

How Executive Function Weaknesses May Manifest in the Classroom

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Children may have difficulty with:

- identifying the problem or knowing what the finished product of a task should look like
- planning, executing, and monitoring projects or assignments
- holding directions in mind, especially if the directions are complex or multi-step
- multi-tasking (trying to organize and complete several tasks within a specific time frame)
- resisting or delaying impulses (for example, tendency to blurt out answers rather than resisting the impulse and putting up hand)
- getting started on assignments (that is, difficulty with initiation) despite interest in the work
- setting goals and carrying out steps to achieve goals
- monitoring school work (for example, checking for errors)
- monitoring how their actions affect others in a social context

Educational Implications of Executive Function Weaknesses

- In order to acquire and exhibit self-regulatory behaviours (for example, the ability to plan, monitor school assignments, set goals, and evaluate progress), students may require direct instruction, coaching, and instructional supports.

- Tasks should be analyzed (for example, for task complexity, novelty, number of steps, types of skills required, familiar vs. unfamiliar context) to help teachers understand where students may need support and targeted instruction.
- Executive function weaknesses can occur despite the student exhibiting good ability in specific domains of functioning (that is, achievement in the normal range on standardized tests of reading and/or mathematics). Thus, these executive function difficulties should not be considered to reflect laziness or unmotivated behaviour on the part of the student.
- Executive function weaknesses may hinder the student's ability to perform novel and/or complex tasks independently. Therefore, instruction that identifies critical components and action sequences can help students learn "how to learn" and facilitate their ability to perform complex academic tasks (for example, reading comprehension, written composition).

References

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