What do successful students do?

• Learn academic content

• And…

This workshop will help you:

• Explore and develop a common language around EF

• Deepen your understanding of how EF impacts students at all levels

• Enhance your ability to effectively support students in developing their EF skills
Agenda

- Refine our understanding of EF and develop a common EF language
- Explore ways to best support students in managing EF challenges and developing EF skills
  - Alter the environment to decrease EF load
  - Teach EF skills and scaffold EF support
  - Support students around EF challenges using a non-directive, inquiry-based approach

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Executive Functions
(Work together in various combinations)
Adapted from Thomas Brown's model of Executive Function

Activation
Focus
Effort
Emotion
Memory
Action

Organizing thoughts & materials
Planning & prioritizing
Initiating tasks

Sustaining attention
Thinking flexibly

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Cognitive Flexibility

- Switching mental sets (focus) to adapt to changing situations or transitions
- Engaging in mental play for problem-solving or finding new options
- Moving from big picture to details and vice versa

Executive Functions

Activation | Focus | Effort | Emotion | Memory | Action

Sustaining effort
Regulating alertness

Managing self in the midst of strong emotions
Bringing rational thought to bear on emotions

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The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand

Middle Prefrontal Cortex

Source: Mindsight, Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., 2010
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Executive Function

Memory
Holding information in mind for the purpose of completing a task

Working Memory

Non-Verbal Working Memory
• Using mental images to guide behavior and remember sequential steps
• Hindsight, foresight, and overall sense of time ("time management")

Verbal Working Memory
• Using the internal voice as a source of guidance and to direct actions
• Holding info in mind while working on something else

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Executive Functions

Activation Focus Effort Emotion Memory

Action

Inhibiting action, as appropriate

Monitoring and regulating one's own performance

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Inhibition
(Self-Restraint and Self-Control)

Inhibiting the tendency to:
- Quit in frustration, boredom or anger
- Procrastinate or do nothing
- Blurt out the first response that comes to mind
- Do what is immediately satisfying
- Prematurely shift focus or hyper-focus

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Executive Functions

Adapted from Thomas Brown's model of Executive Function

Self-Awareness
Self-Regulation of Motivation

Source: Adele Diamond, Russell Barkley

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Understanding of personal EF strengths & weaknesses in specific situations, under specific conditions
• Conscious knowledge of the EF or self-regulatory demands of a performance situation

Self-Awareness (Metacognition)

Self-Regulation of Motivation

• Ability to develop and engage internal sources of motivation
• Ability to alter environment and establish external motivators when necessary

Executive Functions
Adapted from Thomas Brown’s model of Executive Function

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Starting with Ourselves

• What are your EF strengths and weaknesses?

• How do they impact your work with students?

Creating an EF-Friendly Environment

• Explicitly bring attention to EF tasks and the EF skills needed for success

• Match EF task demands to students’ developmental level

• Create routines; make steps, guidelines & expectations clear

• Provide “just enough” structure

• Rehearse what’s next – set students up for success

Creating an EF-Friendly Environment

• Build in choice and variety

• Use visuals to reduce memory load

• Reduce distraction

• Increase structure in socially complex situations

• Replenish the EF fuel tank
Teaching EF Skills
--Informally
--Direct instruction

Students often know what to do, but not how to do it

Study skills are essential, but are not enough

Teaching EF skills is really teaching self-regulation skills

Teaching EF Informally

- Use verbal scaffolding
  - Provide explanations, context, connections
  - Articulate feelings students are experiencing but may not know how to articulate themselves
  - Ask questions that engage students in reflection, problem solving or speculation
  - Cue students to visualize and verbalize

- Externalize self-directed speech to model using EF skills
Direct Instruction

- Provide tools
- Encourage self-observation & an attitude of experimentation
- Provide “just enough” support & structure
- Build in accountability
- Fade support gradually and explicitly

Using a Non-Directive, Inquiry-Based Approach

A Working Definition of the Mind

“The human mind is a relational and embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information.”

EF support is most beneficial when it reinforces and facilitates students developing, and managing their own executive function skills and resources.

Using a Coaching-Inspired Approach to EF Development

- Partner with students to:
  - Deepen their understanding of what works best for them
  - Experiment with strategies and structures
  - Encourage and support them to stay engaged with their own process

Start with Ourselves

- Slow down
- Arrive
- Remember that we are not the problem-solvers; we are facilitators of problem-solving and EF development
Align with the Student

• Acceptance
  – Clear seeing
  – Compassion
• Curiosity
  – Being open to mutual discovery
• Autonomy
  – Strengthening students’ capacity to be fully themselves

Engage in Dialogue for Learning and Action

• Basic skills
  – Listening to “get it”
  – Describing
    • The situation
    • The “gap”
  – Asking non-directive, curious questions to facilitate learning and action
  – Providing structure, strategies, skills, support

“Up” Questions

• What would it look like if ____________?
• How might your life be easier/better/happier if you ____________?
“Down” Questions

• What’s one small step you could take?
• What might get in the way?
• If that happens, what could you try instead?
• What support would you like?
The Wheel:  
A Tool for Integrating and Clarifying 

- Facts 
- Thoughts/Opinions 
- Emotions 
- Body Awareness 
- Wants 
- Willing To Do 