

Cécile Sfedj



Cécile, archivist-archivist in the cultural patrimony field, during her training for a professional reconversion to the field of well-being, made a very enriching experience by offering courses of Zen-Stretching® to children.

Although a child is different from an adult, the child is nevertheless brought to make decisions, take choices, determine what he likes or dislikes. He builds his personality by learning assertiveness. The child is confronted with all sorts of situations, especially in the schoolyard, which leads him to learn the relationship with others. He has thoughts, concerns that join those of adults.

He wonders about life, love, death, fear, etc., he faces more and more situations of stress. The school, parents and more generally the society, require the children to perform or to be successful since from an early age, the kindergarten evaluates their abilities according to objectives to be achieved. The daily life of a child is fast, active, punctuated by the school and often by his parent's job.

For all these reasons, the Zen-Stretching® is a beneficial aid to the construction and development of a child.

Cécile's primary goal was to offer children a moment to take time, and learn how to take care of themselves and to know their body, express themselves with their body, identify what makes it happy, provide it with well-being and relaxation.

Since her courses were aimed to a valiant but still fragile public, Cécile set rules always to be respected:

- To respect the rhythm of the child.
- To work in the respect of the body of the child and the pains that he can feel.
- Do not hold the postures too long, work dynamically.
- To consider the child as a person in his own right, always be sincere with him.

In order to introduce the concept of energy Cécile preferred to use a simple language, asking questions to the children, allowing them to express themselves and drawing their attention to their feelings while practising. She found it appropriate to image the practice as telling a tale. The tale works as a support for the child to remember a sequence of postures for example and allows to rely on something tangible when he cannot name it initially. In addition, the tale introduces a playful element into the session.

In the same way as for an adult session, a class with children requires a preparation and structuring; we can distinguish several sequences:

- A time of welcome and exchange.
- A preparation to get into practice.
- The practice of postures.
- A time of distension and relaxation.

- Closing of the session.

To begin the session and invite them to relax, she offers an example of active relaxation or massages.



Massage session

This preparation allows the children, although they know each other, to feel comfortable and confident to one another. It also allows the child to feel his body, to receive sensations and to capture the listening by the feeling of the gestures to reproduce. Finally these massages provide a sense of well-being and relaxation.

For the realization of Makko-ho Cecile shows the 6 postures while the children realize them. She uses simple words without going into the details of the elements and their meanings. She remains focused on the posture, but according to the curiosity, the requests or the attention of the children she simply explains that the energy circulates in our body and that these postures can help us to feel this energy in different forms (heat, tingling, stiffness, etc.)



Makko-ho of the Earth

She is experimenting also another way, by asking the children to show each one a posture to another and explaining it at the same time. This encourages them to remember the posture and they can help themselves with the poster. This practice also leads them to name the different parts of the body and explain the movements. Or, again, she uses the cards by drawing one at random to be performed and taught to one another in a funny way.

At the end of the session, Cécile asks them to show what posture they liked the most, then she ends with a short relaxation where she proposes to draw an element of their choice, an activity that also serves as relaxation.



Wood element drawing by Gregoire

Cécile was very satisfied with her experience, all the sessions with the children were beautiful moments rich in sharing. Each of them expressed their desire to come back and all the sessions were extremely positive for the children who were very receptive to the Zen-Stretching® which brings them at the same time mobility, serenity, creativity, the sensitivity to the body language and allowed them to live their emotions.

Even the very young children feel, live states of mind, suffer and the practice of the Zen-Stretching® improves their self confidence and allows them to regain self esteem.

She has worked with children of various ages (5 - 11 years old) and although the abilities of children differ according to their age, she concluded that mixing them in the same session it is interesting. This will only be richer thanks to the exchanges that happen between the children and the Facilitator.

The main difficulty Cécile faced was the desire to convey too much in one sitting. She has experienced that it is better not to exceed a duration of 45 min per sessions. It's a long enough time to structure a session, introduce a start and end ritual and have a sharing time with the children. For the sessions to be held in good conditions, a group of 8 or 9 children would be a maximum.

Working with children requires as many demands as with adults. The children react spontaneously and they immediately show their pleasure but also their dissatisfaction during the session. The Facilitator must be careful and able to adapt to the needs expressed by the children. On the other hand, she must also state the rules of a session so that it runs in the respect of each one. Finally, the Facilitator should not hesitate to use, to take inspiration from all the tools now available to children, such as meditation CDs, activity books (games, drawings), etc. to enrich the sessions. (see following illustrations).