Executive Function and Student Success: Fostering Motivation and Engagement

Karen Boutelle
Associate Director, Landmark College Institute for Research and Training

Morning Session (9 – 12:30, with breaks)

Deepening our understanding of executive function (EF)
Developing a common language to describe challenges
Creating an EF-friendly environment
Teaching EF skills

Lunch (12:30 – 1:30)

Afternoon Session (1:30 – 5:00, with breaks)

Using a non-directive approach to foster EF development
Addressing specific EF challenges
Developing tools and strategies
Executive Functions

Adapted from Thomas Brown's model of Executive Function

Self-Awareness
Self-Regulation of Motivation

Source: Adele Diamond, Russell Barkley

Action
Memory
Emotion
Effort
Focus
Activation

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Questions that Engage Students in Solving their Own Problems

Questions to ask before asking any other questions

- Would you like any input from me? If so, what kind?
- Would you like me to help you come up with some options, or would you like to work on this yourself?
- What would you like help thinking through?
- What kind of help would you like from me?
- What else would you like to tell me about it?

Questions to help students gain deeper understanding

- What’s most important to you about this right now?
- How is this affecting you?
- What do you want to happen?
- What concerns you the most about...?
- How is this working out?
- What do you think?
- What else would you like me to know about this?
- What other ideas do you have about it?
- What might be humorous about the situation?
- What do you want?
- What might that mean for you?
- How can you find out more about it?

Questions to help students explore options for action

- How might you manage the situation?
- What could you do to improve the situation even a little?
- What resources are available to you?
- What have you tried so far?
- If you had your choice, what would you do?
- What possibilities do you see?
- What options do you see?
- What are some other options?
- Where do you go from here?
- What do you want? What are you willing to do to get what you want?
- What could you do right now that might help you get unstuck?
- Who else on campus could you talk with about this?
Questions to Facilitate Action

1. What do you want to accomplish? or What are you being asked to do? What is important to you about doing this? What outcome are you hoping for?

2. How do things stand now? What is your current situation?

3. What is your time frame? When do you want/need to have this done?

4. What’s one small step you could take to get started? What’s most challenging about actually taking this step? How could you handle that?

5. What might help you develop and sustain momentum, so you can get this project done?

6. What kind of support or external accountability might be useful to you?
Using “Up” and “Down” Questions to Generate Motivation and Action

“UP” Questions

Primary “up” questions:

- What will having ______ do for you?
- If you have/achieve/get ____________, what will that do for you?

When to ask “up” questions:

- The student does not feel motivated to do something s/he wants or needs to do
- The student feels boxed in or sees no alternatives to getting moving
- The student knows what’s best, yet can’t seem to move forward on it
- The student finds him/herself in a conflict situation

How far to move up:

- Until the student can readily generate new alternatives in order to move toward the desired outcome
- Until the student feels motivated to take action

“DOWN” Questions

Primary “down” questions:

- What’s stopping you from having/ getting/doing ________?
- What do you want instead of (the named obstacle or problem)?

When to ask “down” questions:

- The student feels overwhelmed by the desired outcome
- The student has run into an obstacle and can’t get around it

How far to move down:

- Until the student identifies a smaller outcome that feels manageable and still leads toward the bigger outcome
- Until the student connects with the energy needed to take action

Problem Oriented Questions

Think of a problem you have and respond to these questions:

1. Why do you have this problem?
2. Who or what caused this problem?
3. Who or what is to blame for this problem?
4. What are the roadblocks or obstacles to solving this problem?
5. How hopeful are you that this problem will be solved?

Outcome Oriented Questions

Think of the same problem and respond to these questions:

1. What do you want instead of this problem? (The person’s response will be his/her desired outcome.)
2. How will you know you have achieved this outcome? What will you see, hear, and feel to know you have achieved this outcome?
3. Imagine it is sometime in the future and you have the outcome you want. What have you gained by achieving this outcome? What have you lost?
4. What resources will you have to activate or acquire to achieve this outcome?
5. What might be a first step you could take to achieve this outcome?

Adapted from Outcome-Directed Thinking: Questions that Turn Things Around, Vikki Clawson and Bob Bostrom, 2003.
### Working With Students through the Stages of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Approaches that may be useful in working with student</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Pre-contemplation  | Student is not planning to make change in a specific area this semester.     | • Raise awareness of need for change  
• Provide personalized information  
• Help student identify pros and cons of change from his/her point of view  
• Indicate readiness to offer support |
| Contemplation      | Student is thinking of making a change in a specific area this semester.      | • Discuss benefits of change  
• Discuss barriers to change  
• Increase self-confidence about ability to change  
• Notice and help reduce ambivalence |
| Preparation        | Student is planning to make change in a specific area this semester.          | • Help to resolve ambivalence  
• Help student break action into small, manageable steps  
• Ask student to commit to one small action and experiment with trying it  
• Provide information and skill development support  
• Identify and appreciate small changes made |
| Action             | Student recently began taking new action in a specific area.                  | • Set short-term goal  
• Identify support needed  
• Continue dialogue to discover what action and strategies are useful  
• Continue dialogue to overcome obstacles that arise |
| Maintenance        | Student has regularly practiced taking new action in a specific area.         | • Continue to engage student in problem solving as difficulties arise  
• Preview obstacles that are likely to arise in the future and how to overcome them  
• Continue to notice and appreciate change |
| Recycle            | Student has returned to an earlier stage in a specific area.                  | • Identify cause of breakdown in action  
• Discuss options for getting back on track  
• Remind student that ups and downs are a normal and expected part of any change process |

Stages of Change based on the work of James O. Prochaska

Karen Boutelle, 2011  
Karen@karenboutelle.com
## Stages of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Contemplation</td>
<td>Student is not intending to change a specific behavior this semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Student is thinking about changing a specific behavior this semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Student is planning to change a specific behavior this semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Student recently began trying a specific new behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Student has regularly practiced a specific new behavior during a semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recycle</td>
<td>Student has returned to an earlier stage</td>
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</tbody>
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Adapted from the work of James O. Prochaska, PhD

Karen Boutelle, 2011
Karen@karenboutelle.com
# Strategies for Managing Executive Function Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EF Challenge</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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| **Activation** | • Promote self-observation to develop awareness of habits of procrastination  
• Encourage students to ask: “What’s one small step I can take right now?”  
• Intentionally and explicitly move back and forth between big picture & details  
• Help students identify and separate the set up from the task  
• Use projects/next actions format when organizing or planning tasks  
• Establish maximum/minimum (create a window of time)  
• Encourage students to identify and plan for hindrances to getting started |
| **Focus** | • Promote self-observation to develop awareness of where focus slips  
• Break up work sessions with physical activity  
• Create maximum/minimum guidelines before beginning work, then use a timer  
• Allow students to stand up to work  
• Allow students to use a small fidget object |
| **Effort** | • Promote self-observation to develop awareness of where effort wanes  
• Teach students to use “multiple pick-up and put down” approach (ex. 20 min. work periods)  
• Model breaking tasks down into specific next actions to experience “little wins”  
• Encourage students to use a timer or race a timer  
• Teach students to expect obstacles to completion and preview overcoming them |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Memory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Lead with empathy and understanding</td>
<td>- Provide visuals, diagrams, mind maps and teach students to create them</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use humor to keep atmosphere light</td>
<td>- Ask students to visualize activities, information, processes, concepts</td>
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<td>- Share information about executive function and emotional regulation</td>
<td>- Encourage students to write down assignments and information, rather than carrying it in their minds</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide opportunities for students to do 5 minute ‘brain dumps’ –</td>
<td>- Pair physical action with sequences of steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Take a minute to write down everything that may be cluttering your</td>
<td>- Use metaphors and ask students to create metaphors</td>
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<tr>
<td>mind before we move on.”</td>
<td>- Use activities &amp; assessments that engage multiple memory pathways – visual, auditory, kinesthetic/procedural encoding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Help students shift from narrow focus to wider focus, and vice versa</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide opportunities for students to develop awareness of facts,</td>
<td></td>
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<td>feelings, thoughts, sensations around specific situations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide opportunities for students to verbalize what they intend to</td>
<td>- Brainstorm alternative paths of action</td>
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<td>do</td>
<td>- Suggest: “You could try it as an experiment.” or “Remember, this is all an experiment to see what works best for you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Brainstorm alternative paths of action</td>
<td>- Help students prioritize important tasks from less important tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Suggest: “You could try it as an experiment.” or “Remember, this is</td>
<td>- For some students, it will be helpful to show in detail how the same concept or process is present in multiple contexts</td>
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<td>all an experiment to see what works best for you.”</td>
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</table>
LCIRT is eager to make our professional development offerings as useful and effective as possible. Please take a few minutes to give us some feedback by filling out this form. Thank you!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The content was applicable to my needs</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>2. The presentation was effective</td>
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<td>3. The presenter was knowledgeable about the topic</td>
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<td>4. The presenter responded well to questions</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>5. Materials, handouts, etc enhanced training</td>
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<td>6. I would recommend this event to others</td>
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<td>7. The event was as described in the marketing materials</td>
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Yes | No | N/A
---|----|-----
8. Do you work directly with students? | ○ | ○ | ○

How many students do you work with annually?

9. If yes, will you be using information from this session with students? | ○ | ○ | ○

Will you be using information from this session in your professional capacity or with other colleagues?

10. What other types of events would you be interested in attending?

Comments or Suggestions:

OVER⇒
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☐ Would you like to receive ongoing notice of other similar events?

☐ Would you like someone from LCIRT to contact you about hosting an event at your school or venue?

Thank you for your feedback!