EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

FOR EVERY

CLASSROOM

CREATING SAFE AND PREDICTABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

GRADES 3–12

MITCH WEATHERS

FOREWORD BY PATRICE BAIN

CORWIN

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TEACHING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

One of my favorite experiences occurred 15 years ago while visiting a high school in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

One teacher, in particular, was making huge strides with her 5 classes, each with 30+ students, and was tracking the data to prove it. She found that by simply implementing a predictable learning routine and modeling each skill with binders, 30% more of her students were passing and her grade book had nearly 50% fewer missing assignments or zeros. The reason, of course, was that her students were developing their executive functioning skills!

This teacher decided to interview a handful of her students to better understand their experience. I was fortunate enough to visit her during her prep period when she was conducting a few student interviews. I will never forget her conversation with Darren.

I took a seat in the classroom as a young, wiry student wearing horn-rimmed glasses, walked into the room. The teacher had shared with me prior to his interview that Darren really struggled the previous year, behaviorally and academically. This year, however, he was doing much better, and she wanted to ask him about it.

Darren took a seat at a desk by a window, and they started casually chatting. He shared openly and honestly about his behavior and effort in school in the past and how things had changed for him this current school year. To conclude their conversation, she asked him how it made him feel to have all of his work neatly organized in his binder for her class. As if out of a movie, Darren paused and turned his gaze toward the window, seeming to ponder her question. Then, after a while, he turned back to her and said, "It makes me feel...smart." ●

Darren felt confident as a learner, maybe for the first time in his life. But his confidence did not come from test scores, grades, or even his teacher's ability to skillfully teach the content of the course. His confidence was rooted in the skills he was developing

as a consequence of engaging in a predictable routine in this teacher's class!

It was obvious that Darren saw himself as a capable student, certainly compared to his experience in previous years. How students perceive themselves within an academic context has a significant influence on their ability to succeed.

What Are Executive Functioning Skills?

A quick check that we are on the same page and share a common language around executive functioning skills. These skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus our attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. From my experience, these skills are often best learned at school, not at home. Despite caregivers' best intentions, trying to teach them at home can turn into a battle of wills. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, teaching executive functions offers a unique way to engage families, one that is not tied to content or curriculum (we will come back to this topic through the remaining chapters and conclusion).

Executive functioning skills is an umbrella phrase encompassing multiple categories. As educators, our task is to identify and teach the executive functions that have the greatest impact on learning. We also want to be certain that they are skills that we can meaningfully teach from within a class context—remember our sphere of influence. These skills allow students to skillfully engage in their schooling, regardless of the content they are learning. They are not only academic in nature; these are the skills we use every day in the workplace and in our personal lives. However, we will focus on six specific executive functioning skills that research has indicated have a profound impact on student learning and success.

Figure 2.1 depicts these skills: working memory, time and task management, organization, goal setting, accountability, and self-regulation:

In each remaining chapter, we will unpack how to bring clarity to the process of teaching these skills by modeling them with a

Figure 2.1

Executive Function Skills

Working Memory

Organization

Goal Setting

Accountability

Executive Function Skills

Time & Task Management

Self-Regulation

portfolio, and how students can get practice employing them by engaging in our predictable learning routine.

The Benefits

In the previous chapter, we explored the costs of underdeveloped executive functioning skills. Now let's consider the benefits of

students developing greater executive functioning, both for themselves and for their teachers (you!).

Student Benefits

What we discover when students begin to hone their executive functioning skills is a newly formed sense of "I got this!" When a particular skill moves from a student's conscious brain to their subconscious, it becomes their own. This is a game changer for students since it expands their agency as learners (and frees up working memory). Students' **self-efficacy** around school grows as their executive functioning skills increase and *this* is one source of the strength, or tenacity, needed to hang in there and not give up when school (and life) gets tough.

As students sharpen their executive functions, they have an easier time paying attention in class. In particular, **working memory** is linked to students' attentional skills. When students are better able to focus on what they are learning in a sustained fashion, they are more likely to experience success, but it also results in fewer off-task behaviors for teachers to manage.

When it comes to school, feeling that one belongs to the community matters, regardless of performance or grades. For struggling students, in particular, being a part of a learning community can make a profound difference. Because executive functions are best learned when they are practiced by virtue of routine, when teachers establish this routine, they create the opportunity for students to engage together as a learning community—and students are held accountable to do so. Every day in class students get to be active members of a community and it feels good to belong.

In addition to increasing belonging, there is something else that happens when students engage together via predictable learning routines—they all *look* the same. This provides a model that students can emulate, which ultimately affords them more opportunities to be successful (and therefore receive celebration). Designing daily opportunities for students to experience success within an academic context, which are not linked to content, is critical but we can't stop there—the key is to celebrate these victories. Rita Pierson poses a great question in her

TED Talk, "How do I raise the self-esteem of a child and his academic achievement at the same time?" (Pierson, 2013). I believe the answer is found in the promise of a predictable learning routine (more on this in Chapter 3).

When students, by virtue of our predictable routines, practice the skills and habits that help them succeed academically, it is a win-win-win scenario.

- **Win #1:** Students are an active part of our learning community and feel a greater sense of belonging.

- **Win #2:** Because of the predictable routine students find themselves consistently in a safer learning environment where they are more likely to take risks inherent to learning.

- **Win #3:** Students, by virtue of engaging in the daily learning routine, develop their executive functioning skills. All three work together to set them up for success.

Teacher Benefits

The truth is, just as many students struggle with executive dysfunction, so do many teachers. Troublingly, when students who struggle with organizational skills, for example, find themselves with a teacher who also struggles organizationally, the consequence for the student is amplified. These teachers discover that the predictable routine that organizes their students will also serve to better organize them as well.

Just as students feel better and develop a sense of agency in their learning as they begin to hone executive functioning skills, the same is true for teachers. Teachers who are organized are more efficient, often more effective, and foster a more calm and orderly learning environment. In particular, when teachers implement a predictable learning routine, they spend less time and energy managing behaviors and relationships and can focus on their students and teaching the content of their course.

When teachers implement the routine described in this book, they can rest assured that everyday students will have multiple opportunities to review what they are learning along with the chance to get their questions answered. Teachers will also have the opportunity to introduce each lesson while making clear to

students where we have come from and where we are going. This will also more easily allow students who were absent to quickly pick up on what they need to do to catch up.

Ultimately, teachers become confident that their students are developing as learners while they are learning the content of their grade level or course. When students get daily practice employing executive functions, they become transferable skills that stick with them, setting them up for success in subsequent school years and into their lives beyond K-12.

Family Benefits

As we touched on in the previous chapter, it goes without saying that students with more engaged families are more successful. We also know that most family members want to be a more active part of their child's education. If you ask most parents, they yearn for deeper, more meaningful conversations with their child about what they are learning as opposed to the usual check-ins like, "How school was today? Did you learn anything? Do you have any homework?"

Students are far more likely to hone executive functioning skills if they also receive support and accountability at home. Fortunately, this sort of family engagement is not tied to content, so family members can support their child's academic development even if they cannot support them with the content of the course or grade level (i.e., support with homework or activities from class done outside of school).

Historically, schooling has been focused entirely on content and if a parent cannot help their child with their homework, they are left with the general questions listed above. When teachers invite families to support the development of executive functioning skills, they engage them in their child's education in a powerful way. From my experience, families appreciate it.

Offering a guide or some structure for how parents can support this work at home is key. Tools for families include specific questions to ask their child, where to look in their portfolio if they want to see their goals or daily reflections, or asking whether or not they have homework. In doing so, teachers give families valuable insight into their child's learning process.

EXAMPLE FAMILY QUESTIONS

- Ask your child to summarize the content of what they learned that day in class, not just what they did in class.
- When possible, read your child's concluding reflections and discuss it with them!
- Check to see that your child is updating their table of contents each day in class and that all coursework has an assignment number and is in chronological order behind the table of contents.
- Read your child's goals and discuss it with them. Be sure to ask them if they are committing to their "daily task" throughout each quarter or marking period.

Clarity, Routine, and Modeling

As I mentioned earlier, these skills are not actually taught, in a traditional "teaching" sense. Executive functions are best learned when students see them **explicitly modeled** and get **daily practice** employing them in a no-stakes learning environment. Two major hurdles teachers face are that they rarely have enough time to teach their content in the first place, so the challenge is how to find more time to teach executive functioning skills. An additional concern is that teaching these skills may not lie in their zone of genius.

Thankfully, teachers don't have to "teach" these skills in order for students to learn them. Instead, they just need to know the three keys for teaching executive functioning skills:

1. Clarity

2. Routine

3. Modeling

We bring about **clarity** in our classrooms by committing to a **predictable routine**. We make that routine clear by **modeling** it each day for students.

Clarity

In her book, *Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit explains that for the sake of clarity teachers should make explicit what is implicit in

the classroom (Delpit, 1995). As teachers, we must guard ourselves against the natural propensity to make assumptions about what students understand and can accomplish, as these speculations can be hidden pitfalls for learning.

Unfortunately, most of the time, teachers are unaware that they are making assumptions about students. In order to become a more aware educator, this requires deliberate reflection on our practice to discover and tease out, then address, the assumptions we make about students.

On a recent visit to a TK-8 elementary school, I was fortunate enough to walk through classrooms to see teachers in action. In one room I watched as a 3rd grade teacher introduced a new math activity. The students were working with number lines, but before the teacher let the students engage in the activity, she asked them a series of questions such as, "We are going to work with number lines, so which workbook do you need to have out?" She then followed this up by asking, "Since we will be drawing lines, what tools do we need to be successful?" and, "What do you think, should we use pen or pencil for this activity?"

After each question, she would let students respond to be sure every student in the class knew exactly what they needed to successfully engage in the activity. Once it was clear that *every* student understood (which only took 1–2 minutes), she gave them the go-ahead to begin.

I was so impressed by this teacher! She made absolutely zero assumptions about what students knew regarding this math activity. Instead, she brought clarity to the activity, and as a result, it went off without a hitch. ●

What was obvious is that this teacher's students were not only having fun while learning; they felt a sense of empowerment because they knew exactly what to do to successfully engage. Taking the time to check our assumptions is critical to bring about clarity for students.

When teachers make a point to paint the gray areas black and white for their students, they bring clarity to the learning process.

The key is clarity, not content. Because this teacher was clear, 100% of her students knew what to do to successfully engage. That is different from saying 100% were successful with the content of the activity. She made sure every student could engage, then, while they were working, she could check in with students who had questions and or needed individual help with the concept. When teachers lack clarity, they inadvertently create gray areas—in other words, ambiguity and a lack of structure that can be troubling for students. When teachers

make a point to paint the gray areas black and white for their students, they bring clarity to the learning process.

If we zoom out for a moment, this is a model of how teaching executive functions, within the context of what students are learning, sets students up for success. It is a way to ensure that all students can more successfully engage in their learning, as teachers engage in the teaching of content.

I was standing at the front of my class when the bell rang, noticing the cortisol rise in my blood. The class had begun, but fewer than half of my students were in their assigned seats. Some students were in the room, others were standing outside of the classroom in the hall, while others, if I could even see them, were making their way to class. This was the way my class typically started and as a result, I was wasting precious minutes of instructional time each day.

I could hear my inner dialogue: "Why are they tardy? They must not care. I put so much effort into this lesson and now we are going to run out of time. I am a bad teacher."

Then it occurred to me: I had *my* idea of what it meant to be on time for class. I assumed everyone else held the same idea of punctuality. The truth is, in a class of 30 students, if I don't make explicit what it looks like to be on time then we are left with potentially 31 different versions of that idea.

This is what I did: The next day in class, I waited until every student arrived, tardy or not, and I told them, "Here is what it looks like to be on time to class." Then, I walked over to a student, asked to borrow their portfolio, and stepped outside of the classroom momentarily. Then, I walked back in, pretending to be a student, and sat at an empty desk in the classroom. I opened the portfolio to the page we used for our beginning routine and then sat there quietly.

Next, I stood up, handed the portfolio back to the student, and walked to the front of the classroom. I asked my students to turn to their neighbor and explain what it means to be on time for class. After asking a few students to share, I knew that everyone understood what it meant to be on time for class.

What I discovered was that when I made it crystal clear what it looked like to be on time for my class, without even using words, my tardy issue nearly disappeared. It was fascinating. Then, over time, fewer and fewer students arrived late to class. If students did arrive late, it was likely the result of a situation or factor outside of their control.

Clarity is king! ●

Clarity is what is needed when we aim to teach executive functions, and it can be infused into every aspect of our teaching practice. We can bring clarity to this process by establishing a predictable daily learning routine and modeling the use of these skills for students.

Routine

One way to be explicit as a teacher is to establish a predictable daily learning routine, which serves to create safer and more dependable learning spaces for students. When students feel safe, they are more likely to take risks inherent to learning. Learning environments that lack clarity can feel and actually be less safe for some students.

Figure 2.2 shows the daily routine we will explore in the coming chapters. Each day, we start with an explicit beginning routine before we move on to our agenda and table of contents, and on occasion the academic toolkit, to introduce the lesson and get organized. Then, teachers dive into their lessons and do what they do! In other words, the routine we will learn does not infringe upon academic freedom or change the way a teacher delivers their lesson or content. Then, as a calming conclusion, students take a moment to reflect each day on what they have learned in the final step of the routine.

Let's explore what a predictable learning routine can do for teachers and students.
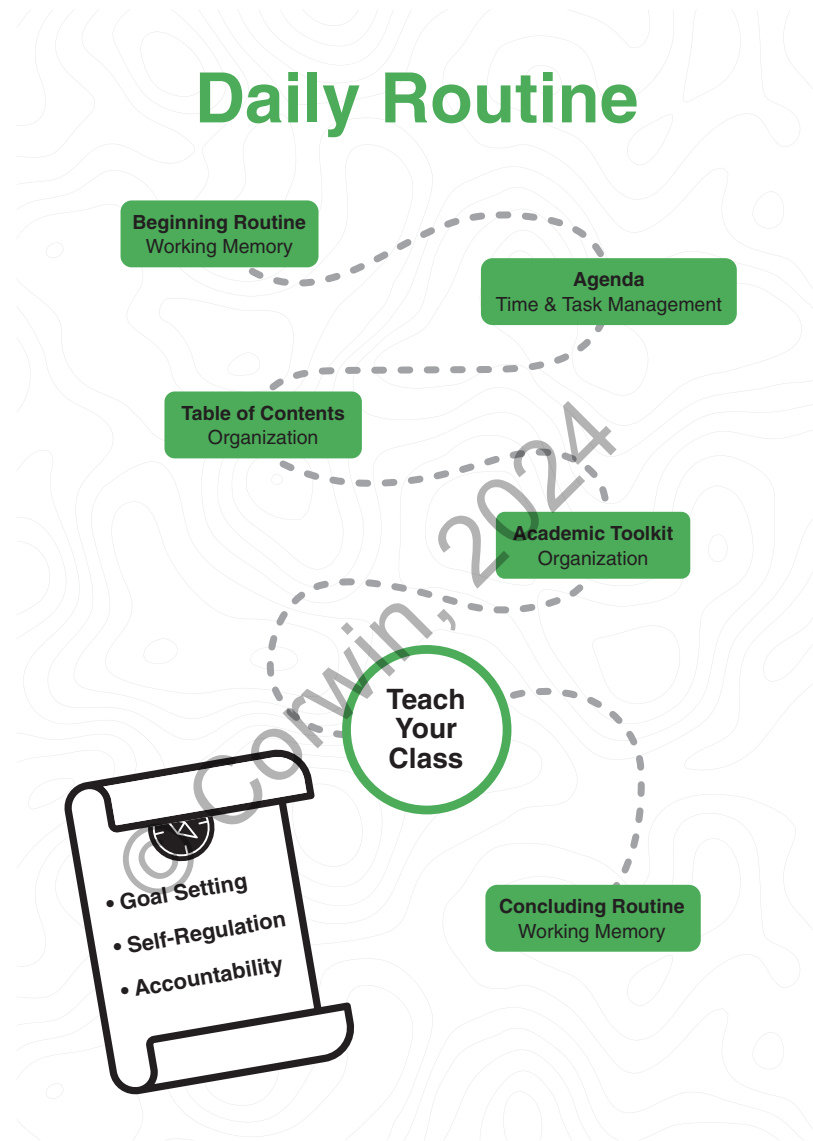
Routine and Classroom Management

Predictable learning routines set students up for success, but they also help teachers reduce classroom management issues that disrupt the learning environment.

During classroom walkthroughs, I like to mentally track how long it takes for the class to engage academically. I have found a strong correlation between how long it takes a teacher to start class and their overall classroom management issues. The longer it takes to get started usually indicates a teacher who struggles to control and manage behaviors and relationships in class. If, for example, it takes a teacher just one minute each day to start the lesson after class begins, that teacher wastes three hours of classroom time (1 minute × 180 days of school = 3 hours).

Besides the lost instructional time, classroom management issues breed during these undefined gray areas in lessons.

Daily Routine in Full

Daily Routine

Beginning Routine
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Hence, the slow start can lead to a lack of management. The good news is that a simple but consistent routine can take full advantage of these wasted minutes and utilize them for teaching and learning, which ultimately reduces the likelihood of off-task behaviors in the first place.

One day after class, just before lunch, I overheard a colleague consoling a very emotional student. As the tears raced down the student's cheeks, I could pick up a little of what she shared with the teacher. She was in the teacher's Primary Language section, a class taught entirely in Spanish. From their interaction, it was obvious that the student trusted him.

On our lunch break, I spoke with my colleague about the student and he shared that he had been concerned about her for a while. She was excelling in his class but failing her English class. When he asked her why, she confessed that she had been skipping her English class because she felt lost in the class. She often sat in the back of the classroom and struggled to keep up with her classmates. Over time, she had started falling behind and now felt overwhelmed.

During this class, the student explained that there were times when it seemed like there was nothing for students to do. There were gaps between the bell ringing and when the teacher started class, between finishing one activity and moving on to the next, and at the end of class, it was common for students to "hang out" for a few minutes until the bell rang to dismiss them.

This is a classic example of "gray areas" in a lesson. For some students, these undefined times are not troublesome, but for many students they are. A lot of students get lost in the gray and these moments of class do not feel safe because unstructured time can open students up to bullying, distractions, etc. The student in my colleague's class shared that the students who sat around her would turn and make fun of her during gaps in the lesson. To the teacher at the front of the room, this likely sounded like casual conversation, but in reality, this student was being bullied. When the class was engaged in an activity, the bullying stopped, and she felt safer.

In the coming days, I made a point to visit this particular class to observe how it started. What I discovered was that the teacher embodied many of the qualities of an effective educator. I could see that she liked her students, and her students liked her. But when the bell rang to start class, it was evident that she had a casual style that allowed for a lot of unstructured, "free" time. ●

Steve Farr in *Teaching as Leadership*, says it well, "Highly effective teachers use procedures and systems to maximize the value of each minute of learning...To be clear, these highly effective teachers sweat the details not because they are obsessed with control but because they see that this attention to detail translates into student learning" (Farr, 2009).

There is no doubt that a predictable routine can influence student behavior and engagement. When students know what we want them to do and they can do it, they are more likely to engage. As a reminder, a predictable routine creates safer spaces, reduces management issues, and saves class time, but if by virtue of engaging in the routine students get practice with executive functions, a seismic shift occurs in student success.

One day, just before class was about to begin, a 9th-grade intervention teacher was asked by a colleague if they could speak to her in the hallway. Keeping one foot in her classroom door to prop it open, the teacher leaned into the hall to speak with her colleague.

The bell rang to start class, but their conversation continued. After a few minutes, the teacher became nervous that she was not in class with her students and stepped into the classroom to check on them. To her glee, she found her students engaged in her beginning routine!

It turns out that one of her students had quietly walked to the front of the room and touched her presentation board to reveal their starting prompt. Each student had their portfolio open and began by recording the prompt and responding to it. When she did eventually rejoin her students, it was as if she had been with them the entire time. Her students knew what to do and willingly engaged when they had every opportunity to sit idle and chat with a neighbor.

Because this was an intervention class, which included students who needed extra support, her routine was crucial to their success. In fact, she rarely had to deal with classroom management issues. When I asked her why, she did not hesitate even a second to respond, "Routine!" Her students found safety and structure in the predictable nature of her class. ●
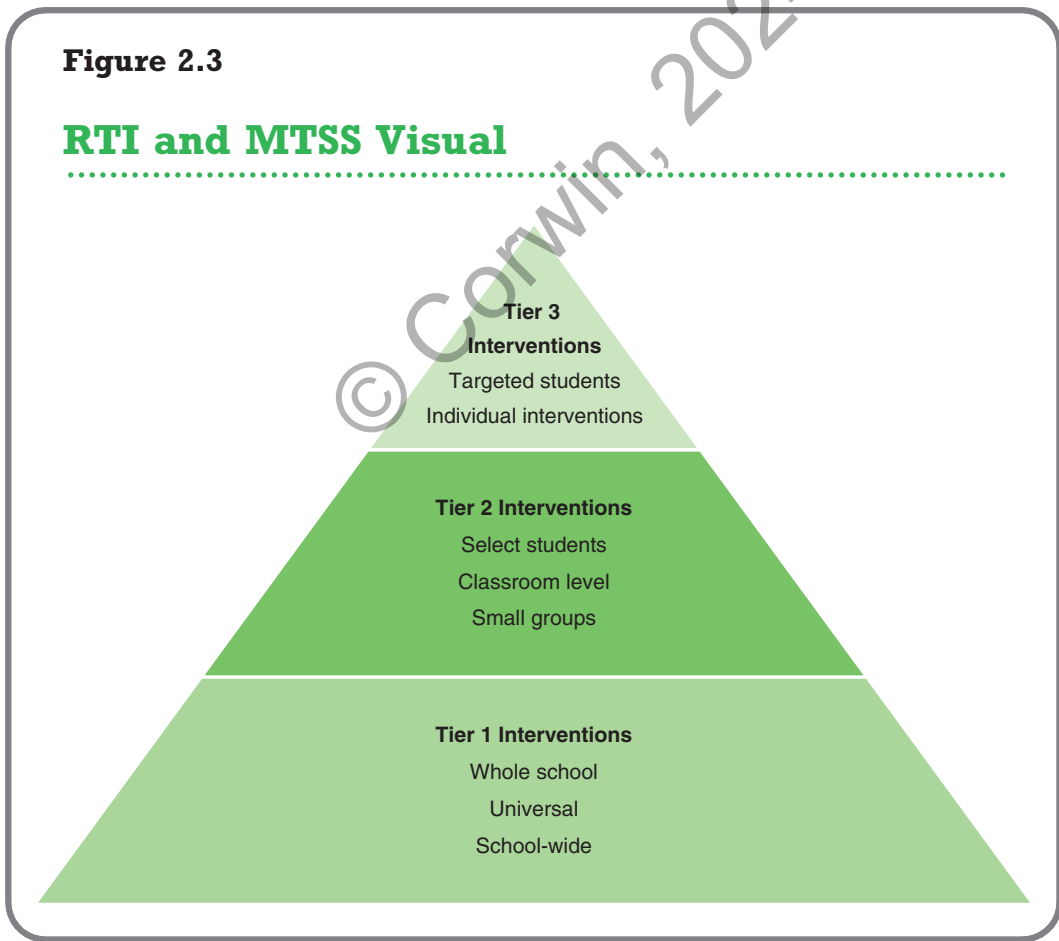
Routine and Inclusive Practices

When we consider Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) models, tiered frameworks that schools use to give targeted support for students, the need for a true universal Tier 1 resource cannot be overstated. Most Special Education educators well understand this. However, universal Tier 1 support is meant for general education classes; it is for all students. I like how a director of Special Education recently stated it at a conference we both attended: "Our focus is on raising awareness that ***all*** students are general education

students first and should have the right to *all* general education curricula. The job of special services is to provide access to general education, not replace or supplant it."

Think of RTI and MTSS school models as a pyramid, similar to Figure 2.3. The further up the pyramid, the more targeted or specific student intervention or support may be. A true Tier 1 resource should do more than just offer support; it should help identify students who are struggling and, in many cases, remediate that student's issue or concern. Tier 2 and 3 interventions should only be for students who are facing barriers or challenges that cannot be identified and addressed in the first tier.

Without an effective first tier, schools often push most issues up the pyramid, ultimately overtaxing the Tier 2 process. As a good friend once told me, "You can't Tier 2 yourself out of a

Figure 2.3

RTI and MTSS Visual

**Tier 3
Interventions**
Targeted students
Individual interventions

Tier 2 Interventions
Select students
Classroom level
Small groups

Tier 1 Interventions
Whole school
Universal
School-wide

Tier 1 problem." Teaching executive functions through a school-wide predictable learning routine is an authentic universal RTI or MTSS Tier 1 intervention and one that does not infringe upon academic freedom or interfere with content instruction.

By incorporating this work into general education classes, all students benefit from practice with executive functions. In doing so, we create more inclusive learning environments where all students are welcome and growing as learners.

The Power of Shared Routine

There is power in shared routines. In fact, "Schools cannot expect a change in outcomes until initiatives are implemented by the majority of teachers" (Donohoo, 2021). Committing to a shared routine promotes collective teacher efficacy, the belief that through collective action, teachers can influence student outcomes and increase achievement, which has more than triple the impact on student success compared to other factors like socioeconomic status, home environment, and student motivation (Hattie, 2016). When teachers commit to implementing the same predictable routine, they reduce the cognitive load for students. When the cognitive load is lightened, it frees up working memory. Think of working memory as the bank of cognitive energy, or mental calories, students have to do the work of learning. With a shared routine, students spend less cognitive energy navigating the school day and therefore have a greater capacity for learning.

Shared routines do not have to infringe on academic freedom. As shown in Figure 2.2, a predictable routine is largely taking advantage of the first few and last few moments of the school day or class period. This allows teachers to commit to a common routine while maintaining autonomy and creativity in the way they teach the content of their class. Some researchers refer to this as the "tight but loose" approach:

> *On the one hand, a reform will have limited effectiveness and no sustainability if it is not flexible enough to take advantage of local opportunities while accommodating certain unmovable local constraints. On the other hand, a reform needs to maintain fidelity to its core principles, or theory of action, if there is to be any hope of achieving its desired outcomes. The Tight but Loose formulation combines an obsessive adherence to central design principles (the*

tight part) with accommodations to the needs, resources, constraints, and particularities that occur in any school or district (the loose part), but only where these do not conflict with the theory of action of the intervention.

(Thompson, 2008)

Interestingly, teachers across grade levels and content areas who adopt a common predictable daily learning routine find that they have even more instructional time than when they went at it alone. This is the result of getting clear with colleagues on what part they need to be "tight" on—the learning routine, and what part they can be "loose" on—how they teach or deliver the content of their course!

When it comes to developing executive functions, a shared routine can reduce the uptake time. If students get the opportunity to engage in the same routine in every class or grade level, teachers afford even more practice with the skills—essentially accelerating the process. Teachers who have a strong predictable routine not only have more instructional time, but ultimately their students are more successful.

Modeling

Modeling is essential to making a predictable routine explicit for students. Although modeling is the third key to teaching these skills, you will notice that all three—clarity, routine, and modeling—work together.

The routine becomes clear only when it is modeled. It is possible to gauge clarity by whether or not words are required to communicate expectations. Recall the story of how I communicated what it meant to be on time to my class: It would have never worked had I not had a color-coded class portfolio in hand to model for students what our beginning routine looked like. The same holds true for our next steps in the routine, transitions, and how we conclude each day—they all require modeling if our goal is clarity.

Without a model, we forfeit clarity. Students must see executive functions modeled as they get practice employing them by engaging in the predictable routine. Without both routine and modeling, students will be less likely to hone these skills. Think

back to the teacher in the Introduction who provided binders for his students but never created a model for what it looked like to be organized. The result: his students were disorganized and experienced less success. That is why class samples that serve as a model are of utmost importance if you are going to teach executive functioning skills.

Revisiting Robert Belfanz's quote, "In moving to college and career readiness for all, we must now teach some skills formerly learned by students on their own. All students need lessons and ***modeling*** of study and work skills like time and task management, note taking, and assignment completion strategies…" (Belfanz, 2009). Interestingly, with a goal of clarity, teachers use routine and modeling to teach executive functions. Students, once they hone their executive functioning skills, find clarity in their learning.
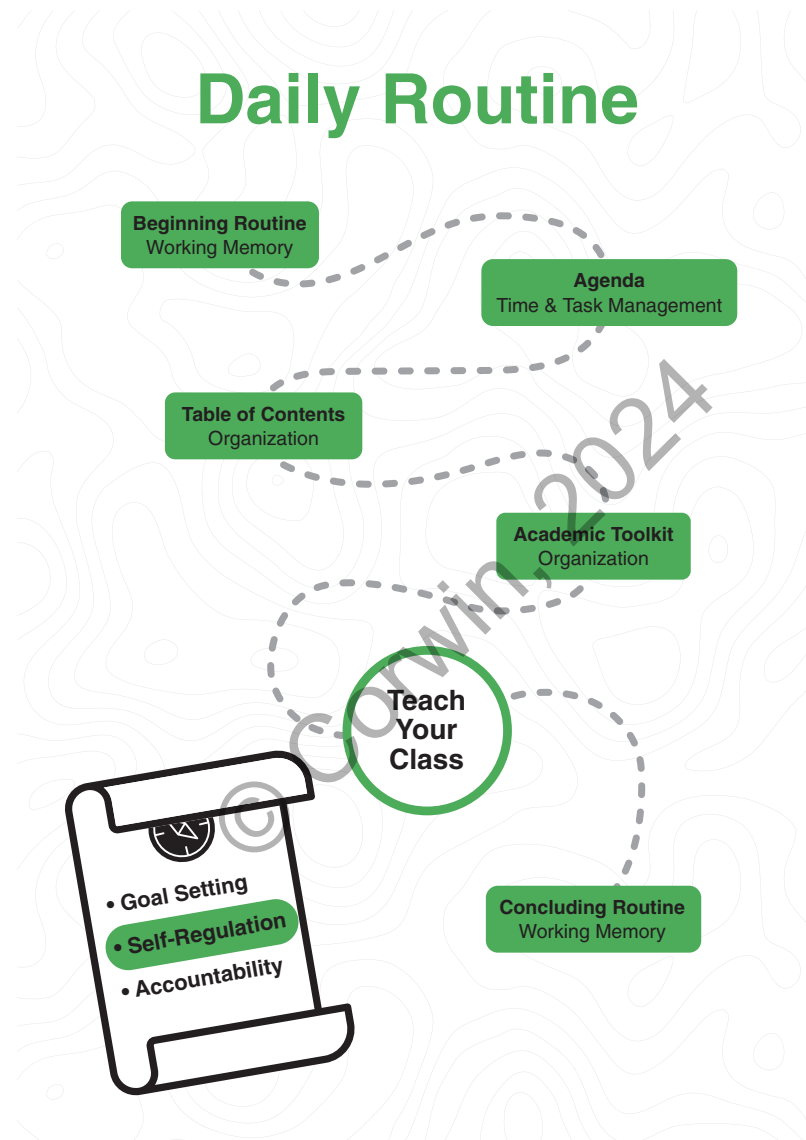
Self-Regulation Through a Daily Routine

As mentioned above, each chapter will explore how to teach a different executive function, except for self-regulation. Because it is inherent to strategies introduced to teach each of the other skills, self-regulation will be discussed just before the conclusion at the end of each remaining chapter. I am also including self-regulation within each chapter because executive functions have been shown to help promote or further self-regulation (Hofmann, 2012). Therefore, I want to unpack how each skill can give students the opportunity to practice self-regulation. Before we move on, let's take a moment to introduce self-regulation to understand why it is innate to each step of the routine and how it is incorporated into each strategy we will learn in the coming chapters.

Self-regulation is a key component of academic success. It is loosely defined as an individual's ability to control themselves, primarily their emotions and behaviors, in order to stay on target to accomplish their goals. In the classroom, self-regulation is particularly important because students who can manage distractions and stay focused on a task are far more likely to succeed than students who struggle to self-regulate. Therefore, we

Figure 2.4

Self-Regulation and the Daily Routine

Daily Routine

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can consider self-regulation as a predictor of academic success. Students who have stronger self-regulation skills are more likely to perform better in school while the opposite is true for those who struggle with self-regulation. Hence the importance, as with

all executive functioning skills, of students getting practice self-regulating.

A lack of self-regulation can be mistaken for a student's inability to sit still. And although there are connections between the two, a human's ability to self-regulate is much broader in scope than simply sitting still at a desk at school. Don't mistake the inability to self-regulate with boredom resulting from poor teaching, unengaging lessons, or activities students perceive as meaningless busy work. Without skillful teaching and a fair and equitable routine, many students, from time to time, may exhibit off-task behaviors that can be interpreted as the inability to self-regulate. Gone should be the days of lessons that consist largely of one-and-done lectures where students "sit and get" as an adult drones on from the front of the room. As we highlighted earlier, many students already experience their education as passive objects, and our goal is to find ways to actively engage them in their education. Because our routine gives students no-stakes opportunities to self-regulate, holding them accountable for actively participating each day can help!

Without skillful teaching and a fair and equitable routine, many students, from time to time, may exhibit off-task behaviors.

When teachers establish a consistent daily learning routine for their class and commit to implementing it every single lesson, they present students with an opportunity to self-regulate. Because the class is engaging in the routine together, the teacher is inviting each student to participate. This invitation is a question that students must ask themselves each day: "Will I engage with my peers in the routine or not?" As students' ability to self-regulate grows, so does their self-awareness. When students are aware of how they are feeling and yet still have to make the choice to participate, the class results in strengthening one's ability to self-regulate.

A consistent daily routine provides students with a self-regulation "call to action" and is the most effective way to substantially incorporate a "no opt-out" policy—meaning, students need to make an effort to engage in the routine, and they are held accountable to do so. In other words, no one is allowed to not participate. Why incorporate a "no opt-out" policy? First, it communicates to students that they matter to you, to the class, and to the world. Second, a thriving classroom is the sum of all its parts. Learning communities do not function the same if every part of that community is not present and engaged. Yet it is difficult, at times, for students to actively participate in the curriculum if they are struggling to understand. However, they can

actively participate in the *routine*, even if they are still striving to understand the content. This is why teachers need to ensure that they communicate and show their students that making mistakes is okay, that they are part of the learning process, and something we cannot hold students accountable for. Our routine, however, is something that we can hold students accountable for participating in because the purpose is engagement, not accuracy.

This is so important that of his 49 strategies that put students on the path to college, Doug Lemov lists a "no opt-out policy" first in *Teach Like a Champion*, and for good reason! (Lemov, 2010). For students with a fixed mindset, those who believe they cannot succeed or have experienced historical academic failure, not trying, or opting out, is the safest route. If students choose not to engage, then their risk of failure is greatly diminished. Yet we want to cultivate opportunities for engagement, those that are not necessarily tied to content, so we can find small victories to celebrate to amplify engagement! The daily routine is what makes a no opt-out policy feasible for teachers to realistically incorporate while ensuring that students get daily opportunities to practice self-regulation.

Conclusion

In each of the following chapters, we will explore specific executive functions, beginning with working memory. We will unpack how to bring about clarity by embedding practice with each skill into a coherent learning routine and how a portfolio can be used to model each executive function.

Let's jump in.

Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on your own practice. In what areas do you make assumptions about what students can do or accomplish?
2. What gray areas do you see in your practice that can be painted black and white? What are students experiencing during these times? How could you provide more safety and consistency?

3. What does your daily learning routine look like? Are there any ideas from this chapter that you can incorporate to bring more clarity to your routine?

4. How do you see a predictable routine influencing management issues in classrooms?

5. Does your school have an authentic Tier 1 resource or intervention in place?

6. How can you incorporate opportunities in your lessons to explicitly give students practice with self-regulation?

7. Is it possible to collaborate with your colleagues to implement a shared routine? What would that look like?

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Working Memory

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