

Ep #313: Executive Function Strategies for Leaders, Teachers, and Students with Candace Heiken



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 313.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. Hey, I have big news for you. Are you ready? All right. The doors for the next cohort of EPC, the Empowered Principal® Collaborative, in case you don't know, they are open for the next round. This means you have a decision to make my friends.

You can lead your school for the rest of the year as you are right now, which is not a problem. Or you can take your leadership skills and your school to a level beyond what you imagined was possible and faster than you thought was possible by joining the Empowered Principal® Collaborative.

Most school leadership resources are limited in scope. I know this because I searched high and low to find the tools and resources I need. They offer inspiration that's limited or information that's limited, but it requires you to do the heavy lifting. EPC is different. Most professional development options tend to be a one and done offer. It's a book or an article or an online resource. Or maybe it's a day-long training, or a two day workshop, or maybe even a week conference.

All of these programs and resources, they offer insights to improving your leadership skills. I'm not putting them down. They're amazing. I use them, and I implemented them. But none of them walk you through week by week through the process from start to finish of improving your leadership skills

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and enhancing your school, creating the culture you want, the vision implementation you want, and hitting the goals you want.

There's nothing out there like EPC in the industry. I created this because it was the missing link. It was what I wanted and did not have. EPC is innovative. You receive two for the price of one. You're doubling down on your investment of time, energy, and income and resources. Right? You have a mentor who's a master at school leadership and a certified life coach who's an expert in helping you navigate all life throws your way personally and professionally.

So I am the combination. You get the mentorship of a skilled leader who's been in your shoes and has done the job at multiple levels, and you get a certified life coach. There is no other mastermind or program to my knowledge that combines leadership mentorship and life coaching from the most prominent life coaching school program in the world, which is the Life Coach School. You can look it up. It's legit.

We have the strongest tools in the industry for life coaching and leadership coaching. I've created leadership coaching tools and resources for you from the life coaching certification program and the ongoing certifications that I receive on an annual basis. I have years of experience in both of these fields. I've personally incorporated all of these life coaching tools into my work when I was a site and district leader because I wanted to make sure that the tools worked. I wanted to make sure that they work in different scenarios with different people under different sets of circumstances.

I'll tell you what, they do. They hold the test of time. They work in any school at any level in any situation with any school leader who is willing to give coaching a try. That's all you have to do. It's easy on your part because I do the heavy lifting with you. You are not alone. You're not isolated, and you're not given a bunch of resources, a book, a workbook, a

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training, and then asked to go figure it all out yourself. That's not how this operates.

We're with you side by side, every single week for the entire school year. EPC will never leave your side. You have an advocate in your corner every step of the way. You have solutions at your fingertips for every problem that you encounter. You have support and friendship when you most need it when you're struggling or you're hitting a low point. We are there for you. We get it. We understand because we're school leaders.

EPC guarantees your progress. You cannot fail when you have ongoing support. You either win and we celebrate, or you learn and we keep going forward. You create a plan that is simple and doable to implement. You win as a school leader when you join EPC. So sign up for the Empowered Principal® Collaborative. There's no risk on your part. You either win, or you get your money back. That's it.

You receive all the tools you need to feel in control of your time, your energy, your focus, your attention. When you sign up, you're going to receive all of the school leadership mastery series workbooks that I've created over the last six months, and I have been training on them. You will get access to those trainings, the replays of those trainings, and all of the workbooks.

You also are going to get the QuickStart Guide and the Empowered Principal® Life and Leadership Legacy plan. I'm going to walk you through your legacy plan, your one year plan, your three month plan. I'm going to show you how to prioritize, how not to overwork, how to delegate appropriately. I'm going to show you how to reprioritize when obstacles come up and get in your way.

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I'm going to teach you how to communicate, how to build relationships, how to build up emotional regulation for yourself and your school and your students. I'm going to teach you every single mastery pillar that you need to learn in EPC. So come on in. You deserve to have this. You deserve as a school leader to have ongoing support to help you tackle and solve every problem, every obstacle that comes your way. We begin Wednesday, January 10th at 4:00 p.m. The link to sign up is in the show notes. I'll see you there.

Angela: Hello empowered principals. Welcome to the podcast. Today I have a very special treat. I have a very special guest here. Her name is Candace. She and I connected, I think, online. Well, I'll let her tell the story. I can't even remember. I've had so many amazing people reaching out to be on the podcast and really to connect at a deeper level where we are doing this work in different ways. Candace is doing some amazing things at district and site levels that I wanted her to share with you today.

So I'm going to let her introduce herself and her company and what she offers to schools. We are going to have an amazing conversation for you in store. So Candace, welcome to the podcast.

Candace: Thanks for having me, Angela. I'm really happy to be here.

Angela: Yes. Candace, tell them how we connected. I've had so many people reaching out that it's been just a blur, but a really exciting blur. I've been connecting with a lot of people. What I'm excited about actually is the fact that the work that I'm doing with school leaders, there are other people in the world starting to offer similar programs or programs that like enhance or collaborate with the work that I'm doing here Empowered Principal® Program.

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So I just loved what Candace had to offer. I really think she has some amazing insights to share with you guys. So Candace, introduce yourself briefly. Tell them a little bit about yourself and what you're doing with schools.

Candace: Well, thank you. So my name is Candace. I've been in education for about 25/30 years now. You start to lose track a little bit.

Angela: I'm in that area too. Yeah.

Candace: So, and I started in the classroom. But then about 12 years ago, I started a company that really focused on helping students who were struggling in the classroom and mostly with content. Then we quickly realized that there was a large group of students who it wasn't really about the content as much as it was the skill development. They just didn't have the skills they needed to be good students. So they could do their math homework, they just couldn't find it in their backpack to turn it in.

So we started working with students on that skill development and helping them learn new strategies and put systems in place so that they could start to meet those expectations a little bit better. So for the last 12 years or so, we've been doing that we've worked with students at that student level. So we've had a team of educators who've been working with students to help them develop those skills.

But then about five years ago, we started developing a curriculum specifically for teachers in the classroom so that they could start to work with the students in their classrooms who are struggling to meet those expectations and start developing some of those skills. And really have a way to identify what the issues were, where the some of those skill deficiencies were, and then have a way to target their instruction and start

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teaching them strategies. So we've been working with districts and school leaders to help teachers in the classroom be able to do that.

Angela: That's so important. I mean, all of us can relate. If you've ever been a teacher, you can relate to the child who the backpacks a mess and the homework's all crumpled up and they don't know where their pencil is. They're constantly like digging in their desk, and there's that 200 things in that desk. So we can all relate.

And there might be some of us adults out there who feel a little bit like that. Like, we're really bright people. We're smart people. We know where our stuff is. I went to a school recently and did a professional development. The principal was like you need to help me organize my desk. I know where everything is, I know all the piles. But she was just talking about the organization piece. She wished she could be more organized. We feel organized in our head, but sometimes it shows out in the world.

But eventually, if we're not able to create systems and organize ourselves externally I mean, we'll get mixed up internally. I think vice versa. I do think it's kind of a representation into how fast our brain is going inside. So I love that you are helping teachers and students, school leaders all learn the systems that they need. I'm assuming in a pretty simplistic way to help them break down how to just the basics so that they can be available for more advanced learning and conversation.

Candace: Well, and you know, something you said was so important there. I think that at certain stages in our lives we realize the systems that we've had in place maybe aren't working for us anymore. So those of us felt like boy, I really felt super organized at one point in my life. Now my desk is such a mess, I can't find what I'm looking for. Or I used to be able to get started and get going. But now I just feel so overwhelmed with the amount

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of workload I have. I don't know how to task chunk it and manage it so that I can actually get started and get going.

So we see the same thing with students in the classroom. We see a lot of times they have systems in place for some of these executive functions, whether it's those cognitive pieces like planning and organization, or even some of the emotional or the behavioral pieces. They've got those systems in place.

But then as soon as some expectations change, they move into middle school years or they move into high school years, and the expectations change. Now those systems that they had in place don't work anymore. So now they need new strategies to meet these new expectations. So I think it's just a progression that we all see through life that these executive functions that we have, they've got to grow with us and change depending on the situation that we're in and the expectations that come along with that.

Angela: Yes. I think one of the things I really saw when I was in school leadership, there was such a lack of patience when it came to slowing down enough to teach these skills or to teach an actual process. Not because teachers wanted to be impatient with kids, or that principals wanted to be impatient with teachers.

It was that there was so much pressure to go really fast. We didn't feel like we had permission to slow down enough to teach the actual step by step process of how to manage your backpack or how to manage the items in your desk, or what to do when you're done with your assignment or how to get started on an assignment.

We briefly kind of cover over those, but there's so much pressure or urgency to cover all of the curriculum or keep up with the pacing guide and

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all of that. So if principals are feeling pressure and teachers are feeling pressure, it eventually lands with the kids. So what are some of the things that you teach teachers or school leaders in how to, first of all, give themselves permission? Then how do you maintain a system once you've taught it?

Candace: Yeah, that's a really great question. I think first of all, that is the question we get most often from teachers. Okay, so how do I fit this in my day, right? We get all of these demands. So how am I now supposed to fit in these executive function instruction?

So one of the things that we love to look at is just how executive function integrates naturally into your day anyway. So whether you've got a specific content area like math or language arts, you're using so many different executive functions and the students are needing to rely on that. So how can we look at integrating it in a natural way to where you're teaching some of these strategies and skills along with the content so that you don't have to designate a half an hour out of your day to now teach these executive function skills. So that's one of the pieces.

But really, I think it's important to kind of take a step back and look and see that so often, we manage those behaviors throughout the year. So if we take a minute and we step back and we realize here are the behaviors in my classroom that are affecting my ability to instruct and my ability to be effective with these students. These are the behaviors. These are the troublesome things happening.

If we take a step back and we see that and then we put a plan in place to address those. Now, we don't have to manage those behaviors the rest of the year because we've actually taught a strategy. So different than having a consequence in place for when you do this or that. What are they doing

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instead? What sort of skill have you helped them develop in order to meet those expectations and change that behavior?

Angela: Yes, I love that so much because we don't think about the cost of not doing this. What is the cost associated with not slowing down and teaching the skill or rushing through the process of teaching it, or not wanting to review it, or go back and teach it again, if necessary. We don't think about it in that way. So it's a really helpful way to get your brain on board with this is the most productive use of my time. Because once I do this and I teach this process, then it will let the year be smoother.

If we, after a break, especially a long break, like we have Thanksgiving coming up. Or as this podcast airs, you guys are coming into Christmas holiday probably, or the whatever holidays you guys are celebrating in December. That longer break might warrant a great time to review the process that the teacher is looking for, the process that the school leader's looking for with the staff to review. Here's the process that I would like to see. This is why it's helpful for you. It makes life easier for you as the teacher or the student, and it will make life easier for us as a team.

The other thing, I know you and I talked about this offline when we met the other day. We talked about if one student in your classroom is needing this support, or you have somebody in mind. You've got like that teacher or that student that's like struggling to like turn their paperwork in on time.

Candace: Yeah.

Angela: One of the things I like to think about is if one person is struggling, there might be others out there. You might not be as aware of them, but they might also be struggling. It doesn't hurt for everybody to get the review.

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Candace: We see that frequently. Because you've got students who, you've got the ones who stand out to you, right? The ones that you think oh yeah, those are the ones. There's that handful of kids in your class who really have a hard time, right? Then you also have a lot of the kids who you're just not going to hear it.

I think one of the things that we see a lot are things like the student who can't get started on their worksheet. You handed them a worksheet. All they need to do is write their name and do number one and then number two. But to that student, they're looking at that, and it feels so big and overwhelming. They really truly don't know how to start. They are completely overwhelmed.

Our natural reaction as a teacher is to think okay, the student is lazy or unmotivated or defiant. Something's going on because it's not that hard. Just write your name and start on number one. Right?

Angela: Right.

Candace: But to that student, it really is that hard. When we can look at that behavior, and we can identify the skill deficiency and the task initiation is this student's struggle. So can we do to provide a strategy for that student to task chunk and make that worksheet sitting in front of them less overwhelming to where they can get started?

So looking at the behaviors in the classroom, and understanding some of them aren't going to be the kids who are having a complete meltdown because they can't find their work in their backpack. Some of them are the kids who are just staring at the wall and can't get started on their work. So, just paying attention to those behaviors that are impacting a student's ability to learn in your room.

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Angela: Right. I know you and I were chatting about this where like a lot of people think oh, there's an executive functioning problem. They need a 504. They need an IP. Like they need some kind of official something to help them. But we could circumvent that and just say if they had an IEP or a 504, what goal would I have for this child or this group of students? How might I implement that right now at a tier one level?

So if one kid's struggling, there's probably others struggling in silence. There might be different, like you said, there might be somebody who's a total mess and just like really getting your attention, but then there's this kid over here who it looks like he's always talking or she's always talking. But they're asking what do I do? Where does this go? They're kind of trying to figure it out with social cues. Then you've got the other one who kind of just goes into shutdown mode.

So kids are responding different ways. But I know even as an adult, if I'm in a new environment or I'm asked to do a new task, I can feel a little overwhelmed or like what did they say? Or if I didn't catch what they said verbally, I'm wondering like I'm looking around to try and figure out what to do so that I don't stand out. I fit in. I don't feel embarrassed, or I don't feel like I missed the directions. I'm not being a good student.

Just framing like executive functioning as a normal developmental aspect of learning and teaching. That it should be a part of what we teach. When we do allocate time to it, it helps students become more effective, as you said, when they get to middle school, and the demand is greater and then on to high school when it's even greater. But developmentally, we've allowed for that trial and error and helping them and actually directly teaching them how to do some of those skills in addition to just covering academic content.

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Candace: Yeah. No, we've seen it time and time again over the years. It's so exciting, really, to see what happens when a student starts to realize that the reason they're not having success in the classroom isn't a result of them not being smart enough or not being capable. That they are actually capable of this if they just had a few systems in place, if they knew how to do what we expect them to do.

We hear that from teachers and parents that their student, they can't get them to do anything. They just can't get them to do their work. But really, if you really stop and think about it, what student wants to continue to attempt something that they're just going to keep failing at? So if we can step back and show them a different way to do it, and we can show them exactly how we want them to meet those expectations, that starts to address that motivation piece, right? If we can put a little bit of success in their way.

I think when we talked last week, I had shared this story with you about one of my daughters. I've got four daughters, and my second daughter is both dyslexic and has ADHD. She struggled quite a bit with reading. Then, of course, we had the support for the academic side.

But the executive function side, we had to very explicitly teach her strategies and systems to manage everything, to manage the impulsivity, to sustain focus, to get organized, and plan and manage her time. So all of those things.

When she was in late elementary years, early middle school years, she was really struggling. But she had a desire to do well, and she wanted to do it. So we started working on that. By the time she graduated high school with a 4.4 GPA and gave her senior speech to her 1,000 classmates at graduation.

Angela: Wow.

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Candace: She just finished. She started teaching in a fourth grade classroom up in Colorado this year. She's excited to be a part and to give back. She just has such a passion for the kids like her in the classroom. But, again, she wasn't one of the kids who was really standing out as someone who needed that extra attention or support. But she sure would have benefited from having some of that instruction in the classroom.

Angela: That is such a testament to the work you're doing in the world now. Like that is personal experience, especially from the parent perspective. That just adds a whole other dimension to the work that you do in your school because you have literally personal experience with it at home. How you were able to support her in turning that around. Like that says a lot for the programs and the tools that you use with your students and your schools.

Candace: Well, everybody has their why, right? Their passion behind what they do. I think when you can see it firsthand like that, and you see the impact that it has, you see a student from both sides. From the educator side, and from the parent side. You see how they feel about themselves. How they're starting to think maybe I'm just not capable, right? Maybe I'm just not as smart as I thought I was. They've got to somehow come to resolve why they're struggling as much as they are.

So to see a student be able to change that narrative and start realizing actually I am capable and I can do this. I just needed to learn how to do X, Y, Z. So it is exciting when you see that. You know it changes lives. It changes the paths students are on. You start to see some pretty exciting things when kids feel empowered.

Angela: Yes. Oh, I love that so much. I taught kindergarten for 15 years. I can't think of one student in 15 years that came in into kindergarten feeling that they weren't a capable learner. They all came in excited to learn,

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excited for school. Some were scared like they might even have some attachment issues with mom and dad, but nobody came in saying I can't learn. I'm not smart. I can't learn. I don't know what to do. They all come in with this kindergarten like new energy show me all the things. I want to learn all the things.

So somewhere along the line, kids hear or learn through adults that they are behind, and that they need intervention, and they're not doing it right. That they need to keep up. We just, we promote this. If you're not on grade level or keeping up with your peers or doing it the way the teacher said or your backpacks not pulled together at the same time as everybody else's. You've got to hurry up.

I feel like they get these messages in our schools and probably at home too. But we want to be mindful of that. I'm wondering what are some of the signals or like red flags that can indicate to an educator, whether it's a school leader or a teacher. What are some of the things that you can recommend that they look for just to create awareness so that if they're frustrated with a student's behavior or lack of motivation or it feels like defiance or anything like that, what's the signal to indicate that it might be an executive functioning issue?

Candace: So it's all in the behaviors, right. So it's an executive function. That's such a big, huge category. I mean, we're talking about a lot of things. Ultimately, the executive functions are what our brain is using to help us complete a task to reach a goal. So they develop a lot in those infant and toddler years. But then they continue to develop as we go through the school years. You see a lot of that start to happen during adolescence as, like we said, the expectations change. So they need to start developing more and more of these strategies.

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So, it covers a huge range of skills. So in our program, we like to look at it in three different categories. So we see the behavioral pieces, so things like self-control, or the ability to stop and think about consequences of your actions. Self-monitor, the ability to evaluate yourself in a situation and understand how you're doing. So these are behavioral pieces.

The second category is emotional pieces. So things like flexibility. Being able to transition nicely. Whether that's physical transitions or mental transitions. So changing your thoughts or being open to new ideas, and you can see how important that would be in education.

But then we've got the emotional control. So being able to manage your reactions to certain stimulus. So those are the emotional pieces. Then we have the cognitive pieces. So you've got working memory. So the ability to use information that's stored in your brain and sustain attention and focus to complete a task. You've got task initiation. Just getting started and staying focused. Then you've got planning an organization.

So planning, creating systems or steps in order to finish what you need to do. Then organization, making sure that you have all the pieces in place how they need to be. So you've got all of these different areas that are all working together. So when we look at what would indicate a deficiency, it's the behaviors that we're seeing.

So are we seeing students who don't know how to wait their turn before speaking? So they're struggling with a self-control issue. Or they're really impulsive. They don't think about their actions before they do something. They don't think about the consequences. That, of course, looks different in a kindergarten or first grade classroom or a ninth or 10th grade classroom. But you've still got the same self-control deficiency where they're not considering their consequences.

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Or you've got a student, like we mentioned, who just can't get started on their work, or a student who can't find their things in their backpack, a student who can't manage distractions. That's one we hear a lot, right? Distractions in the classroom. So even just everyday distractions. The kids who just, oh look, a squirrel kids, right?

So we see all of those sorts of behaviors in the classroom. Most of those classroom behaviors that we see can be easily linked to an executive function. So that doesn't necessarily mean that's the only thing going on. It's certainly something to consider and something to look at.

When you start to think about it in that way, that maybe the student isn't doing that to be defiant. Maybe they really just don't know how to do what you're asking them to do. That kind of changes the mindset a bit. It changes the way we see those kids who are making it more difficult than we think that should be.

Angela: Yeah. Well, it just, it changes the dynamic of how you approach them. Because if you're approaching them thinking, and this could be like I work with school leaders on this whole thing with their staff, right? You're working on it with like teachers and the kids. But if you are coming in with the thought that it's intentional. They're doing it on purpose. It's their lack of motivation, they're lazy.

If you're coming in frustrated or judging them, you're going to approach them and handle that conversation and that interaction differently than you would if you're like there's a reason this is happening, especially if it's consistent. There's something going on for this child, whether it's a mindset issue, or just a lack of skill issue, or maybe there's something more going on that maybe does warrant that assessment.

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But before we get to assessment, considering what is the problem under the problem kind of a thing, right? Like, there's a reason for the behavior or reason for the emotion. We want to understand where that child or where that teachers coming from that is creating this like, I don't know. A gap or like a kind of a struggle in the process.

Because some kids come in, and they just naturally, they are taught the process, and they come in and they just do the process. But I would say that's maybe half your kids. Most of them need reminders. They need updates. They need visuals. They need context clues. They need a lot of scaffolding for those systems.

When you take the time to do that, for your staff and your students. The more we reiterate and emphasize the actual process, the easier it is for you, the easier it is for the teacher, the easier it is for students. It's easier for everybody. It's a win all around, right?

Candace: Like truly, yeah. Well, they know how to do what you're asking them to do. That's what's so important. We think about that in the other subjects, right? I taught high school math. So I can think about the foundational pieces and making sure that students have those foundational pieces so that we can build on that. I make sure that they know how to do those processes.

But we don't always think about it on the executive function side of things of whether they really have those pieces in place. Especially as students get older when we think they should just know how to do this. This isn't that hard. They should just know how to do this. We see that a lot, especially at that middle school and high school age. Maybe they should. Maybe they should know how, but it doesn't necessarily mean they do know. So.

Angela: Yes, all of this.

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Candace: So we can take a break and just show them some simple ways to do what we need them to do. I think the piece that I think is exciting is when we can engage students and get them on board. When they understand what's in it for them. Why is this important? They start to gain that awareness of what they're doing and why they're doing it and why that's making their lives more difficult than it needs to be right? Why their parents are taking away their privileges on their phones and this sort of thing because they're not meeting expectations.

So there are a lot of things going on that we can engage students and make it relevant to what's important in their lives and then show them some simpler ways to do it and help them see what they need to be doing to be a good student, and that they're capable of doing that.

Angela: Yeah, this is everything right here because I think it comes down to our expectations of other people. I talk a lot about emotional literacy. As a school leader and adults, we're not taught emotional literacy. It's not something we really teach in schools. Hopefully, it's starting to take hold. But it's the same thing.

Like systems, organizations, it's not an innate skill set for everybody. I would say for the majority of people. So assuming, especially if you're a school leader. If you're assuming an adult should know how to be organized because they're an adult or know how to be emotionally resilient because they're an adult, that thought, it doesn't serve you or them because it's not true.

It's not because we're adults we should know anything. It's whether or not we've had the you know the exposure or the conversation or the lessons or we've been explicitly taught the skill sets. As we're coming out post pandemic, there's been so much conversation around kids not being

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motivated. Kids being lazy. Kids not having the same values that they used to have. Kids just being different, just showing up in a different way.

We have a set of expectations for an ideal student, and kids more and more, according to what I'm hearing from my clients, is that people aren't meeting the expectation. My offering, my suggestion is let's look at what the expectation is. Then let's just recalibrate maybe the expectation, but also recalibrate what is it we want them to do? How do we expect them to know how to do it to that level of our expectation?

Candace: Yeah, absolutely. I love that. We talk about that a lot too. You know, we hear similar stories, of course, from our schools and districts. Increased behaviors and increased frustration among the staff and teachers trying to deal with it. Then the support teams who are having more and more students on their caseload and needing to address all of these issues. So it becomes a big spiral, right.

I think one of the things that kids really dealt with a lot during the pandemic and post-pandemic were a lot of changes in expectations pretty rapidly. As adults, that's overwhelming, but as kids, that's very overwhelming. So as we continue to change these expectations, that has a different set of skills that's needed for each time that changes, right?

When they've got to be at home and do assignments at home, or when they've got to now be online, or when they've got to be back in the classroom but only part time. There were just, there were so many changes that we needed them to be able to adjust to and to utilize a different set of skills each time. Really a lot of different skills.

I think one of the benefits to all of that was that I think parents and teachers and administrators alike start to see where some of those skill deficiencies are. We realize oh boy. Okay, yeah. These kids really are struggling to do

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this, to get organized, to come prepared to class, to be independent learners. So we've really got to address this and help put some systems in place for that and provide support for our teachers who are struggling with those increased behaviors because we've certainly been seeing that. So how do we provide that support, as well?

Angela: Oh, that's so great. So tell the listeners how do you work with schools? Just tell them a little bit about your company and what you offer and any other words of wisdom that can help them because this is, it is a primary focus in my program right now with school leaders helping them try to navigate the, I would call them new or different demands, in terms of executive functioning for students, executive functioning for adults. The change in we went from well, we went pre-COVID then we went home, and then we were hybrid. Then we were onboarding back in.

But we've got kids who have lost between one and two to three years of traditional in person schooling. So we are definitely seeing that impact in our schools now. So can you just share with them what you do, how you do it, where they can get a hold of you? Then any magical words of wisdom that you've learned over the years in working with your school districts.

Candace: I'll save my magical words for wisdom for last.

Angela: Okay. Great.

Candace: Well, one of our big challenges that we really worked hard to overcome and we had a large team of educators who we worked with to develop the program that we have now for executive function. One of the big challenges that we worked to overcome was this ability to customize a solution because we know that time is limited.

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We know that if we're going to get classroom teachers on board with teaching executive function, they need to be able to target their instruction to exactly what their students are struggling with rather than trying to spend six months teaching a bunch of strategies that may or may not ever really address what's happening in the classroom.

So that was what we sought out to do was to create a solution where teachers can say here are the top five behaviors happening in my classroom. Now please give me the resources to address that so that I can instruct to that and teach those strategies and start to develop habits and skills.

So that's what our program does. We have an evaluation tool that helps identify what are those deficiencies based on the behaviors so that we can connect those two things together and then provide a lot of strategies and systems to teach students. We often hear okay but I've tried to teach a kid how to use a planner for the last three years, and they still won't use a planner, right? So how do your strategies work? What's the deal with that?

That's where that motivation and engagement piece comes in. Because ultimately, there are a lot of ways that you can keep a planner or have some sort of planner system. At the end of the day, if it's accomplishing what it's meant to accomplish to where you know when your assignments are due, and you've got everything you need when you go home, and you've got everything in the morning when you come back. If it's accomplishing that, it doesn't necessarily need to look like a planner, right? So we can have some flexibility in our instruction with that.

I think one of my favorite parts of working with students and with educators is when we get that pushback, right? That well that's a great idea, but that's not going to work for me when we're telling a seventh grade student that

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this is how we want them to manage something, or this is the new system in place.

Honestly, that's the best part. That's the best when they do that because now we've got some buy in. Now they're a part of the process. Now is our opportunity to say okay, let's figure out how it will work for you. Right? Like what would work. We let them have some ownership in this.

This is the part where we've kind of come back to what we were talking about before that even as adults, we have the systems in place. But ultimately, we have to be able to use that metacognition to be able to recognize and see that what I'm doing isn't working for me. I can evaluate that and see, and now I can see why. Then I can start to work on a solution and putting that in place and then evaluate how that's going.

So this whole process is what is happening with executive function development. If we can teach that process, even if it's just in a simple time management strategy, that's so huge and so good. So, yeah. So I think with the program that we've developed it, there are a lot of opportunities for teachers to teach strategies, but then help students become a part of the process. Help them apply and practice this strategy so that they can start to develop the habits.

Angela: That's so great. I mean every school leader is probably knocking on your door wanting this because it's, I do it at the site and district level. I hear you saying like this is really going to give teachers some practical tangible tools that schools can implement at an individual level, a customizable level.

But also like, I'm sure there are some more school wide or like a classroom wide systems that can apply to all kids and can help your classroom just function more smoothly overall, right?

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Candace: Yeah, absolutely.

Angela: Yeah. Awesome.

Candace: That's a really good point that there needs to be an application that is available to that one student who's really struggling or to a small group of students who's struggling with a skill, but then also is available to the whole class. So that, again, if we're wanting to buy in of a classroom teacher, we need to make it accessible.

So if we're asking them to create a customized solution for the 30 kids in their classroom, that's not real appealing. So, so being able to look at it from a whole class perspective, and think what am I going to teach to my entire class that would be of benefit to everyone here so that we can have these strategies and systems in place?

Angela: Yeah. Oh, so good. So good. Okay, words of wisdom. Looking for the magic.

Candace: You know, I think it's probably one of the biggest takeaways is just simply practice, right? Because as we're looking at skill development, I think that's one of the pieces that we forget about sometimes as educators. We think we just showed them how to do that. Why aren't they doing it? You have to provide a lot of opportunities to practice in real world situations where it makes sense, and it's relevant to the student.

Because ultimately when we're talking about skill development, we're talking about building those habits, which has to happen over time and with a lot of practice. So regardless of how you're doing it in your school and how you're doing it in your classroom, give a lot of grace and give a lot of opportunity to continue to make mistakes with it but then practice how to do it the way you're wanting them to do.

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Angela: Yeah. At the school leader level, I think of it as three P's. Permission and then practice and then patience. Like there will be no perfect system. There will be no one system that fits, one size fits all. There will not be perfection. So the fourth P has to go. No perfection. But like we're just really, like we have to give teachers permission to slow down and teach this.

We have to give them permission to practice it. But then also we, as leaders, have to be patient with our teachers and our students that this is a part of learning. It's a critical part of learning. It's equally, if not more, important than like jumping into those academics and pushing teachers to get into those curriculum books.

They spend more time redirecting and having to like help kids keep up instead of like laying a foundation. It's like walking on a dirt path versus a paved path. If you can pave the path for the students, lots of P's today pave the path for the students with these tools that Candace is able to offer to your school, then it will set up just a much smoother journey all along the way.

Candace: Yeah, it's true.

Angela: Yeah. Awesome. So where can people find you?

Candace: Well, our website is probably the easiest way. So our parent company is Lively Minds Institute. So livelymindsonstitute.com is the website. Then our executive function program is called cerebrate, which sounds made up, but is actually an old fashioned word we just don't use much anymore that means to think or ponder to make a good decision, to cerebrate.

Angela: Oh, I love it.

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Candace: So celebrate.education is our executive function program. So I'll provide.

Angela: We'll put it all in the show notes. We'll put the links in the show notes for everybody. But I just wanted you to be able to say where if they're listening in the car, and they just want to make sure they circle back and check out your website, I just want to make sure we noted it here too.

Candace: That's great. There are a lot of resources there available too. So if the product itself isn't of interest, there are a lot of tools and tricks that we share with educators just to help understand what are these executive functions? What can I do in my classroom? We just look at how can I model the executive functions in my classroom? What are ways that I can help start gaining awareness for my students, help my students gain an awareness. So there's a lot of resources that we make available on the website as well.

Angela: Oh, that's awesome. Yeah, I took a peek at it the other day, and I was really impressed with it. So school leaders, I mean definitely take a look at it. Use the freebies, whatever she's got on there. Check them out as a resource, but share it with your teachers as well because you might have some teachers who can really benefit from the work that she's doing. Definitely check her work out and see if it's a match for your school.

So that, I think it's just amazing the work you're doing. I think it's such an important part of our schools. It's just not something we talk about. I feel like until we get to that we've got to have an SST on this kid then we need a 504. I feel like we already have to go down the special ed track versus let's just have the conversation now. If we could teach this, maybe our whole class would run better. Now we're only looking at a handful of students who truly have specific disabilities that would require that tier three intervention assistance. Yeah.

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So good. So good. Well, thank you for your time today, Candace. We'll have to tell the listeners that we had a little bit of a hiccup today. I ended up having emergency dental procedure done. Candace was so great to be able to reschedule so that I could speak to you without Novocaine in my mouth.

My cheeks were swollen like a squirrel all day. So I am just now getting back to business. So thank you for your time and patience with me, Candace, I appreciate it. It's been such an honor and a pleasure to meet you and to connect with you. I hope we do work again together. Feel free anytime you've got more to share, come on the podcast. Let's get this work into our schools.

Candace: Thanks so much. I appreciate you having me. It's great to be a part of what you're doing. So thank you.

Angela: Oh, so fun. I love it. It's such a compliment to the work that I'm doing. They just complement each other so well. I'm really seeing it as working together. That's what I want to do. I want to promote as many people as possible so we can get all the angles covered when it comes to student support, staff support, and school leader support. So thank you for the work you're putting into the world.

Candace: Thank you.

Angela: Talk to you soon.

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