Inclusive 52 Executive Functioning

Weekly Strategies to Help All Learners Thrive

Christopher Bugaj, Karen Janowski,
Mike Marotta, and Beth Poss

iste+ascd
Arlington, Virginia USA

INTRODUCTION

Before You Begin

ADOPTING AN INCLUSIVE MINDSET

The first step in designing authentically inclusive learning experiences is believing that every learner can be successful. Adopting an inclusive mindset is the foundation for designing opportunities that reach all learners. An inclusive mindset is supported by embracing and respecting the fact that everyone is unique, with different abilities, backgrounds, and preferences. An inclusive mindset celebrates these differences as strengths not just within each individual, but also throughout your community and society as a whole.

The first step in inclusive design requires reflection. Before new strategies or tools can transform instruction, educators must pause to ask: *Who might I be excluding with my current instructional methods? How can I design differently to include everyone?* This act of reflection opens the door to greater learner flexibility and choice, the core elements of inclusive design. Providing choice empowers learners and intrinsically motivates them to actively engage in their own learning. Individually, the educational strategies outlined in this book can help you immediately provide more options to learners. However, our greater hope is that experiencing, practicing, and implementing these strategies collectively will further your professional (and personal) goals of adopting and spreading an inclusive mindset. Using these strategies can help you, your colleagues, and your entire school or district cultivate a culture where every learner, regardless of ability, background, or demographic group, is valued, respected, and honored.

Inclusive design involves much more than the space where someone learns and who else might be in that space. A truly inclusive experience is designed so that any learner, regardless of ability, can participate in and learn from it. An experience that is authentically inclusive allows anyone, even learners the educator hasn't yet met, to participate and make progress toward achieving personal learning goals.

Throughout this book, we have included short Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal spaces between each content area. Use these to reflect on the inclusive strategies presented in the previous section, as well as the connections you make as you read.

Our Philosophy Is Learner-Centered

Learner-centered instruction involves designing learning experiences that meet the needs of each individual learner, empowering them with agency over their own learning. As educators, we recognize that learners are not born with executive function skills but rather with the potential to develop them, and that different strategies work for different learners. Providing a choice of organizational systems by offering options for ways to remember work, manage time, study, break down tasks, and by customizing instruction empowers the learner to find what helps them the most.

Remember, *these choices belong with the learner.*

Throughout the book you will see us "inviting the learner" to participate in the learning. We know there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. Educators must listen to their learners to facilitate success.

Environmental Design and Explicit Instruction

The development of executive function skills is greatly influenced by the quality of the interactions and experiences learners have within educational settings. It's important to acknowledge that those experiences can either strengthen or hinder the development of emerging executive function skills. According to the work of Dawson and Guare (2018), learners who are developing their executive function skills need a two-pronged approach to intervention: strategies at the environmental level (external structure and support) and at the individual level (explicit, individualized strategy instruction).

When learning executive function strategies, learners benefit from explicit instruction, including discussions about what works and what doesn't. The emphasis should be on learners developing metacognitive awareness, understanding how they learn best, and applying strategies that lead to greater success and the development of strategic competence. Strategies may fluctuate over time: new technologies may emerge, circumstances and expectations may change, and what worked in the past might no longer be as effective. When providing explicit instruction, educators must also provide opportunities for practice and feedback to strengthen neural connections and help learners move from in-the-moment working memory to permanent memory.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The most passionate and effective educators set personal goals and work to achieve them. We believe that one of these goals should be centered around increasing inclusive practices.

Learning Something New Every Week

One powerful strategy to help you achieve your personal goals is to learn one new nugget of information every week that you can apply to the educational experiences you design to make inclusive education an achievable reality. With the 52 strategies in this book, you can aim to tackle one strategy a week to support the goal of making inclusive education a priority.

Educators who have an inclusive mindset often intuitively model this for others. Share these inclusive strategies with your colleagues, invite feedback, and work together to make learning inclusive.

Strategy > Tools

If you are reading this book, chances are you already understand the inherent value of technology in education. We, the authors, do too! We get excited when a new tool becomes available, and as early adopters of many technology resources we are always

eager to try something different. However, we made a deliberate decision to structure this book not around specific technology tools, but rather around inclusive strategies and the functionality that technology can provide to learners and educators. Tools change: they may not remain compatible when hardware changes, and much to our frustration, they may even become obsolete or disappear altogether. By focusing on inclusive strategies and the functionality of technology, we are better able to align our use of technology with pedagogy, which is what sound instructional practices are based on, after all.

If you love tools, don't worry—you will learn all about various technology tools as you read this book, but we want to be sure that our readers understand the *why* and not just the *how* of using an educational tool. We hope that as you browse the strategies that fill these pages, you have many *aha!* moments, discovering more reasons to use familiar tools and discovering new tools that may help you implement strategies with which you may be familiar. Just remember, it's about the functionality of the tool and the learning that is occurring. The tool just helps you get there!

Strategies Are Grouped by Components of Executive Function with Corresponding Icons

Executive functioning is a vast and multifaceted topic that can be broken down into many different components depending on the lens through which it is studied. We analyzed multiple frameworks that categorize and define executive functioning to identify commonalities and meaningful distinctions. These included the widely recognized model from Dawson and Guare, which outlines specific skill areas such as planning, organization, and self-regulation; the Pathway 2 Success approach, which focuses on practical classroom strategies; the Cleveland Clinic framework, which highlights the neurological and behavioral underpinnings of executive skills; Ignite Achievement Academy's model, which emphasizes personal growth and self-management; and the 6 Super Skills for Executive Functioning structure, which groups related abilities into accessible, student-friendly themes. After synthesizing these sources, we identified five overarching categories that encompass the essential dimensions of executive functioning from across the research and practice. We organized the inclusive strategies in this book into the key areas of **planning and organization**; **time management**; **working memory**; and **regulation and impulse control**. In addition, we created a fifth category called **engineering environments**. These categories focus on designing learning experiences to help learners build cognitive flexibility, leading to the development of metacognitive skills. These categories additionally provide a cohesive foundation for understanding and supporting executive functioning, aligned with research and practical for everyday learning environments.

Many of our inclusive strategies address more than one essential component. The icons on the page represent all the components the strategy addresses, as well as different types of media that are represented in the Related Resources section of each strategy.

Executive Functioning Components

 Engineering Environments

 Planning and Organization

 Time Management

 Working Memory

 Regulation and Impulse Control

Resource Types

 Book

 Article

 Video

 Website

 Podcast

Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal

We created the Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal to promote reflection on the connections you make as you read. When we pause, reflect, and make sense of what we have learned, we increase the likelihood that the ideas we read about will meaningfully influence our instructional decisions and learner outcomes. It is through reflection that we become aware of our own beliefs, assumptions, and instructional tendencies. By identifying what is working, what is not working, and why, we become more intentional and strategic in our quest for inclusive learning.

Use the Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal spaces at the end of each section to reflect on changes you will make in your educational setting, the barriers you may encounter, and the insights you gain on your inclusive learning journey. We hope that putting these thoughts into words will help you translate your ideas into actions as you become a more inclusive educator.

Learn More at the Companion Website

We wanted to ensure that every inclusive strategy is supported with practical, ready-to-use resources, including articles, videos, podcasts, and implementation tools. We have curated all the digital resources we discuss on our companion website, Inclusive365.com. You will find direct links to every tool and reference highlighted in this book.

In keeping with our philosophy of providing a variety of options, while each section of this book ends with an Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal space, we have also placed a link to an electronic version of that document on our companion website. Clicking the link will create a copy of the Journal file in your own Google Drive. There you will have a space for ongoing reflection and ways to document your inclusive learning successes!

We invite you to explore **inclusive365.com/executive-function-52** to enhance your learning experience and to stay connected with the Inclusive 365 community.

A WORD ABOUT PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND ACCESSIBILITY

COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act), FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), and Title II of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) are three laws in the United States meant to protect the privacy and security of students while also ensuring accessible content. In our quest to provide readers with an outstanding resource for inclusive strategies, one area beyond the scope of this book is individual tool compliance with these laws. Companies often update policies; it is not possible to ensure the most recent compliance information. We encourage you to check with your own local educational agency for their specific policies about adopting tools, including those tools listed as samples in this book. If a tool is currently not allowed in your district, remember that the function and strategy are what is paramount. You can always look for a different tool that provides a similar function. If you can't find something already available, you can advocate for the adoption of a tool that does provide the function if that tool is determined to be compliant. Many of the resources highlighted in this book include legal statements about their privacy policies. The reader is encouraged to review those statements when considering implementation.

inclusive365.com/executive-function-52

Inclusive Strategies Implementation Journal

What resonated with you after reading "Adopting an Inclusive Mindset"?

How does this introductory section align with your educational philosophy and current practices?

Engineering Environments Strategies

The importance of the educator's role in **engineering environments** for executive functioning success cannot be overstated. This importance is precisely why we begin with this category; it is the foundation for all the other categories that follow. External supports provide scaf olding as executive functioning skills develop. They provide structure and boundaries to guide the learner on their executive functioning journey. Ef ective environmental design reduces cognitive load and creates the conditions for learning. Importantly, these supports do not replace independence; they build it. With the right supports, every learner can thrive.

inclusive365.com/engineering-environments

STRATEGY 1

Self-Evaluating Executive Function Skills

When designing executive function learning experiences for learners, it's important to identify both their strengths and the skills that require further development. One effective way to discover this information is by inviting learners to complete an Executive Function Skills Questionnaire, which helps highlight both their current abilities and areas for growth. Using this information, educators can analyze results to design targeted interventions guided by questions such as: Which areas should we prioritize for growth? What environmental supports will be provided? How will the skill be explicitly taught? Through this reflective process, educators and learners can collaboratively explore no-tech, low-tech, and high-tech tools to strengthen executive function skills.

INCLUSIVE USES

A structured approach to developing executive function skills supports all learners. Using a questionnaire that helps educators identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth allows them to examine resources, supports, and instructional strategies that can be used by individual learners or applied universally.

SAMPLE TOOLS

- The **Executive Skills Questionnaire** by Dawson and Guare helps learners identify their executive function strengths and areas for growth.
- The **Life Skills Advocate Planning Assessment** helps learners, parents, and educators identify executive function strengths and areas for growth.
- The **Life Skills Advocate Planning Assessment (Smiley-O-Meter Edition)** helps learners, parents, and educators identify executive function strengths and areas for growth, using a smiley-face rating system rather than numbers.

EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

Invite learners to use generative AI to analyze their responses and create a visual representation showing patterns or themes. Encourage them to use this information to identify strategies that can strengthen their executive function skills.

Invite learners to complete the questionnaire again after six months and reflect on their progress and growth over time.

RELATED RESOURCES

Smart but Scattered with Dr. Peg Dawson and Dr. Richard Guare

Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents, Third Edition: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention

ESQ-R Self-Assessment Tool

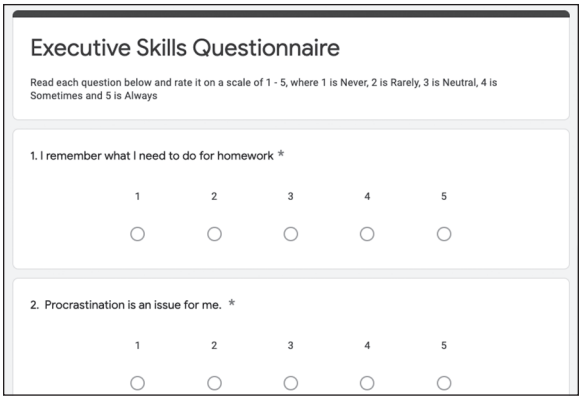


Figure 1. Questions on a sample executive skills questionnaire.

ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

1.1.a, 1.1.b

ISTE STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS

2.1.c, 2.5.a, 2.5.b, 2.6.a, 2.6.c

ISTE+ASCD TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Nurture: Connect Learning to the Learner

Guide: Elevate Ref ection

Empower: Ignite Agency

STRATEGY 2

Implementing Familiar Routines and Materials

When educators implement commonly used instructional routines and resources, the cognitive demand to understand the task is reduced for learners, freeing more attention and focus on the content. Standard procedures minimize cognitive effort, while repetition of learning experiences with variety and novel content can actually increase cognitive engagement, foster deeper understanding, and strengthen the ability to generalize skills across various situations. When similar learning experiences are repeated with variations in the content, learners can expend their cognitive energy on learning the content, rather than the task.

INCLUSIVE USES

The use of familiar routines and materials allows learners to establish mental models for tasks and minimizes working memory demands with consistent instructions. Learners developing executive function skills can move beyond understanding the directions to engaging with new ideas and concepts. When the environment is predictable, students with anxiety may feel safe and less anxious. Lower stress means their brains can stay in the learning zone rather than in survival mode.

SAMPLE TOOLS

- **Diffit** is a generative AI tool that generates the same types of activities and resources for learners, regardless of the content area or topic. These include Notice and Wonder, Frayer Model Vocabulary charts, RACE (Restate, Answer, Cite, Explain) charts, and much more. Having activities that repeat across different content and units allows the learners to focus on the content rather than what they need to do with the content.
- **Canva** allows educators to use templates to create learning materials. By choosing a common template, such as a study guide, vocabulary journal, or book report template, and using it across units of study, educators can provide familiar resources for students to engage with new content.

EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

Invite learners to design their own graphic organizer, study guide, or report template that they can reproduce across units of study to reflect on layouts and features that help them accomplish their learning objectives.

Engage learners in a group discussion about which routines make learning easier. Based on learners' feedback, identify additional routines that can be incorporated into the day to reduce cognitive load.

RELATED RESOURCES

Supporting Students' Working Memory

Ways You May Be Cognitively Overloading Your Students (including transcript of the podcast)

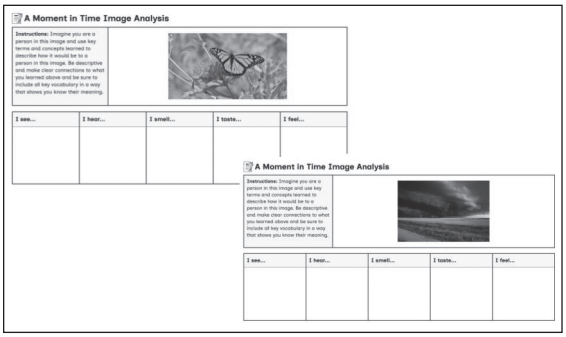


Figure 2. Two different A Moment in Time analysis activities for different content, created in Diffit.

ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

1.1.a, 1.1.c

ISTE STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS

2.5.a, 2.6.b

ISTE+ASCD TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Nurture: Connect Learning to the Learner; Ensure Opportunity

Guide: Elevate Ref ection

Empower: Ignite Agency

STRATEGY 3

Decorating Learning Spaces Purposefully

While many educators love eye-catching decor, keeping decorations functional should take priority. Many learners can be easily overstimulated by overly decorated learning spaces. Researchers found that increased visual stimulation correlated with decreased cognitive performance (Carnegie Mellon University, 2014; Rodrigues & Pandeirada, 2018). Be mindful of what you have displayed, and consider the functionality of decor and resources posted on walls. This awareness should be extended to digital learning materials, such as slide decks.

INCLUSIVE USES

Learners working to regulate sensory information may find an abundance of visual materials and extraneous decor distracting. Limiting visual stimulation may help with attention and focus.

SAMPLE TOOLS

Upload a picture of a decorated wall or learning space to **Google Gemini**, **Microsoft Copilot**, or the generative AI tool of your choice, then prompt it to give feedback about the design prioritizing practicality and purposefulness

EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES

Invite learners to reflect on what materials they would like to see posted or shared. Learners can be invited to provide input before the material is placed in public spaces.

When displaying student work, invite learners to choose specific artifacts to highlight their achievements and learning progress, rather than automatically placing work on a designated learner bulletin board or display. Work can be related to a theme or content area, or it could be in a designated "I Am Proud of My Work" area of the room. Be aware that having their work displayed can be stressful for learners who are anxious about the quality of their work.

RELATED RESOURCES

- Heavily Decorated Classrooms Disrupt Attention and Learning in Young Children
- Dos and Don'ts on Designing for Accessibility
- 7 Ways to Support Executive Function in Your Classroom
- Classroom Decoration Ideas

Figure 3. A primary classroom from Hilary Statum (pencilstopigtails.com) with decor selected to decrease overstimulation and enhance learning without clutter, including wall space for student work.

ISTE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

1.1.b, 1.6.d

ISTE STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS

2.5.a, 2.5.c

ISTE+ASCD TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Nurture: Cultivate Belonging; Connect Learning to the Learner

Guide: Spark Curiosity; Elevate Reflection

Empower: Prioritize Authentic Experiences; Ignite Agency

CONCLUSION

Creating a To-Stop-Doing List

Now that you've made it to the end of the book, beyond adopting these 52 strategies we invite you to reflect on your past instructional methods. What are some beliefs that do not promote meaningful belonging? What are some instructional practices from a bygone era that may have led some learners to feel overwhelmed, stuck, or dysregulated? What approaches persist today because of the mindset That's The Way We've Always Done It goes unchallenged? You, regardless of role, are part of the movement to bring about a change where every learner develops a set of strategies to promote lifelong success. Consider what actions you can take to eliminate the following:

- Failing to recognize how executive functioning skills impact academic performance
- Overlooking the educator's role in the development of learners' executive functioning skills
- Assuming learners will develop executive functioning skills without explicit instruction
- Minimizing how procrastination can lead to stress and anxiety
- Minimizing how stress and anxiety can lead to procrastination
- Labeling learners as lazy or unmotivated
- Expecting learners to develop their own organizational systems without modeling and explicit instruction
- Ignoring the need for routines and visual supports
- Requiring all learners to use a paper agenda
- Labeling learners as disruptive when they are dysregulated
- Expecting everyone to use the same materials
- Assuming learners know how to break down large tasks into component parts
- Ignoring the impact of the physical learning environment on performance
- Avoiding opportunities for learners to reflect
- Asking learners to mask their need for movement
- Expecting learners to be self-sufficient
- Assuming one size fits all; overlooking learner variability
- Expecting learners to remember verbal directions
- Penalizing learners for late work or forgotten or lost materials without teaching compensatory strategies

Reflect on Your Inclusive Journey

Review your Inclusive Experiences. What was an exciting discovery? What went well?

What changes have you seen in yourself? (Instructional practices, mindset, etc.)

What changes have you seen in the learners you support?

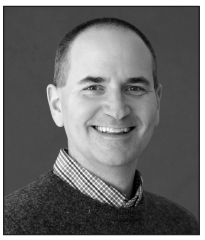
How will you share these inclusive practices and strategies with your colleagues?

About the Authors

ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE 365 TEAM

The authors are a multidisciplinary team of educators who have collaborated on numerous projects, book studies, and presentations which include, but are not limited to, the following: Tips to Activate Inclusive Learning (QuickWins! Strategy Cards) (tinyurl.com/quickwincards), *Inclusive Learning 365: EdTech Strategies for Every Day of the Year* (bit.ly/inclusive365book), and The Inclusive Leaders Academy (inclusive365.com/inclusive-leaders-academy). For presentation and keynote requests, or anything else, contact us at inclusive365.com/contact. We look forward to working with you!

About Chris



Christopher R. Bugaj (chrisbugaj.com), MA CCC-SLP, is a founding member of the Assistive Technology Team for Loudoun County Public Schools and is currently the district's assistive technology specialist. Chris co-hosts the Talking With Tech (talkingwithtech.org) podcast and has hosted *The A.T.TIPSCAST* (attipscast.com); a multi-award-winning podcast featuring strategies to design educational experiences. Beyond his work with the Inclusive 365 team, he is the author of *The New Assistive Tech: Make Learning Awesome For All*, first and second editions (iste.org/NewAssistiveTech2) and the co-author of *The Practical (and Fun) Guide to Assistive Technology in Public Schools* (bit.ly/chewatamazon), both of which are published by the International Society for Technology in Education. Chris co-authored two chapters for a book published by Brookes Publishing titled *Technology Tools for Students with Autism*. Chris has presented over 750 live or digital sessions (bit.ly/bugajpresentations) at local, regional, state, national, and international events, including TEDx (bit.ly/bugajtedx).

About Karen

Karen Janowski, MS Ed, OTL, is an assistive and inclusive technology consultant, a former adjunct professor at Simmons University in Boston, Massachusetts, and has worked as a school-based occupational therapist. She presents both locally and nationally about the importance of using ubiquitous technologies that remove the obstacles to learning for all learners, and is a passionate advocate for inclusive technology for learners of all ages. Karen is the president and owner of EdTech Solutions, Inc., in Reading, Massachusetts, which provides AT and AAC professional development, coaching, consultations, and assessments throughout the Greater Boston area.

About Mike

Mike is a RESNA Certified Assistive Technology Professional and the ISTE Inclusive Learning Network 2017 Outstanding Educator. He has been providing direct services to individuals with all types of disabilities for 35 years. Mike is an adjunct professor at Ramapo College of New Jersey, where he teaches courses for masters-level educators in assistive technology and universal design for learning. Mike is the director of the Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center at Disability Rights New Jersey, the statewide Assistive Technology Act program. He runs his own technology consulting firm, Inclusive Technology Solutions, LLC, where he works collaboratively with teams in all environments (school, workplace, and community) to effectively match each learner's needs to inclusive technology supports.

About Beth

Beth Poss is a speech/language pathologist and has also served as a technology consultant, curriculum writer, and school administrator. She is currently the Director of Educational Programs for LessonPix and has a private educational consulting practice. Having spent over 30 years working for a large public school district, Beth is passionate about designing educational environments that support all students in accessing a rigorous curriculum and meeting educational outcomes. In her ongoing work with school districts, universities, and national- and state-level educational organizations, she focuses on how technology is an essential component in designing equitable and inclusive learning environments for learners of all ages. Find her on Instagram @bethposs and for book recommendations @bethpreadsbooks.

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