



## **Professional Development Institute**

### **Flex Course Syllabus**

## **Focused Interventions to Improve Executive Function Skills (K-12)**

**PDI Course Number: 127T02**

**UCSD Course Number: EDUC42260**

If you would like information about receiving post-baccalaureate (graduate) credit for completing this course, [please click here](#).

### **Course Timeline**

Participants have one year to complete the course. Participants must spend a minimum of three weeks in this course.

### **Course Description**

Have you ever worked with a student who just can't seem to grasp a certain concept, no matter how hard either of you tries? Or perhaps you may have encountered a student whose desk is such a mess that s/he can never seem to remember where s/he put things? Or a student who, having just listened to you explain directions, has no idea where to start? While frustrating, these scenarios (and others like them) can be explained by a deficit in a student's executive function (EF) skills. Executive functioning involves the neurological processes used by students to consciously control their thoughts, emotions, and actions so that goals can be set and achieved. This online course begins by explaining what executive functioning is and how critical it is to the learning process. Teachers will take a deep dive into eight core EFs that control not only students' ability to think metacognitively, but their ability to respond appropriately using their social-emotional skills. The role of working memory is explored first, as it is an essential element in the processing, storing, and retrieval of information. Teachers will learn how this critical executive function interacts with seven additional EFs — task initiation, planning and prioritizing, organization, self-monitoring, impulse control, shift (a/k/a cognitive flexibility), and emotional control. Teachers will be provided with thorough background information on each executive skill, as well as the implications for teaching and learning. Within each executive

function, the course takes a deep dive into strategic focused interventions that help students who have these executive deficits. By the end of this course, teachers will feel more confident and successful in their quest to incorporate explicit, direct, and strategic instruction within reading, writing, and mathematics so their students with EF deficits can succeed academically and achieve a growth mindset.

## **Educational Outcomes**

1. Teachers will learn what executive function is and how it relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
2. Teachers will learn about the role that social-emotional learning plays in executive functioning.
3. Teachers will learn how executive function challenges manifest themselves in the classroom.
4. Teachers will learn about the role that the brain plays in executive function.
5. Teachers will learn about the two core strands of executive function — the metacognitive strand and the social-emotional strand.
6. Teachers will be introduced to eight core executive functions from both strands (working memory, initiation, planning and prioritizing, organization, self-monitoring, inhibition/impulse control), shift, and emotional control, and they will learn a strategy to try right away.
7. Teachers will learn specific strategies for assessing (both formally and informally) executive skill deficits in the classroom.
8. Teachers will learn how metacognition is related to executive function, and they will learn several general metacognitive strategies which are designed to enhance students' executive skills.
9. Teachers will understand the basics of both growth and fixed mindsets.
10. Teachers will take a deep dive into the four distinct categories of learning profiles, specifically the role that learning styles, intelligence preferences, culture, and gender play in executive functioning.
11. Teachers will learn various comprehensive strategies to improve students' working memory.
12. Teachers will learn various focused interventions for each executive function deficit — working memory, initiation, planning and prioritizing, organization, self-monitoring, inhibition, shift, and emotional control.
13. Teachers will learn the behaviors commonly associated with attending, initiating, and focusing deficits, and will understand that initiation deficits are not a result of a lack of motivation.
14. Teachers will learn how initiation deficits affect student achievement.
15. Teachers will learn how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals, as well as goal-setting strategies to use with their students.
16. Teachers will learn how to recognize organizational deficits, and the importance of having basic organizational skills.
17. Teachers will learn the elements of self-monitoring and how to implement the gradual release of responsibility to encourage students to manage their own work.
18. Teachers will learn the concepts and principles of Universal Design for Learning, and how they relate to executive function.

19. Teachers will learn the connection between executive functions and social-emotional learning.
20. Teachers will learn the foundations of applied behavior analysis, including the importance of behavior management, behavior goal setting, and strategies for tracking and monitoring behaviors.
21. Teachers will learn how to identify students with shift deficits, the difference between convergent and divergent thinking, and how to assist students with cognitive flexibility.
22. Teachers will learn Plutchik's Theory of Emotions, how emotional control deficits impact students, and coping strategies for emotional regulation.
23. Teachers will learn the impact that executive dysfunction has on reading, and they will learn specific strategies that are aimed at improving the reading skills in students with executive deficits.
24. Teachers will learn the impact that executive dysfunction has on writing, and they will learn specific strategies that are aimed at improving the writing skills in students with executive deficits.
25. Teachers will learn the impact that executive dysfunction has on mathematics, and they will learn specific strategies that are aimed at improving the mathematical skills in students with executive deficits.

## **Instructional Media**

- Online Discussions
- Online Engagement
- Online Collaboration
- Instructor Feedback
- Instructor Interaction
- Online Resources and Websites
- Supplemental Instructional Materials
- Printable Classroom Resources

## **Evaluation**

- Test #1 (5% of final grade)
- Test #2 (5% of final grade)
- Test #3 (5% of final grade)
- Test #4 (5% of final grade)
- Test #5 (5% of final grade)
- Autobiography and Goals for the Course (10% of final grade)
- Article/Video Reflection (15% of final grade)
- Course Collaboration/Share Ideas with the Class (10% of final grade)
- Cumulative Assignment/Project: Respond to Classroom Scenarios (20% of final grade)
- Culminating Practicum (20% of final grade)

## Topical Outline

### Unit One

- Understanding Executive Function
- The Brain's Role in Executive Function
- An Introduction to Executive Function Skills
- **Assignment #1**  
*Write an autobiography including information about yourself, your grade level and what you specifically hope to learn about helping students with their executive functions so that they can succeed in an inclusive K-12 classroom. Your autobiography should be a minimum of three paragraphs.*
- **Test #1**

### Unit Two

- Assessing Students' Executive Function Skills
- Metacognition and Executive Function: A Dynamic Relationship
- Growth Mindset and Learning Profiles
- **Assignment #2**  
*As an educator, it is important to be aware of the research, studies, and professional work done in the field. In the course, you will find an article and video that are relevant to the specific course content. Read the article and then write an essay with your thoughts.*
- **Test #2**

### Unit Three

- The Role of Working Memory
- Focused Interventions for Initiation Deficits
- Focused Interventions for Planning and Prioritizing Deficits
- **Assignment #3**  
*Online Discussion Board Participation/Engagement: Please post a tip, strategy, or idea that specifically relates to helping students with their executive function deficits so that they can succeed in an inclusive K-12 classroom. The tip, strategy, or idea that you share needs to make a difference to other teachers in their own classrooms. Your assignment should be a minimum of three paragraphs and detailed enough for another teacher to follow easily. This is a great opportunity to share and collaborate with other teachers at your grade level around the country. Take time to review and respond to other postings that are relevant to your classroom population in order to gain effective ideas to use immediately in your classroom.*
- **Test #3**

## Unit Four

- Focused Interventions for Organization Deficits
- Focused Interventions for Self-Monitoring Deficits
- Meeting Students' EF Needs with Universal Design for Learning
- **Test #4**

## Unit Five

- Focused Interventions for Inhibition/Impulse Control Deficits
- Focused Interventions for Shift Deficits
- Focused Interventions for Emotional Control Deficits
- **Test #5**

## Unit Six

- The Impact of Executive Function on Reading
- The Impact of Executive Function on Writing
- The Impact of Executive Function on Mathematics
- **Assignment #4**

*Review each of the scenarios in Assignment 4. Choose your favorite three and identify the likely executive function skill(s) that the fictitious students are still learning. Next, write a paragraph discussing how you, as the teacher, can provide explicit, strategic, and systematic intervention to help remedy the problem(s). Then, write another paragraph focusing on what your next steps would be to help students with similar problems and behaviors. Be sure to carefully follow all the directions, as given in the assignment. When you are finished, you will have responded to three separate scenarios and have written two paragraphs for each, for a total of six paragraphs altogether.*

- **Assignment #5**

*The culminating practicum is a three-step process. (1) In the first assignment, you were asked what goals you had and what you hoped to learn from the course. Think back to your original goals for this course. Write a minimum two-paragraph reflection specifically describing how what you learned can be used to help you reach those goal(s). (2) Next, write a minimum three-paragraph plan that specifically describes the ways in which you intend to implement a particular strategy you learned in this course into your own teaching situation. (3) Last, write a minimum two-paragraph reflection describing a student you have or have had in the past. Then, discuss how the strategies you learned in this course will specifically benefit that student as you put your plan into action.*

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