

The Executive Teacher Program

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Introduction

Can We Afford To Wait?

There is a deep chasm between new science in psychology, neurology, and psychiatry, and the people who can most benefit from this important information: those who care deeply for the healthy development of children. Unfortunately, there may be as much as a 10 year lag time between research discoveries and the *practical application of this knowledge* in the classroom or clinic.

Yet recently, there have been remarkable discoveries in neuroscience that we need to understand now. Most particularly, *we now have a far more sophisticated understanding of child and adolescent brain development*. Not only does this have broad implications for how we assess and teach children, this information—occasionally surprising, sometimes counterintuitive, and always exciting—illuminates how to build effective instructional strategies. We simply can't afford to wait an entire generation until these new helping strategies are universally known and accessible. The nature of children's minds is evolving too rapidly to be complacent; we need new *tools* now!

The Executive Teacher program bridges several disciplines to achieve universal goals: helping students be better learners, more skilled peers, and more involved community members. This is accomplished by learning how to help students access their executive thinking skills – the key to maximizing capability.

Who are Executive Teachers?

The Executive Teacher is a program to build a constituency of highly informed, professional leaders to bring the science of the mind into the 21st century classroom. Participants are generally selected by school administration,

peers, or parent groups. While demonstrated classroom skills are important, key attributes of successful participants are intellectual curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to share their learning with colleagues, peers, and parents.

Participants will learn how to use the eight pillars model as a framework for strategic classroom management and teaching. Where beneficial, these faculty members can then serve as on-site advisors and mentors to other staff. Some benefits of the program are:

- Your faculty has an opportunity to increase the depth and breadth of their professional skills, and this knowledge “stays with the school.”
- Learning occurs over time. Teachers can practice techniques in the classroom and then get feedback and follow-up.
- An advanced workshop moves ideas into action, and promotes accountability. As you know, the excitement and good intentions of a professional development day can diminish under the press of everyday responsibilities *unless there is ongoing support*.

Which Schools Benefit From This Program?

Understanding how executive control works reframes our concept of student achievement. As you review the Eight Pillars of Executive control, it will be apparent that various students have different executive control profiles. Still, most students can improve aspects of their learning, behavior, and social development with consistent, strategic support. While we are naturally quicker to recognize executive control deficits at the far ends of the spectrum—children with special needs, or those underachieving despite high level abilities—the majority of students in the middle ranges of achievement have untapped reserves of talent and capability.

The eight pillars of executive control have been adopted by a wide range of educational

settings, from schools working with intensively learning disabled students to some of North America's most selective private institutions. (references available)

What is a Capable Brain?

As a new century unfolds in front of us, there's an emerging dimension to the purpose of education that deserves our full attention. If being a great teacher has always meant nurturing an insightful mind, then it's time to acknowledge that the job description includes being the *architect of the physical mind* as well. Indeed, these two minds are inextricably related. Actually, educators have always contributed to the development of the physical mind. It's just that until recently, science couldn't clearly explain how this happens. Now, however, medical technology literally allows us to watch how words and experiences spur the brain to productive action. We'll examine the micro-skills that allow children and adolescents to express their innate talents and intelligence.

--And, speaking of intelligence, the Executive Teacher program explains why high "IQ" doesn't always translate into success, reviews current thinking on intelligence, and identifies alternative models for shaping young minds - even when we can't see it happening.

Program Goals

The Executive Teacher program provides a practical framework for approaching learning and behavior challenges systematically. At the end of the program, participants will have a comprehensive understanding of:

- each of the eight essential brain skills (working memory, initiation, attention, flexibility, self-monitoring, emotional control, organization, and planning.)
- how the development of meta-cognitive skills boosts achievement

- specific, classroom-ready strategies for the development and support each executive skill
- common executive skill deficits in children and/or adolescents
- the neurobiology of prefrontal cortex skills as it relates to student/teacher interaction
- tools to help unmotivated, disorganized, emotionally labile, inattentive, or inflexible students become better learners, peers, and community members
- instructional methods that help a wide range of learning styles and challenges
- how to identify and reduce systems that take valuable time and resources away from creative and effective teaching
- how to assess the immediate benefit of executive teaching interventions

Program Content

1. **In-depth analysis of the Eight Pillars of Executive Control, including specific examples of student behavior and misbehavior, targeted for particular age groups and/or student populations.**
(As you review the eight pillars of executive control, please note that our efforts are not intended to create super-human children solely dedicated to efficiency and organization! We are interested in helping children with challenges in these areas avoid the effects of underachievement and frustration.)

Pillar 1: Working Memory

- How memory works, and the role of working memory in learning
- Building processing speed, enabling fluency of thought and communication
- Why working memory is critical for the transition to higher education

Pillar 2: Initiation

- Motivation to begin tasks and activities
- Challenges such as poor follow-through on homework,

procrastination, and related problems with time management

Pillar 3: Sustained Attention

- Executive control deficit associated with ADHD
- Explanation of how attention is related to brain's ability to inhibit distraction, and what psychostimulant medication *does and does not do* to enhance attentional capability.

Pillar 4: Flexibility

- Helping students shift focus as needed
- Understanding "rule" changes such as applying different work habits, communication styles, etc., according to specific situations

Pillar 5: Self-Monitoring

- Self-assessment with an adequate degree of objectivity and analysis
- Adapting behavior in accordance with social cues
- Facilitating social connection and meaningful self-awareness

Pillar 6: Emotional Control

- Keeping emotional reactions in proportion to events
- Self-regulation and transitioning in school
- Building resilience: coping with frustration and stress

Pillar 7: Organization

- Avoiding wasted time and effort
- Keeping up with the presentation of new information
- Management of personal space and belongings

Pillar 8: Planning

- Assisting goal-directed thinking
- Time awareness and management
- Learning to "begin with the end in mind"

2. Surrogate Executive Control How teachers can support executive thinking skills; *including specific strategies to assist with each executive function*. Implications for classroom organization and interaction.

3. The Common Denominator of Common Syndromes

Executive control capabilities and challenges are at the core of learning and social development. This portion of the program defines and clarifies the relationship of executive control to many syndromes, including ADHD, Asperger's disorder, non-verbal learning disabilities, problems with social perception and behavior, as well as a range of learning disabilities. *We will also look at how lack of executive control skills translates to common problems with study habits and attitudes toward learning*. Participants learn techniques to bolster short term skills such as focus, and long term skills such as auditory awareness.

4. Brain Science 101

What every teacher needs to know about the neurobiology of learning. A short tour of the developing brain, with particular attention to the biology of learning and the key role of the pre-frontal cortex.

5. Executive Teacher Job Description

- Elements of executive leadership in classroom
- What and when to model executive management skills
- Helping students to understand what they are observing
- Helping students to assimilate and experiment with newly acquired skills

6. Building Modules of Collaborative Learning

- Making accomplishment everyone's responsibility
- Visual schematics
- Kinesthetic rehearsal
- Accountability systems

7. Rethinking What it Means to be an Outcome-Focused School

- How to practically emphasize and reinforce immediate benchmarks for retention and achievement.
- School-family partnerships
- Strategies and scripts for school-based meetings
- How to write a contract or achievable action plan for family involvement

8. A Basic Ecology of Attention

- New definitions of attention
- The “bored” student– balancing the need for stimulation with space for reflection
- How to visually assess a student’s attention
- *Attention density* – facilitating deep attention

9. Four Essential Keys to Executive Instruction

- Two-Tier Thinking
- Structuring Time and Space
- Repetition and Rehearsal
- Coordinated Accountability

10. Implementation

- How to respond to the persistently inattentive student
- Adjusting the classroom “thermostat”
- An unconventional method of converting disrupters into leaders
- How to identify signs of immediate improvement

10. Review of Case Scenarios (interactive)

We will review case studies that are relevant to many of the current teaching challenges that educators face today. Using the knowledge we have gained, participants will be able to practice and use their new skills.

F.A.Q.s

Is the Executive Teacher Program *only* for teachers?

While the program focuses on practical application of neuroscience to teaching and classroom management skills, this series is also of value to those who would like to develop a deeper understanding of child and adolescent development. These professionals include those who work with and support teachers, such as school principals, psychologists, guidance counselors, and learning center staff.

Can our entire faculty attend?

Ideally, every teacher will have access to this information. For logistical purposes, we limit participation so that the program can target the needs of professional working with specific age groups, and so that the program can be highly interactive. We can work with your organization to schedule a series of workshops to accommodate your entire staff.

Must we have already participated in the “Building the Eight Pillars of Capable Young Minds” workshop to enroll?

The Executive Teacher program was developed in response to schools that implemented the coaching skills presented in this workshop, and were excited by the results. Due to the time limitations of a single workshop, a follow-up program was requested. “Building the Eight Pillars of Capable Young Minds” is an ideal introduction to executive control and provides participants a common understanding of important concepts and teaching skills. Your school can elect to use the “Building the Eight Pillars of Capable Young Minds” presentation as a stand-alone professional development program, or offer both programs, “Building the Eight Pillars of Capable Young Minds” and “The Executive Teacher.”

Do you travel outside the U.S.?

Yes. Because of the travel time involved, please contact us at your earliest convenience regarding preferred dates.

Does Dr. Cox teach every workshop himself?

Yes. In 2007, after many years of directing a private psychology practice in Pennsylvania, USA, he relocated with his family to his home state of Rhode Island, where he devotes himself to writing, speaking, and whenever possible, sailing and surfcasting. (With regard to scheduling, late October is when striped bass are biting best! However, we recognize that this is also the time of year when teachers are noticing a lack of executive skills in their students and need practical, positive solutions.)

Can we make this a district-wide program?

Yes. We will work with your school district to develop a program that addresses the goals and challenges of individual schools, while keeping the core program consistent. In addition, we are happy to consult regarding the participant selection process.

Which teaching grades are optimal for this program?

Executive skills develop through late adolescence (and beyond). We can begin developing these skills in pre-school, and continue through college. This program has been requested by schools working with very young children, all the way up to those working with college students. In addition, we have many requests for the series from those working with students who learn differently.

How is the Program Scheduled?

Schools begin with the workshop, "Building the Eight Pillars of Capable Young Minds." This program can accommodate large groups.

Following this workshop, we suggest that teachers spend some time in the classroom observing students through the lens of the Eight Pillars, and begin using the strategies

they learned in the workshop. We can also recommend readings for teachers who would like to expand their understanding of executive control and related topics.

Next, depending on the size of your faculty, we schedule one or more follow-up "Executive Teacher" workshops. This is typically a 3-hour workshop, but is designed as a deeper exploration of each individual skill and is very interactive. For this reason, the workshop is generally limited to a maximum of 35 participants. We suggest separate tracks for teachers of elementary, middle/junior, and high school students, so that the interventions can be specifically targeted to the appropriate developmental level. You may choose to select representatives from each school in your district, who can then serve as mentors to their home school colleagues.

Ongoing consultation is available. We will develop a program to meet the needs of your school, district, and whenever possible, professional education credit requirements.

For more information about the Executive Teacher workshop, please contact us via:
www.dradamcox.com
or telephone 401-816-5895.

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