Discovering Root Causes of Academic and Behavior Challenges for ELLs with Special Needs

Bernice Moro, Ph.D., NYC R-BERN @ Fordham University and Alison Provencher and Marta Villarroel, NYC RSE-TASC
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The Big Ideas...

• How do we discover the root causes of learning difficulties for ELLs with special needs using a problem solving protocol?

• What classroom-based accommodations, modifications and interventions can we implement to address academic challenges?
Icebreaker
“Teacher, Maestra”

Read the vignette and discuss with a partner these questions:

• What knowledge of L2 acquisition process would inform instruction?

• What else could the teacher do to assess the student’s knowledge of concepts and skills?

• How could L1 be used to validate the “difficulty” the student was having?
Prior knowledge & experiences

Abstracting general principles & applying to new and different situations

Making connections

Identifying predictable rules

Finding patterns

A review of how students learn...
EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/
What is Executive Function?

**FOCUS**

COGNITIVE processes that enable us to:

- Focus and Attend
- Recall and Retrieve information
- Plan and Solve Problems
- Organize and Sequence
- Self-monitor

Helping us learn efficiently and develop important social skills.
Think of a classroom you have observed that functioned as a “well oiled machine”.

Why did things run smoothly?

What is it that the teacher did that made instruction effective?

What makes this classroom stand out for you?

Think, Pair, Share
Cognitive skills are not academic skills.

Cognitive skills are the underlying skills/tools you need to learn academic subjects.

Not easy to see to recognize.

Without cognitive skills one cannot process information received from sound, touch, sight and smell sources.
Brain Research: Cognition

• Learning is primarily a cognitive function.

• Cognition is a group of mental processes that includes attention, memory, producing and understanding language, learning, problem solving, and decision-making.

Adapted from Learning RX.com
Executive Function

Attention and Focus

Memory

Self-monitoring

Planning and Problem Solving

Organization

Guide to Quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development and Implementation (February, 2010)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Ability/Brain Function</th>
<th>Skills involved</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus &amp; Attention</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Self-Regulation</strong></td>
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## Executive Functions

Abilities that enable goal-oriented behavior, such as the ability to plan, and execute a goal.

These include:

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<tr>
<td><strong>Attention/Focus</strong></td>
<td>the ability to withstand distraction, and internal urges.</td>
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<td><strong>Working Memory</strong></td>
<td>the capacity to hold and manipulate information in real time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Planning/Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>identifying the problem, generate solutions and decide on the best option.</td>
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<td><strong>Sequencing</strong></td>
<td>the ability to break down complex actions into manageable units and prioritize them in the right order.</td>
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<td><strong>Emotional self-regulation</strong></td>
<td>the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions for good performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Skills</td>
<td>Looks Like…</td>
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It’s not how much you know, but how effectively you process the information you have received.

Cognitive skills are the processors of this incoming information.
1. Which area of Executive Function do you see as a strength for yourself? Why?

2. Which area do you struggle with most often? Why?

3. What type of support would you appreciate on days when you are having trouble? Why?

4. Which area that your students struggle with is the most difficult for you to manage in your classroom? Why?
Describing Before Diagnosing
The tendency to choose intrinsic explanations...

A Case Study

What observable characteristics describe the academic and behavioral challenges Jose exhibits?
Developing Classroom Interventions when students struggle with Executive Functioning

How can we develop classroom interventions that support Executive Function skills?

How can we consider Language Acquisition needs in relation to Executive Function?
The **INCLUDE** Strategy

- **I**dentify environmental, curricular & instructional demands;
- **N**ote student learning strengths and needs;
- **C**heck for potential areas of student success;
- **L**ook for potential problem areas;
- **U**se information gathered to brainstorm adaptations;
- **D**ecide which adaptations to implement;
- **E**valuate student progress.
Digging Deeper to Root Causes

What? → Root Cause
How? → Root Cause
Who? → Root Cause
Where? → Root Cause
When? → Root Cause
Why? → Root Cause
The Five Whys Method

Diagnosing problems at the root cause to find solutions.

The more precise the diagnosis, the better the chances of providing the most effective support.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-M3YIA2KDg
Root Cause – 5 Whys

Ask 5 Whys

- Write down the specific problem. Writing the issue helps you formalize the problem and describe it completely. It also helps a team focus on the same problem.
- Ask “Why” the problem happens and write the answer down below the problem.
- If the answer you just provided doesn’t identify the root cause of the problem that you wrote down in Step 1, ask “Why” again and write that answer down.
- Loop back to step 3 until the team is in agreement that the problem’s root cause is identified. Again, this may take fewer or more times than five Whys.

Example

Got caught speeding
Late for Work
Got up late
Alarm clock didn't work
Batteries were flat
Forgot to replace them

Countermeasure
Get an alarm clock that plugs into the mains or even replace the batteries at set intervals before they run out.
Developing Classroom Interventions when students struggle with Executive Functioning

Accommodations, Modifications, Adaptations? Which should we choose? Equal Access, Equal Opportunity
Adaptations

Accommodations

Modifications

Environment

Curriculum

Instruction

Assessment
Accommodations
Create equal opportunity for access

• Supports provided to help students progress in the general education curriculum and allows their learning to be measured.

• Methods used that alter the academic setting or environment so students can easily access information

• Strategies based on strengths and needs that validly demonstrate what students have learned

• Accommodations do NOT change the instructional level, content, or standards.
Modifications

Changes what a student is expected to learn and demonstrate

• Change the actual content and performance expectations for what a student should learn.
• Change in the instructional level or benchmark
• Change in the number of key concepts mastered within a benchmark or unit of study

For example, a student may read the text at a 4th grade level instead of a 6th grade level or study fewer concepts or skills.
Carousel Activity
Brainstorm Solutions for Executive Function Challenges

• Go around the room to each of the 5 Charts identifying an area of Executive Function Root Cause and add your ideas for an adaptation (*an accommodation or a modification*) to each chart

• Be very specific and include details, instructions, procedures, steps or materials needed
Resources

• Causes & Cures in the Classroom, 2013, Searle, M. ASCD.
• Getting to “Got It”: Helping Struggling Students Learn How to Learn, 2007, Garner, B. ASCD

Websites:

www.Understood.org
www.Ldonline.org
www.childmind.org
www.developingchild.harvard.edu
Happy Summer Vacation!

Bernice Moro: bmoro@fordham.edu
Alison Provencher: aprovencher@schools.nyc.gov
Marta Villarroel: mvillar@schools.nyc.gov