

Stress-Buster Bags for Children

Created by Jeri Bayer, The Welcome Project,
Somerville, MA

Intention of Lesson

To integrate the development of understanding about stress and ways of managing it with the other two elements of the course (English language learning and knowledge about schools and ways to advocate for children).

This semester I taught a multi-level ESOL class for mothers who want to be able to help their children in school. I facilitated discussions not only on how adults experience and react to stress, but also on how children do. In addition, we looked specifically at school as a cause of stress in children's lives. Therefore, when it came time to engage my students in an expressive arts project, it seemed most meaningful to create something that could have a direct impact on their children's stress. The idea that evolved was the decoration of canvas bags to be filled with "stress-buster" items, many of which would be similar to those to which my students had been introduced over the course of the semester for their own stress relief.



Population of Students

Multi-level class

Materials

- Canvas bags for decoration
- Fabric Markers
- Mandala Coloring Books and colored pencils
- Jump ropes
- Scented candles
- Wiki Stix
- Tension Tamer Tea
- Colored Markers (wide ones and thin ones)
- Blank Books
- Scribble pads
- Blank CDs (on which to "burn" relaxing music)
- folders with photocopies of finger labyrinths and simple mandalas for young children

Preparation

- Brainstormed a list of the materials that would be most appropriate for the bags.
- Ordered items or purchased items at stores.
- Considered that most of my students had more than one child and that the age span of my students' children extended from preschool to high school.
- Managed project budget to cover amount of items needed given number of children.

- Reviewed grammar for accompanying English lesson. I decided to revisit the modal “can,” which we had practiced a lot during the semester. Since we were going to do the project during the last class, it seemed appropriate to review something familiar, rather than to introduce something new.
- Arrived early to prepare room, creating a festive yet relaxing atmosphere:
 - Arranged tables in a v-shape and covered with colorful cloths.
 - Arranged items for the bags.
 - Laid a cloth on work table and provided a pitcher of water and cups.
 - Provided a small bowl of chocolate kisses, symbolic of the affection they had all agreed was the first and most important kind of stress reduction “medicine.”
 - Put on soft background music to be played as students arrived.

Implementation

1. We gathered in a circle for breathing, hook-ups and cross-crawl and checked in with each other about how we were feeling.
2. I reminded students about the survey they had done about stress in early October and then distributed “Post” survey and went over the questions with them. For each question we reviewed what we had done during the semester, and the students answered based on how much they thought they had learned.
3. The final question of the survey focuses on the stress reduction activities the students like the most. We discussed how they could continue to do these activities even when class was not in session and how they could engage their children in some of them as well.
4. I invited everyone to the tables where all of the stress reduction items were laid out and asked students to answer this question for each item: “What can you do with _____?”, followed by practice with the sentence stem, “When my child is stressed, s/he can _____.”
5. I held up the sample bag that I had decorated beforehand and explained that they could draw on their bags in any way they liked, keeping in mind that it was to be a gift for their children. I then handed out the bags and distributed the fabric markers. Students spent about 25 minutes decorating their bags. Many wrote the names of their children in large, bright letters; some drew beautiful scenes of flowers and sunshine. While they were working, I turned the music back on.
6. When they were done with their bags, the students filled them with the items from the tables.
7. Back at the work table, I distributed heart-shaped sticky notes and demonstrated how students could write notes of explanation in English and attach them to the items. For example, one student wrote on a heart, “When you are stressed you can write about your feelings.” She then stuck it to the cover of the blank book she had taken for her teen-aged daughter.
8. To close, we gathered in a circle and danced the “Hokey Pokey”, which I had included on the playlist burned on their CDs. We said good-bye to each other in high spirits.



Classroom Snapshot

My students enjoyed this project and deeply appreciated the gifts received. Some of them could not quite believe that the items were theirs to keep. It was a relaxing, joy-filled way to end the semester and to conclude our discussion about stress. It also reminded my students of their own capacity to help their children with stress in significant and concrete ways.