

Stress, Learning, and Executive Function:


Addressing psychological and
emotional trauma and promoting
genuine recovery

A Special Collaboration between
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Infinite know how
for school



CORONAVIRUS

ALL SCHOOLS CLOSED

WEBINAR COLLABORATION



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Question 1 for Peg:

What has the pandemic and the need for distance learning taught you about the role executive function skills play in learning and schooling?

The ability to use executive function skills is highly **context** *dependent*. That is, our executive function skills look different depending on environmental factors (e.g., what's happening around us, how we're being cued, and how tasks are structured)



Here's what the pandemic taught me:

- The classroom is a significant contextual variable that supports students' executive functioning.
- Teachers and classrooms provide a massive amount of support for children with weak or immature executive function skills.



- Teachers and classrooms teach lessons that have built-in cues to support task initiation and sustained attention
- They give kids a schedule to follow, which supports planning and time management



- Other children in the class serve as role models to help kids follow rules, inhibit impulses, and manage emotions
- They provide organizational structures and help students use them





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Question 1 for Sucheta:

Why should educators
consider teaching EF skills
urgent and vital to kids
thriving in these new norms
of persistent pandemic?

As part of everyday follow-through during the classroom/virtual learning, the most important place where strong Executive Function skills makes a difference is in

Daily Decision-Making



Hot & Cool Executive Function



Hot EF

= Affective
Challenges



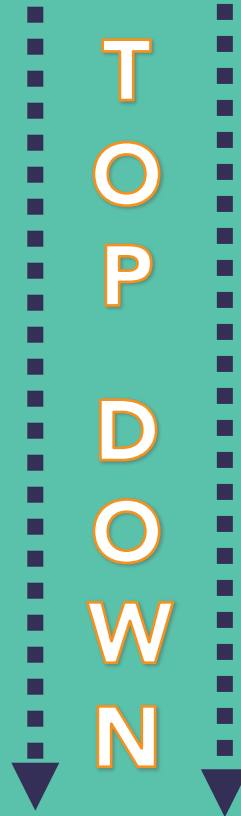
Cool EF

= Abstract
Problem-solving

Zelazo/Mueller (2002 & 2011)



- Evident when situations involve conflicting motivations
- Triggered when one is provided with rewards and losses for performance



- Evident when there are no motivational conflicts
- Works on solving problems in a decontextualized way



- Philip D. Zelazo, PhD

Bringing Attention Back to What Matters





Dysregulation during the pandemic:

- Lack of patience
- Quickness to anger
- Taking too long to cool off
- Drawing erroneous conclusions
- Holding grudges
- Hard to work with
- Less collaborative or easy going
- Failing to shift perspective
- Limited problem-solving
- Limited creativity

Having to deal with the pandemic is building skills to actively regulate HOT EF and promote COOL EF





Question 2 for Peg:

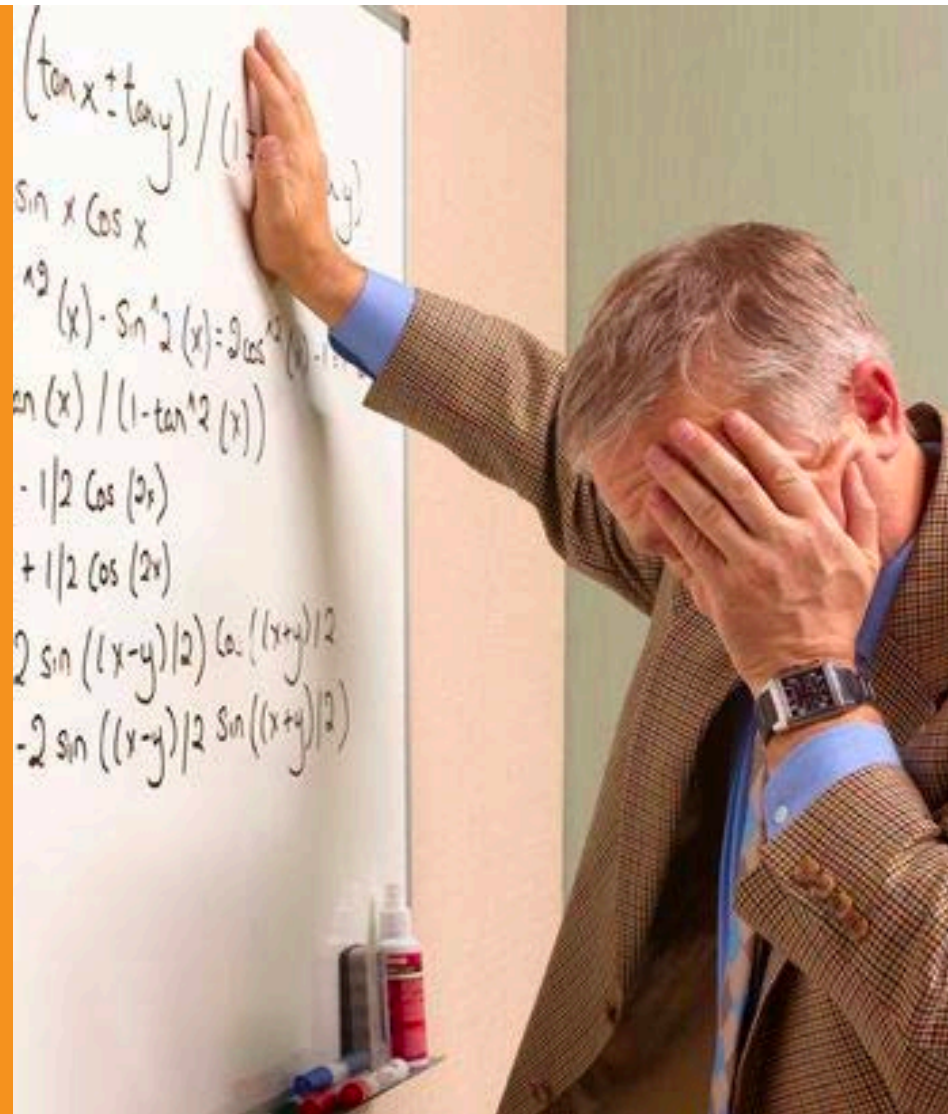
How does stress affect the ability of parents, teachers, and students to access effective executive function skills?

The brain is hard-wired to focus on the immediate situation and whatever is causing stress in the moment—it's the most basic survival mechanism that the human species has.

Stress trumps executive function skills, which makes it hard to access them.



When parents or teachers are experiencing stress, it can rub off on kids and stresses them out, too.



While all executive function skills may be diminished when stressed, the ones that may be particularly affected are

- **Emotional control**
- **Flexibility, and**
- **Working memory**





Question 2 for Sucheta:

What's an EF-Culture and
how can we develop it?



Students growing up in highly cultivated EF Culture know how to

- Bring attention back to the task in hand
- Plan and organize tasks into steps
- Remove barriers so that goals can be reached
- Activate patience, care and persistence
- Seek help and self-advocate
- Do something different when things go awry



Behaviors are considered as barometer of child's brain functioning and not their will or character



Learning *how* to learn is taught explicitly (to strengthen the “plate”)



Reflection is at the heart of students managing their work, their emotions and solving their personal problems



Teacher's self-management is considered vital to student's self-development



- Make personal strengths and challenges transparent
- Strategic thinking is discussed openly and is integrated in the grading process
- Students are taught to delay reacting, "Here's a question I don't need to ask."
- Self-reflection Q's are rehearsed, "Through these behaviors, what am I trying to satisfy right now?"





Question 3 for Peg:

As parents and teachers prepare for a new school year, what are some child-friendly strategies they they might use to guide students through that transition?

- Talk to kids about what it will be like to go back to school
- Ask them what they're looking forward to and what they're worried about



- Acknowledge their feelings (resist the temptation to jump in and reassure them before you've let them know you understand their feelings).
- Talk about how things will change at home when kids start back at school. Ask them what will make the transition easier for them.



- Focus on building relationships before worrying about the curriculum. Place a premium on lessons that “spark joy.”
- Recognize that relearning old routines may take time.
- Give kids the opportunity to share what they liked and didn’t like about distance learning.



- Understand that some kids actually did better with distance learning
- Figure out what worked for them and see if that can be brought into the classroom



- Teach kids about executive function skills so that if distance learning comes back, you'll have a common language to help them navigate that landscape more successfully





Question 3 for Sucheta:

What are some of the ways
to strengthen social,
emotional and interpersonal
skills in children that can
improve closeness between
teachers and students?

Channeling Mr.
Rogers through:

- Pace
- Tone
- Routine

A Learning environment
that is safe, comfortable
and familiar!



Effective non-verbal & verbal communication skills is a priority:

- Tone of voice
- Facial expressions
- Gestures
- Brevity
- Bridge
- Word choice
- Paraphrasing





**"Anything
mentionable is
manageable."**

- Fred Rogers



**"I understand
how you would
feel that way."**

- Fred Rogers





**“Help children
believe the
world is
beautiful, noble
and sacred.”**

- Bo Lozoff



A Taipei American School's middle school performance of The Little Mermaid



"Developing true social-emotional skills is hard and lifelong work, and regrettably, Americans are attracted to quick fixes."

- Marc Brackett & Diana Divecha

IN SUMMARY...



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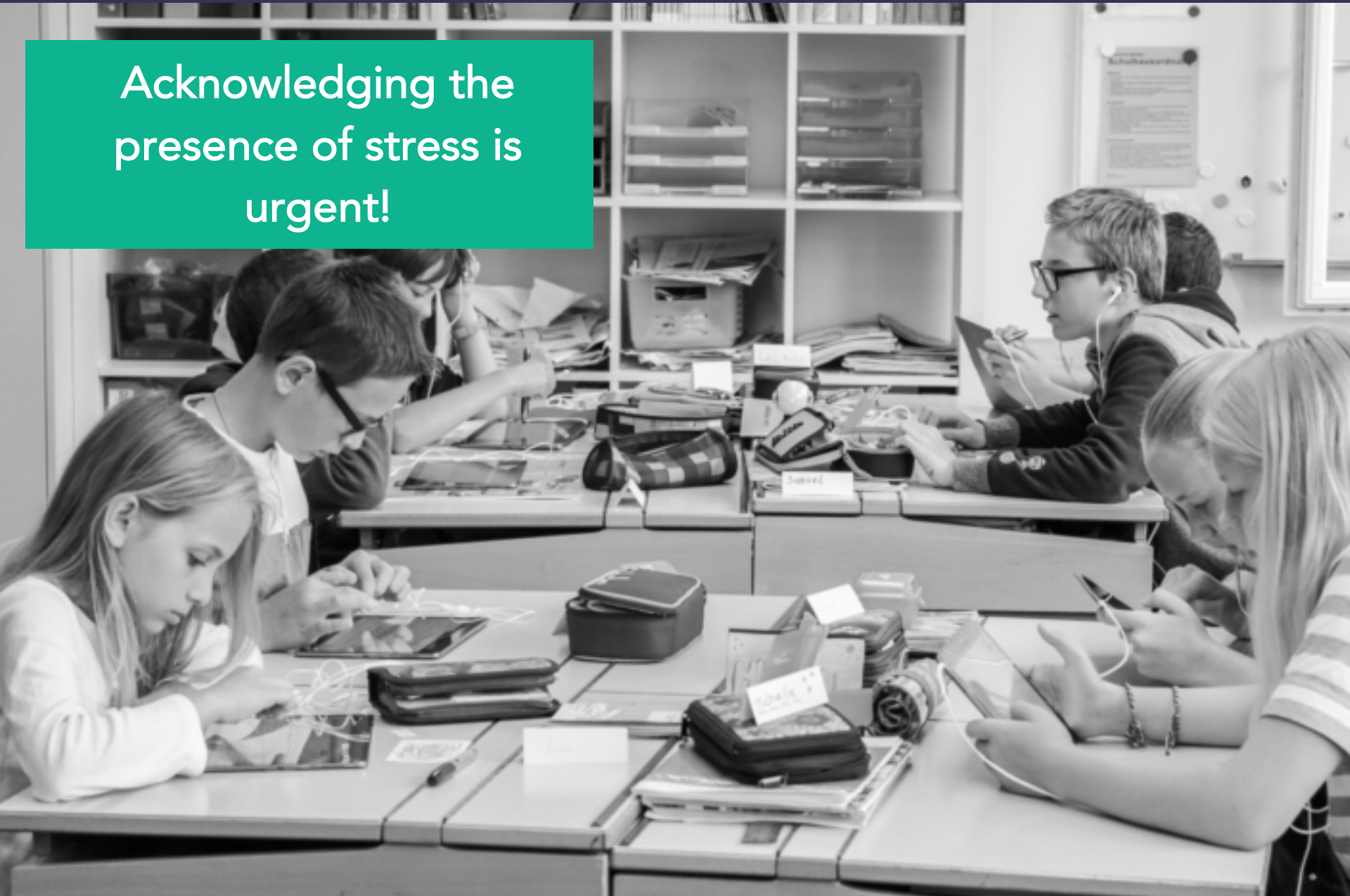


The teaching
uncertainty is new and
real!



The range of responses is
going to be new as well

Acknowledging the
presence of stress is
urgent!




We are all in this
together!





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A black and white photograph of three students in a classroom. A boy with glasses is on the left, a girl is in the center holding a tablet, and another girl is on the right. They are all smiling and looking at the tablet. In the background, there are bookshelves filled with books and a box labeled 'Beginner Angel Andy'.

Remember, how we
live today is how we
live our lives

Thank You!



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