
Spring 2016

Special Schools and Programs Network National Association of Gifted Children

Ellen Honeck, PhD
Chair
honecks@comcast.net

Anne Johnson
Chair-Elect
johnsonsouth@msn.com

Inside this issue:

Using the Schoolwide
Enrichment Model To
Overcome The
Underrepresentation of
Diverse Students in Pro-
grams That Develop
Gifted Behaviors and
Talents In Young People 1

Fear Factor: “But I Don’t
Want to Have My Child
Tested” 5

Executive Function: A
Practical Approach for
Students in Grades 1-5,
Part II 9

Have an *IDEA* for a
future newsletter?

Send it to
[Anne Johnson](mailto:annejohnson@nagc.org).

Using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model To Overcome The Underrepresentation of Diverse Students in Programs That Develop Gifted Behaviors and Talents In Young People

Joseph S. Renzulli
Sally M. Reis
The University of Connecticut

Gift: a thing that is given, a present.

The underrepresentation of low-income and culturally diverse students is the hottest topic and most controversial issue in gifted education today. Numerous articles in the education literature and popular press have called attention to disproportionately low numbers of minority students in gifted programs. And this problem does not just pertain to minority and low-income students. There are many young people with high potential in single-subject and non-academic areas that, if given the right opportunities, resources, and encouragement can and will do work above their grade level curriculum and in creative and innovative ways that may not be part of the standards driven curriculum.

Our inability to address this problem in practical and sustainable ways could place our field in great danger, including program eliminations or cutbacks, watering down of services, loss of financial support and gifted teacher positions, and changes in public policy. It is, therefore, necessary to explore various options for providing services to a long neglected but rapidly growing segment of our school population. Because of variations in state regulations for identification and funding formulas, there is probably no single best way to address the challenge of more inclusion of diverse student groups in our gifted and talented programs. Proposed suggestions include universal screening, the use of multiple criteria, the use of local norms, and greater emphasis on non-verbal tests but these types of adjustments have not had a major impact on increasing minority student participation nationwide.

Continued on p. 2

Using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model To Overcome The Underrepresentation of Diverse Students in Programs That Develop (cont. from p. 1)

**Labeling Students vs. Talent Development Perspectives:
It's All A Matter of How We Use The Word**

The essence of addressing the underrepresentation issue has to do with two key concepts that define our field – Identification and Programming Services. Must a student be officially labeled as “gifted” before educators provide supplementary services? Can selected services be provided to certain students at certain times, and within certain contexts because of their demonstrated behavioral potentials, regardless of whether or not they have the official label? For example, do we serve a young Stephen Spielberg who was pursuing exceptional work with a movie camera at a young age but was not a traditionally high achieving student? Or would we have provided language arts enrichment to a young Emily Dickinson, regardless of how seldom she responded or participated in class? Can we use certain general enrichment or acceleration activities with all students and use their level of responses to see for whom more advanced level follow up is warranted? We have always maintained that giftedness is in the response, not in the stimulus, to various types of enrichment opportunities.

Developing Gifted Behaviors

If we are as concerned with developing gifted behaviors as we are with labeling some students as gifted or not gifted, we must first examine the parts of speech assigned to the “g-word” in the dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2016). It is categorized as both a noun (giftedness) and an adjective (gifted).

“...any gems or seeds of talent potential resulting from preliminary screening are disregarded unless one hits the cut-off score.”

When used as a noun, the word refers to an *entity* or state of being — e.g., “he or she is gifted.” Synonyms for the word as a noun are almost non-existent.

When used as an adjective, it refers to high potential in a particular area of human performance and almost always to a criterion or comparison group (e.g., “she is a gifted writer for her age or when compared with other fifth graders.” Synonyms frequently found when the word “gifted” is used as an adjective are also adjectives

that usually take an object (e.g., superior mathematician, advanced reader, innovative designer, exceptional artist, persua-

sive speaker, compelling writer), all words that are popular when we talk about the types of services that we advocate for development in special programs and opportunities. Indeed, we even use the word as an adjective when we refer to the field as “Gifted Education,” and remind ourselves of the root word— that a gift is something to be given rather than a state of being.

A potential pitfall of advocating the entity perspective is that one must first be labeled as “gifted” before any special services can be applied; and, unfortunately, the criterion for being gifted is almost always a predetermined cut off score on a cognitive ability test. Individuals maintaining this perspective may also assert that they are using a “multiple criteria” approach (usually for preliminary screening), but the label will often not be bestowed unless a predetermined cut off score is first achieved. In such case, the preliminary screening is usually a ticket to take a test and any gems or seeds of talent potential resulting from preliminary screening are disregarded unless one hits the cut-off score.

The traditional entity usage and primary reliance on test scores have resulted in remarkable underrepresentation of high potential/low-income and minority students in the US as well as students with highly specialized talents, interests, or motivation in a particular area: those who are highly creative or those who think and approach tasks differently from traditional lesson learning. A teacher described John Gurdon, the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize For Medicine, in a report as follows:

His work has been far from satisfactory. His prepared stuff has been badly learnt and several of his test pieces have been torn over: one such piece of prepared work scored 2 marks out of a possible 50. His other work has been equally bad, and several times he has been in trouble, because he will not listen, but will insist on doing his work in his own way. I believe he has ideas about becoming a scientist: on his present showing this is quite ridiculous (Collins, 2012).

Controversy about which students should be selected for participation in gifted education programs has existed since the inception of special services for this segment of the school population. In most identification systems that follow the traditional nomination, screening, and selection approach, the students nominated and screened but not finally selected

have invariably been those students who qualified for screening on the basis of non-test criteria. Teacher nominations, for example, are often used as a ticket to take an individual or group test, but in most cases the test score is the deciding factor. The strengths and evidence of potential that lead to a teacher, parent, self or peer nomination and screening in the first place may be totally ignored when it comes to the final selection decision. Thus, the multiple criteria game ends up being a smoke screen for the same old test-based approach.

Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment is an alternative to the entity approach that uses predominately psychometric data to identify students. As any good basketball coach knows, if team selection is based only on height, then good ball handlers, playmakers, defenders, passers, and those with a talent for sinking three pointers from beyond the arc will be overlooked. Potentially gifted students are recognized for their aptitudes in particular areas of performance, motivation, creative behaviors, and executive function skills, which are all traits that may not show up on intelligence or achievement tests. In addition to, or in replacement of a standardized ability test, teachers and content area specialists should observe students interacting with conceptual rather than memory-oriented material in science, art, mathematics, theater, writing, history, and other areas and make decisions based on actual performance.

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model

Our Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) was originally developed in the 1980's and revised and expanded during the last three decades (Renzulli & Reis, 2014). The focus of the SEM is on the development of thinking skills, creative productivity, and an investigative mindset on the parts of all students. In this model the role of the student is transformed from that of a learner of lessons to one in which she or he uses the *modus operandi* of a firsthand inquirer to experience the joys and challenges of creative productivity, the application of knowledge and thinking skills, and the development of an investigative mindset.

The SEM has three major service delivery components for students. The first is a Total Talent Portfolio that documents the academic strengths, interests, learning styles, and preferred modes of expression. The second is a differentiated teaching practice called Curriculum Compacting for high achieving students who can cover regular curricular material

at a faster pace and advanced level of comprehension than other students. This elimination or streamlining of curriculum enables above average students to avoid repetition of previously mastered work and guarantees mastery while simultaneously minimizing boredom and finding time for more appropriately challenging activities.

The third component is a series of enrichment opportunities organized around the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 2016). These three types of enrichment experiences are delivered in various organizational settings (regular classes, pull out programs, cluster groups within regular classes). This model differs from most other approaches to talent development in that general enrichment (Types I and II) is provided to all students through a process called infusion of enrichment activities into the regular curriculum. Type I Enrichment (General Exploratory Experiences) is designed to expose students to topics, issues, and ideas that may promote various levels of follow up on the parts of individuals and small groups. Type II Enrichment consists of six categories of thinking skills that can be infused into any and all regular curricular topics and that are designed to develop cognitive, affective, and meta-cognitive processes. Type III Enrichment (Individual and Small Group Investigations of Real Problems) is the most advanced level and is generally pursued by our most highly able and motivated students, usually under the direction of a special resource teacher with training in this advanced investigative learning process.

“Performance-based assessment is an alternative to the entity approach that uses predominately psychometric data to identify students.”

Another unique feature of the model is a series of interest-based grouping arrangements called Enrichment Clusters that are open to all students. These clusters are planned and organized to accommodate various levels of cognitive ability and use all three types of the enrichment pedagogy mentioned above. The clusters have made all the schools with which we have worked more exciting, enjoyable, and engaging places and we sometimes refer to them as “the growth stock” of our model.

When general enrichment is offered to all students it provides them with the 21st Century skills necessary for aca-

Using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model To Overcome The Underrepresentation of Diverse Students in Programs That Develop (cont. from p. 3)

ademic and career advancement in today's rapidly changing knowledge economy, and it also serves as a form of performance based assessment. The SEM approach is a comprehensive system of enrichment using Types I and II Enrichment and all school/all student enrichment clusters to provide opportunities for teachers to observe students as they participate in various types of enrichment activities. During these events, teachers and content area specialists can observe students interacting with more challenging thinking skills activities in all content areas.

“Our field must become innovative enough to take the bold step of reassessing the labeling issue.”

Teachers can then make decisions about more advanced gifted or enrichment program opportunities based on actual performance. Enrichment clusters are a particularly valuable environment for observing opportunities for advanced follow-up because they make use of highly engaging Types I and II activities rather than focusing mainly on received content.

These Type I and II enrichment activities are essential parts of the SEM because they focus on recognizing potential and aptitude in a specific area rather than making judgments about advanced opportunities solely based on test scores. This perspective is critical in locations where students have disadvantages that may be limiting their achievement on standardized test scores. In a performance-based identification system, like the basketball coach conducting try-outs, classroom observations of challenging performance situations play an equal part in making decisions about advanced services. By recognizing and developing the unique strengths of children across and within domains, students have the opportunity to develop a sense of self-efficacy that promotes a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), which often carries over to higher success rates in other areas. In other words, identification and nurturance of talents and special potentials may lead to the kinds of access to advanced opportunities that have been denied to low income and minority students and students who show their potentials in non-traditional ways. Our field must become innovative enough to take the bold step of reassessing the labeling issue. We need to define the field as one that develops gifted behaviors and talents in any student whose performance-based assessment indicates the need for advanced opportu-

nities, resources, and encouragement. This approach does not mean that we will not continue to support our highest achievers, that we will do away with AP or honors courses or pull-out programs; and it doesn't mean that we no longer need highly trained gifted education specialists in all of our schools. It simply means that we use the common sense approaches that the basketball coach, the band director, the arts teacher, and the teacher directing a school theater production use effectively year-in-and-year-out to find and develop the talents in their students.

References

- Collins, N. (2012) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/9594351/Sir-John-Gurdon-Nobel-Prize-winner-was-too-stupid-for-science-at-school.html>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Renzulli, J. S. (2016). The Enrichment Triad Model: A Guide for Developing Defensible Programs For The Gifted and Talented. In S. M. Reis (Ed.), *Reflections On Gifted Education* (pp. 193 – 210). Austin, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Renzulli, J. S., Reis, S. M. (2014). *The Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A how-to guide for talent development* (3rd ed.). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Fear Factor: “But I Don’t Want to Have My Child Tested”

by [Kellie Kinsland](#)

I’ve heard those words many times since my 17-year-old daughter, Mikaila, was diagnosed with dyslexia ten years ago in first grade. Though she is settled and content today, seeking the root cause of her academic struggles led us on tumultuous journey with a twist that no one predicted. I share our family’s story with anyone who asks to help others expedite their own journeys toward answers and understanding.

Friends who know about Mikaila’s learning difference occasionally request my insight into their own child’s academic difficulties. Sometimes, the child’s school has recommended diagnostic testing. More often, the parent suspects something different about the child when he or she struggles over an extended period of time and doesn’t respond as expected to support strategies, usually tutoring.

In each scenario, parents occasionally have told me they don’t want to have their child tested, sometimes because of the expense, but, more often, the reason is fear. They fear that medication will be recommended. They fear their child will be “labeled” as “LD” (“learning disabled”). They fear that less will be expected of their child, or that the child will be written off as “slow.” In short, parents fear their child will not develop to his or her potential.

Their fears are misguided.

To the contrary, by allowing fear to dictate their decisions, parents unwittingly undermine their child’s development. They don’t understand that diagnostic testing, particularly psychoeducational testing, is a powerful tool in their child’s favor.

Psychoeducational testing is advantageous in that it offers a “broadband” diagnostic evaluation. It examines the full spectrum of factors that affect one’s ability to learn, encompassing both cognitive and behavioral components. An evaluation that examines exclusively the cognitive components or the behavioral components paints only a part of the picture (e.g., testing solely for dyslexia or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Such “narrow band” testing can lead to a diagnosis of a learning difference without revealing the root of the child’s difficulties, and it might not expose the child’s strengths. Identifying weaknesses but not strengths can lead adults to the mistaken impression that the child is

less capable than he or she actually is, and it denies educators the opportunity to use the child’s strengths to benefit the weaknesses. My daughter’s experience illustrates the value of “broadband” testing over “narrow band” testing.

In kindergarten, Mikaila struggled with sight words. While her classmates were sailing through the list of 20+ words, Mikaila recognized only a few. Furthermore, I noticed that she tended to swap syllables when she spoke, saying “tophography” instead of “photography,” for example. I suspected dyslexia, but on the advice of several, my husband and I didn’t pursue a diagnostic screening.

Six weeks into first grade, Mikaila was changing for the worse. Our happy girl who lamented the weekends because she would rather be at school began to say that she didn’t want to go to school. She experienced headaches daily. We had her vision tested, but it was normal. Our pediatrician ordered blood work and an EEG test, but he found no medical cause for the headaches.

Meanwhile, Mikaila struggled with reading and spelling. Short vowel sounds seemed insurmountable. She could readily identify individual letters and their sounds, but she couldn’t sound out words. Her refusal to attempt to sound out words led me to believe she was obstinate. I told her she didn’t have to be right; she only had to try. “I can’t sound out,” she insisted. Homework was a nightly routine of tears and frustration.

I continued to suspect dyslexia, but allowed myself to be talked out of diagnostic testing by those who spoke of how expensive it would be and that “some kids just need more time for things to click.” I wondered whether I was just a paranoid mom, though my gut told me otherwise. My husband followed my lead.

Embarrassed and self-conscious, Mikaila believed that her classmates knew she struggled, though her teacher observed no evidence of such awareness. Our bright 6-year-old

“...by allowing fear to dictate their decisions, parents unwittingly undermine their child’s development.”

Fear Factor: “But I Don’t Want to Have My Child Tested” (continued from p. 5)

perceived herself as slow and stupid because she couldn’t keep pace with her peers in language arts. Her self-esteem was slipping away.

Meanwhile, at home, she asked profound questions. She wanted to know why there are different Christian denominations. She frequently asked about heaven, the planets, space, and God. She loved all things scientific and demonstrated a

knack for ideas and design.

“Could there be something besides dyslexia?” we wondered.”

One night around mid-year, Mikaila was again frustrated by her spelling homework, but this incident provoked more than tears. She was angry... furious, in fact. Face down, she lay on the living room floor, pencil in hand, flailing and screaming, “I can’t spell! I can’t spell!” Even as a tod-

dlar, Mikaila didn’t throw tantrums. We had reached the point of crisis. My husband and I vowed to have her evaluated and wouldn’t be talked out of it this time.

Knowing nothing about diagnostic testing options, my husband and I had Mikaila evaluated at a local reading clinic. The screening cost \$1,100, but it quantified what I had suspected for months: Mikaila was moderately dyslexic. Rather than making her feel “labeled,” it brought her comfort. She was relieved to learn that she wasn’t stupid. Moreover, identifying her condition helped the educators around her understand how to support her.

Mikaila received specialized tutoring once or twice a week for the next three years. Her mysterious headaches dissipated soon after she entered tutoring. Her decoding and comprehension improved markedly, though she continued to struggle with all forms of memorization. By fourth grade, she was still uncertain of her home phone number. Memorizing all the U.S. presidents (a school assignment) was beyond her ability, even after months of practice using audial mnemonic devices. Memorizing the steps to long division was all but impossible. She couldn’t remember all her multiplication facts. She failed math in the last quarter. Her self-esteem was decimated.

Realizing we were at another critical juncture, my husband and I homeschooled Mikaila her fifth grade year while we awaited an opening at a different local school that was more

progressive in its teaching approaches. While homeschooling, I noticed that memorization continued to pose a struggle for Mikaila, even in small quantities. My husband and I wondered whether she might have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). “Could there be something besides dyslexia?” we wondered. Baffled, we consulted her former tutor for guidance. The tutor referred us to a local neuropsychologist for a full psychoeducational evaluation.

The psychoeducational evaluation cost just over \$2,000, but it was worth every penny as this diagnostic changed our lives forever when it revealed the full scope of Mikaila’s cognitive and behavioral characteristics. We sought the evaluation to learn what was wrong, but to our surprise, we learned what was “right,” so to speak. My husband and I entered the post-testing consultation braced to possibly hear that our child would benefit from medication. However, the doctor smiled as he began our meeting by stating that Mikaila’s nonverbal reasoning was in the 94th percentile. “If you’re gonna have a spike in your scores, that’s where you want it to be,” he said, explaining that nonverbal reasoning is a measure of the intelligence with which one is born. “It can’t be learned,” he added.

This spike, he continued, was actually hindering her ability to learn at the elementary level. “She’s ten years old with the cognitive skills of a fifteen-year-old—a conceptual learner,” he said. “Her memory stores information according to its concept or principle. If you don’t show her the concept first, her brain doesn’t know where to store the information. It gets lost,” he explained.

He noted that most elementary schools don’t teach concepts because most children don’t have the capacity to understand them at such young ages. Elementary schools teach the parts, and the concepts come later, typically in high school.

Furthermore, Mikaila’s spike in nonverbal reasoning indicated that she would be “a whiz” at math, the doctor said. He was stunned to discover that she had failed it in the most re-

“...this diagnostic changed our lives forever when it revealed the full scope of Mikaila’s cognitive and behavioral characteristics.”

cent quarter at school and that she was afraid of numbers. Shaking his head, he advised, “If you teach this child math conceptually, she will amaze you with what she can do.”

Through the doctor’s evaluation, we also discovered that Mikaila’s visual memory was exceptionally strong. Her sequential memory was in the normal range, but at the low end. As the doctor had also evaluated Mikaila’s attentional characteristics, we inquired whether she might benefit from medication. “Absolutely not,” said the doctor. “She is highly aware of everything around her. Putting her on medication would make things worse for her.”

To strengthen Mikaila’s sequential memory, the doctor recommended a local learning specialist to teach her strategies for memorization. We followed through. By chance, one of the first exercises Mikaila tackled in tutoring was memorizing the presidents. Within three sessions, she memorized all of them in chronological order with the help of *visual* mnemonic cues. Today, six years later, she still can name them rapidly because she can “see” the visual mnemonics in her mind’s eye. Her memorization ability improved overall, and she continues to employ the strategies she learned in tutoring.

After the neuropsychologist’s evaluation, Mikaila’s self-perception changed significantly. She finally understood that she was exceptional in various ways, not simply dyslexic. Months after the doctor’s evaluation, Mikaila entered sixth grade at her current college prep school where she is thriving. Although she continues to struggle more than her classmates, the school’s progressive teaching approaches appeal to her way of learning in that they emphasize conceptual learning, critical thinking, and application skills. She still loves science, but she has also discovered a love for reading and writing. In fact, as I write this, she is taking a practice exam with her Advanced Placement class in English Language & Composition, a course she elected to take.

Without the neuropsychological evaluation, our family would not have learned “the rest of the story,” nor would we have Mikaila’s teachers. They, along with the school’s learning specialist, have referred to the doctor’s evaluation and recommendations several times over the years to help them understand how to use Mikaila’s strengths to support her needs. Diagnostic testing is invaluable to educators in that it removes the “guess work” and enables them to address a student’s needs efficiently and effectively. Without the neuropsychological evaluation, we would not have recognized the extraordi-

nary strength of Mikaila’s visual memory to use to her advantage in memorizing information. That discovery alone was worth the cost of testing as it revolutionized Mikaila’s approach to learning.

Beyond all doubt, psychoeducational testing enabled Mikaila to achieve her true potential because it helped her teachers understand how to teach her, and it helped her to understand herself and why she is different from her peers. Without it, I fully believe that Mikaila’s true abilities would have gone unrecognized and undeveloped.

Above all, our experience taught my husband and me the value of evaluating *all* factors related to learning, *i.e.*, aptitude, achievement, and behavior. My advice to parents is to learn all the facts and allow those to guide their decisions rather than letting fear and assumptions dictate their actions. Matching intervention strategies to a continuously struggling student without the help of a “broadband” diagnostic evaluation is like treating cancer with antibiotics. Antibiotics can work miracles, but only in the presence of a bacterial infection. They won’t help cancer. Both illnesses can cause lethargy, discomfort, and elevated white blood cell counts. Based on those symptoms alone, a definitive diagnosis is impossible. Only a complete diagnostic evaluation can reveal the root cause of the symptoms, and the root determines the proper treatment that leads to wellness.

In summary, these are the lessons my husband and I learned through our experiences and observations:

- **Listen to your gut.** If a parent senses something isn’t right, it probably isn’t. Take action until you are confident that the concern is resolved.
- **Listen to your child’s educators.** If an educator advises diagnostic testing, follow through. Educators are keenly attuned to students’ needs, and they consider carefully whether diagnostic testing is warranted before making such a suggestion.
- **Start with a full psychoeducational evaluation** (must be administered by a psychologist or neuropsychologist). Seek a professional who is knowledgeable about both giftedness *and* learning differences. A skilled interpretation of the evaluation results is essential. A psychoeducational evaluation

“Without the neuropsychological evaluation, our family would not have learned ‘the rest of the story’...”

Fear Factor: “But I Don’t Want to Have My Child Tested” (continued from p. 7)

will reveal the full scope of the child’s weaknesses and strengths, and it is more likely to uncover the root of the child’s difficulties. For example, a child who appears to have ADHD might simply be gifted and easily stimulated, but an ADHD evaluation alone won’t expose giftedness. Use the strengths to benefit the weaknesses.

- **Have the child evaluated as soon as a concern surfaces.** Generally speaking, children can be evaluated as young as 5 years of age or sometimes younger, depending on the nature of the concern and the professional’s perspective. To postpone an evaluation is to delay progress, except when a qualified diagnostic professional advises waiting. The earlier a child’s exceptionalities are diagnosed (including giftedness), the greater the child’s odds of reaching his or her potential with the help of intervention strategies. *Sooner is always better.*
- **When deciding on a diagnostic professional, talk to the child’s school for suggestions, and do your own homework as well.** Ask why a particular professional or clinic is recommended. Listen for reasons founded in research and facts that match your child’s circumstances, not hearsay. Be skeptical of recommendations based primarily on personal familiarity or the professional’s bedside manner. Use online resources to learn about professionals in your local and regional areas, noting their areas of specialization, training, and practice. Recognize that you might need to travel outside your locality to meet the professional best suited to your child’s needs.
- **Generally, a referral is not required.** Usually, a parent’s concern is adequate reason for a diagnostic professional to accept the case.
- **Include the school in the evaluation process from the outset.** The data and observations that your child’s school can provide are invaluable to the diagnostic professional because they offer insight into the child’s performance in his/her daily environment where the child might perform differently from the testing environment.
- **Understand that many mainstream teachers are not formally trained in learning differences.** Parents cannot depend on teachers to recognize a learning difference (including giftedness). Unless a teacher has sought training in learning differences, there’s a good chance that he or she has little or no formal training in them. Among teachers who intuitively recognize a learning difference, most are

unauthorized to suggest diagnostic testing to parents due to a lack of credentials. If you suspect your child has a learning difference, talk to the teacher and school administrators, but know that, in some cases, administrators, too, are unauthorized to suggest diagnostic testing, even when they suspect a problem. Parents must educate themselves about how to advocate for their children.

Kellie Kinsland is married to Gary Kinsland. They are the parents of two teenage daughters in Lafayette, LA.

What Are the Steps to Psychoeducational Testing?

- Parents should talk to the school about which professional is best suited to the child’s needs in addition to doing their own homework online.
- At the first appointment, the parents will meet with the professional alone to provide a case history, including the following documents:
 - Recent progress notes
 - Teacher notes
 - Significant work samples
 - Any prior diagnostic evaluations
 - Additional documents requested by the professional
- For best results, authorize the professional and the child’s school to share information directly between them, though this is not required.
- Next, the professional will determine whether additional assessment is warranted. If so, he/she might recommend some combination of the following diagnostic evaluations:
 - Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)
 - Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement
 - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF)
 - Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT)
 - Various options for attention measures
- The child will meet one-on-one with the professional or a staff member for the testing.
- Weeks later, the parents will meet with the professional alone to learn the screening outcomes and the professional’s recommendations, which might include additional assessments, intervention (*e.g.*, specialized tutoring), classroom accommodations, counseling, and/or medication.
- Parents are not required to share the assessment results with their child’s school, but doing so is in the child’s best interest.
- The professional might or might not recommend future appointments, depending on the assessment outcome.

Executive Function: A Practical Approach for Students in Grades 1-5, Part II

[Paula Majeau, M.Ed.](#) and [Shannon Fruge, M.C.D.](#)

Editor's note: This article is the second in a two-part series. Part I appeared in the Winter, 2016, issue.

As we close out our third year of formal instruction in Executive Functioning, we've had a chance to see how this program has impacted our students, the classrooms and the teachers. Providing regular and systematic instruction to all of our students has ensured that all students are taught the necessary skills and has ultimately enabled us to identify the outliers.

In our previous article, we gave a broad overview of the Executive Function program we developed and teach at our elementary school. As a follow-up, this article will provide the topics we cover, the framework we use, and specific examples of lesson activities.

Drawing from several sources, we've developed a curriculum for grades 1-5 that we believe addresses the key components of executive function. (see table below)

Executive Function Topics
Active Listening
Organization and Planning
Time Management
Routine
Mindfulness
Active Reading and Comprehension
Test Taking
Note Taking
Study Strategies
Knowing myself as a learner

The skills addressed at the youngest and the oldest grades are the same; however, just like any concept in a core curriculum, students are ready for different information at each developmental stage. The level of complexity at which

we teach the skills increases in sophistication with each grade level. For example, in Science class, one would teach the scientific method as early as preschool. Young students may refer to a hypothesis as an 'educated guess' or prediction and over time will use more accurate and sophisticated vocabulary with a deeper understanding.

Below is the lesson plan template we use each week. This is the format we use for all of our grades. From the beginning, we knew we wanted it to be a predictable but engaging lesson template because we didn't want the students to struggle with adjusting to a different structure each week. The information was new, not the format. We didn't want the novelty of gathering together to overshadow the learning. Knowing what to expect helped our students to better focus on the new skills or information.

Lesson Template		
1. Set the timer		
2. Planner check (grades 2nd - 5th)		5-7 min
3. Active listening activity		2-5 min
4. Lesson focus & practice activity		10-15 min
5. Wrap up		1 min
6. Homework		1 min

1. Set the timer: Our lessons are designed for a 25-30 minute time block. We always set a timer that is visible to the class. By doing this, we model the skill we hope to develop in the students. We explain to them that this helps us with time management and recommend that they use a timer at home.

2. Planner Check: In second grade we begin teaching students how to effectively use their planners. They are instructed to copy their assignments 'neatly and completely' and to check off assignments as they are finished at home. Each year, as the demand increases, good planner habits are reinforced. Upper elementary students are taught to in-

Executive Function: A Practical Approach for Grades 1-5, Part II (continued from p. 9)

clude after school activities in their planners, as well as how to break down longer assignments into manageable daily chunks. Fourth and fifth graders are given a monthly calendar to help them look at the big picture. We check their planners weekly to ensure that they are writing their assignments accurately and that they are growing in their independent use of this tool.

3. Active Listening: In first grade, much of the year is spent teaching, practicing and growing active listening. Active listening is the core topic of many of the first grade lessons. We nurture and build upon this skill in all of our age

“Like Active Listening, we have found that [mindfulness] is a skill that students need to be explicitly taught.”

groups. While the focus of the lesson in first grade may be Active Listening, once the concept is established, we reinforce and practice listening skills with riddles or jokes containing multiple meaning words (puns) every week with all of our grades.

4. Lesson Focus and Practice Activity: At this point we are 10 minutes into our session and starting our lesson focus. Each week we focus

on one of the ten executive function topics listed in the table above. We teach a concept, and then reinforce it with an activity. Our activities, like our concepts, are selected based upon the age and instructional level of the group.

For descriptive purposes, we will break down a few of the key executive function concepts and give examples of activities for a lower and an upper elementary lesson.

Sample Lesson Activities

Active Listening Activities - As mentioned above, Active Listening is a key component of our weekly lesson plan. However, we first need to establish what Active Listening is with the students. So, for *first grade* students, active listening is a large portion of their yearly lessons. We meet every other week and practice identifying the key components of being a good active listener. Students love to participate in discussions about the qualities; they can tell us that active listening involves more than just hearing the words. At this level, we practice this skill with oral riddles that contain multiple meaning words, and games such as “Simon Says.”

Each year the games and activities increase in complexity, and by *fourth grade*, active listening has evolved. Students are still required to know and identify the key components of being a good active listener, but now we practice with loops, and games like Telestrations™. Students are asked to consider the importance of actively listening to peers and building on their ideas. As a class we discuss the value of listening to our classmates - both from a social and academic standpoint.

Organization Activities- Organization is a skill we start teaching as early as *first grade*. We discuss organization at home and at school. Students are asked to relate ways in which they are keeping their belongings neat at home - such as legos and stuffed animals. We then transition into how this is valuable with our school belongings. We practice this skill in the classroom by cleaning out seat sacks on a regular basis. Students then discuss how keeping their things tidy helps them focus on learning rather than locating materials.

In *fourth grade*, students are familiar with the importance of organization, but don’t always practice this skill. One activity that helps to reinforce the importance is a “Backpack Scavenger Hunt.” Students are divided into two teams, and asked to complete a scavenger hunt by finding items in two prepared backpacks. One team has a highly organized backpack, and the other is working with a very ‘messy’ one. Since the team with the highly organized backpack always ‘wins,’ this activity hits home the importance of organization with our students.

Mindfulness Activities - Mindfulness is critical to executive control. Like Active Listening, we have found that this is a skill that students need to be explicitly taught. We give them concrete tools that they learn and practice. Once we teach this skill, it can be interwoven into other executive function lessons.

In *first grade*, we introduce mindfulness as a part of active listening. Students are taught that they must listen with their brains. As a class, we discuss the need to pay attention to what the speaker is saying even though our minds like to wander to other thoughts. We begin by simply attending to the rise and fall of our breath. We progress with focusing activities like attending to the sound of a bell. Students are instructed to quiet their bodies and listen to a bell tone until

they can no longer hear the sound. Because this practice emphasizes the concept of attending for extended periods of time, students then reflect on how this makes them feel, and why this skill is important.

In *third grade* we discuss the concept of “Metacognition”, and practice activities in the areas of math and language arts that highlight our awareness of what the mind is thinking. We model the think aloud process for the students while reading a passage. This pinpoints the importance of our thoughts as we read. We then link this to our active reading lessons where students share their own think aloud strategies connected to concepts such as making inferences. We provide students with a short passage and instruct them to read it silently. We then ask them to share what they were thinking while reading. They respond with anything from, “oh, I didn’t know that!”, to “now that makes sense”, or they’ll share how they used context clues to understand unfamiliar vocabulary.

5. Wrap up and Homework: We conclude each session with a reminder of “what we learned today,” and how we can use this skill throughout the week. Homework varies depending on the subject. At times there is an assignment to complete for the following lesson, and at other times we challenge them to observe and use this new skill.

Through the passage of time, we’ve seen which areas needed to be adapted based upon the needs of each class. Although we teach a certain skill set that we know is developmentally appropriate for each grade, we have also found that each year some classes are more adept with certain concepts. We make adjustments that are specific to that group.

Explicitly teaching executive function skills has made a difference for all of our students. It has taken the emphasis off of executive control and placed it back on academics, where it should be. When a student can easily locate his materials and knows what to do for homework, he can focus on diving deeply into the subject matter. Our parents, students, and teachers have noticed and commented on the valuable impact this has had on our individual students and on our school community.

Shannon Fruge and Paula Majeau teach at the [Episcopal School of Acadiana](#) in Lafayette, Louisiana



Special Schools & Programs Network Mission

The Special Schools and Programs Network believes that gifted/talented students are served in a variety of alternative settings, such as private independent schools, magnet, or specialty schools; Saturday or summer programs; and university-sponsored schools and institutes. These private and publicly funded special schools and programs are vital to the ongoing research and comprehensive delivery of services addressing the needs of gifted individuals. This Network is dedicated to promoting alternative, experimental, comprehensive services to gifted individuals beyond the scope of the traditional public school settings, and reporting in a scholarly way the findings and activities developed and practiced in the special schools and programs in order to benefit all gifted students.