

Professional Learning Module

Supporting Executive Functioning Skills in the Preschool Classroom

How to Use this Resource

The *Supporting Executive Functions in the Preschool Classroom* module provides early childhood educators with current and relevant information about the importance of supporting young children's emerging executive functioning skills. Strategies for embedding these crucial skills into all aspects of a preschooler's day will be discussed and provided. The information included in the module is closely aligned to the *Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards: Birth to Kindergarten* and provides developmentally appropriate research-based practices to support young children in reaching expected learning outcomes in all domains of the Standards. The following materials are included in this module:

- **Overview of Executive Functions** includes foundational information and explores the three main brain functions that make these skills possible: cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory/self-control.
- **Self-Assessment** provides the key elements of scaffolding these skills and requires the educator to determine if an instructional strategy is in place or if additional support is needed.
- **PowerPoint Presentation** includes detailed notes with classroom photos and videos of Florida's VPK teachers supporting executive functioning skills through developmentally appropriate activities.
- **Support Documents** highlight all the key concepts presented throughout the module.
- **Content Support Resources** provides links to and articles that, and documents intended to, deepen understanding of executive functions and strategies to support them in the preschool classroom.

Directors: As instructional leaders, directors are aware of the planning and practices used in the preschool classrooms, especially if they are using data to inform instruction. This module may easily be used as an opportunity for directors to establish a community of practice with instructors. A community of practice suggests that the director, instructors, trainers, coaches, and other staff, participate together in reviewing and discussing relevant educational topics. For example, after completing the self-assessment, the group may meet to discuss what strategies for supporting children's emerging executive functioning skills are in place and what areas may need improvement. A portion of the content is presented by the director and next steps are determined for implementation. Overtime, the group meets to reflect and discuss how children are responding to the content. The group reviews another portion of the content then plans next steps for implementation. The process continues until all content has been reviewed and discussed. The self-assessment may be revisited to determine if all elements have been addressed or if more professional learning is required.

Coaches and Trainers: There are many instructional coaches and trainers who support early educators in preschool classrooms. Through observations and conversations with instructors and directors, they may determine areas of instructional practices that require additional support. The flexibility of the resources presented in this module affords coaches or trainers the opportunity to choose the materials that best fit an instructor's specific needs and interests.

For example, the self-assessment may be used as an observation tool to determine areas of need in implementing activities that support and enhance executive functioning skills. After observing in classrooms, a coach may determine that an instructor needs to provide more opportunities for children to practice and enhance their emerging executive functioning skills during outdoor play. The coach may use the PowerPoint content, support documents and videos that demonstrate the practices then sit side-by-side with the instructor to review and discuss the information. The coach may also model the instructional practices and provide additional support for implementation.

Instructors: Many early educators are self-aware and self-motivated. They are able to identify for themselves the areas of practice that they would like to improve. This module can support individual educators or even teaching partners to grow their practice through reviewing and using the instructional resources in the modules in a self-guided learning experience. As a self-guided resource, it is important to begin with the overview document and knowledge check before proceeding with the content. Effective adult learning practices inform us that the first step in beginning any new learning opportunity is to think about what you already know and do as it relates to a specific topic. The self-assessment is designed to assist educators in deciding the next steps for planning their learning experience. The success of professional learning is determined by how the information is applied in the classroom and how an instructor is able to modify the information to meet the needs of young learners. The quality of a preschool program and the effective use of reflective practice can impact the success of implementation.

Quality teaching and learning involves everything that goes on in a preschool classroom where instructors provide a safe, caring, and loving environment for children to learn and grow. A quality learning environment supports the learner in many ways. The principles of quality teaching and learning are:

- Know your standards. - Use ongoing assessments to plan and implement instruction. - Purposefully plan for learning goals every day.
- Provide intentional instruction through developmentally appropriate practices to ensure all children achieve expected outcomes at their own pace.
- Monitor children's progress and make adjustments to learning goals as needed.

These principles of quality teaching and learning are embedded in the content, materials, and resources of this module.