Getting Complex Learners Ready to Learn for Success in the Classroom.

Kelly McDonald, MS, OTR/L
Kristyn Sequeira, MS, CCC-SLP
Leah Valentine, MS Ed
Learning Objectives

1. Getting Ready to Learn
   Discuss the foundational skills required for learning

2. Teaching Complex Learners
   Achieving a learning ready state through differentiation

3. Implementation
   Discuss helpful tools, strategies and resources
Introductions

Kelly McDonald  
Occupational Therapist

Kristyn Sequeira  
Speech & Language Pathologist

Leah Valentine  
Special Educator
The Wolf School

An independent, special education school. Our curriculum encompasses a rigorous blend of academic subjects and intensive therapeutic support that addresses three major learning challenges:

- Language processing/production
- Sensory regulation
- Socially effective communication

The Wolf School’s Immersion Model© integrates therapeutic support within the entire curriculum throughout the day in each classroom.
Getting Ready to Learn

Foundational skills required for academic success
Movement in the Classroom

**Benefits:** Movement wakes up the brain!

- Organizes the nervous system
- Increases alertness, attention and focus
- Tells us where our bodies are in space
- Activates and strengthens muscle tone
- Improves visual skills
- Promotes emotional wellbeing
- Makes learning fun!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Movement that Support Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heavy work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Calming and organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pull, push, climb, jump, lift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crossing Midline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Syncs both sides of the brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Required for reading/writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endurance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increasing your heart rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can improve memory &amp; focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Nature deficits”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Free play outside is the most powerful type of movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vestibular</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Changing head position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Get out of the “upright”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Movement in the Classroom

Make time for movement:

➢ Schedule movement breaks
➢ Create movement based activities
➢ Gym class and recess are essential
➢ Incorporate relaxation and rest time

Important Tips:

➢ Provide structure - beginning / ending
➢ Make it purposeful
➢ Have boundaries and rules
➢ End movement with a cool down
Movement in Academic Lessons

➢ Keep it simple - maintain focus of academic skills
  ○ Move before seated tasks
  ○ Take movement breaks
  ○ Change the child’s position
  ○ Make it part of the routine
  ○ Use manipulatives
  ○ Make it multi-sensory
Who said learning has to happen in a chair?
Keep it simple. It's not all about the “stuff”.

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Learn by doing.
Learning should be a multi-sensory experience!
Movement makes learning fun!
Executive Functioning

Foundational skills required for academic success
How Executive Dysfunction Presents in the Classroom

❖ Children with executive dysfunction can be seen as non-compliant or poor listeners
❖ Often present as inattentive
❖ Struggle with initiating tasks due to feeling overwhelmed
❖ Lack self inhibition and self regulation
❖ Rigid thinkers
❖ Poor working memory
❖ Difficulty with time management and organization
Classroom Accommodations

- Clearly define goals and expectations
- Step-by-step instructions with check boxes
- Repetition, repetition, repetition!!!
- Chunk information
- Provide routine, structure, and consistency
- Have child repeat information back to you
- Eliminate distractions
Strategies to Improve Executive Function

➢ Decrease amount of language

➢ Provide a visual of what “ready” looks like

➢ Allow child to make prediction of what they will look like

➢ Encourage self-talk
What “Ready” Looks Like

- Say to student “match the picture”
- Use gestural cues
- Eliminate the language/steps for kids with weak working memory and slow processing of language
Visualize for Future Planning

★ Children with EF weakness haven't yet developed the ability to visualize the future

★ Wear “future glasses” to help visualize what they will look like initiating, executing and completing a task

★ Ask child to imagine the work “done” instead of getting ready first

★ Get Ready, Do, Done

Get Ready

Materials:
- glass
- cotton balls
- glow in the dark paint
- purple, pink and blue paint
- spoon
- glitter

Do
1. Make swirls of glow in the dark paint around jar
2. Pour water to second line
3. Add a few drops of colored paint
4. Stretch cotton balls apart, then put in jar
5. Add glitter
6. Add glow in the dark paint
7. Repeat steps 1-

Done

Get Done
When it's night time, watch the galaxy glow!
Social Thinking Language

1. Encourage flexible thinking
2. Use positive self-talk
3. Visualize themselves in the future being successful
4. Visuals!!
It all comes back to play!

- Gross motor activities promote a natural progression of executive function skills
- Develop social skills and schemas
- Problem solving and conflict resolution
- Promotes organizational skills
Teaching Complex Learners

Achieving a learning ready state through differentiation
Recipe for Success

➢ Predictable schedule
➢ Preview
➢ Provide visual supports
➢ Help manage time and organization
➢ Teach flexibility and Growth Mindset
➢ Create multi-sensory experiences
➢ Achieve a learning ready state
Differentiated Instruction - Learner #1

**Student Description**
- Sensory processing disorder
  - Sensory seeker
- Difficulty attending
  - Distracted by his surroundings
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Academics are very challenging
  - Avoidance / refusal
- Has high interest areas / preferred topics
- Loves to be silly

**What gets him reading?**
- Heavy work and change of head position before and/or during lesson
- Specific lesson visual checklist with last item preferred
- Use different locations in the room during the lesson
- Multi-sensory teaching
- High interest topics
Differentiated Instruction - Learner #1

1. letters ABC
2. words
3. Titanic book
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Description</th>
<th>What gets her engaged in math?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internally and externally distracted</td>
<td>Match the picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often off topic comments and conversation</td>
<td>Use of visuals - less language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with sustained attention</td>
<td>Lesson checklist or first / then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly anxious</td>
<td>Dividers to reduce visual stimuli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed by academic assignments</td>
<td>Break Visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shut down / refusal when confused</td>
<td>Use of rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine motor delays</td>
<td>Limited visual information on pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with visual perception</td>
<td>Highlighted or defined boundaries to write within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manipulatives for kinesthetic learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differentiated Instruction - Learner #3

**Student Description**
- Active sensory seeking and avoiding
- Difficulty attending - internally distracted
- Very strong reading and math skills
- Difficulty with writing
  - Delayed fine and visual motor skills
- Difficulty spelling
- Difficulty generating ideas
  - Concrete thinker
- Avoids writing - “I can’t”
- Gets stuck and becomes frustrated, angry, has outbursts

**What gets him writing?**
- Heavy work and deep pressure before lesson
- Fine motor warm up
- Slant board
- Growth mindset strategies
- Lesson checklist
- What done looks like
- Explicitly taught and practiced strategies available and encouraged
- Break visual

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Implementation

Tools, strategies and resources
## Getting Ready to Learn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED TOOLS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Bean bag chair</td>
<td>● Structure - clear beginning and ending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Fidgets</td>
<td>● Make it purposeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Exercise ball</td>
<td>● Include cool down/relaxation/breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Scooter board</td>
<td>● Use rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Swing (indoor or outdoor)</td>
<td>● Change head position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Yoga mat</td>
<td>● Cross midline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Play-Doh or resistive theraputty</td>
<td>● Heavy work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Individual dry erase boards</td>
<td>● Change physical positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Make learning hands-on and multi-sensory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## Resources

*Links are embedded*

### MOVEMENT

**Websites:**
- The Zones of Regulation
- Kids Yoga Stories
- YouTube Channels:
  - Cosmic Kids Yoga
  - The Learning Station
  - Jack Hartmann
  - Get Kids Moving
  - The Body Coach TV
  - Chair exercises PE Bowman
  - Kid Mindfulness

**Books:**
- Spark - John Ratey
- Out of Sync Child - Carol Kranowitz

**Apps:**
- Make Dice Lite
- The Metronome
- Sworkit Kids

### EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

**Websites:**
- Sarah Ward - Cognitive Connections
- Jill Kuzma
- SMARTS program
- Brain Talk curriculum

**Books:**
- Smart but Scattered - Peg Dawson
- Bright Kids Who Can't Keep Up - Ellen Braaten PhD., Brian Willoughby PhD.
- The Explosive Child - Dr. Ross W. Greene

**Apps:**
- Lumosity
- Quizlet
- Planning 30/30
- 360 Thinking Time Tracker

**Games:**
- Imaginiff Jr.
- Stare Jr.
- Charades for Kids

### ACADEMIC

**Websites:**
- Understood.org
- The World of Complex Learners
- LD @ School
- Conscious Discipline
- Mindset Works

**Books:**
- Mindset: New Psychology of Success - Carol Dweck

**Apps / Extensions:**
- SnapType
- Visual Schedule Planner
- Epic
- Bookshare
- Co:Writer
- Read & Write
- Kami
Questions / Comments?

Email us:  kmcdonald@thewolfschool.org;  ksequeira@thewolfschool.org;  lvalentine@thewolfschool.org
References


