands, and require little mental energy, and are quiet, and easily stored in a desk or a pocket. With guidance, this puzzle toy becomes personal, creative, and inclusive metacognitive reminder to attend, to be resilient, to remember a formula or sequence, to hold onto a question instead of blurting out, etc. for every type of learner in grades four through adulthood.

After building the contraption (see sidebar, figure 1, etc), the bare wooden sides become an opportunity to solidify our students' self awareness. I allow my students to decorate the cube, adding personal touches to each side while allowing them to see the pattern of the cube movement; locating the sequence of the sides and unmatched rectangles.

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[1] Based on the presentation ***Fidget-Widgets with a Purpose,*** by Cynthia Z Hansen, M.Ed.,ET/P at the National Association for Gifted Children 62nd Annual Convention in Phoenix, AZ Creativity Night 2015:

[2] Cindy Z Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P is an Educational Therapist specializing in the needs of Gifted and Talented Children Find out more at **CynthiaZHansen.com**

Cynthia Z. Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P
Educational Therapist/Professional
Gifted & Talented Education Specialist

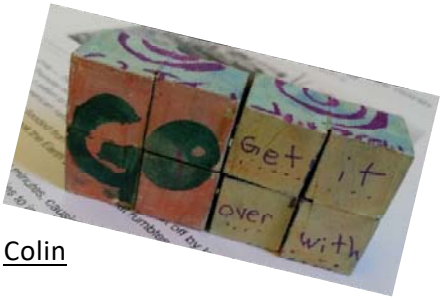
Before they add words, a series of metacognitive surveys are effective in guiding their insights. Simple school-skill surveys may be found in *Smart but Scattered Teens*(Guare & Dawson, 2013), and Randy Kulman's, *Train Your Brain for Success* (2012). Alternatively behavioral or personality tests may be found that are developmentally appropriate on the internet. Another possibility is to set goals for the year, or add mathematical formulas, creating a study cube.. As the facilitator, you guide your students to the awareness which is applicable to your class or school goals.

Note: Be sure the selection of words is concise and planned – there is limited space! Students may want to type and spell-check their list before copying them onto the cube. Sample statements for children (or adults) are:

- Find the fun
- What is my Point of View
- Pause, Breathe
- Is this *my* worry?
- What are the steps?
- I can ask for help!
- Return to Now
- Can you repeat that?
- Am I *really* listening?
- How can I picture this?
- Is this connected to other things I know?

Your guidance is key:
How do you envision the best use for these Memory Cube-Fidget-Widget-Puzzles?

Additional Resources for the use or creation of thoughtful fidgets:



- An engaging use in fiction is *Calder's* use of pentaminos in the ***Chasing Vermeer, The Write Three, The Calder Game, and Pieces and Players*** by Blue Balliet
- ***From Fidget to Focus*** by Roland Rotz & Sara Wright (2005)
- ***Smart but Scattered Teens:*** *The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential*, Richard Guare, Peg Dawson, and Colin Guare (2013)
- ***Train your Brain for Success*** by Randy Kulman (2012)
- http://personality-testing.info/printable/big-five-personality-test.pdf
- https://www.interactiontalks.com/personality-test-for-teenagers-take-the-personality-test-now/

Cynthia Z Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P, is an Educational Therapist/Professional in private practice, a SENG Model Parent Group Facilitator, The Marketing and Outreach Director of Association for Educational Therapy, and Pacific Region Parent Representative of the California Association for the Gifted, serving Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties in central California through the Tri-County GATE Council.

Cynthia Z. Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P
Educational Therapist/Professional
Gifted & Talented Education Specialist

Fidget Cubes: **The Instructions:**

Though there are many ways you can make these tools, and students may be able to complete a block by looking at one, here are some hints.

- In each step, be careful to stay on the top of the cube without overlapping the other sides.
- Each step needs to be taped on the opposite side, creating a hinge, in order to stabilize and strengthen the cube.
- **For the best, longest lasting success, use reinforced packing tape cut to the width of the cube**.

A. **Step One:** Line up the 8 blocks in a rectangle with the long side (width) parallel to you.

B. **Step Two:** Tape the top of the cubes as shown (Figure 1). This creates two squares with width-wise tape patterns (resembling two equal signs). At this point you have four pairs.

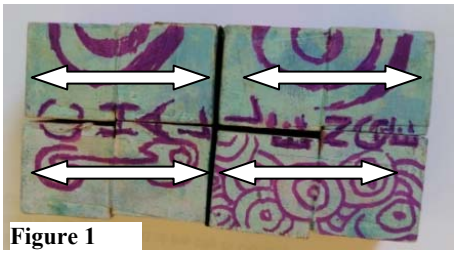


Figure 1

C. **Step Three:** Looking at the width of the rectangular prism sides, tape the faces of the middle two cubes together. Repeat on opposite side. This effectively creates two sticks of 4 cubes (Figure 2).
   - *The contraption is very fragile at this point and is easily broken so the next step may need older/more coordinated hands for assistance.*

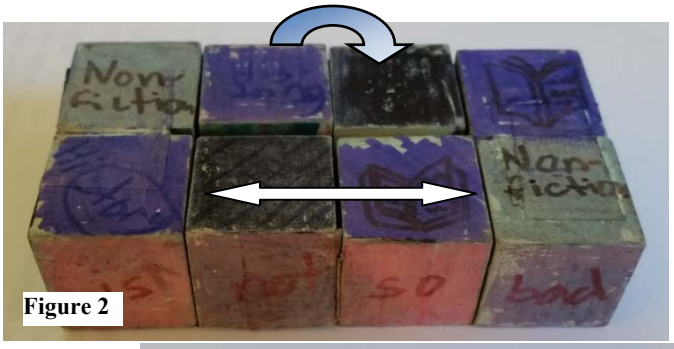


Figure 2

D. **Step Four:** Turn over the entire set of 8 cubes, being careful to keep the same orientation. I prefer to flip the piece toward me by squeezing the short ends toward the center as I turn it over.

E. **Step Five:** Tape the sets of 4 cubes at the end of the rectangle connecting the two. (Figure 3)

Figure 3

F. **Step Six: As stated at the start, this is a critical step in order to stabilize the structure. VERY CAREFULLY** reinforce each hinge by taping the opposite side. This step effectively solidifies the "hinges" of each block pair so that the contraption may be manipulated in both directions with the tape holding fast.

G. Have students use their cube to assure that it is in working order. Revisions are often needed at this point.

H. **Step Seven:** Decorate the completed cube with acrylic paint or very bright watercolor. Pencils and crayons are possible but may be resistant when adding words or symbols with pens.

I. **Step Eight:** Students plan and then write their 6 to 8 statements on the cube. They will have to be thoughtful and creative to have statements match even on disconnected sides.

J. **Final Step:** Reinforce their use and storage. Enjoy!

Cynthia Z. Hansen, M.Ed., ET/P (805) 407-1742 CindyZHansen@Gmail.com
Educational Therapist/Professional *P.O. Box 7165, Ventura 93006*
www.CynthiaZHansen.com
For more information about educational therapy please visit: www.aetonline.org