Supporting Neurodiversity in Active Learning and HIPs

Accessibility is the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. It is also: identifies and responds to conditions of access and provides *equitable* opportunity, regardless of a person's abilities or circumstances.

Accommodations are put in place through an interactive disclosure process between the student and the Accessibility/Disability Services department on your campus. Accommodations are protected by the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – which are both civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination.

Key Takeaways

Executive Function Challenges and Consequences in an Active Learning Context
- Activation - Procrastination and feeling overwhelmed
- Focus - Missing important information; work out of order
- Effort - Difficulty in sustaining interest and motivation
- Emotion - Miscommunications and unsettled team dynamics
- Memory - Missed deadlines; not following directions
- Action - Missing steps of project; not following-up with teammates

Accommodations Translated to a Project Context
- **Access to professor notes =** Encouraging open dialogue and communication; set expectations of where to turn to for support. Provide multiple means of representation (videos, handouts, etc.). Directionless requests are overwhelming for some.
- **Alternate testing site =** Be aware of barriers: locations, environmental factors such as temperature, strenuous activity, etc. Consider meeting spaces and what distractions may be there – have an open conversation about how to navigate this. Consider different ways of presenting.
- **Attendance flexibility =** Clear expectations of where to be and expected length of time to be spent; set expectations of how student will communicate when they cannot attend at a certain time.
- **Extended time on exam or extensions on assignments =** Clear structure of project outcomes; a rubric of project requirements. Set expectations of how often the group should be meeting and what should be happening in these meetings. Keep in mind extra time for processing of information and work completion.

Main Takeaways
1. Project-based learning **can be a transformative pedagogy** for students across all experiences, identities, and capacities.
2. The key to leveraging the power of PBL is to **design in a way that is universally accessible**, while having multiple entry points and modalities for student engagement
3. **Incorporating student voice** – purposefully, thoughtfully, and discreetly – and asking for input + reflection throughout the process is critical.
4. **Disclosure** must be balanced with **dignity**. Building a safe environment for students to share their needs and expectations for support – while not singling them out or putting them in a vulnerable position – is key. This means cultivating *all* student's capacity for caring, communication, and collaboration in intentional ways.

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6 Components of Executive Functioning & How it Applies to Project Work

What is Executive Function?

Executive function is the term for the brain processes that guide thought and behavior. They are essentially the "conductor" of the brain that involve higher order cognitive skills that enable independent, purposeful, goal-directed behavior.

Component	Description	PBL Application
Activation	Getting started, estimating time tasks take, prioritizing tasks, organizing	Procrastination of tasks, feeling stuck or overwhelmed, losing track of what needs to be done
Focus	Maintaining focus on a chosen task or switching from one task to another	Focusing on an aspect of the project that is not the highest priority or focusing for longer than is required, losing focus on specific tasks, missing important information
Effort	Sustaining long term motivation and alertness	Pacing a term project, sleeping issues, finding sustained motivation, difficulty reading or listening
Emotion	Managing frustration and feelings	Emotions that are seemingly out of proportion to the stimulus, team miscommunications and dynamics issues, low tolerance for frustration
Memory	Recalling information and remembering details	Missing deadlines, recalling information when put on the spot, remembering group discussions, following directions
Action	Refraining from impulsive behaviors	Jumping to conclusions, skipping steps, acting without considering teammate or project implications

Adapted from: Brown, Thomas E. (2005). *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults* (pp 20–58). New Haven, CT, Yale University Press Health and Wellness.