Practical Strategies to Improve Executive Function Skills

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UNDERSTANDING EXECUTIVE CONTROL

How is Situational Intelligence/Time Awareness for Executive Control Developed?

Specific Time of Day Sequences: Before, After, During, etc.

Translate Bedtime routine:

- **space** – in my own home, upstairs, bathroom, bedroom
- **time** – 7:30, after Dora
  - **sequence** – bath before pajamas
- **objects** – pajamas, toothbrush, washcloth, etc.
- **people** – need dad to read a story, need mom to brush out my hair

Time Involved, Logical Order, Get a Feel for Time

To cooking routine:

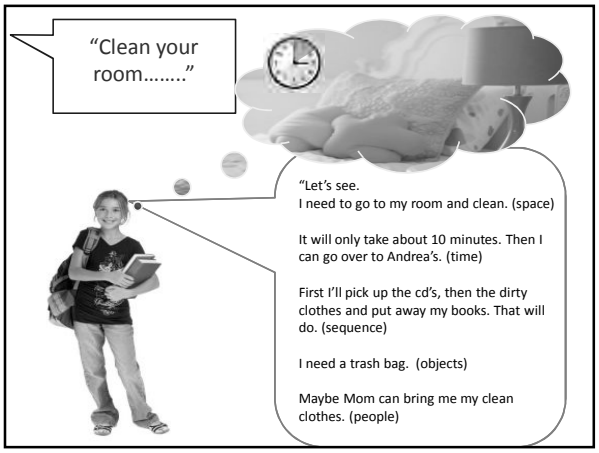
- **space** – in the kitchen
- **time** – prep time, cooking time, clean up time
  - **sequence** – check ingredients before mixing
- **Objects** – recipe, ingredients, utensils, dishes
- **people** – help turning on the stove

Being Aware

Under What Condition: When is it the 'right' time?

Cleaning Routine:

- **Space**
- **Time**: Before you leave the house, before guests come, after a mess, to have a clear mind, before the cleaners come
  - **Sequence**: items off the floor, make the bed, maybe vacuum and dust
- **Objects**: trash bag, laundry basket, vacuum, duster
- **People**: mom, dad, cleaners



Home Routines Translate to School Routines

-Routines are Procedures that ensure the effective use of time and space.

The regular daily routines help establish the neurologic structure for classroom life.

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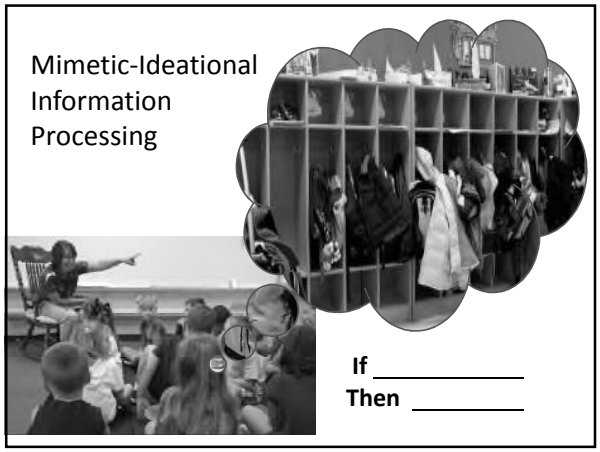
Situational Awareness

STOP and Read the Room

Space	Time	Objects	People
Read the Room	**Get on the Timeline**	**Sense the Organization**	**Read the Person**
Where am I? What's going on? Is this Expected? Unexpected?	Time of day (routine vs. non-routine) What is happening at this Moment in Time What is coming up? *Predictable sequence What Pace is Required?	How are things Organized? We Consider the basis for their Organization: Location Purpose	Face Body Appearance Mood Pace Saying

Mimetic-Ideational Information Processing



If _____

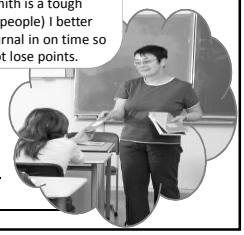
Then _____

Self Directed Imagery and Self Speech Precede The Development of Planning and Problem Solving Skills

" So I better go to my locker (space).
I only have a few minutes before the bell rings (time)

I need to get my poetry journal (object) and then I have science class next (time) so I better get my lab goggles too(objects).

Mrs. Smith is a tough teacher (people) I better turn my journal in on time so I do not lose points.



If _____

Then _____

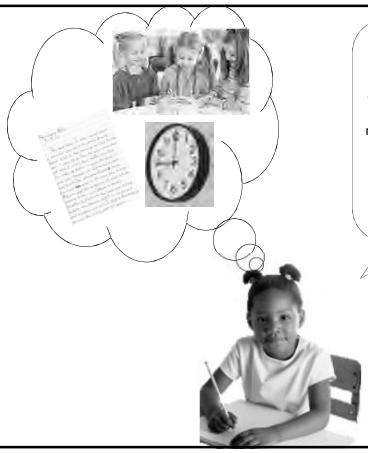
What If .....?

"What, Where, And When"

"Why?"

If _____

Then _____



"Let's see, I can write about Lauren's birthday party. It was so fun! I need an intro sentence and a few details about what we did. I need "expensive adjectives". We learned how to make things out of frosting. My cake had pretty flowers. My best friend got a cool new backpack

Ok Class! It is time to work in our writer's journal! Start thinking about what you did over the weekend!

"Oh! I can't remember what I did this weekend. What am I going to write about?
This is going to take *forever*....."

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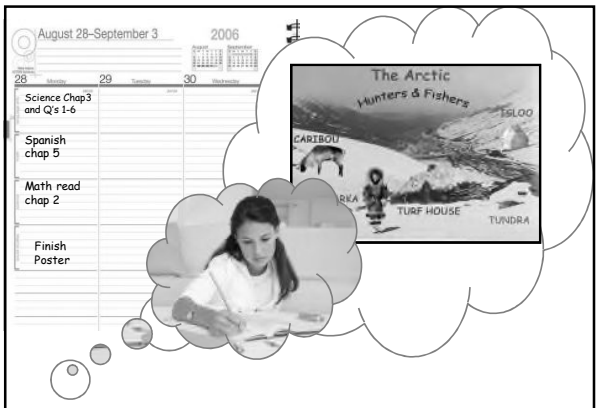
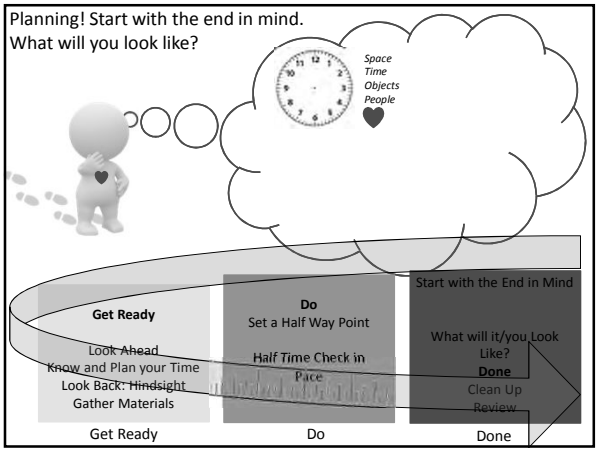
Prospective Memory
The Time Horizon/Temporal Window

The Ability To Remember To Do Something In The Future

Immediately *Next* *Later* *In Awhile* *Tomorrow* *Coming Up*





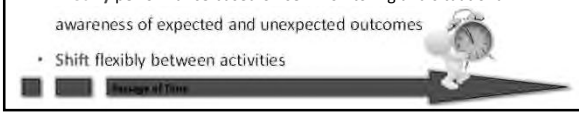
Give the Student Future Glasses!

Develops the Skill of Comparing Planned vs Actual

Operational Definition of the Executive Function Skills

Brain functions/skills that allows us to . . .

- **Demonstrate** situational awareness
- **Predict** possible outcomes and **Recall** past experiences
- **Generate** a plan to achieve that outcome (even if it is a novel event)
- **Initiate** appropriate actions and or responses to situations
- **Monitor** in an ongoing manner the success or failure of one's behavior (planned vs. actual)
- **Modify** performance based on self monitoring and situational awareness of expected and unexpected outcomes
- **Shift** flexibly between activities



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Developmental List Of Executive Function Skills

From Executive Function Skills in Children and Adolescents, by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare

Preschool

- Run simple errands (e.g., "Get your shoes from the bedroom").
- Tidy bedroom or playroom with assistance.
- Perform simple chores and self-help tasks with reminders (e.g., clear dishes from table, brush teeth, get dressed).
- Inhibit behaviors: don't touch a hot stove; don't run into the street; don't grab a toy from another child; don't hit, bite, push, etc.

Kindergarten – Grade 2

- Run errands (two to three step directions).
- Tidy bedroom or playroom.
- Perform simple chores, self-help tasks; may need reminders (e.g., make bed).
- Bring papers to and from school.
- Complete homework assignments (20-minute maximum).
- Decide how to spend money (allowance).
- Inhibit behaviors: follow safety rules, don't swear, raise hand before speaking in class, keep hands to self.

Grades 3—5

- Run errands (may involve time delay or greater distance, such as going to a nearby store or remembering to do something after school).
- Tidy bedroom or playroom (may include vacuuming, dusting, etc.).
- Perform chores that take 15—30 minutes (e.g., clean up after dinner, rake leaves).
- Bring books, papers, assignments to and from school.
- Keep track of belongings when away from home.
- Complete homework assignments (1 hour maximum).

Grades 3—5 (continued)

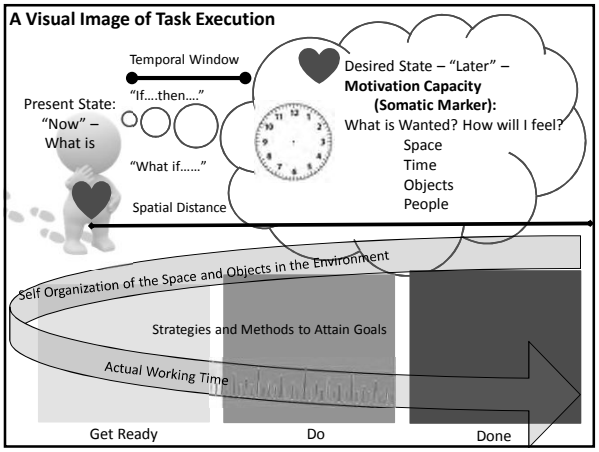
- Plan simple school project such as book reports (select book, read book, ‘write report).
- Keep track of changing daily schedule (i.e., different activities after school).
- Save money for desired objects, plan how to earn money.
- Inhibit/self-regulate: behave when teacher is out of the classroom; refrain from rude comments, temper tantrums, bad manners.

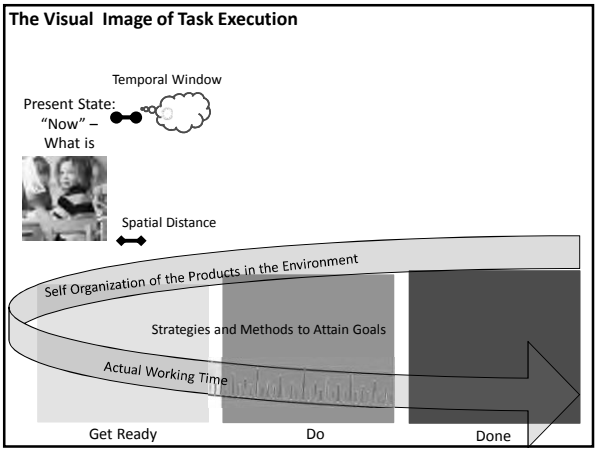
Grades 6—8

- Help out with chores around the home, including both daily responsibilities and occasional tasks (e.g., emptying dishwasher, raking leaves, shoveling snow); tasks may take 60—90 minutes to complete. Baby-sit younger siblings or for pay.
- Use system for organizing schoolwork, including assignment book, notebooks, etc. Follow complex school schedule involving changing teachers and changing schedules.
- Plan and carmy out long-term projects, including tasks to be accomplished and reasonable timeline to follow; may require planning multiple large projects simultaneously.
- Plan time, including after school activities, homework, family responsibilities; estimate how long it takes to complete individual tasks and adjust schedule to fit.
- Inhibit rule breaking in the absence of visible authority.

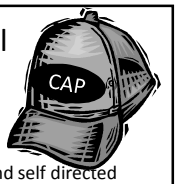
High school

- Manage schoolwork effectively on a day-to-day basis, including completing and handing in assignments on time, studying for tests, creating and following timelines for long-term projects, and making adjustments in effort and quality of work in response to feedback from teachers and others (e.g., grades on tests, papers).
- Establish and refine a long-term goal and make plans for meeting that goal. If the goal beyond high school is college, the youngster selects appropriate courses and maintains grade point average (GPA) to ensure acceptance into college. The youngster also participates in extracurricular activities, signs up for and takes Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) or American College Tests (ACTs) at the appropriate time and carries out the college application process. If the youngster does not plan to go to college, he or she pursues vocational courses and, if applicable, employment outside of school to ensure the training and experience necessary to obtain employment after graduation.
- Make good use of leisure time, including obtaining employment or pursuing recreational activities during the summer.
- Inhibit reckless and dangerous behaviors (e.g., use of illegal substances, sexual acting out, shoplifting, or vandalism).





Developing Executive Control in Students



Executive **C**ognition: private mental and self directed

Executive **A**ctions: overt and observable

Executive **P**rops

"Props help one extend even further across space and time by creating a more permanent form of self directed speech"

*Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved. Russell A. Barkley PhD

The Ultimate Goal?

Students Understand that All Tasks Start with "What will it look like?"

Give the Child Future Glasses

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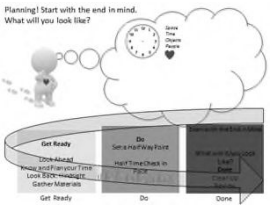
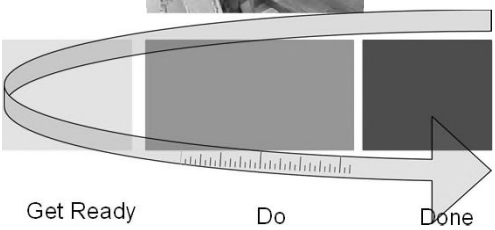
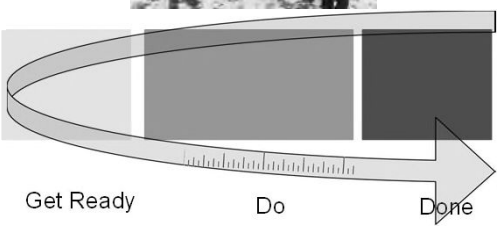
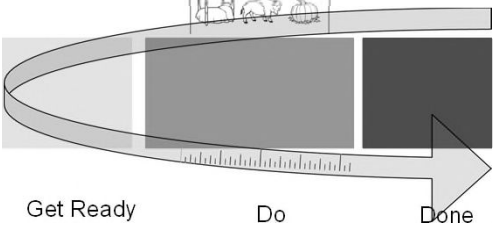
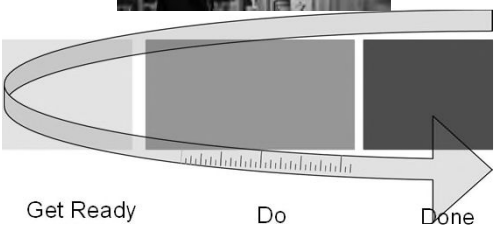
Goal: Students Understand
All Tasks Have 3 Phases
[Context Dependent]

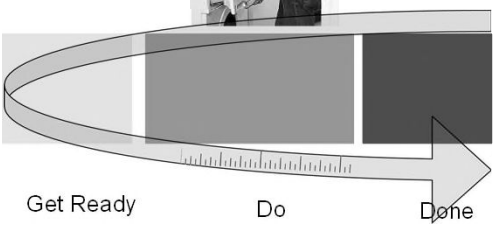












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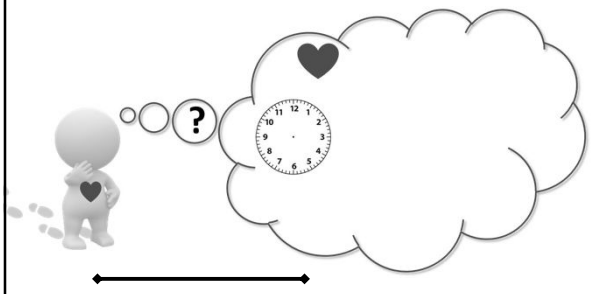
Goal: Develop the Extended Time Horizon



Stop and Read the Room:

Space: Baseball Field (Town park)

Time: What is happening in this moment in time?

Objects: Large Trophy (bat, glove and ball, bag, bases)

People: Players (coaches, parents, ssiblings)

If….. they have a big trophy and are cheering

Then….. they just won the championship game

Before: They won the big Championship Game

Now: Photographed

Next: More pictures; Pack up and get in the cars; Pizza/ice cream; Celebrating in school/newspaper

- Immediately
- Within the next 10 minutes
- After an hour
- Tomorrow

Stop and Read the Room:

Space: Bedroom (house: hall, bathroom, bedrooms)

Time: It is play time. She is playing Dress Up.

Objects: Box (dog house); Dog "Costume", Marker

People: Nancy, Brother (mom)

If….. she has a marker and her brother is a "dog"

Then….. she is going to draw on his face

Before: They searched for items to make a dog costume and dog items with

Now: Playing Doggy

Next: Draw on his face; Put the Dog to bed/take dog for a Walk; Lunch; Vet

- Immediately
- Within the next 10 minutes
- After an hour/later
- Tomorrow

Stop and Read the Room:

Space:

Time:

Object

People

If…..

Then…..

Before

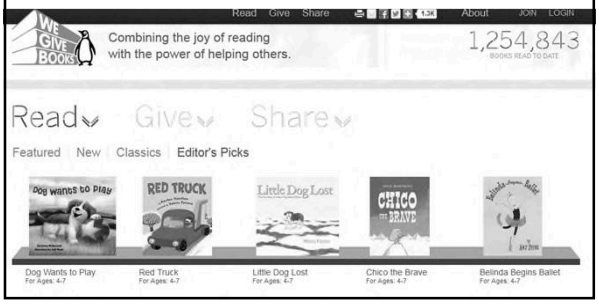
Now

Next

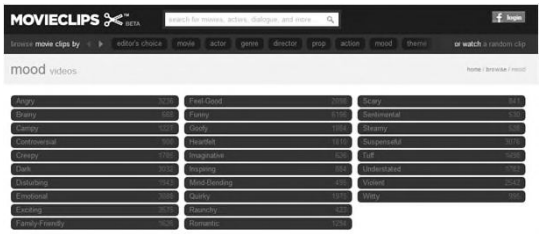
- Immediately
- Within the next 10 minutes
- After an hour
- Tomorrow

Need a Resource for Easy Access to Picture Books?

wegivebooks.org



Movie Clips Website: Develop the Extended Time Horizon and Determine Time Between Contexts



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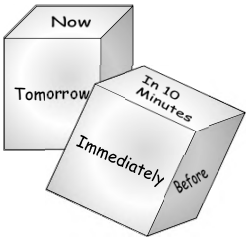
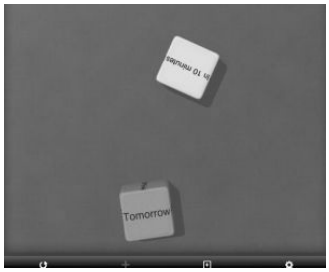
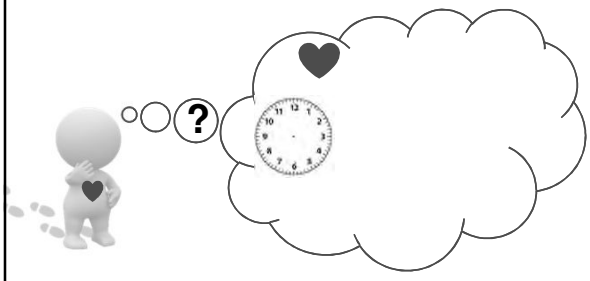
Try Using Dice



Make Dice App!



Goal: Start with the End in Mind- "What will it look like?"

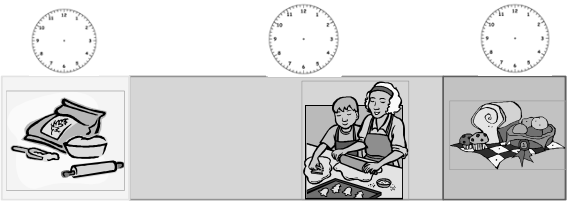


Give the Child Future Glasses

Teaching Future Thinking: Sequencing

- Ask the student to identify which is the "future picture"
- Ask them to pair the pictures by the three phases of tasks: Get Ready, Doing, Done:

- If steps are not pictured, ask the student to draw or describe them
- Ask student how their experiences would be the same but different when given different scenarios (Develops "What If.." thinking)
- Give the student a scenario and ask which stage of the planning phase is effected.
- Have students estimate the time for each step.



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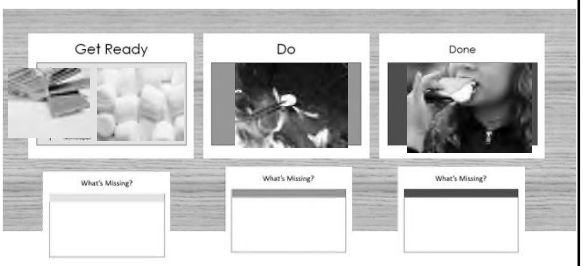
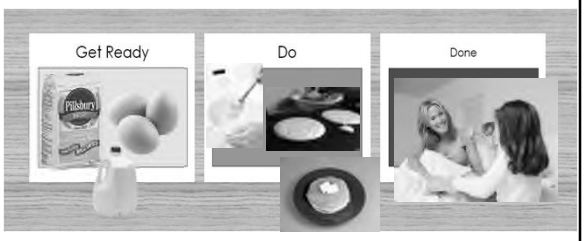
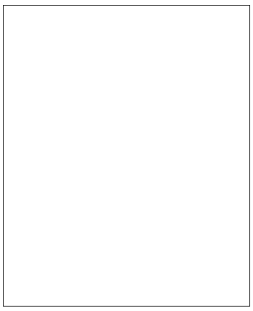


Put on Your Future Glasses!



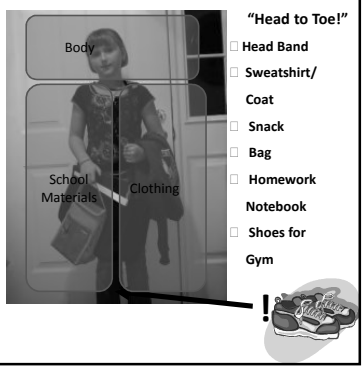
Organized Self: Match the Picture



"Head to Toe!"

- ☐ Head Band
- ☐ Sweatshirt/ Coat
- ☐ Snack
- ☐ Bag
- ☐ Homework / Notebook
- ☐ Shoes for Gym

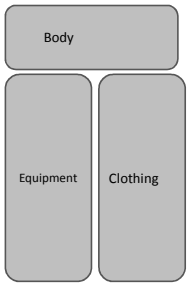
"We have to go! Are you ready for school?"



"Head to Toe!"

- ☐ Head Band
- ☐ Sweatshirt/ Coat
- ☐ Snack
- ☐ Bag
- ☐ Homework Notebook
- ☐ Shoes for Gym

"Are you ready for baseball?"
Same but Different



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Apps for Match the Picture

Skitch App!

Doodle Buddy App

My Video Schedule

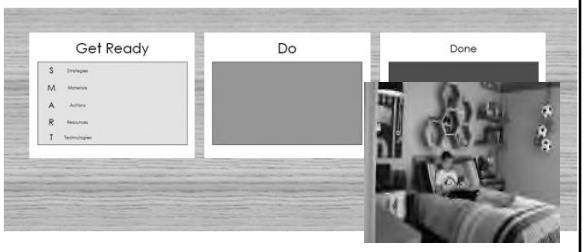
For Older Students - Transition

Goodwill Community Foundation Tutorials

- www.gcflearnfree.org/everydaylife

Clean your Bedroom

Clean Your Bedroom



Counter Cleaner

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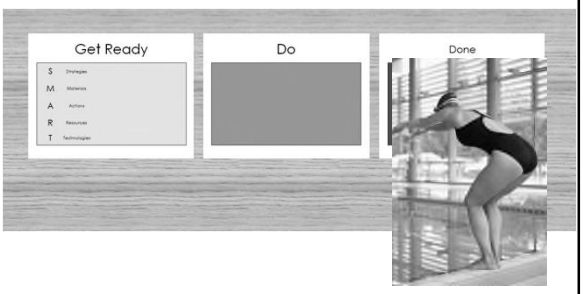
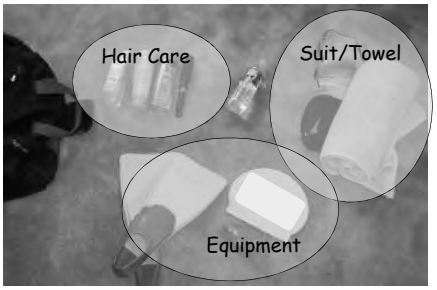
Swim Practice



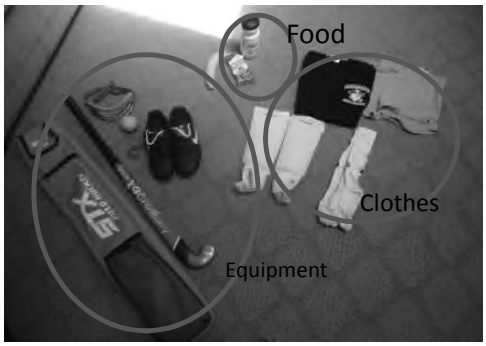
Is your Bag packed?

- ☐ Shampoo
- ☐ Conditioner
- ☐ Brush
- ☐ Lotion
- ☐ Water Bottle
- ☐ Swimsuit
- ☐ Towel
- ☐ Cap
- ☐ Goggles
- ☐ Flippers

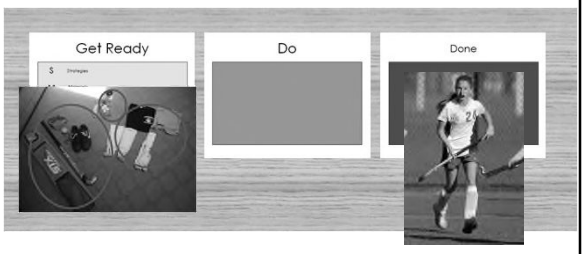


Use Luggage Tags: Is your Bag packed?

Take a Picture. See It. Do It!:
Is my field hockey bag packed?(Thanks Dr. K.!)



Get Ready – Do - Done



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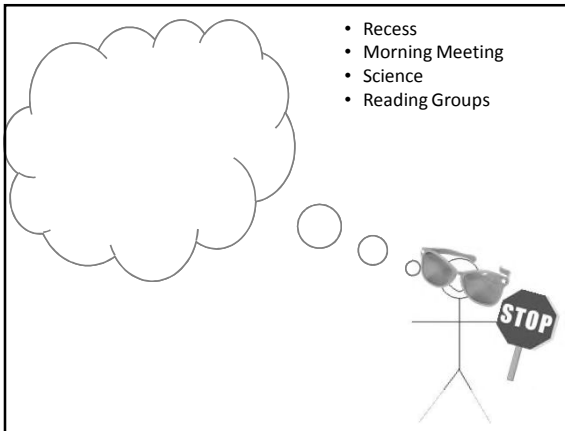
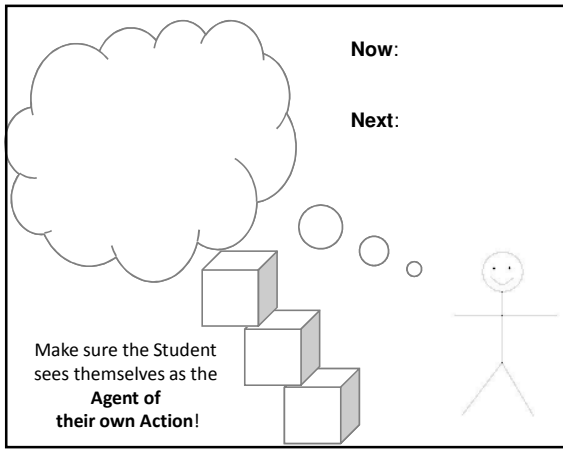
What will I look like? Transitioning



- Recess
- Morning Meeting
- Science
- Reading Groups

Practice in Real Time Situations
STOP and Read the Room – If….then…?

Helicopter Taxi App



Now:

Next:

Make sure the Student sees themselves as the **Agent of their own Action**!

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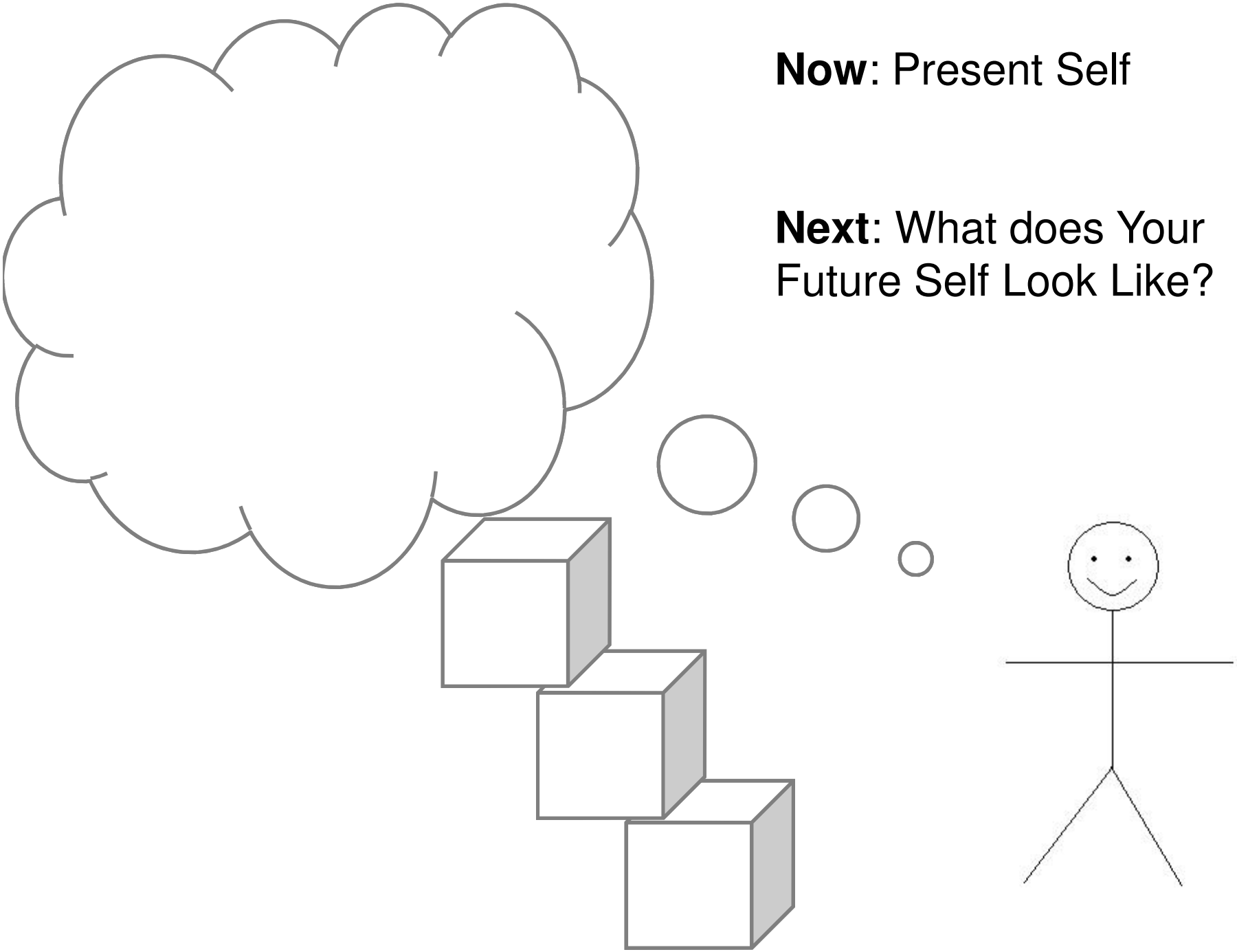
Now: Present Self

Next: What does Your Future Self Look Like?



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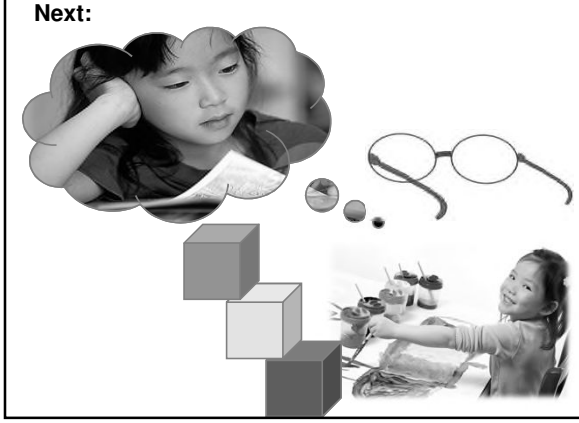
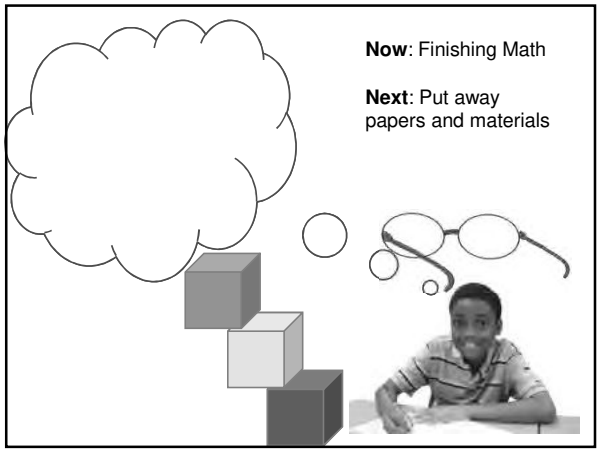
Next:



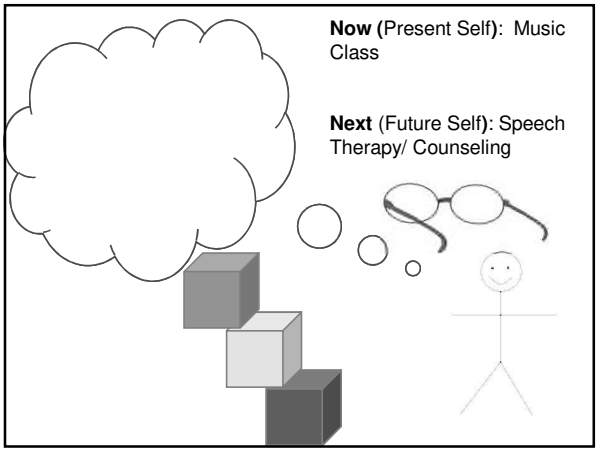
Now: Finishing Math

Next: Put away papers and materials



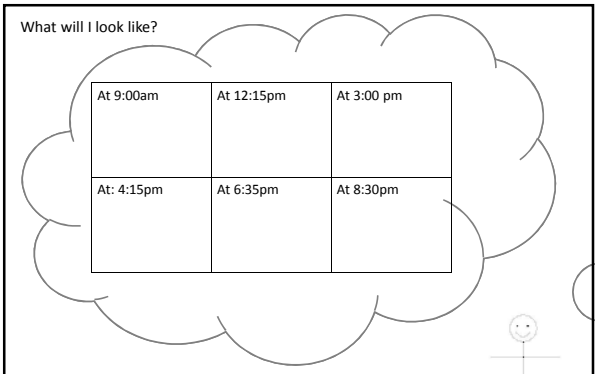
Now (Present Self**)**: Music Class

Next (Future Self**)**: Speech Therapy/ Counseling



What will I look like?

At 9:00am	At 12:15pm	At 3:00 pm
At: 4:15pm	At 6:35pm	At 8:30pm



Now: Present Self Getting Dressed in the morning. I am thinking ahead about the day – What do I look like today?

Next: What does my Future Self Look Like at these specific times?

What will you look like when you leave here today?

Future Glue

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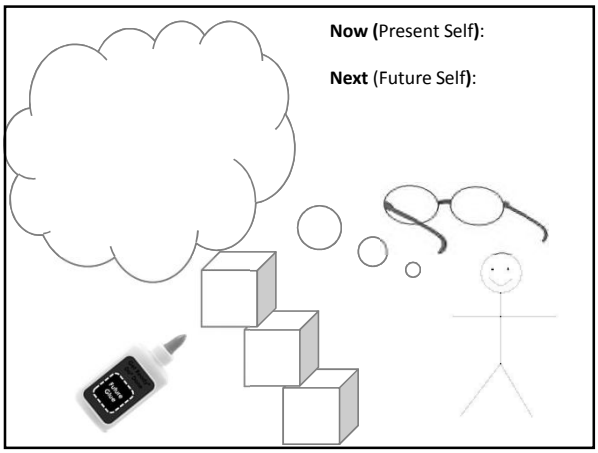
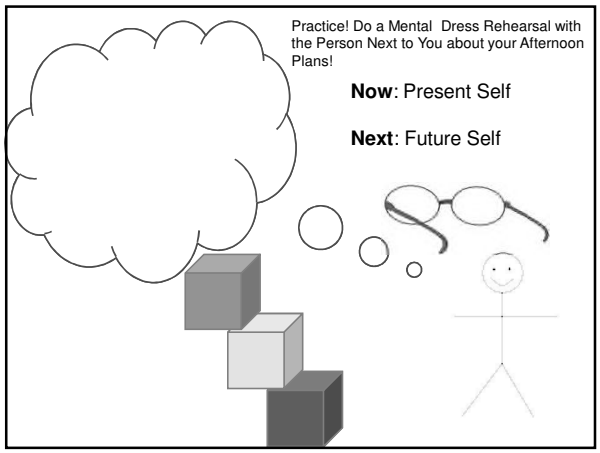
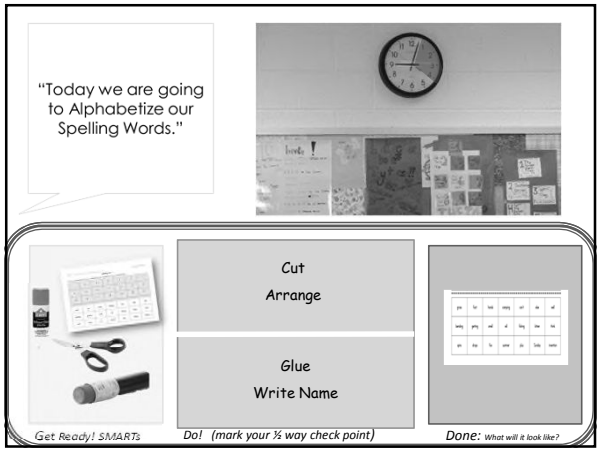




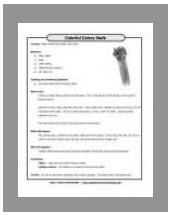
Get Ready * Do * Done

IN THE CLASSROOM



Lab Today: Celery Science Experiment

S
M
A
R
T



Get Ready

S	Strategies /Sheets
M	Materials
A	Art Supplies
R	Resources /Reach Out
T	Technologies

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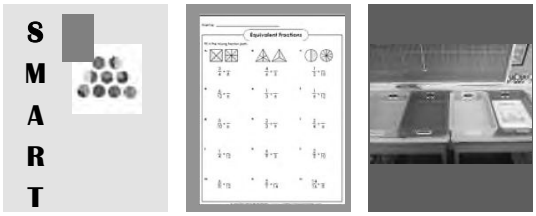
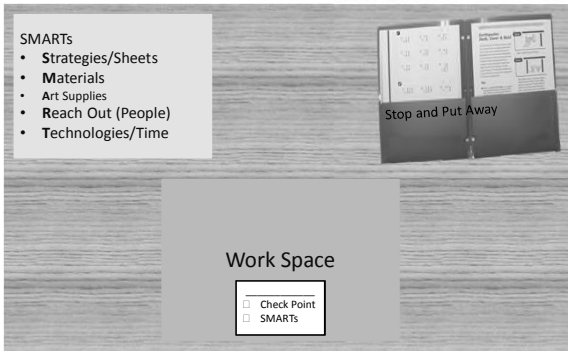
Use Your SMARTs!

Strategies/ Sheets	Materials	Art Supplies	Reach Out/ Resources	Technologies
•Graphic Organizers •Handouts •Flash cards •Edit checklists	•Pencils •Books •Binders •Text Book •Class notes •Calculator	•Glue •Crayons •Markers •Colored Pencils •Scissors	•Teacher •Parent •Classmate	•School Website •Flash Drive •Post Google Docs •Email teacher •Internet •Specific Program

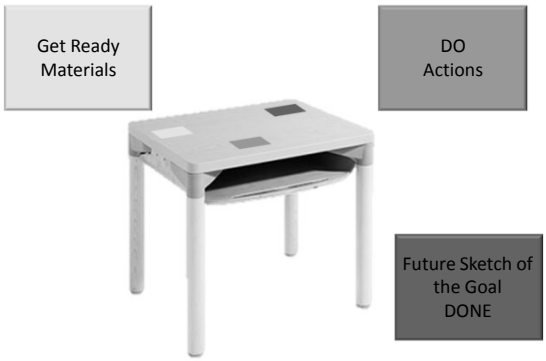
Today: Fractions Worksheet



Have the Work Space Match the White Board



Use Post it Notes on Student Desks



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Lab Today: Create Density Bottles

S
M
A
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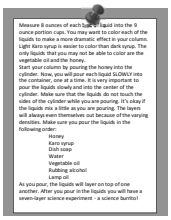
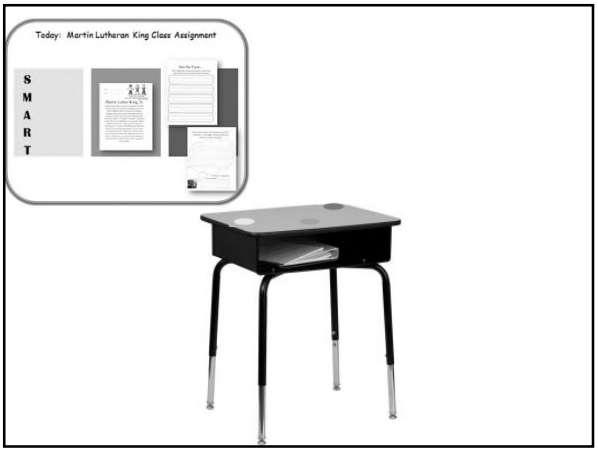

Measure 8 ounces of each liquid into the 9 ounce portion cups. You may want to color each of the liquids to make a more dramatic effect in your column. Light Karo syrup is easier to color than dark syrup. The only liquids that you may not be able to color are the vegetable oil and the honey.
Start your column by pouring the honey into the cylinder. Now, you will pour each liquid SLOWLY into the container, one at a time. It is very important to pour the liquids slowly and into the center of the cylinder. Make sure that the liquids do not touch the sides of the cylinder while you are pouring. It's okay if the liquids mix a little as you are pouring. The layers will always even themselves out because of the varying densities. Make sure you pour the liquids in the following order:

Honey
Karo syrup
Dish soap
Water
Vegetable oil
Rubbing alcohol
Lamp oil

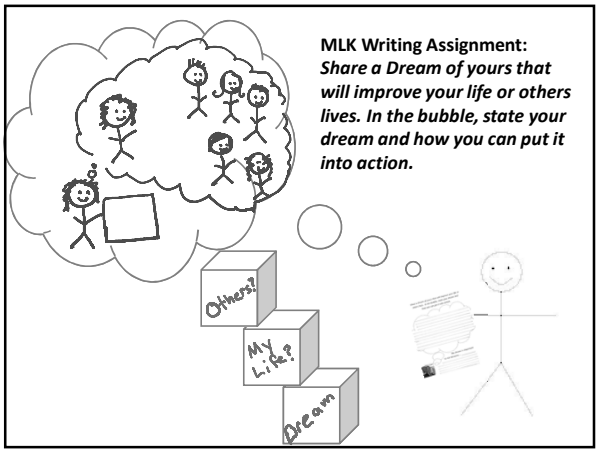
As you pour, the liquids will layer on top of one another. After you pour in the liquids you will have a seven-layer science experiment - a science burrito!

Today: Martin Lutheran King Class Assignment

S
M
A
R
T



MLK Writing Assignment:
Share a Dream of yours that will improve your life or others lives. In the bubble, state your dream and how you can put it into action.



MLK Writing Assignment:
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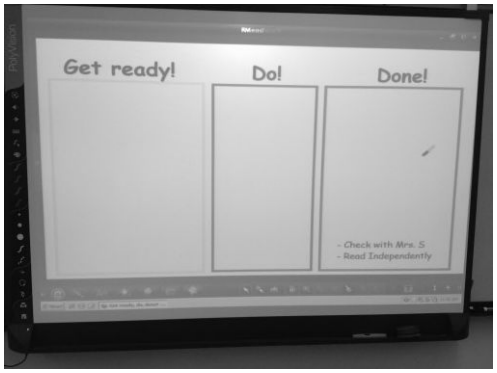
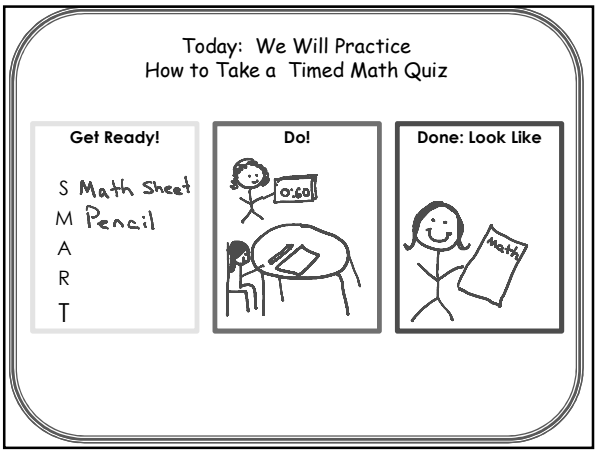
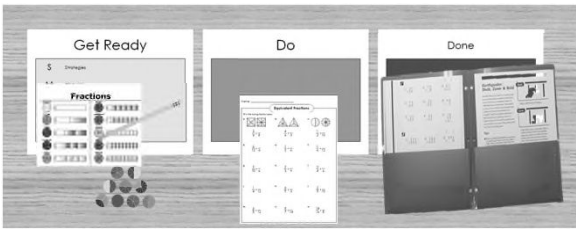




Student's Desk Space at Home for Homework



Before I Get Started:
Create My Space

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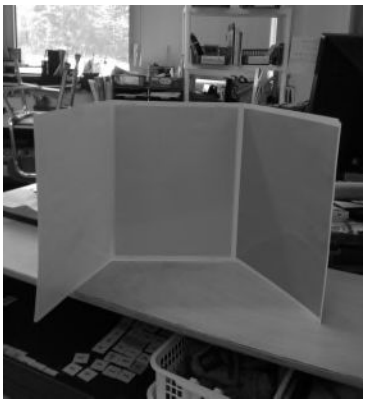
Small Space Study Idea

- Create Study carrel with Cardboard presentation boards from Staples
- http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/homework-central-787551/
- Closet study areas



Get Ready * Do * Done

IN THERAPY

Therapy Activity:
Video Modeling

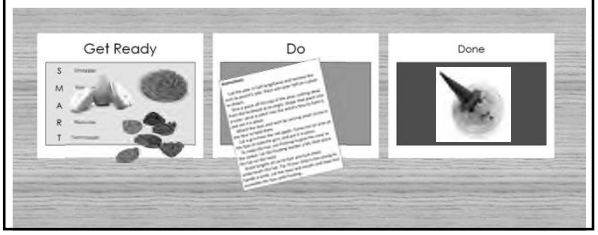
*Choose a Social Skills topic

*Choose "jobs": storyboarder, casting director, sign maker, camera man, actors

*Gather Materials: whiteboard, markers, poster board, camera

Make a sign Create storyboard Act it out	photo/video it

Today we are going to make a Witch Out of Food! We have 30 Minutes!



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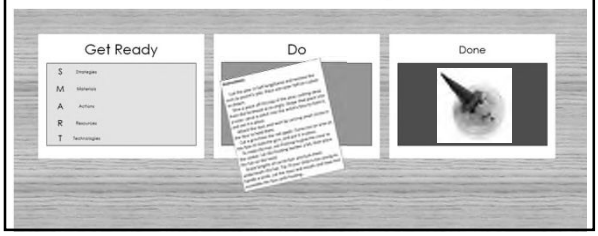
Today we are going to make a Witch Out of Food!
We have 30 Minutes!

Be sure to Include Items **NOT** Needed to teach
Relevant vs Irrelevant!



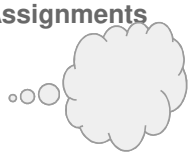
Therapy Activity Projects:

The web of course has some GREAT ideas for therapy projects!
My favorites:

- https://www.facebook.com/Funtivities
- Family Fun Magazine Website
- PBS Zoom website
- Many Pinterest Sites
  - ASHA arts and crafts
  - http://pinterest.com/pediastaff/
  - Crafts for Speech Therapy:
    - http://pinterest.com/dhkluesner/crafts-for-speech-therapy/
  - http://pinterest.com/kthigh16/

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Get Ready * Do * Done for Assignments



Increase Forethought for Assignments:

- What will the assignment look like in the end?
- What are the parts?
- How much time do I have?
- In that time what needs to be accomplished?

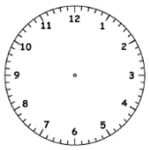
Social Studies Index Cards
Ancient Egypt Time Line Landmarks
On an index card carefully draw a colorful picture representing your topic. At the top of the card write the "topic" and date. Below the picture write two or three sentences explaining your topic. Your sentence should state who or what the card is about and describe what's most important to know about this person, place or event.

index card
crayons
class notes

color my picture
write the topic name and date

Write the what/who and why impt. sentences

We have been studying major forms of bias:
Exaggeration: *The greatest…*
charged words: *voluntary implementation*
Overgeneralization: *all people who*
opinions asserted as facts: *..it is well known that…*
Inclusions/exclusions: *the only fact to consider is*
Prejudices: *I believe…*



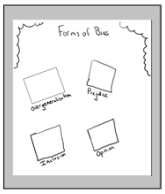
Look in newspapers, magazines, flyers, pop up ads, websites, advertisements for 4 examples of the above bias. Then arrange your evidence in an interesting collage and be prepared to share your findings.

Magazines/News
Scissors
Glue
Construction Paper
Markers

Get Ready! SMARTs

Steps	Time
Look for forms of bias.	30min
Print/Cut out Examples	10 min
Arrange and Glue	5 min
Add captions and title	15min

Do! (mark your ½ way checkpoint)



Done: What will it look like?

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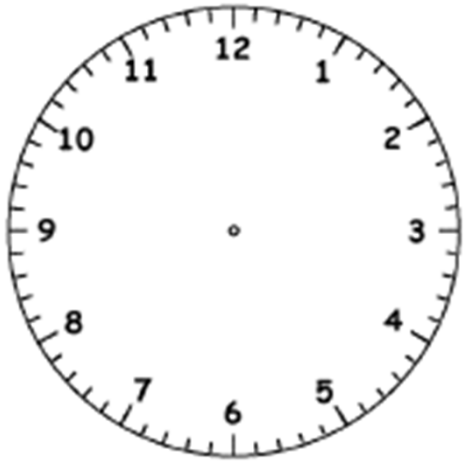

Steps	Time

Get Ready! SMARTs

Do! (mark your ½ way check point)

Done: What will it look like?

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Sample Assignment: Practice

Write a multi-paragraph essay. Be sure to include a graphic organizer OF YOUR CHOICE!

1. Man has always been a questioner, wanting to know the whys of everything. Man used both his intelligence and his imagination to answer his questions long before science solved these mysteries. Myths were created thousands of years ago to help answer these age old questions, as well as to calm fears of the unknown, and as a means to teach good from evil.

Write a well-structured, multi-paragraph essay summarizing three Greek myths (you may choose ones we have read together) and describe what natural phenomenon they explain.

Write a well-structured, multi-paragraph essay summarizing three Greek myths (you may choose ones we have read together) and describe what natural phenomenon they explain.

Future Sketch: This is what it will look like…

Intro

Greek Myth #1

Natural Phenomenon

Greek Myth #2

Natural Phenomenon

Greek Myth #3

Natural Phenomenon

Conclusion

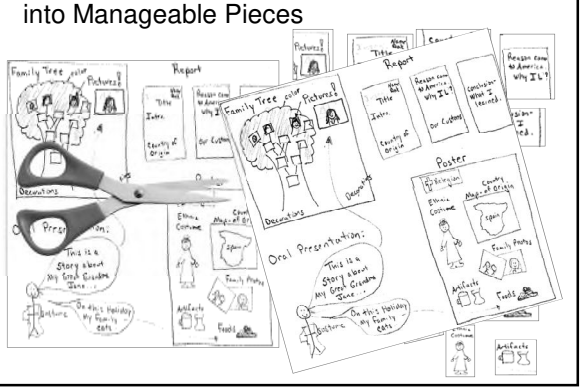
LONG TERM PROJECTS

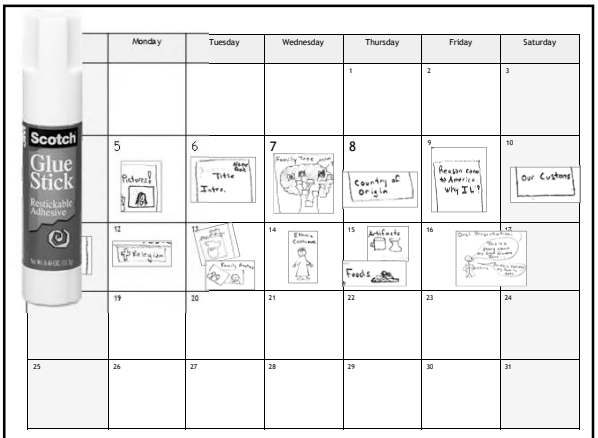
Social Studies Project

In this long-term project students will be asked to interview members of their families to learn about their ethnic heritage. Students will

- construct a family tree,
- compose a report,
- craft a poster board,
- make a n oral presentation to the class.

Breaking Large Projects into Manageable Pieces





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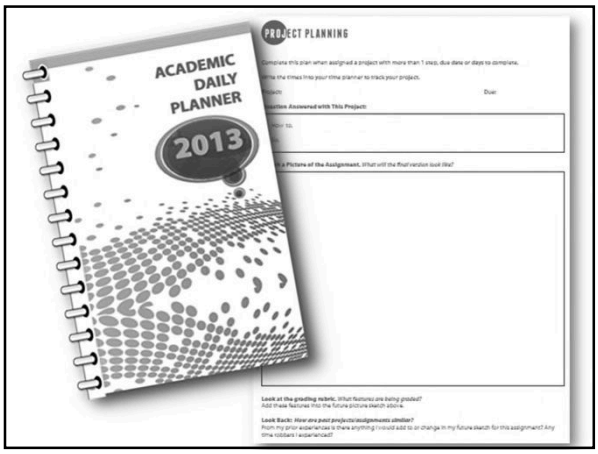
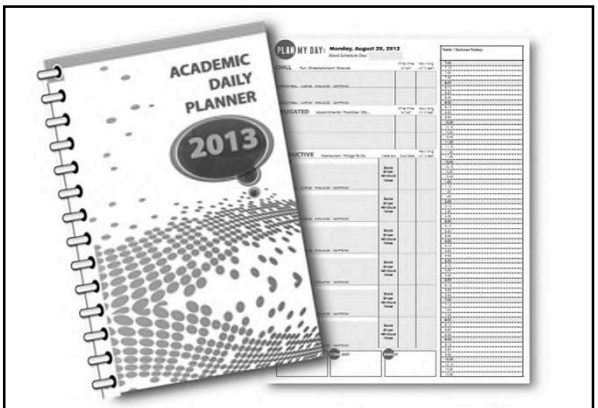
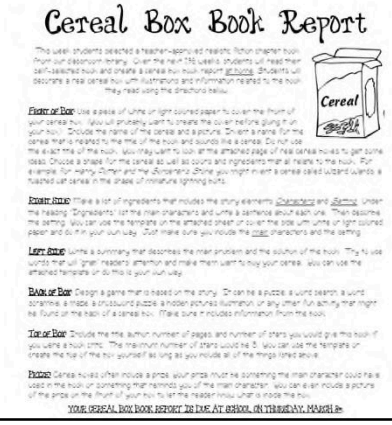




Available for Purchase at: www.executivefunctiontherapy.com

Sketching Projects

- Sketches vs Models
  - What is the difference?
- Sketch = Features
- Label the Parts
- Teachers: How to Present the Project – Provide Space for Future Sketches
- Incorporate the Rubric Expectations from the Start



Cereal Box Book Report

Front of the box: title, author, picture	Back of the box: Plot Pyramid
Side of the Box: Ingredients	Side of the Box: Paragraph about the Setting

TIME MANAGEMENT

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The Working Clock

- Have Analog Clocks in the Room – Make sure they are not Roman Numeral!
- Make sure they are at eye level of the child!
- Have a wall clock and a **Working** clock. Try putting magnet strips on the back of the clock so it can stick to a magnetic whiteboard.

Drawing Time: Create Time Zones

1. Draw **How Much Time** the student Has
2. Create **Time Markers**
3. Identify/sketch the "**Future Picture Image**": if everything goes your way what will it look like?
4. Make sure to state over and over: "**Factor in** time for _____" (gathering materials, the computer to boot, to find your equipment, etc.)
5. Mark the **start time** and the **stop time**.
6. Mark a "**time check**" at the **½ way point**.

The Working Clock

Shade the Available Time

Shade in How Time Fills Up

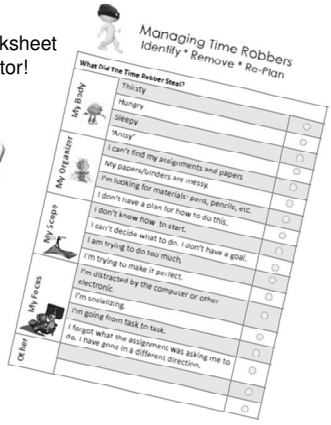
Cue How the extra Shaded Time Might be Used

½ Way Check Point

- Am I half way done?
  - Am I still focused on the goal?
  - Has my priority changed?
  - Am I still answering the question?
- Any time robbers?
  - Identify
  - Remove
  - Re-Plan
- Do I need a faster or a slower pace?

Identify Time Robbers, Remove, Re-Plan!

The Time Robbers Worksheet
Put it in a sleeve protector!



Managing Time Robbers
Identify * Remove * Re-Plan

What Did the Time Robber Steal?		
My Body	Thirsty	
	Hungry	
	Sleepy	
	"Antsy"	
My Organizer	I can't find my assignments and papers	
	My papers/binders are messy.	
	I'm looking for materials: pens, pencils, etc.	
	I don't have a plan for how to do this.	
My Scope	I don't know how to start.	
	I can't decide what to do. I don't have a goal.	
	I am trying to do too much.	
	I'm trying to make it perfect.	
My Focus	I'm distracted by the computer or other electronic	
	I'm socializing.	
	I'm going from task to task.	
Other	I forgot what the assignment was asking me to do. I have gone in a different direction.	

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Managing Time Robbers

Identify * Remove * Re-Plan

What Did The Time Robber Steal?		
My Body	Thirsty	○
	Hungry	○
	Sleepy	○
	'Antsy'	○
My Organizer	I can't find my assignments and papers	○
	My papers/binders are messy.	○
	I'm looking for materials: pens, pencils, etc.	○
	I don't have a plan for how to do this.	○
My Scope	I don't know how to start.	○
	I can't decide what to do. I don't have a goal.	○
	I am trying to do too much.	○
	I'm trying to make it perfect.	○
My Focus	I'm distracted by the computer or other electronic.	○
	I'm socializing.	○
	I'm going from task to task.	○
	I forgot what the assignment was asking me to do. I have gone in a different direction.	○
Other		○
		○

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The Time Tracker Program
www.executivefunctiontherapy.com

TRACKNETS:
Individual magnets with prompts for tracking start, check and stop times for up to 3 different tasks or parts of task in one hour. A Time Robber magnet to identify and remove distractions that might be "stealing" one's time from a task.

My Power Clock:
An easy set count down timer. Can be set on music or vibrate modes to reduce sensory overload.

The Analog Clock:
A magnetized, non –ticking analog clock to plan and self-monitor time to complete tasks

Available at www.executivefunctiontherapy.com

MyPowerClock

An easy set timer that alerts the student to the passage of time. If you want a time reminder to check your half way point in 10 minutes..you just push the '10' button around the outside edge and the timer is set. Need to know if 30 minutes has passed? Press the '30'. I also love this timer because it does not make an obnoxious alarm sound but instead plays music or vibrates to alert the time has passed. Middle and high school students report they *love* this tool. As one student said "It makes the time go so much faster and I realize how I am spending my time!" I often have students press the '10' minute button, and then begin their work. As soon as 10 minutes passes I have them press the '10' again and so on. Using this trick they begin to feel how they are spending their time.

Step 1. Get Ready

Set the analog clock and the My Powerclock Timer at the individual's workspace in a PLAN SPACE where it can be easily monitored.

Place the GET READY SMARTS magnet at the current minute hand to mark the start of the planning time.

Step 2. Create Time Markers:

Place the START Magnet to mark the beginning point of a task on the clock.

- This allows an individual to maintain a visual reference point as time passes.

The 1, 2 and 3 Magnets can be placed when/if parts of a task or different tasks will be started within the hour.

Step 3. Identify When to Stop

Place the END Magnet next to the start magnet then slide it around the clock to the identified END time on the clock.

Sliding the magnet makes time multisensory and helps the student to "feel" the sweep of time.

Step 4. Create a Checkpoint

Slide the Yellow ✓SMARTs Magnet on the clock to mark the 1/2 way check-point of the first part of the task.

Set the My Power Clock Timer
Set the my power clock timer for the amount of time to the 1/2 way checkpoint.

It is important to convey that the timer is to monitor pace, not measure "how fast" a task can be completed, as this could increase distractibility or impulsivity.

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Hide the Time Robber

Place the Time Robber magnet on the side of the clock beneath the ½ way check in.

This reminds students to think ahead about minimizing actions and distractions that will steal their time.

Step 5. Self Monitor

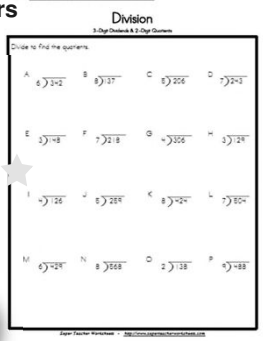
Self-Monitoring Questions:
When the My Powerclock timer is activated cue the to student to ask themselves:

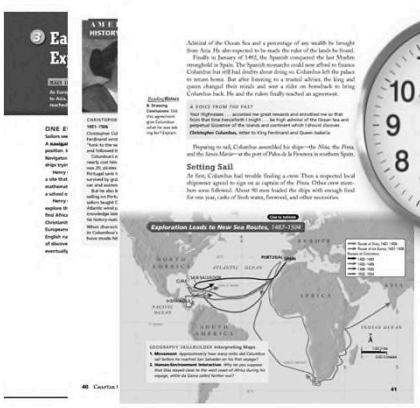
"Am I on track with my predicted time?"
"Am I half way done?"
- Am I still focused on the goal?
- Has my priority changed?
- Am I still answering the question?

"Do I have any Time Robbers?"
- Identify
- Remove
- Re-Plan

"Do I need a faster or a slower pace?"

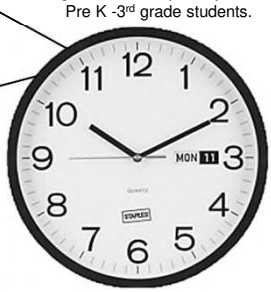
Examples of How to Create Time Markers





Wondertime Clock: For Directions and a Video on How to make this clock: executivefunctiontherapy.com

This clock can be created and used as a pre-cursor to learning how to read an analog clock. It is especially terrific for Pre K -3rd grade students.



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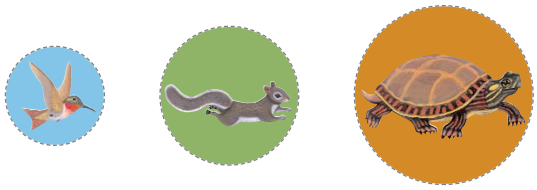
A child's first clock



© Wondertime

A child's first clock

© Wondertime

A Magic Trick

Job Talk!

Trick: Turn the task into a "job" and name for the child their "job title"

Washer, Holder, Dumper, Wiper, Loader, Sprayer, Wiper, Talker, Writer

- Creates Immediate Structure for the Child
- Accesses Procedural Memory
- Limits Emotional Reactions

Situation: Student has a LARGE collection of trading cards ALL over the floor and is not working towards cleaning them up.

Tasks:

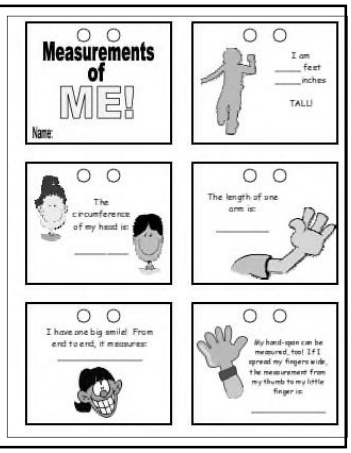
Jobs:

What about this desk?
What are the jobs towards task execution?

Situation: Student has a math worksheet to do and is not initiating the task.

Tasks:

jobs:



Situation: Student is Not Engaged in Packing for the 2 day Outdoor Adventure Camp

Tasks:

Jobs:

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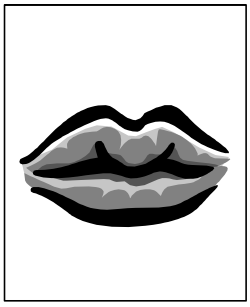
Situation: Student needs to remember to turn in their homework.

Jobs:

Roles:

How Should I look in Class?
Am I a Talker or a Listener?*



*Tools of the Mind, by Elena Bodrova

After the conference, I got home and noticed the garbage needed to be taken out. Instead of calling my son and saying, "Take out the garbage." I said, "Hey Tim I'm glad you're here in the kitchen. I need some help. Would you like to be my sanitation worker?"

He replied, "Sure mom, that sounds so much better than just take out the garbage"

I have to tell you too, that over the weekend, I had the kids complete many jobs without complaining simply by giving it an "er" title. At one point my husband wanted the kids to clean the dirt off the driveway. The kids were upstairs playing xbox and I thought to myself "This is not going to work. I've been using this strategy all day. I'll give it a try but I don't think it will be easy." I went upstairs. My two kids and a friend were playing. I said, "Hey I need a scooper and a dumper" My daughter quickly responded, "I'll be the dumper. Then, "what does a dumper do?" The friend said, "Hey I want a job too." So then I said, "I need a sweeper too." So it was decided, my daughter was the dumper, the friend was the sweeper and my son was the scooper. Unbelievable success with no arguing! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Need Help Around the House?

Create A Help-Wanted Bulletin Board

Check Out our Pinterest Board
http://pinterest.com/swardtherapy/

Cognitive Connections

The Center for Executive Function Skill Development
www.executivefunctiontherapy.com
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Help Wanted

Job: _____

Description:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pay: _____

Help Wanted

Job: _____

Description:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pay: _____

Help Wanted

Job: _____

Description:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pay: _____

Help Wanted

Job: _____

Description:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pay: _____

My Top 5 Reasons to Use Declarative Language

1. Model self-narrative to help your child develop his or her own inner voice.

Early on infants and toddlers develop and learn language when they hear it from others. When children are just learning to talk, parents are reminded to label objects, narrate simple actions and comment on their child's focus of attention so that the child will learn and then use those words accordingly. After the initial language spark is ignited, most of us then go on to develop our own voice that we use to share our thoughts, recap experiences, talk about what we are doing, and talk about what we are thinking.

Most of us also then go on to create our own inner voice. This is a hugely important by-product of our language learning. We use our inner voice to problem solve and plan. We remember what we have learned or noticed in the past, and apply it to the here and now. For example, imagine you are getting ready to go to work and you can't find your keys. Your inner voice may say something like, 'Hmmm…. Now when did I last see my keys? Where do I usually put them down? What jacket did I have on yesterday?... Maybe they're in the pocket." Your inner voice helps you think through the problem and gets you started on a plan of action to solve it.

Children with Executive Functioning difficulties do not usually develop this inner voice to regulate their thoughts and actions on their own. Just as modeling was important when your child was learning to talk, thoughtful modeling now, in this regard, is equally important. So – talk out loud, think out loud, work through a problem, make predictions, ponder opportunities, consider possibilities, and reflect on past experiences when you are with your child. They will learn from your models, internalize the ideas, and begin to form their own inner voice.

2. Provide a window into another person's perspective.

Some children have difficulty taking perspective. Using declarative language to share your thoughts and feelings provides your child a regular window into these things in an inviting, nonthreatening way. We are providing them information that is critical in a social interaction that we know they may not pick up on their own. When we present declarative language in this way, we are not asking them to provide an answer that may be right or wrong. Rather, we are clueing them into social information and then allowing them to decide what to do with the information.

By regularly using declarative language in this way, we are also slowly building memories and awareness that different people have different thoughts, opinions, perspectives and emotions. For example, you say something to your child but he is facing the other way, appearing not to listen. Rather than say to him "turn around!" or "look at me" (both imperatives) share your feelings and perspective with declarative language: "It would make me happy if you would face me when I'm talking to you" or "I feel like you are not listening to me." Or, if you arrive home and your child does not say hello, instead of saying "say hello to me" we could say, "I really like it when you say hi" or "I feel disappointed because you haven't said hello to me yet." In my experience, kids usually make choices that are good for the relationship once they are provided this information. It's not that our kids don't want to say hi! It may just be that they don't realize how happy it will make you when they do.

3. Help your child zoom out to see the big picture and generate multiple solutions to a problem.

Often times when we get caught up trying to get our kids to do specific things, we all lose sight of the big picture. Because some children with executive function challenges are strong when it comes to details, but weak when it comes to seeing the big picture, it is important to think about the big picture when we present information. Giving very specific directions or questions that have one right answer promotes that focus on details. For example, if we tell a child to "put the toy in the box" or "say goodbye to Grandma" we are zooming into the details and creating a situation where there's one and only one right answer. However, if we use language instead to comment on what we see in the big picture: "I see a toy on the floor" or "Grandma is leaving" - we are instead encouraging our children to take a step back, notice the context and situation around them, and subsequently form a plan of action that makes sense to them. We are also leaving open the possibility that there may in fact be more than one solution – i.e., maybe the toy could go on a shelf or in the toy box, maybe the child could say "goodbye," wave, give Grandma a hug or walk her to the door. Generating multiple or alternate solutions to a problem can be hard for some kids. Declarative language naturally creates opportunities to practice this skill.

4. Empower your child to be a problem solver rather than direction follower.

Anytime we tell children what to do, ask them to follow a direction, or ask them to answer a question that has a right/wrong answer, we are honing their receptive language skills. This is not a bad thing, but it may not be what your child needs most. In contrast, if we use declarative language to present information about the environment or situation at hand, we are instead inviting her to notice this information and develop a plan of action. We are inviting her to have an "aha!" moment where she figures out on her own what to do with presented information. We are giving her an opportunity to think! Problem solving moments are huge for all children as they learn to view themselves as competent human beings in the world. Most kids have been asked right/wrong questions and given directions from a very young age. More practice in this area is not what they need most! Rather, they need practice problem solving, and identifying themselves as competent problem solvers. It is important to become comfortable presenting information to your child, and then waiting. The waiting time allows your child time and space to consider his next step. Here are some examples of direction following vs. problem solving opportunities – can you feel the difference?

"Throw that away" vs. "There is a piece of trash on the floor."
"Wash your hands" vs. "Your hands look dirty."
"Open the door" vs. "I heard someone knocking on the door."
"Give that to your sister" vs. "I sure bet your sister would like to use that now."
"Pass me that" vs. "I can't reach that."

5. Help your child read what's going on in his environment.

We know that it can be difficult for some kids to tune into the social information that is going on around them. Rather than telling them exactly what to do and when to do it, use declarative language to help them notice what is important! For example, if it is time for a transition, instead of telling your child "go to the table for snack" or "put on your coat," direct his attention toward the changes in the environment: "I notice all the kids are at the table" or "I notice all the kids are putting on their coats." This will help internalize the importance of periodically checking in on one's environment; there are visual clues available all the time, and they are important to pay attention to! We want our kids to learn that information is not always going to come to them - they have to become active information gatherers. In contrast, if we are using imperatives all the time with our kids, information *is* coming to them on a regular basis, and they don't have the same need to look around or read the behaviors of others.

Recommended Reading on Executive Function Skills and Related Disorders

by Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP

Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention **2nd Edition** (Practical Interventions in the Schools) by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare

- *A good introductory book on Executive Function Skills. Particularly excellent for teachers and parents who need foundational understandings on what the Executive Function Skills are. The Second Edition has lots of additional information and updates. These authors have also written the book Smart but Scattered which has many practical ideas to improve executive function routines in the home setting.*

Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education (2nd Edition) by Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong

- *This book is my absolute favorite for understanding how executive function skills develop in young children. Several chapters are dedicated to an outstanding approach to teaching writing to young children. Writing can be a real struggle for kids with executive function based deficits and this technique is extremely helpful. This book also addresses the value of teaching play skills as a means of learning self regulation, delayed gratification and tolerance for frustration. The companion website toolsofthemind.org has unbelievable resources and lists of research on the EF skills.*

Lost in School and The Explosive Child by Ross Green.

- *Both are excellent books for communicating to school professionals about the underlying EF difficulties children with behavioral challenges experience and why they act the way they do. A must read for teachers and parents alike. If you have an explosive child at home this is a must read resource, but I do not recommend you skim the book. Read it cover to cover to really understand collaborative problem solving to work with children who struggle with flexibility. Related resources include the websites:*
  - *thinkkids.org*
  - *www.greatschools.org/special-education/health/executive-function-lens-to-view-your-child.gs?content=1017*
  - *http://www.livesinthebalance.org/*

Fostering Independent Learning: Practical Strategies to Promote Student Success by Virginia Smith Harvey and Louise Chickie-Wolfe

- This has many practical strategies to improve study habits, time management, organization, writing and reading comprehension skills. An excellent book for teachers and tutors alike, the strategies are very metacognitive in nature and demonstrate how to move the student from dependence to independence.

Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom by Lynn Meltzer

- A must for all teachers interested in improving executive function skills in the classroom. Has many practical strategies to improve classroom organization, note taking, studying, emotional self-regulation and task management.

Recommended Reading on Executive Function Skills and Related Disorders

by Sarah Ward, M.S., CCC/SLP

For a fantastic description for parents and professionals about what the executive function skills are, the development of the EF skills and some interventions check out the Six Part Series by *Philip David Zelazo, Ph.D. at* http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/News/Series/ExecutiveFunction/Pages/default.aspx

Thinking About You Thinking About Me 2nd Edition by Michelle Garcia Winner

- Provides a strong foundational understanding for how to evaluate and treat students who struggle with social thinking skills.
- This is a must have book to understand social interaction and social awareness. Many students, including those with high-functioning autism, Asperger syndrome, ADHD and similar social and communication challenges, have difficulties understanding that other people have perspectives that are different from their own. Michelle's model of perspective-taking makes research into Theory of Mind practical for teaching these students and even students who may be considered "neurotypical." Specific lessons, and how to apply them in different settings, are explored. **The assessment chapter now includes the Social Thinking Dynamic Assessment Protocol®, a fantastic diagnostic tool for evaluating a student's social thinking and executive function skills.**

The Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships: Decoding Social Mysteries Through the Unique Perspectives of Autism by Temple Grandin and Sean Barron

- *If you ever wondered why students socially think and act the way they do then this is a fundamental read. This book addresses the social challenges those with autism and Asperger's face, explaining in the process how confusing and illogical normal societal rules can be. The authors also address the "unwritten rules" that most children understand instinctively but are a mystery to those on the spectrum. The book contains strategies on how to teach students to trust feelings, be assertive in a positive way, and deal with negative people and situations. I often print the Rules and use them as a road map for therapy with students.*

Organizing the Disorganized Child: Simple Strategies to Succeed in School - by Martin L. Kutscher and Marcella Moran

- A superb book. The author's explain the roots of children's organizational problems, and the parents' role in fixing them. They outline different organizational styles used by different students. (Not all kids organize the same way!) They provide a step-by-step plan for an organizational system including: Refining morning and nighttime routines, Getting the correct work home, Planning the work, and getting it back to where it belongs, Tips for reading and note taking, Study and test taking skills, Learning how to ask the right questions.

Recommended Reading on Executive Function Skills and Related Disorders

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Raising a Thinking Preteen: The "I Can Problem Solve" Program for 8- to 12- Year-Olds by Myrna B. Shure and Roberta Israeloff

- *This book focuses heavily on teaching students how to develop flexible problem solving skills. This is one of the few books I have read that does not merely say 'problem solving is an important skill' but rather truly teaches the reader "how to" teach children the steps to being independent problem solvers. If you work with younger students, her workbooks have terrific premade group lessons to teach problem solving and thinking skills to elementary aged children.*

The 6 Most Important Decisions You'll Ever Make: A Guide for Teens by Sean Covey

- *This is written for teenagers and is OUTSTANDING. I have seen the information in this book really speak to and turn around even the most difficult of teenagers. Sean shows teens how to succeed in school, make good friends, get along with parents, wisely handle dating and sex issues, avoid or overcome addictions, build self-esteem, and much more. Jam-packed with original cartoons, inspiring quotes, and fun quizzes, this innovative book will help teens not only survive but thrive during their teen years and beyond.*

Fall Down 7 Times Stand Up 8

- *I LOVE this book and recommend it to all the parents that I work with. It is all about how to teach students to develop internal motivation and a desire to succeed. Includes excellent summaries of such popular ideas as Mindset by Carol Dweck. Really teaches parents how to use their language to coach students to develop internal , positive self directed talk.*

Related to developing Self Motivation and the Mindset of Success I really like Carol Dweck's computer guided program for children call Brainology. It uses a computer model of games and challenges to teach students about how brains work and how they can develop a growth mindset.

Recommended Reading on Executive Function Skills and Related Disorders

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The World of RYUU: social-skills-games.com

- AMAZING PRODUCT. These are cards that look like Magic or Pokemon cards. They cards contain 4 sets of dragons that evolve their social/emotional skills. There are builder cards (for example Flexibility) and Destructor cards (for example rigidity). For students who have a strong interest in fantasy and trading cards they are immediately engaged and attracted to the cards. Check out the You Tube videos on the World of RYUU to learn more. You use the cards and read the stories of the dragons and play strategy games with the cards to teach students core social emotional skills. My students LOVE these cards, remember the tools and demonstrate amazing carry over and generalization for learned concepts.