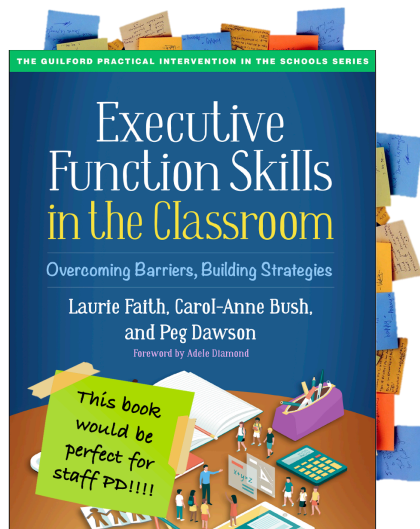


**How to Use *Executive Function Skills in the Classroom*
to Foster Steady Change,
Either Alone or with Colleagues**



by Laurie Faith, Carol-Anne Bush, and Peg Dawson

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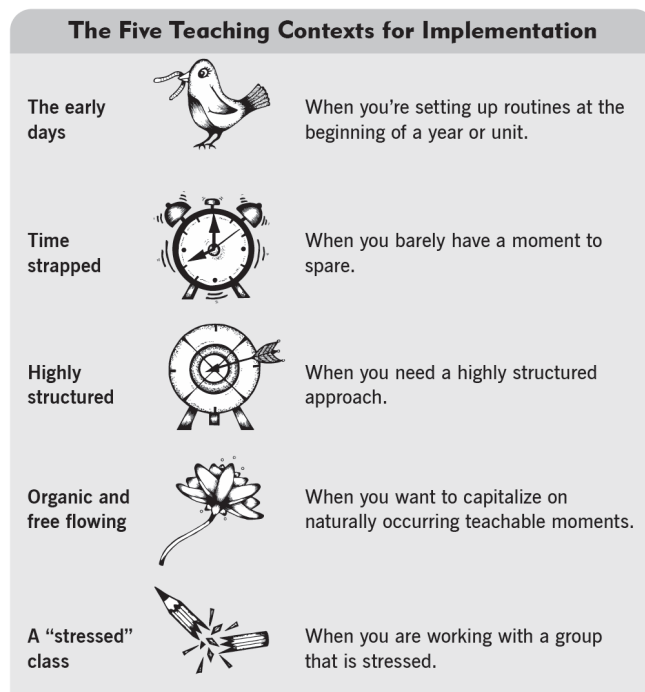
Educators must change and adapt constantly. They run a variety of clubs and teams, navigate new teaching partners and board mandates, learn new technologies, and manage last minute shifts in their class lists. Their pedagogy, however – the all day, every day, moment-to-moment way they interact with students and respond to their learning behaviors – *isn't* something they're typically very flexible about. It is the hardest part of working with kids, and teachers tell us that when they finally get into a rhythm, they really don't want to mess with it. Routines are comforting, and, even at the best of times, habits can be quite stubbornly entrenched. For this reason, most EF interventions won't touch pedagogy with a ten-foot pole. That said, research tells us that the daily, in-context, *pedagogical* moments are exactly where the biggest learning for students is possible. This is why the Barriers and Strategies book tackles pedagogy head on.

This book will guide you through some very simple day-to-day moves to evolve your pedagogy slowly, steadily, and naturally. We've populated each chapter with a dose of research, and then a peek into five different teaching contexts (see image) with examples from teachers we know who are using an EF-oriented approach. We show you how to make the research work in five different classrooms, so you have loads of specific, feasible examples with which to experiment.

Because we built the *Barriers and Strategies* book in this way, you have a few options for navigating it. Obviously, you can just open it up and read it cover to cover. Also, as a solo reader, you can skim it in several rounds. The first time through, perhaps during first term, you can skip to all of the “early days” examples, returning in second term to follow the more “highly structured” thread. However you choose to tackle it, don't just *read* about the approaches—roll up your sleeves and *do* the approaches. Use the examples we provide like a springboard.

Another very productive way to use this book is with a team of colleagues, a school staff, a bunch of special education consultants, or a crew of resource teachers. Here's how a book study might look over the course of a school year if you work through one chapter per month:

- Imagine launching your professional learning journey or book club by reading Chapter 1. The first chapter provides a vivid and grounded explanation of what EFs are and the role they play in day-to-day life and performance. Everyone should read this to get up to speed on the basics and to make personal connections to the impact of EFs on life. After taking a couple of weeks to read, if you're working with a colleague or small group, your team should come together to discuss what resonated with them. In our experience, this stage of the learning journey leaves educators rather shocked to discover that an issue they have been dealing with every day of their career has a name and an entire research literature to describe it. “I have learned that EFs are a thing,” they tell us.
- Chapter 2 explains exactly how to teach children from grades K to 8 about EFs. It provides detailed examples across five different teaching contexts, including those in which the teacher is (1) in the early days with a class, (2) very time strapped, (3) seeking high structure, (4) hoping for a more free-flowing approach, or (5) managing a stressed group (see below). This means that the reading can be “jigsawed” among a team, with different people set off to read a different section of the chapter. For example, perhaps the grade 2 teachers will read about and apply highly structured methods for teaching children about EFs; the grades 1 and 4 teachers will read about and apply material related to a more free-flowing style of teaching children about EFs; the K, 5, and 8 teachers will apply methods for teaching EFs in the early days with a group of students; and the grades 3 and 7 teachers focus on how to teach EFs among highly stressed students. There are five different teaching contexts presented, so there will be plenty of options for everyone to choose from. When you come back together to discuss, your team will have a wide range of experiences and approaches to talk about. Perhaps you'll ask each team to briefly present what they have been applying in the classroom. What worked for the grades 1 and 4 teachers? What didn't work for the K, 5, and 8 team? How did the grades 3 and 7 students respond? How did the grade 2 teachers adapt and improve the approaches from the book?



What are everyone's next steps? By the end of this month, your professional book club will have a lot of learning under its belt about how to build EF literacy. At this point, many educators reflect that they wish they had known about EFs sooner in their own education. "I wish I could turn back time and be a student in my own class," they tell us.

- In Chapter 3, you will learn a protocol for actually using the whole-class EF literacy that you have developed. There is nothing too technically fancy here—you'll learn to lead students in 5- to 10-minute problem-solving conversations about EF barriers and strategies. What you'll gain is an up close and personal sense for how, when, and why these conversations can be transformational. If you're working in a team, each member should read the introduction to the chapter, and then, once again, you can divide up the rest of the reading, perhaps each choosing a different context than the one you followed in Chapter 2. Mix it up! If the grades 3 and 7 teachers explored the "Highly Stressed" context in Chapter 2, they might like to split up and focus on something different for Chapter 3. At the end of the month, your whole team will have used the Barriers and Strategies Protocol to manage problem solving in a variety of different ways, and you should have a lot to reflect on and teach one another. Even with students as young as kindergarten, teachers tell us that creating space for barriers and strategies conversations is like opening the floodgates: "My students have so much to say about their learning!"
- By Chapter 4, you will have accumulated some expertise and confidence. You should be starting to notice a change in how you see and relate to your students. This is a perfect time to zoom in on the way EF literacy can improve the depth and quality of teachers' classroom observations. This chapter will explore a wide range of specific approaches for slowing down and tuning in to students' EF challenges and compensatory strategies. We stretch this guidance across the same five teaching contexts that we used in Chapters 2 and 3. By now, if you're working in a team, you will be in a rhythm and each member may know exactly which of the teaching contexts they want to read up on. Or, more likely, people will be way too curious to read only one. At this point, teachers comment on the increasing self- and other awareness growing among their students. "One of my kinders congratulated me for taking a deep breath to calm down when my coffee spilled. It was really rather lovely."
- Chapter 5 digs deeply into one of the most powerful teaching practices there is: feedback. We'll explore the issue of drive and explain how clear and precise feedback regarding the use of EF strategy is so intrinsically motivating. Money saved on stars, stickers, and other extrinsic incentives should be put toward the coffee fund because there will be a lot to learn, apply, and discuss! After reviewing motivation and some other key research, we'll dig into (once again) five different grounded examples for focusing both spoken and written classroom feedback on the use of EF strategy. In Chapter 4, you learned how to engage students in a process of problem solving and strategy use; they may now know when and how to be independent. In Chapter 5, we provide the extra motivational oomph needed to translate this knowledge into action. Teachers tell us that something kind of magical happens when they comment on EF strategy use. "It is like a trail of breadcrumbs that even my most disengaged students will follow."
- Chapter 6 focuses on everyone's favorite topic: formative assessment and report cards. This chapter explains how a day-to-day focus on students' process and EF strategy use can be balanced with high-stakes assessment, grades, and parents' expectations; we argue that both have an important place in education. Once again, we provide examples of practice across five different contexts, explaining how teachers gather summative data and then share that learning with administrators, parents, and students themselves. This chapter will be an asset to educators struggling to comment on students' learning skills or strategies. Discovering how to gather data relating to EF strategy use has left many of the educators we know feeling as if their reports "write themselves."

- Chapter 7 forms the first part of the conclusion of this book. We take a step back to consider how an EF-oriented classroom can support other educational priorities, such as closing the achievement gap, managing 21st-century learning, ensuring equity in multicultural classrooms, balancing individualized education programs (IEPs), using universal design, and mitigating teacher burnout. We present an overview of each of these challenges, a breakdown of the types of interventions and remedies typically recommended, and an analysis of how our approach may help. We included it because of the number of times we sat at a psychology or education conference on the edge of our seat thinking, “Oh! Our approach can help that problem.” Essentially, we think many of these challenges emerge from the same deficiency in the way classroom teaching works: a lack of connection, understanding, relationship, and teamwork. We hope this will encourage you or your team to persevere with a whole-class, whole-child, EF-oriented approach, knowing the many other aspects of classroom life it affects.
- Finally, in Chapter 8 we sum up the learning we have done as partners, designers, and trainers. We include this because we’ve been asked many times how our EF-oriented teaching movement was conceived, took root, and grew. This section sums up the issues we faced (and continue to face), and we think it will help psychologists, administrators, and educators as they chart their own paths toward leadership in this field. It includes many practical tips that will likely be useful to those leading the charge.