

# Resources for Implementation

The Early Education Leader's Guide

## Chapter and Case Study Discussion Activities

### Chapter 2: Using Executive Functions: Planning and Reflection in the Early Education Setting

In this chapter, we focused executive functions and why they are a cornerstone educator competency. We also reviewed tools and leadership skills that promote executive functions. Use the following case study from Chapter 2, along with the questions below, to reflect on how concepts and key takeaways from the chapter apply to your professional work and setting.

*It's a chilly and slushy walk from the bus station to the Explorations Early Learning Center, but Maria brightens a bit when she thinks about the day ahead. Maria, a Pre-K teacher at the Center, has a special activity planned for the sensory table today and can hardly wait to see the looks on children's faces.*

*When center time begins, Maria joins the children who chose the sensory table. As planned, she brings some surprises with her: smocks, cups, a funnel, and a big bucket of snow. Maria exclaims, "We're going to do something different at the sensory table today," pouring the snow into the table. The children shriek with delight, immediately digging into the icy powder.*

*As the children play, Maria tries to carry out her lesson plan. She begins explaining what "freezing" and "melting" are, but the children do not seem to understand—or at least do not seem to be paying much attention. As she tries to decide what to do to help the children focus on the information she is explaining, they begin throwing snow at each other. Maria quickly bursts out, "No throwing snow! If you don't stop, I'm going to close the table." This seems to work for the moment.*

*Maria is trying to stay calm, but before she has the chance to take her first deep breath, she hears arguing coming from the art table where children are making collages. She sees that children are quarreling over supplies, reminding her that she meant to search for extra glue sticks earlier. Maria calls over to Jada, her co-teacher, and asks if she knows where any glue sticks are, but Jada is busy in the bathroom where children are washing their hands. Maria yells over to the children at the art table to share, and then turns back to her group. She's trying to recall the science words she was teaching, but now can't remember them. As she struggles to bring these words to mind, several more children come over to the sensory table and push and shove one another to squeeze into a spot, eager to have a turn with the snow, too. With the added children at the table, the snow-throwing commences once more. Maria recalls how excited she was about this activity this morning and realizes that now she just wants it to end.*

#### Questions for Leaders to Consider

How can you encourage educators to take risks when teaching, even if an ambitious activity doesn't go as planned? What systems of support help Maria learn from this experience, develop executive function skills, and then try again with a plan for predictable challenges? How can you create/enhance those systems?

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## Case Questions for Leaders to Use in Professional Learning Discussions

- What does Maria do well in this situation? How does she use executive functions- planning, goal-setting, and flexible thinking- in the case example?
- We see Maria deal with multiple demands at once- conflict at the water table, students fighting over too few glue sticks across the room- which cause her to make several decisions quickly, in real-time. Which executive functions- planning, goal-setting, and flexible thinking- are particularly important at this moment? How could these skills have helped Maria prevent the problem in the first place?
- We read about “predictable challenges” in the chapter and then see them in the case study. What barriers prevent educators from planning for these “predictable challenges”? How can educators and leaders work together to overcome some of these barriers?
- How could Maria use executive function skills to plan for a similar lesson? How could the instructional planning tools in the book help Maria prevent the challenges she faced in the case example? How could you use these tools to prevent challenges in your professional work?
- What steps are especially important to remember when planning? Which steps did Maria forget during this activity? What steps do you typically miss when planning your lessons and want to improve on?
- How could Maria use executive function skills to reflect on the situation? What role does reflection play in enhancing executive function skills? How is reflection part of your daily practice? How can the instructional reflection protocol in this book support your reflective practice?
- How can collaboration support planning and reflection in your professional work and settings?

## Self-Study Activity

This discussion highlighted the role of executive function skills in early learning settings. Much like we saw in the case example, educators often face challenges when implementing activities. Apply your learning from this chapter to your own challenges through the questions and prompts below:

- Think of a time when you faced challenges in implementation of an initiative or activity. Which of these challenges were predictable? What could you have done differently to prevent the problem?
- Now consider an upcoming initiative or activity and use one of the tools from the chapter to create a plan to predict challenges and use executive function skills for advanced preparation.