

How teachers can create an Executive Function friendly classroom

with Executive Function Coach Seth Perler

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Topics I covered:

1. What is Executive Function and how does it show up in the classroom?
2. How is EF similar or different from ADHD?
3. What are common mistakes, myths and misunderstandings teachers have about EF?
4. What can be done to support students who struggle with EF?

1- What is Executive Function and how does it show up in the classroom?

Overview of EF aspects in the classroom.

The A to B journey and the roadblocks on this journey.

2- How is EF similar or different from ADHD?

Don't overthink it. EF describes how everyone executes.

ADHD is not so much a disorder of attention, but of executive skills.

ADHD describes a medical diagnosis, DSM 5 lists symptoms

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/diagnosis.html>

Both need pillars to improve EF: Relationship/buy-in/action, Systems, Skills, Mindsets, Habits, etc.

3- What are common mistakes, myths and misunderstandings teachers have about EF?

Your impact matters and lasts.

Legitimacy of problem and quality of life issue. We have to help them learn EF and content in school.

Can't or won't, try harder, not behavior problem, choice.

Don't know that kids who do what they are asked, have practiced planners, organization for years. It's not a won't.

Don't know that Education is a story and the history of it.

Don't understand the efficacy of homework in general or the research.

Don't know their communication is unclear (verbal, visual, written).

Don't know how long hw takes these kids, don't see the effort.

Don't understand the collective sense of waste they've experienced, they HAVE tried and have NOT been seen, so why should they try?

Don't know how hard it is for parents to understand expectations/use portals.

Iceberg theory: There are stories you DO NOT know that impact these kids, and that you may never know.

“Once in a while it really hits people that they don't have to experience the world in the way they have been told to.”

— **Alan Keightley**

4- What can be done to support students who struggle with EF?

It starts with the **relationship**, connect, empathy, understanding, compassion, which means for some it starts with TEACHERS own deep inner work, working on their buttons, misconceptions. Always assume positive intent, attunement, coregulation, ER, honest about contempt, etc..

Always leave students on a high note feeling good about themselves. THIS is our real job

Learn about attachment theory so you can create a base of secure attachment.

Learn about polyvagal, nervous systems communicating.

The narrative and the body.

Do your own deep inner work so

Don't shame kids ever, make them feel GOOD about themselves, 3:1, Catch em being good

Focus on their strengths.

Build content based on strength, passion, curiosity, etc.

Long pauses and wait time if not paying attention.

Use pre conversations.

Meditate and teach meditation/mindfulness.

Model self regulation: speak aloud on somatics.

Breaks: They NEED more than other kids to recalibrate (never keep them in for recess).

Give tons of positive feelings: Sincere compliments, praise, encouragement. Notice their effort.

Buy in and ownership: what do THEY think, how will they solve the problem. Don't do too much for them. It's ok if they do it “wrong”, in fact it can be better if it's an opportunity to learn and grow.

Let go of the idea that cookie cutter curric is the way, modify/differentiate it creatively using content, process, product, environment.

Sometimes it's not about COMPLETION, it's more about playing with ideas, effort, exploration, not the destination. Contemplate what you give CREDIT for. What are you REALLY looking for, what's the real point of the exercise? It's NOT to simply do a worksheet, it's to have an engaging learning experience.

Question your entire grading policy.

Assess your classroom for EF:

Sensory, lighting, smell, noise

Options, cubbies, earplugs, model it,

Fidgets, cloth, weighted things

Supply areas, labels, processes posted

Color coding

Standing desks, fit balls, movement

How can you keep IEP info handy and private? (so you can reference it more often)
How are accommodations articulated, can you make sense of them meaningfully?
Get reviewing IEPs into calendar periodically.

EMOTIONAL

Don't shame.

Push beyond comfort zone but before the stress threshold.

Remember why you teach, post your mission in your class.

Tell them you LIKE when parents contact you (students often tell parents that you don't want to be contacted)

Don't let them leave the classroom without showing you they used the planner how they need to given your classroom expectations.

Teach students planning SKILLS they still need.

Understand that learning can be "more is less", particularly with homework.

Start lessons with "Today you will learn".

Label their stuff. Lost and found in class.

Keep folders in classroom. Keep some of their stuff in the classroom, visually labeled.

VISUAL - they WILL NOT REMEMBER, must externalize cues, reminders, systems, etc..

Give them jobs they can succeed at.

Many microsuccess EXPERIENCES so they FEEL it. Often they feel that the only are noticed when they do something wrong. Change this.

Notice their NERVOUS SYSTEM, attune. Maybe they had a bad morning. If they say I hate math, stop then and listen.

Teach planning skills, org skills, time estimate skills, etc..

Overhaul systems with class.

Wall calendars in class.

False choice with hw for buy-in and ownership.

Don't say "it's your responsibility to advocate and ask for accomodation", see it as a skill they are developing and be compassionate and supportive.

Survey parents about hw, how long, how engaging, suggestions from them.

You've got stuff. Be honest about it, its ok, work with it.

Listen to kids. When they say someone did something, address it.

Send surprise emails home with compliments, something you saw.

Creatively differentiated curriculum to increase engagement.

Close your door do what you need to for the best interest of the kids, listen to your truth about that, question the system.

Help students become reflective with temp checks, asking the right questions, listening, what do you think

Use these metrics (survey kids and families): How engaging is my class? How much buy in and ownership do you feel you have? How do you feel seen and valued by me? Am I top down or a cheerleader and partner?

ASK families and kids what they need/want from you. ASK for ideas.

Always assume positive intent.

Put EVERYTHING on shared google calendar, when due, how long it should take, how to simplify or make assignments more challenging, etc..

Use rubrics with details and that give flexibility.

Explain your grading process clearly and repeatedly. Post it in the class.

Have democratic classroom where students make rules or have say in it

Convey your expectations easily to find online without any confusion or ambiguity whatsoever, when you update, where to look.

Think about how to proactively make accommodations for struggling students.

Use rubrics with timelines.

Create interdisciplinary units.

Don't make them use binder UNLESSSS you support them to use them. This is very unfair for kids how struggle to manage details. They need simple systems. Have them manage what's manageable.

Grade on work completed work.

Don't make them do retakes, instead, do a meaningful exercise that gets them to reflect or refine learning (often it's just compliance rather than useful).

Break work into small "urgent" chunks (urgent not anxious).

Ends with the relationship.

Idea:

MR PERLERS POLICIES (print and post)

READ THIS THOROUGHLY!

Hi parents,

Every day you should...

Every Sunday you should...

Homework is due___

How to turn in Homework...

What they should have in their folder...

How to take notes in my class...

Where to locate homework instructions...

How to ask me for help...

How long should homework take...

About long term assignments I assign...

My syllabus

Exact inks you need and when to check them, how to check them...

Where and when to get help:

Office hours

Lunch, after school

etc..