PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #40

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Executive Functioning (EF) Skills:

How Do I Test for Executive Skills Dysfunction?

Knowing about executive functioning skills and how important they are for school and employment success is motivation for doing something about helping students learn these skills. You're probably asking yourself which of your students have problems with EF skills. You'll also want to know what skills a particular student is already able to competently use, since you'll want to reinforce him for using those skills well.

There are some formal test instruments which purport to test some or most of the skills considered to be executive functioning skills. Experts disagree about whether current instruments accurately assess the EF skills. While this is true, you could use these assessments to parse out information on a child's EF ability:

- Stroop Color Word Task: measures an individual's ability to inhibit responses, resolve interference, and resolve behavioral conflict.
- Go - No Go Task: measures an individual's attention, flexibility of responding, and ability to withhold a response.
- Stop – Signal Task: measures an individual's ability to stop a response that is already underway.
- Tower of Hanoi: measures an individual's ability to plan ahead.
- Wisconsin Card Sorting Test: measures an individual's ability to te4st hypothesis and flexibility.
- Behavioral Assessment the Dysexecutive Syndrome in Children (BADS-C): for ages 6-18. Evaluates flexibility, perseveration, novel problem solving, sequencing, use of feedback, planning, impulsivity, and following instructions.
- Dysexecutive Questionnaire (component of the BADS-C as above): identifies emotional/personality issues, motivation, behavioral and cognitive difficulty.
- Test of Everyday Attention for Children (TEA-Ch): for ages 6-18. Evaluates sustained attention.
- Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function-Preschool (BRIEF-P): measures inhibition, shifting, emotional control, working memory, and plan/organization.
- Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF): for ages 5-18. Measures inhibition, shift emotional control, initiation, working memory, planning/organization, organization of materials, and self-monitoring.

These tests may not be available to you, or you may not have the expertise or permission to administer them. If so, I suggest you consider using informal checklists and questionnaires from resources you've collected. Here are some informal assessments that should help you begin.

Dawson & Guare (2009) put several qualitative questionnaires in their books which you are free to use. In their book Smart but Scattered they provide you with four rating scales aimed at specific age groups:

- preschool/kindergarten version;
- elementary version (grades 1-3);
- upper elementary version (grades (4-5); and
- middle school version (grades 6-8).

Each of these scales allows you to rate the observed behavior on a scale of 1-5, tells you which of the items apply to which executive skill, and identifies the child's strengths as well as his/her weaknesses. Just going through the questions will trigger insights into your students' behaviors and skills.

In their book Smart but Scattered Teens (2013), Dawson & Guare go a step further by assessing not just the teenager, but the adults working with him/her! The rating scales given in this book include:

- Executive skills questionnaire – Parent version
- Executive skills questionnaire – Teen version
- For Parents: What's my parenting style?
- For Teens: What parenting style do my parents use?

Since EF skill deficits are more prevalent in children who have at least one parent with the same type of difficulty, it makes sense for parents to assess their own functioning. A teacher can use the parent questionnaires to determine his/her own strengths and styles. The adult's behaviors and style of parenting/teaching are part of the context which controls how the student learns. We all could make a few alterations to get better outcomes from our students.

In the book The Everything Parent's Guide to Children with Executive Functioning Disorder, Dr. Branstetter (2014) provides questions in each of ten EF skill areas which you can use to assess each area. The ten EF skill areas addressed in this book are: task initiation, response inhibition, focus, time management, working memory, flexibility, self-regulation, emotional self-control, task completion, and organization.

Dawson & Guare (2004) provide useful and easy-to-use assessment forms in their book Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents. The book The Source for Development of Executive Functions (2005) by Richard & Fahy has a whole chapter on assessment. Like most authors discussing EF skills, both of these books also provide intervention strategies

You can see that there are ways to assess executive functioning skills available to teachers and parents. Knowing how the mind of your student works will definitely help you to tailor your

instructional style so that she/he can better understand. Building better executive functioning skills in your students is the next step. Teaching these skills to your students will be covered in another Fact Sheet.

Resources

Branstetter, R. (2014). Everything Parent's Guide to Children with Executive Functioning Disorder. Avon, MA: F+W Media, Inc. www.everything.com

Dawson, P. & R. Guare. (2004). Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. www.guilford.com

Dawson, P. & R. Guare. (2009). Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential. New York, NY: Guilford Publications, Inc. www.guilford.com

Guare, R., Dawson, P., Guare, C. (2013). Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential. New York, NY: Guilford Publications, Inc. www.guilford.com

Richard, G.J. & Fahy, J.K. (2005). Source for Development of Executive Functions (The). Austin, TX: LinguiSystems, Inc. through Pro-ED. www.linguisystems.com

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